WOMEN, WORK AND
‘CIVILISED’ WHITE AUSTRALIA:
ASSESSING RESPONSES TO
WOMEN IN FACTORY AND
SWEATED LABOUR

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the degree of
BA (Hons) in History.
The University of Sydney
October 2008
Abstract

The thesis deals with a moment in 1911 when there was an intense interest in women undertaking allegedly ‘problematic; factory and sweated labour. The thesis analyses these responses and illustrates that they were informed by the anxiety of race suicide and notions of appropriate ‘womanliness’. It, however, argues that the responses to these types of labour cannot be understood without attention to the discourse of civilisation. The transnational discourse of civilisation, which stressed that civilised societies had achieved a gender division of labour, fundamentally underpinned the alternative and often contradictory responses to and prescriptions for the ‘problem’ of women working in factories and women working as sweated labourers.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank, first and foremost, my supervisor, Penny Russell, for her marvelous inspiration and unremitting support throughout the past year.

I would also like to thank Liz for her editing and all those who read and critiqued the thesis.

Special thanks must go to my parents and brother and sister for their support throughout the year.

To my friends – you have kept me sane and entertained over the past year.

To my colleagues at the TWU for their understanding and interest.

And finally to the hundreds of thousands of women who are still engaged in ‘sweated’ labour in the Australian textile, clothing and footwear industries and to their supporters at the TCFUA, Fair Wear and Asian Women at Work, who are still fighting in 2008 to secure humane and civilised wages and conditions for outworkers.
INTRODUCTION

In March 1911, Mr J. Barr and Mr C.A. Jeffries returned from an assignment in the slums of downtown Sydney and filed a report for the Sydney based monthly journal the *Lone Hand*. Attached to the report was a covering letter. It began ominously: ‘We are both men to whom the doctrine of White Australia is a holy thing, but if the conditions we have seen are the only ones under which White Australia can go, then better the Pacific rolled over where White Australia stood’.¹ What had shocked them to come to this conclusion was their discovery that the practice of sweating white women, a practice assumed extinct and impossible in modern Australia, was alive and well in the tenement slums of Sydney.

Sweated labourers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were outworkers who undertook piecework, that is, work remunerated on a per item as opposed to a per hour basis, in their own homes, or in places owned by their employers.² Sweated labourers were provided with materials by subcontractors or ‘middlemen’ to make a variety of products, such as clothes and boxes, which had been commissioned by retailers and distributors.³ These subcontractors or middlemen – they seem to have been invariably male – were referred to as ‘sweaters’.⁴

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³ Ibid., p.37
⁴ Ibid. p.38.
a trifling amount for their work and their finished products were sold on by retailers for a substantial profit.5

In 1910, Mrs Kate Dwyer and Miss Elizabeth Flanagan, women heavily involved with the labour movement, were startled to discover that women were being sweated in Sydney.6 They proceeded to establish, under the auspices of the Women’s Central Organising Committee of the New South Wales Political Labor League, the Women Workers’ Union, to organise outworkers and put an end to the ‘sordid’ practice of sweating.7 Their agitation led the Sydney newspaper The Daily Telegraph to inquire into sweating in 1910. The Daily Telegraph was dismayed to find ‘some manufacturers who take advantage of the necessitous state of poor women and hire them to work for mere pittances’.8 Moved by Dwyer and Flanagan’s vociferous campaign and the scandalous findings of The Daily Telegraph, the Lone Hand decided to investigate. Much to their distress, Barr and Jeffries found that the allegations of sweating were only too true.

At almost the same time, the newly elected New South Wales McGovern Labor government announced an inquiry into women and juveniles involved in factory work. Australia was by no means alone in being concerned about women in factory work at this time. Court cases, campaigns and legislative measures to stem the ability of women

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7 Kate Deverall, ‘They Did Not Know Their Place : the Politics of Annie Golding and Kate Dwyer’, Labor History, no.87 (November 2004), p.38.
to work in factories were also prominent in the United States. The new government had been under pressure from the Employers’ Federation and the Labor Council to address the shortage of labour in New South Wales, the flagging apprenticeship system and the ‘problem’ of women working in factories. The government announced three separate Royal Commissions to inquire into all three of these issues. These Commissions were to be chaired by radical liberal barrister, one time academic and former politician Albert Bathurst Piddington. The Commission into ‘the hours and general conditions of employment of females and juvenile labour in factories and shops, and the effect on such employees’ was to be the second installment of the three Commissions. Joining Piddington on the Commissions, as representatives of labour and capital, were Mr E.J. Kavanagh from the Labor Council and Mr E.H. Buchanan from the Employer’s Federation. Mrs Dwyer was also announced as a representative, given her expertise in dealing with women in the workplace. The Commission’s terms of reference precluded it from inquiring into the conditions of outworkers. Nonetheless, Piddington was greatly troubled by the revelation that sweating was occurring in

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12 Kate Dwyer and Elizabeth Flanagan, “Women Workers’ Union of Sydney: Inaugurated 1910, President Mrs K Dwyer, Secretary Mrs E. Flanagan, membership 400.” *The Co-Operator: Eight Hour Souvenir*, October 7, 1912, p.13
Sydney and sought and obtained permission to have factory inspector’s reports on women outworkers attached as appendices to the Commission.13

1911 was a therefore moment when two inquiries investigated two types of ‘problematic’ labour undertaken by women. One was problematic because a group of women had been found to have been grossly exploited, whilst the other was problematic because a group of women had been found to be terrifyingly independent. The rhetoric provoked by these types of labour overlapped at many points. Discourses on ‘race suicide’, on women’s appropriate role in society and on white civilised Australia were all mobilised to conceptualise women’s engagement in these types of labour. It is this moment of focus on women’s labour that this thesis investigates.

Several historians have analysed and assessed the Piddington Royal Commission. They have seen it as ‘the high water mark of masculine liberal concern with the true and natural role of women in Australian society’14 and as an expression of a benevolent liberal patriarchal body’s ‘concern about the health and morality of factory women’.15 These works, produced around the late 1970’s and 1980’s recognised that ideas of ‘womanhood’ and ‘race suicide’ helped frame responses by the Commissioner and the medical witnesses who testified before him to women’s work. Historians have also analysed and assessed responses to women’s engagement in factory work in great detail, with particular attention being given to the 1903-04 Royal Commission into the

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13 Royal Commission into female employees, p.lii.
Decline of the Birth Rate in New South Wales. The most recent of these accounts have employed the analytical category of gender to tease out the anxieties underpinning elite responses to women in factory work.

The history of sweating has received significantly less attention. Historians have acknowledged the existence of sweating in early twentieth century Australia, but have not assessed why sweating emerged as a scandal in 1911. Raelene Frances and Bradon Ellem have dealt with sweating in Victoria and have chartered its demise in front of more capital intensive modes of production, and successful campaigns by Unions, manufacturers and middle-class reform groups to bring outwork under the purview of Wages Boards. These accounts of sweating are materialist or institutionalist and do not to provide an explication of the anxieties and ideas that fostered an interest in sweating in the periods they deal with. Accounts of middle-class feminist activists and prominent Liberal reformers have also noted these actors’ interests in and campaigns

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17 See for instance Mackinnon, ‘Love and Freedom’ and Murphy, ‘Very Decidedly Decadent’.
against sweating. These Whiggish histories, however, have not critically analysed the practice of and responses to sweating. Beverly Kingston has been the only historian to observe the existence of sweaters in Sydney in 1911. Her work, however, simply outlines the conditions of outworkers noted by the *Lone Hand* reports.

Historians have not juxtaposed responses to women’s engagement in sweating and factory labour. Outwork and factory work have been seen as distinct modes of employment and have accordingly been treated as distinct. They have not been analysed together as problematic forms of work undertaken by women. Whilst they are distinct insofar as one was undertaken in the public sphere and the other in the private sphere, a comparative analysis helps reveal contradictions inhering in responses to both types of work and elucidates the discourses that informed the variegated responses to them.

This thesis draws on the work of labour historians, who have identified an individual’s position in the labour market and the structures of the labour market to be fundamental in establishing inequalities of power in societies where capitalism is the dominant mode of producing and exchanging goods. The thesis seeks to extend a conventional labour

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history analysis by drawing on the work of feminist historians. It particularly draws on the work of Marilyn Lake and Jill Roe who have re-assessed Australian labour history and noted the importance of gender discourse in shaping responses to capitalist relations of production and women’s participation in the labour market. Feminist historians’ analyses open up questions as to how categories of manliness and womanliness were constructed, reinforced and challenged in responses to and assessments of capitalism and men and women’s work in the labour market. These questions will be asked of the responses to women’s factory and sweated work. The thesis also draws on postcolonial history, which has also identified the ‘politics of difference’ to be crucial in the construction of categories of societies, races and nations to rationalise and essentialise imperial conquest, exploitation and subjugation. Postcolonial history allows us to ask questions about the construction of civilised and uncivilised gender divisions of labour between societies, races and nations. These


questions have not been canvassed in great detail by historians before. By directing my attention to questions about the construction of manliness and womanliness and to the primary place these held in depictions of difference between societies, I hope to reach a new understanding of the responses to and prescriptions for women’s engagement in the labour market.

Since the focus of the thesis is on responses to women’s sweated and factory work, reports, articles and literature produced that deal with these types of labour will be the prime sites of analysis. The final report of the Royal Commission into ‘The hours and general conditions of employment of females and juvenile labour in factories and shops, and the effect on such employees’, published in 1912 and the testimonies of witnesses before it will be the principal focus in dealing with factory women. The Commissioner’s report and the evidence put before the Commission allows for the retrieval of the languages mobilised to conceptualise women’s labour. The voices of elite actors like the Commissioner, Commission representatives and Doctors, as well as non-elite actors such as women factory workers are able to be gleaned from the Commission. These voices allow us to evince the forms of knowledge produced about women and women’s role in the labour market by these elite actors and to see that these knowledges did not go uncontested by other actors. The *Lone Hand*’s 1911 series of articles on sweating in Sydney will be the chief focus to assess discourses on sweated women. These articles enable us to view the conditions endured by sweated women, as depicted by the reporters. They also allow us to see how the reporters constructed knowledge about
sweating, about civilisation and about Australia as an allegedly civilised nation. These articles also let us hear the voices of sweated women and the men who sweated them. Other reports, articles and literature dealing with women at work will be consulted to provide a wider context to assess the Commission’s and *Lone Hand*’s responses. These works necessarily constructed knowledge about women’s position in society and their role in the labour market, which were drawn on, added to and recalibrated by the Commission and *Lone Hand*. The temporal scope of the thesis is roughly from 1907 until 1912. This period was chosen as it marked a time when there was a profusion of public discussion and literature on women working in factories. 1911 also marked a numerical peak of women’s participation in non-domestic work. In 1911 the Commonwealth census reported that 28.42% of the industrial workforce were women, the greatest proportion catalogued to that time.\(^{26}\) The proportion of women in the workforce declined after 1911 and only reached 1911 levels again in 1947.\(^{27}\) The thesis therefore seeks to critically inquire into responses to women at work, to women’s ‘appropriate’ place in society and to notions of civilisation in early twentieth century Australia.

It is my intention in this thesis to argue that the notion of ‘race suicide’ – the imperative to breed more white Australians – was an anxiety that was constantly enunciated throughout accounts of women’s factory and sweated labour. Historians who have

\(^{26}\) Kingston, ‘My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Ann’, p.60.  
\(^{27}\) Ibid.
dealt with the 1911 Commission have recognised this. I will seek to also show that an environmentalist understanding of human development allowed these elite actors to concern themselves with the production of a qualitatively as well as quantitatively superior white race. Explaining the concern about women’s factory and sweated work solely on the basis of the imperative to produce an increased number of qualitatively superior white children, however, fails to account for the deeper anxieties it produced. I will therefore delve deeper into the Commission and the reports on sweating.

Historians have broached the conceptions of ‘natural’ womanhood that informed responses to women’s factory work. I will adopt the approach that ideas about appropriate manliness and womanliness are discursive categories that are mutually constitutive with other discursive categories such as race and class. By employing a gendered reading of my sources, I will evince why the responses to these types of work differed so markedly and what these responses tell us about prevailing gender notions. Finally, I will consider the impact the gender infused discourse of civilisation had on conceptions of women’s labour and women’s and men’s roles in society.

Historiography of women and men at work in Australia and women and men at work throughout the world has not adequately considered the impact the transnational discourse of civilisation had on understandings of appropriate forms of labour for men

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30 Scott, ‘Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis’.
and women and on their appropriate social and cultural roles. ‘Civilisation’ was also, arguably, a constructed as well as an influential discourse. The responses to women’s engagement in sweated and factory labour provide an apt arena to illuminate the importance of the discourse of civilisation and the construction of the idea of ‘civilisation’. It is ultimately through an understanding of the discourse of civilisation that we can comprehend why the sweating of women and the engagement of women in factory work were found to be profoundly problematic in 1911. I will conclude by suggesting that the field of labour history, reinvigorated since the late 1980’s by labour historians use of the analytical category of gender, will be further enhanced by historians analysing the impact the transnational discourse of civilisation on responses to men’s and women’s participation in the labour market.

The thesis will begin by outlining the concerns identified by the Commissioner and the ‘medical men’ who testified before him about the reproductive health of factory women and the health of their children. It will then illustrate that the Lone Hand and appended reports to the Commission on outwork were silent on health of sweated women. The health of their children, however, will be shown to have been a central concern of the reporters. I will identify contradictions inhering in responses to the health of factory and sweated women and contend that the anxiety of ‘race suicide’ does not provide a sufficient explanation as to why factory and sweated women provoked such intense interest in 1911.
I will then elaborate on the different languages used to construct factory and sweated women. I will contend that these languages depicted factory and sweated women as respectively independent and dependent women. I will argue that gender mandated norms of womanly dependence informed responses to ostensibly ‘independent’ factory women and that the depiction of sweated women as dependent agents established that they did not transgress gender norms.

I will then outline responses to women’s engagement in factory work and in paid work in the public sphere and argue that these were fundamentally informed by the discourse of civilisation and the concept of a ‘civilised’ gender division of labour. I will illustrate that the analysis of historians such as Marilyn Lake and Jill Roe can be furthered if their accounts situate responses to women’s labour within this wider discourse.\(^{31}\) The notion of the ‘maternal instinct’ will then be outlined in respect of factory and sweated work and will be illustrated to be a crucial aspect of the concept of ‘civilised’ womanhood. Finally, ideas of civilised manhood will be illuminated through an analysis of the responses to the sweating of women. Notions of civilised manhood, I will argue, ultimately explain why the sweating of women elicited such intense concern in 1911.

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CHAPTER ONE: Factory and Sweated Women on a ‘scantly populated continent’

The Factory and the Birth Rate

Commissioner Piddington was a proponent of the philosophy of liberal theorist John Bright, who championed the working-class’ role in national development. He was a former member of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly, but had returned to the Bar after losing his seat. Piddington was a favourite of the labour movement, having taken briefs for various trade unions before the Industrial Arbitration Court, and had close relationships with members of the new Labor government. He was a firm believer in the necessity for state intervention to moderate market forces and ensure that white men were afforded a living wage. He was an ardent supporter of the white Australia policy and had once pledged to take part in an organisation to be known as the International Council of the Anglo-Saxon Race. Piddington’s liberal benevolent interests would infuse the questions he asked witnesses and the evidence he relied on and excised from his final report. The Commissioner and the three Commission representatives would visit over one hundred Sydney factories where women and juveniles were employed. They would then hear evidence from eleven ‘medical men’, five ‘factory girls’ and one employer before Piddington compiled his final report.

33 Ibid., p.56.
34 Ibid.
36 Ibid., p.16.
The factory was a problem: there seemed to be no doubt in the minds of the ‘medical men’ who were key witnesses before the Commission that there was a connection between race suicide and women working in factories. For Doctor Cooley, factory life caused the ‘natural process of child-bearing… [to] become unnatural, or what we call pathological’.

Doctor Worrall worried about the factory’s impact on foetuses carried by women: ‘no amount of after-care will make up to the offspring things to which the unborn offspring is exposed’. And Doctor Blue lamented that child mortality was undermined by factory women who returned to the factory ‘when their baby is perhaps a week or two old’, abandoning breastfeeding and determining that ‘the child does not get its natural nourishment’. In an awkward metaphor, Commissioner Piddington thundered that ‘the health and development of women and juvenile workers in factories becomes a matter going to the root of what is recognised as the stem itself of progress in the Commonwealth… the increase in population’. Women’s childbearing had been elevated to a role of national importance and the factory was identified as a zone in which the reproductive health of women of the ‘manufacturing classes’ was injured. Historians have long recognised the concern articulated by elite actors like Piddington and the ‘medical men’ who testified before him about the ostensible connection between women in factory work and the waning birth rate. As this chapter will illustrate, this concern permeated Piddington’s Commission. Nevertheless, taking

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37 Royal Commission into Female Employees, p.xxxv.
38 Ibid., p.Xliv.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid., p.1141.
the words of these elite literally fails to identify the deeper anxieties stirred up by women’s factory work. A close reading and juxtaposition of responses to women’s factory and sweated labour reveals deep contradictions and allows for the revelation of these elite actors apprehensions about women’s role in society and of the perceived social failings of ‘civilised’ white Australia.

In 1907, United States President Theodore Roosevelt, in a letter to his friend Spring Rice, deliberated on the white Australian nation: ‘It is not pleasant to realise how slowly the scanty population of that island continent increases’.42 Roosevelt’s worry encapsulated the anxiety, present in Australia and throughout the avowedly ‘white’ nations of the world at the beginning of the twentieth century, that white nations were depopulating whilst non-white races were proliferating.43 The implications of a falling birth rate were particularly acute in Australia, given its geographical proximity to the prolific races of Asia and to the increasingly powerful Japanese nation.44

Australian Prime Minister Alfred Deakin, writing in 1906 after Japan’s victory over Tsarist Russia, voiced this fear: ‘a sentiment of the duty of self-defence, strong already, is growing stronger the more we realise our strategically perilous position south of the awakening Asiatic peoples’.45

Early twentieth century Australia was a milieu in which the Malthusian fear of

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overpopulation was transcended by a fear that white Australia was imperiled by ‘race suicide’.46

‘Race suicide’ was to be avoided by an increase in the white birth rate. The Australasian Medical Gazette, writing in response to the Royal Commission’s final report, stated that ‘as a nation we desire the birth rate raised and not lowered’.47 Children had thus been elevated to the status of a national resource.

Doctor Ralph Worrall was a gynaecologist based in Sydney Hospital.48 He had written prolifically on female reproductive health and had testified before the 1903 Royal Commission into the Decline of the Birth Rate.49 He informed the Commissioner that ‘growing girls’ had ‘a very mobile impressionable, nervous system’50 on which the ‘the noise of factory life is very baneful in its effects’.51 The ‘constrained attitudes’ of factory work did not allow for a symmetrical and proper development of the ‘ligamentary and muscular systems’, which he said were ‘particularly mouldable’ in growing females’.52

Doctor Cooley, a medical man who had practised in the ‘factory district’ of Redfern for almost thirteen years,53 further articulated the deleterious effects of factory work on young women’s reproductive health. It made them ‘anaemic, and I am certain it

47 The Australasian medical gazette : being the official organ of the combined Australian Branches of the British Medical Association 31, no.9 (March 2 1912), ‘Factory Life’, p.219.
48 Royal Commission into Female Employees, Minutes of Evidence p.6
49 Kate Murphy, ‘Very Decidedly Decadent’, p.222.
50 Royal Commission into Female Employees, p.xxxv.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid., Minutes of Evidence, p.18.
predisposes them to uterine troubles’. The end result of young women’s participation in factory work, according to Doctor Worrall, was that ‘when they become mothers they break down very often’. By inhibiting the capacity of women to bear children, factory work necessarily decreased the birth rate, moving Doctor Worrall to declare that ‘it is injurious for the community and the race [for young women] to be developing and growing under such an unfavourable environment’.

These medical men sharply contrasted the environment of the factory with that of home based domestic service. Doctor Worrall averred that ‘the very best thing for girls is domestic service... there is an absence of crowding, there is an absence of dust... and there is activity necessary to develop all the growing organs’. Piddington accepted that domestic service offered an appropriate environment for the development of young women’s bodies. He was moved to conclude that ‘growing girls’ up to the age of 15, who, out of material necessity had to undertake paid work, should engage in factory work only ‘upon proof that no domestic employment could be obtained’. The imperative to avoid race suicide appeared to require that ‘growing girls’ were to be moved from factories and into domestic service to preserve the health of their bodies for procreation.

The medical men’s fear that the environment of the factory impaired the reproductive health of young women stemmed from a context of prevailing environmentalist social

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54 Royal Commission into Female Employees, p.xxxv.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid., Minutes of Evidence, p.6.
57 Ibid., p.xxxv.
58 Ibid., p.xxxvii.
and scientific thought. The notion that environmental conditions had foremost effect on the physical, moral and mental condition of the human species was articulated by Liberal reformer and chair of the 1903 Royal Commission into the decline of the birth rate, Sir Charles Mackellar. In 1903 he wrote that ‘I will not for one moment deny the influence which heredity exercises… but at the same time I believe that environment and example have a much more potent influence in determining whether a child shall grow up into a reputable citizen’. Faith in the environment not only moved the Commission to be concerned about the muscular development of ‘growing girls’, it also allowed it to contemplate that an increased birth rate could be accompanied by an improvement in the ‘health, physique and moral type’ of children. Piddington’s faith in ‘environment and examples’ was epitomised by his final report’s praise for the WD and HO Wills tobacco factory. He contended that the Wills factory’s provision of a kitchen, uniforms, meals and a dining room to its employees had brought about a marked reformation of the physique and character of ‘tobacco girls’ who ‘some years ago… were looked upon as amongst the roughest and worst-behaved of their class’. The Royal Commission could thus consider the impact of the factory on the ‘health, physique and moral type’ of women and their children as these were moulded by ‘environment and examples’.

61 Royal Commission into Female Employees p.1141.
63 Royal Commission into Female Employees, p.1161.
64 Garton, ‘Sir Charles Mackellar’, p.22.
In the section of his final report entitled ‘Married Women in Factory Work’, Piddington extracted Doctor Worrall’s testimony on the effect of factory work on foetuses: ‘Not alone is it injurious to themselves, but to the unborn offspring... It is better to diminish it [the birth rate] than bring delicate, inferior-physiqued children into the world.’\textsuperscript{65}

Women who engaged in factory work whilst pregnant exposed their foetuses to the prospect of being so horrendously deformed that Doctor Worrall was moved to canvass the seemingly unthinkable; that a drop in the birth rate would be preferable to women bringing forth substandard children. The harmful effects of factory work on foetuses was alleged by Doctor Worrall to result from the noise and vibration of the factory.\textsuperscript{66}

Doctor Binney, an out-door surgeon of the Regent Street Branch of Sydney Hospital, also testified that factory work whilst pregnant ‘would tend to affect their pelvic organs – that is, make them more prone to inflammation of the womb and miscarriages’.\textsuperscript{67} On account of Doctor Binney’s testimony, the Commissioner resolved that factory work ‘involves the risk of miscarriage’ and therefore reduced the birth rate.\textsuperscript{68}

Factory work was also found to have grave consequences for the health of women who had given birth and returned to the factory before they had fully recuperated. Doctor Worrall exclaimed that ‘If you allow her to go back to the factory life in four weeks her general system is not then at all restored to the normal – not for eight weeks’.\textsuperscript{69} Factory work jeopardised the capacity of white mothers to yield more white Australians. The

\textsuperscript{65} Royal Commission into Female Employees, p.Xliv.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., Minutes of evidence p.9.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., p.Xliv.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., Minutes of evidence p.7.
Commissioner was swayed by the ‘Universal condemnation... expressed by the medical men’, to contend that the current provision in the Factory and Shops Act of 1896, which allowed women to return to work four weeks after giving birth was entirely inadequate for the protection of their health and childbearing capabilities.\(^\text{70}\) He advised that ‘the true regulation of the matter ought to be that a woman should not in any case return to work after her confinement without a medical certificate that she is fit for the actual work’.\(^\text{71}\)

Factory working women’s alleged practice of returning to work almost immediately after giving birth troubled Piddington in more ways than one: ‘these married women, when their baby is perhaps a week or two old, begin the factory life again... and the child does not get its natural nourishment’.\(^\text{72}\) The material situations of factory women were not considered a sufficient explanation for their speedy return to factory work. Doctor Blue bemoaned that by going back to the factory ‘she cannot suckle her baby, of course, as she is away’.\(^\text{73}\) He then outlined the importance of breastfeeding for the health of a child: ‘A child that is not fed on the breast has not such a good chance as the baby that is’.\(^\text{74}\) The health implications of not breastfeeding babies were held to be particularly stark by the Commissioner, who concluded that ‘the necessary abandonment of breast feeding leads to an increase of infant mortality’.\(^\text{75}\)

\(^{70}\) Royal Commission into female employees, p.xliv

\(^{71}\) Ibid.

\(^{72}\) Ibid.

\(^{73}\) Ibid., Minutes of Evidence p.1

\(^{74}\) Ibid., p.Xliv.

\(^{75}\) Ibid.
Commissioner thus recommended that the current provision of the Factories and Shops Act, which provided that women could return to factory work four weeks after childbirth, was absolutely inadequate for ensuring the health and life of new born children and their mothers.\(^76\)

The Commission’s interest in the reproductive health of factory women and the health and mortality of their children flowed, in part, from Piddington’s acknowledgement that ‘the manufacturing class of our population is one which stands very high with regard to the average family brought into the world’.\(^77\) The ‘manufacturing class’ was found to be second only to the ‘agricultural and pastoral’ classes in terms of the number of children borne per husband.\(^78\) The health of the women and children of the ‘industrial classes’ were posited to be very important by medical witness Doctor Richard Young, as they would one day become ‘the mothers of the rising generation among the artisan class’.\(^79\) The Commission’s focus on the health of the ‘future husbands and their future wives’ of the working-class reflects Bacchi’s thesis that pre World War One Australia was not beset with concerns about a differential birth rate between the working and upper classes.\(^80\) The importance the Commission accorded to the health of the mothers and children of the ‘manufacturing classes’ demonstrates a pragmatic as opposed to classist approach to the birth rate.

\(^{76}\) Royal Commission into Female Employees, p.xlvi.
\(^{77}\) Ibid., p.1141.
\(^{78}\) Ibid.
\(^{79}\) Ibid., Minutes of Evidence, p.14.
The health of working-class mothers and children also prompted the Commission’s attention because working-class children had been found to not be sufficiently robust.\textsuperscript{81} Between 1907 and 1909, the New South Wales Board of Education conducted an investigation into the ‘physical condition of boys and girls attending Public Schools in New South Wales’.\textsuperscript{82} The Board’s Report categorised the 14360 surveyed children into three groups; ‘well-to-do children,’ children from ‘poorer city and suburban areas’ and children from ‘industrial areas’.\textsuperscript{83} It concluded that ‘from infancy well-to-do and poor children start… from the one level of both length and weight, and that the difference arising from their environment becomes increasingly marked as they pass towards puberty’.\textsuperscript{84} The correlation between a child’s social class and their physique was further reinforced by the Report’s finding that ‘children in well-to-do districts are taller and heavier than those of industrial districts, and more so than those of poor districts, so that… at a certain age the poor boy is lighter than the well-to-do boy by 14lb., while the poor girl varies from the well-to-do girl by 7lb’.\textsuperscript{85} The *Australasian Medical Gazette*, in an analysis of the Report, acknowledged the connection between social class and physical wellbeing, stating that ‘the physique of school children is affected by social and industrial conditions’.\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{82} *The Australasian medical gazette: being the official organ of the combined Australian Branches of the British Medical Association* 29, no.2 (February 21 1910), ‘Open Air Spaces for School Children in Sydney and Suburbs’, p.100.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{86} *The Australasian medical gazette: being the official organ of the combined Australian Branches of the British Medical Association* 29, no.4 (March 21 1910), ‘The Physical Condition of School Children in N.S.W’, p224.
The domestic and mothering capabilities of women who worked in factories, which impacted on the robustness of their children, were found by the Commission to be wanting, as Doctor Cooley explained in interchanges with the Commissioner:

654. Q. Have you any opinion regarding the domestic capacity of factory girls. Are they girls who are helpful in the home? A. The great majority of them are not.

655. Q. Would you say that as a rule they are not domesticated? A. They are not domesticated as a rule.

1771. Q. Have you had an opportunity in your practice of seeing whether factory girls make good housewives? A. I have. I have taken an interest in that, and when I go to a house, I say to the wife, “You were not in a factory before” or “You were in a factory before,” and in the majority of cases I am right in my judgment.87

Doctor Cooley elaborated on the domestic deficiencies of factory women: ‘When a girl is brought up with her mother at home, or in domestic service, and is used to housework, she will keep the house better than the average girl in the factory’.88 Domestic service was again juxtaposed with factory work as an occupation that equipped women with skills necessary to execute their mothering duties. The alleged lack of domestic prowess of factory women was particularly troubling in a context in which the state and

87 Royal Commission into Female Employees, p.xxxviii.
88 Ibid.
medical profession were ambivalent about women’s mothering capacities. As Rowley has argued, the state and medical profession embraced environmentalism and professed that mothering was apt to be carried out in a scientific manner to facilitate a qualitative improvement in children’s health. In a context in which women of the ‘manufacturing classes’ produced a significant proportion of the nation’s white children and these children had been found to not be sufficiently robust, the mothering competence of factory women was profoundly important.

Moved by the imperative to improve the health of the children of the numerically important ‘manufacturing classes’, Commissioner Piddington sought to redress the lack of mothering prowess amongst factory women by advocating an increase in the minimum age for factory work from fourteen to sixteen and prescribing that young women be ‘trained in domestic knowledge and taught elementary physiology’ in the period between fourteen and sixteen. Training in domestic knowledge would remedy their lack of knowledge of appropriate ‘scientific’ mothering practices. A physiological education would also furnish these young women with knowledge of how to care for their bodies, so they could preserve their capacity to produce healthy children. Doctor Walter Fitzmaurice Burfitt, a medical man whose practice enveloped the ‘industrial area’ of Glebe reported that ‘I think they ought to be taught something about their

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91 Royal Commission into Female Employees, p.xxxviii.
health, and about the different ways of looking after it’.\textsuperscript{92} Preservation of the health of factory women’s bodies was also on Doctor Worrall’s mind when he pondered the effect of factory women’s lack of physiological knowledge: ‘Ignorance is often their downfall. They do not know what danger they have to contend with... They do not know they have venereal disease when they have it’.\textsuperscript{93}

Concern about the reproductive health of women of the ‘manufacturing classes’ and the need to avoid race suicide was a very real concern of the Commission and illustrates why some historians have labelled it the high water mark of liberal patriarchal concern about women’s health.\textsuperscript{94} The construction of the factory as a space in which women’s reproductive health was undermined fundamentally influenced the Commissioner’s recommendations for women’s factory work. Piddington’s conclusion that the minimum age at which women could work in factories should be raised from fourteen to sixteen, subject only to minor exemptions, was influenced by the need to remedy ‘the toll at present taken upon the bodily strength... [which] stands at far too high a figure for national welfare’.\textsuperscript{95} The period between fourteen and sixteen would instead be taken up in learning ‘elementary physiology’ and scientific mothering at schools.\textsuperscript{96} Married women were also to be prohibited from engaging in factory work, except in circumstances of necessity when their husbands were unable to work.\textsuperscript{97} This would

\textsuperscript{92} Royal Commission into Female Employees p.xxxix.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., p.xxxix.
\textsuperscript{94} Kingston, ‘My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Ann’, p.72
\textsuperscript{95} Royal Commission into Female Employees, p.1169.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., p.xxxviii.
\textsuperscript{97} Royal Commission into Female Employees, p.xlvi.
ensure that the health of their foetuses would not be jeopardised by the noise and vibrations of the factory. For unmarried women over the age of sixteen, the Commissioner sought to protect their bodies for future procreation by recommending the institution of additional breaks during the working day, so that the longest stretch of sitting or standing would be no more the three and a half hours.\textsuperscript{98} The maximum working day for these women was to be shortened to nine hours and overtime prohibited.\textsuperscript{99} The anxiety of ‘race suicide’ therefore infused the Commissioner’s proposed responses to young and married women’s involvement in factory work. ‘Race suicide’, however, does not provide a sufficient explanation for these responses. The responses to the labour of sweated women were markedly different to those of factory women, in spite of the striking similarities between sweated and factory work. These responses indicate that more was at stake in women’s engagement in factory and sweated labour than the imperative to breed a qualitatively and quantitatively superior white race.

\textit{The Health, Children and Wages of Sweated Women}

Discussion of ‘sweating’ first appeared in Australia in 1879, when Victorian manufacturers organised to lobby the colonial government to regulate outwork.\textsuperscript{100} Sweated women were also discovered in colonial New South Wales in 1880 by the

\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., p.xliii.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., p.xliii.
\textsuperscript{100} Ryan and Conlon, ‘Gentle Invaders’, p.38
Australian Monthly Magazine, which exposed the plight of the ‘sewing girls of Sydney’. The 1891 New South Wales Royal Commission into the great strikes revealed that a substantial number of women and an ‘egregious’ class of men were employed as sweated labourers. The Commission was informed that these ‘objectionable’ male sweaters got ‘on the ‘booze’ and are not particular in conversation’. A group of Jews reportedly sweated these men and women. The existence and extent of sweating in late nineteenth century Sydney disturbed writer and labour activist William Lane so much so that he devoted an entire chapter of his synopsis on the evils of unregulated capitalism, A Workingman’s Paradise, to ‘Sweating in the Slums of Sydney’. In 1895 an Anti-Sweating League was founded in Victoria and in 1896 the Victorian Factories and Shops Act was passed by the Colonial legislature to regulate the rates of remuneration of outworkers. By 1902, sweating had reportedly disappeared in Victoria. No equivalent lobby group appeared in New South Wales and the New South Wales Factories and Shops Act merely provided that outworkers should be registered and their rates of pay recorded. In the period until 1910, sweating appeared to have disappeared in New South Wales.

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103 Ibid., p.259.
104 Ibid., p.287.
106 Frances and Scates, ‘Women at work’, p.35.
Piddington was intensely troubled by reports that sweating was alive and well in Sydney: ‘the employment of out-door workers in connection with factories is far more widespread than the figures cited from the Commonwealth Year Book… this matter – though dealt with in factory legislation – was outside the scope of the Commission’.\textsuperscript{110} He deemed the matter ‘so important that I have obtained the permission of the Minister of Labour to print as appendices the Reports of Miss Duncan and Miss Harriott, Factory Inspectors, made to the Department in August, 1911’.\textsuperscript{111}

Whilst the Commission was preoccupied with the health of factory women’s bodies, the bodies of sweated women, who engaged in work almost identical to that of factory women, completely escaped attention. The reports of women factory inspectors Duncan and Harriot, apart from detailing the negative effect working long hours in artificial light had on their eyesight,\textsuperscript{112} did not canvass the health of sweated women. Harriot and Duncan’s reports also did not detail the working environments endured by sweated women. The \textit{Lone Hand}, in its 1911 series of reports on sweating briefly sketched their working conditions. The reporters recounted that a sweated woman they had interviewed was compelled to work up to seventeen hours a day.\textsuperscript{113} This sweated woman informed them that ‘I work from daylight to dark, and far into the night’.\textsuperscript{114}

Sweated women were also presented as working in restrictive conditions similar to

\textsuperscript{110} Royal Commission into female employees, p.lii
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., p.liii.
\textsuperscript{113} Barr and Jeffries, ‘The Hidden Shame’, p.356.
\textsuperscript{114} Barr and Jeffries, ‘The Hidden Shame’, p.353.
those found by Commissioner Piddington and the medical witnesses to be injurious to women’s reproductive health. A sweated woman interviewed stated that ‘women get chest complaints with the long hours stooping over the machine; some get rheumatism in the ankles and leg cramps from driving the treadle... And then there are the heavy bundles to carry’. The Lone Hand concluded that ‘home workers are soon ruined in health’. Its presentation of the conditions of sweating was similar to the picture painted in William Lane’s novel A Working Man’s Paradise.

When the central protagonists Nellie and Ned visited the home of Mrs Sommerville, a sweated woman, Ned observed that she remained seated ‘working a machine, as if for dear life’. In spite of being written in 1892, almost twenty years before the Lone Hand ‘re-discovered the evil of sweating’, Lane’s depiction of the seated, constricted nature of sweated work is akin to that provided by the Lone Hand. Sweated women appeared to endure a working environment that did not allow the free and full movement of their muscles. The long hours of restrictive, arduous labour were remarkably similar to the long hours of restrictive factory work that Piddington wished to ameliorate by prohibiting overtime and reducing the number of hours factory women would spend in a seated or standing position. No proposals to rectify the hours and conditions of sweated labourers, however, were put forward.

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117 Lane, The Workingman’s Paradise, p.17.
In contrast to the lack of discussion on sweated women’s health, the health of their children was outlined in considerable detail. The *Lone Hand* delineated the injurious effect the poor wages paid to sweated women had on the physical wellbeing of their children. The reporters ‘found one unfortunate woman, whose child is slowly being driven mad by an astigmatism, fretting her heart out because she had not the money to get the child’s eyes attended to... there is never enough food in the house... she is unable to lose a day taking the child to an eye hospital’.

This sweated woman was unable to attend to her child’s medical problems or nourish it adequately because of the measly wages of sweated labour. The children of sweated women were ‘children who had already become old friends with Hunger – little folk who had, more than once, seen a week pass without the sight of meat, or anything but a little bread and treacle’. The sweating of women had created a situation in which ‘thousands of children have been half starved’. Malnourished children of sweaters were also presented by Lane in *A Workingman’s Paradise*. Ned observed the poor physical condition of the children of sweated women during his visit to the area in which Mrs Sommerville lived. He found that by ten o’clock in the morning ‘already the smaller children were beginning to weary of play’.

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119 Ibid., p.356.
121 Lane, *Workingman’s Paradise*, p.15.
122 Ibid., p.17.
When Nellie exhorted her to ‘wean the baby’,123 Mrs Sommerville retorted ‘Wean the baby! That’s all very well for those who can buy plenty of milk’.124

The *Lone Hand*’s focus on the inability of sweated women to provide for the material and medical needs of their children and not the effects sweated labour may have had on their reproductive health appear to flow from a construction of sweated women as women who had already borne children. The *Lone Hand* reported that sweated women were a class of mothers without male breadwinners.125 Sweated women were ‘already mothers’ and not ‘potential’ mothers like the physically developing or married women who seemed to be engaged in factory work. The *Lone Hand* also reported that sweated women ‘cannot go into domestic service or fair wage factories, because they needed to tend to their dependents at home’.126 ‘Dependents’ connotes both children, invalid husbands and other relatives. Sweated women had therefore furnished the nation with children and their health and situation appeared problematic only insofar as it impaired their capacity to ensure that their children were of an adequate qualitative standard.

The ‘miserable wages’ paid to sweated women prevented them from adequately providing for their children. This is evinced by the detailed attention paid to their wages. Annie Duncan reported that she had found ‘A very old-establishment worker...

[who] made weekly earnings as under, during February and March : - 18s. 10d., less 1/2

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123 Lane, *Workingman’s Paradise*, p.18.
124 Ibid., p.19.
d. for cotton; 28s., less ½d. for cotton; 30s. 8d., less ½d. for cotton; 28s. 1d., less 7d. for cotton; 26s. 9d., 17s. 5d., 19s. 4d., less ½d. for cotton'. Duncan also reported that ‘The worker is greatly handicapped by being obliged to buy her own cotton, and by losing time and money in carrying the work backwards and forwards in the middle of the working day’. The attention to the wages and conditions of sweated women is contrasted with the complete lack of attention to the actual wage rates paid to factory working women by the Royal Commission. Beatrix Tracy, a reporter who in 1908 conducted a series of investigations into women in industry for the *Lone Hand*, had found that the ‘growing girls’ and married women with breadwinning husbands who undertook factory work were ‘dependent upon relatives for the balance of her livelihood’ and merely supplemented their incomes by working. These women stood in stark contrast to sweated women who were breadwinners for their children. The construction of sweated women as sole providers in a context where there was a national imperative to enhance the health of children explains, in part, the focus on their wages.

A class of factory women were found to exist whose familial situation mirrored that of sweated women. In concluding the section of the report entitled ‘Married Women in Factory Work’, Piddington proclaimed that ‘the sole case in which married women not separated from their husbands should be allowed into factories ought to be when,

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127 Royal Commission into Female Employees, p.Lv.
128 Ibid., p.Liv.
through illness or misfortune or worthlessness of husband, the married woman is the only or chief support of the family’. The wages of these factory working women would obviously have been essential for them to execute their national duty to maintain and enhance the health of their children. Notwithstanding this, no discussion on their wages, or the impact of their wages on their ability to provide for their children’s health occurred in the Commissioner’s final report, or in the testimonies of the ‘medical men’.

The Lone Hand also made the startling discovery that sweated women were not all ‘already’ mothers, but were also young, unmarried women who had not yet borne children. The reporters investigations led them to meet ‘a stamp of women and a couple of daughters... feverishly working with machine and needle’. One of the daughters informed the reporters that she ‘went to work in a factory... [and] After hours I took work home, and kept at it until my eyes wouldn’t hold up’. Young women, whose bodies and reproductive health the Royal Commission was obsessed with were being sweated. The bodily health of young women sweaters was found to be injured by sweating. A sweated woman informed the reporters that ‘I am worried for my daughter’s health. It was broken down with the strain of the work’.

Paradoxically, the reproductive health of the daughters of sweated women who engaged in sweating was not examined by the Lone Hand or in the appended reports to the Commission. This treatment of sweated ‘growing girls’ stood in marked contrast to

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130 Royal Commission into female employees, p.xlvi.
132 Ibid.
the acute attention given by the Royal Commission to the reproductive health of ‘growing girls’ who worked in factories. The restrictive nature and long hours of sweated labour appeared akin to, or worse than those of factory work. The revelation that ‘growing girls’ were being exposed to such conditions, nevertheless, did not provoke the attention of the *Lone Hand* or the factory inspectors.

The apparently inconsistent responses to the engagement of ‘growing girls’ in sweated labour and the presence of sole-breadwinner women in factory work demonstrates that more than the imperative to breed a numerically and qualitatively superior white race was problematised by women’s factory and sweated labour. Whilst race suicide was a real concern of Piddington and the medical men, factory work cannot be said to have troubled the Commissioner solely because it allegedly impaired the capacity of women to procreate. Similarly, sweated labour did not merely worry the *Lone Hand* reporters and Annie Duncan because its lowly wages affected the capacity of women to adequately attend to the health of their children. The silence on the health of the daughters of sweated women and on the wages of factory working women with dependents, illustrates that these types of labour were problems in more ways than one. The construction of factory and sweated women as women who transgressed or adhered to prevailing gender norms fundamentally informed these contradictory responses.
CHAPTER 2: Free Factory Women and Slaving Sweaters

Whilst sweated work and factory work appeared similar, the language attached to the groups of women who performed this work was vastly different. Factory women were depicted as being worryingly independent, whilst sweated women were found to be distressingly dependent. These contrary constructions were fundamentally informed by ideas of appropriate womanhood.

Young, unmarried women, as Beatrix Tracy had discovered to her deep concern, seemed to ‘throng to factory work’.\textsuperscript{134} Tracy lamented that young women should freely and deliberately thrust themselves into a sphere ‘so foreign to their abilities’.\textsuperscript{135} Evidence at the 1911 Commission supported this view. Doctor Young reported that ‘They are allowed to go in when 14, when just leaving school, and their only ambition seems to be to get into a factory’.\textsuperscript{136} The \textit{Lone Hand}, the Commissioner in his final report and the Doctors who testified before the Commission, did not canvass the possibility that material necessity may have been a sufficient reason for young women to ‘get into a factory’. Beatrix Tracy was puzzled that in spite of ‘the exhausting nature of the labor; the improbability of increasing their miserable earnings’,\textsuperscript{137} young women willfully sought to enter into the public sphere of factory work. Dismissing political economy as

\textsuperscript{134} Tracy, ‘The Factory Girl’, p.593.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{136} Royal Commission into female employees, Minutes of Evidence, p.14.
\textsuperscript{137} Tracy, ‘The Factory Girl’, p.593.
irrelevant these commentators cast women’s factory work as a moral issue of women escaping the confines of dependency.

Beatrix Tracy explicitly acknowledged that factory working women were afforded paltry wages; ‘their miserable earnings’, and the Lone Hand reporters were informed by a sweated woman that factory work paid no better than sweated labour: ‘What factory would pay me more, or as much as I can earn here?’138 Tracy and the medical men who appeared before the Commission nevertheless believed that the wages a factory woman could command allowed her access to ‘some sort of society and enjoyment’139 and with it perhaps a worrying degree of autonomy. Mr Buchanan, a representative from the Employers Federation on the Commission, spelt out the kinds of activities factory women’s wages allowed them to undertake in a question to Doctor Cooley: ‘Have excessive tea drinking, dancing, skating, and late hours at night anything to do… with the general complaint of nervousness?’140 This was a modest list of debaucheries, but perhaps the underlying concern was young factory women’s exercise of independent choice in consumption, social activity and in behaviour.

Beatrix Tracy went on to compare the features of factory work to domestic service: ‘The factory means hours of freedom, companionship, some sort of society and enjoyment. Opposed to the restrictions of compulsory solitude of domestic service, such

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140 Royal Commission into female employees, Minutes of Evidence, p.47.
allurements have a potency’. Tracy postulated that the regulated hours of factory work allowed women ‘independent’ time in a way that home based domestic service demonstrably did not. Doctor Cooley also found the independence provided to women by the regulated hours of factory life to be particularly troubling: ‘A girl can earn a good wage, and does not want to get married when she is young. I frequently ask girls why they do not get married, and they say they are having a good time and do not want to get married. They can keep themselves, and dress well, and if they do get married and have a family it prevents their working in a factory’. Doctor Cooley’s remark also revealed that young women actively sought the autonomy provided by factory work.

The behavioural sovereignty of the factory was contrasted with the dependence and deference of domestic service in the testimony of May Outch, a former domestic servant who had begun employment in a tobacco factory. Startled by Outch’s revelation that domestic service was more laborious than factory work, Piddington sought to clarify her disquieting statement:

1173. THE COMMISSIONER : Q. I understood you to say, to start with, that the work is harder in domestic service? A. Yes, it is much harder.

1174. Q. Just explain what that means ; – do you mean you have more laborious work to do, or that, the hours being longer, it takes more out of you? A. It is more

142 Royal Commission into female employees, Minutes of evidence, p.19.
143 Ibid., p.30.
laborious than the factory work. At two or three places that I have been in you
work from 6.30 in the morning till half-past 4 in the afternoon without ceasing.\textsuperscript{144}

Outch outlined a grueling daily schedule in private service: ‘I would get up at a quarter
to 7, and I was finished my work at half-past 2. From half-past 2 till half-past 5 I had to
myself, only just answering the door. When I had washed up at the private house… I
had till half-past 5. Then I made tea. Then after washing up and finishing I would be off
at half-past 7’.\textsuperscript{145} In domestic service she was compelled to work until 7:30pm each
evening. The conditions of service, which often prescribed that servant women had
little freedom outside the private sphere of the home,\textsuperscript{146} were explicitly contrasted with
factory work in an exchange between Mr Buchanan and Outch:

1228. Mr. Buchanan : Q. Do you get more time now that you are working in this
factory ; – you get your evenings to yourself? A. Yes.

1229. Q. In fact you get every evening? A. We have from twenty minutes past 5 to
ourselves.\textsuperscript{147}

Unlike domestic servants, factory working women such as Outch were able to be
behaviourally independent from 5:20pm each evening. This disturbed Doctor Young
who found that they ‘go on to the streets as quickly as possible in many cases, where
they can have any amount of liberty... They want to have any amount of liberty. That

\textsuperscript{144} Royal Commission into female employees, p.31.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., p.32.
\textsuperscript{146} See for instance, Kingston, ‘My Wife My Daughter and Poor Mary Ann’ and B.W. Higman, \textit{Domestic
\textsuperscript{147} Royal Commission into female employees, Minutes of evidence, p.32.
means trotting up and down the streets, but I do not think it is a very good thing for them at that age. I think they might be doing far better’. Freed from the control of mistresses, young factory women could do as they pleased after they finished work.

Given the imperative to ensure the reproductive health of women, May Outch’s revelations of the physically strenuous nature of domestic service should have alarmed the Commission members. In his final report, Piddington had declared that ‘the claims of national health (required)... a barrier between defenceless workers and the hindering of their development or the injuring of their health’. But May Outch’s testimony did not support his assumption that factory work would impair women’s health, despite pressing questions from Mr Buchanan:

1238. Q. And you have not had any ill effects? A. No.

1239. Q. You have not felt exhausted? A. No.150

Piddington was unmoved by her evidence and his report sided with the opinion of medical men such as Doctor Worrall who had reported that ‘the very best thing for girls is domestic service’. The Commissioner and Commission members did not ask whether Doctor Worrall had had any first hand contact with factory women or had observed the conditions of factory life.152 Doctor Blue had never made any efforts to

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148 Royal Commission into female employees, Minutes of evidence, p.16.
149 Ibid., p.xlv.
150 Ibid., Minutes of evidence, p.32.
151 Ibid., p.xxxv.
152 Ibid., Minutes of Evidence pp.6-9.
inquire into the conditions of factory work, and knew no medical man who had,\textsuperscript{153} Doctor Veech had never been inside a factory\textsuperscript{154} and Doctor Cooley had only seen into factories ‘through the doors. I have never been asked to go in’.\textsuperscript{155} Piddington nevertheless excluded Outch’s evidence and embraced the opinions of the seemingly inexpert experts, exclaiming that there were ‘numberless opportunities for girls in domestic service... [and that] girls obliged to work for a living at age 15 should be allowed to take up factory work only upon proof that no domestic employment could be obtained’.\textsuperscript{156} Piddington’s and the Doctors’ neglect to acknowledge the patently negative health effects of domestic service, in the context of Outch’s first hand evidence are inexplicable if it is assumed that the reproductive health of prospective mothers was the paramount national concern. In a context in which dependence was an essential womanly quality, however, it was all but too predictable.

Justice Henry Bournes Higgins’ 1907 Harvester Judgment in the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration, the quintessential Australian solution to the conflict between capital and labour, prescribed that men should be afforded a living wage providing for the maintenance ‘in frugal comfort’ of themselves, a dependent wife and three dependent children.\textsuperscript{157} Higgins’ articulation of what he considered to be a ‘living wage’ heralded a new definition of manliness for Australian working men.\textsuperscript{158} Affording

\textsuperscript{153} Royal Commission into female employees, Minutes of Evidence, p.2.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., p.4.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., p.19.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., p.xxxvii.
\textsuperscript{158} Lake, ‘Socialism and Manhood’, p.62.
men a ‘living wage’, proclaimed Higgins, was ‘necessary for the man’s manhood’.159 The capacity of a man to be a successful breadwinner and maintain his dependent wife and children in ‘frugal comfort’ henceforth emerged as the threshold test of a man’s manliness.160 Being a suitably manly man was necessarily predicated on having dependents to win bread for. Manliness, for Higgins, became premised on the dependence of women, specifically the dependence of a wife.

An alternate version of manliness, referred to as ‘masculinism’, which prevailed amongst working men in the late nineteenth century, still persisted in the early twentieth century.161 Masculinism stressed that the ideal ‘manly’ lifestyle was Bohemian.162 Suitably masculine, bohemian men sought to escape an emasculating domestic family life.163 Whilst waning in the early twentieth century, this alternative version of manhood was still present in late 1920’s when Labor men opposed pushes by Labor women to mandate a living wage based on a man’s actual number of dependents.164 Labor men argued that single males should be afforded a ‘living wage’

164 Lake, ‘The Independence of Women and the Brotherhood of Man’, p.21
to maintain a suitable standard of enjoyment. Higgins’ ‘living wage’ could thus provide for an ‘appropriate’ domestic manliness and a ‘bohemian’ masculinism.

Higgins further articulated the new concept of appropriate manhood for working-class men in a subsequent decision in the 1912 Fruitpickers Case. He found that ‘If he has a wife and children, he is under an obligation… to maintain them’. Men’s manliness, according to Higgins’ pronouncement, was contingent on their successful care for their dependents. A definition of appropriate womanliness, in line with the new breadwinning definition manhood established that women were to be dependents. Norms of dependence stipulated that women were to be spatially segregated within the domestic sphere where they would tend to children, be economically and behaviourally dependent on their breadwinning male helpmeet and be ‘sexually moral’ by confining their sexuality to the institution of monogamous marriage where it was a means to a procreative end. Appropriate womanhood became contingent on these criteria. Deviation from these norms necessitated that a woman became ‘unsexed’. In a context in which appropriate womanhood was premised on womanly dependence, the wages and regulated hours of factory women and the behavioural autonomy these permitted, were intensely problematic.

Women such as May Outch, who were unmarried, childless and free from 5:20pm each day to choose how to spend their time contravened norms of appropriate womanly

\[165\] Lake, the Independence of Women and the Brotherhood of Men, p.21
\[166\] Higgins quoted in Hearn, ‘Securing the Man’, p.15.
\[167\] Rowley, ‘Inside the deserted hut’, p.82.
dependence. Outch and young single women like her were perceived to be able to engage in ‘tea drinking, dancing and skating’ because of the free hours and disposable income factory work provided and because their post work hours were not regulated and restricted by a mistress, by a husband or by the demands of dependent children. Young, single factory women appeared as independent agents. This construction of factory women is further encapsulated in Buchanan’s questioning of Outch:

1250. Q. Where do you live – at home, or with a family? A. I live with my sister in a room.

1251. Q. You share the rent and expenses? A. Yes.

1256. Q. And of course, you have a little place of your own, so to speak, and you and your sister are the mistresses of your own room within your own four walls? A. Yes.¹⁶⁹

Outch and her sister were their own breadwinners. They were women evidently capable of supporting themselves and able to be ‘their own mistresses’ without the assistance of a man.

On Monday the 18th of December, a week after the Commission had begun hearing evidence, Mr William Vicars of John Vicars & Co, a tweed manufacturing company located in Marrickville, decided to come before the Commission and give evidence.

¹⁶⁹ Royal Commission into female employees, Minutes of Evidence, p.32.
‘with regard to some matter which was touched on in the evidence last week’. Mr Vicars stated that his evidence was based on ‘an experience in a woollen mill where we employ a large number of females, an experience extending now over nearly forty years’. Mr Vicars revealed that he wished to proffer evidence concerning statements made ‘reflecting on the general character of female workers in factories’. Vicars asserted that factory work had no detrimental effects on the physique and morality of women. He happily reported that men seeking a spouse should not hesitate to marry a factory girl. His evidence was based on actual knowledge of factory women, as opposed to the musings and hearsay posited by the medical men. His evidence was, however, completely left out from the Commissioner’s final report. During Vicars’ testimony he had contended in an exchange with the Commissioner:

1857. Q. Then you consider the girl that enters factory life has her self-reliance, independence, and her constitution developed by it? A. I think so.

1857. Q. I suppose sometimes you would not have any doubt about the independence? A. Independence and self-reliance too, sir.

The use of the term ‘self-reliance’ is especially significant as it reflects the language employed by Kate Dwyer and other feminists to argue for equal pay for women. Dwyer had argued in 1912 that ‘women were endowed with intelligence and ability, combined

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170 Royal Commission into female employees, p.48.
171 Ibid.
172 Ibid.
173 Ibid., Minutes of Evidence p.48-49
174 Ibid., p.49.
175 Ibid., p.48.
with health, strength and self-reliance, and that they should therefore, be encouraged to become self-supporting and self-respecting’. The discourse of self-reliance, invoked by Vicars and Dwyer, was a language employed by feminists in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century to argue that women needed to receive equal remuneration to men to ensure that they would not be thrust into a demeaning economic dependence on a husband. Women’s economic dependence on men, for feminists like Dwyer and Rose Scott, determined that they were inevitably compelled to be men’s sex slaves. Economic dependence on men was degrading and akin to prostitution. Vicar’s evidence thus spoke to a wider context in which women argued for economic independence from men.

Vicars saw independence as strength of character in a young woman, Piddington, uncompromisingly saw it as a flaw. Piddington’s privileging of the Doctor’s testimonies, his excision of May Outch’s and William Vicars’ evidence from his final report and his failure to consider the health implications of domestic service all flowed from his construction of the factory girl as a transgressor, who defied notions of appropriate womanhood. Beatrix Tracy concluded that a factory working woman surrendered ‘her best hopes of contentment when she achieves her independence… she

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does not succeed in becoming a really independent worker. She is just a woman spoiled’.\(^{180}\) Women who engaged in factory work and embraced the independence it offered rendered themselves ‘unsexed’. In a milieu in which, according to Doctor Young, young women’s ‘only ambition was to enter a factory’ and take advantage of the autonomy it offered, the sphere of the factory was troubling indeed.

The Commissioner and the other members of the Commission repeatedly asked the factory working women who testified before the Commission whether they believed that young factory girls would object to having to attend compulsory domestic science classes in the evening. Kate Dwyer, for instance, asked tobacco factory employee Emily McIntosh: ‘As a factory worker, do you think it would be a great strain on factory girls if they were to attend domestic science classes twice a week?’\(^{181}\) The Commission’s interest in mandating domestic science classes can be viewed as springing not only from the imperative to remedy the domestic deficiencies of factory women, but as a reaction to the worrying independence of women factory workers. Such classes would limit the behavioural autonomy of women in the hours after they had completed factory work and could be arenas in which young women could be inculcated with appropriate ‘womanly’ dependent values.

In addition to ostensibly independent, young and single factory women like May Outch, another group of factory working women were recognised to exist who, in spite of their movement into the public sphere of factory work, were constructed as being


\(^{181}\) Royal Commission on female employees, Minutes of Evidence, p. 34.
behaviourally dependent. American middle-class feminist Jessie Ackermann, in her 1913 book *Australia From a Woman’s Perspective*, observed that there existed many Australian women who ‘must work as a matter of necessity’, and were compelled to engage in ‘factory work and other toilsome occupations’. Commissioner Piddington portrayed these women as being forced to engage in factory work to support their families because of the ‘illness or misfortune or worthlessness of husband’. Unlike their younger counterparts, these women had dependent children and ill and worthless husbands to care for. Their responsibilities placed them in a different relationship to the factory and locked them into dependence. The ‘toilsome’ occupation of factory work for them was not a means to an ‘independent’ end but a material necessity. They were thus in a condition that was the antithesis of their young, single and independent counterparts.

Beatrix Tracy explicitly distinguished the dependent factory woman from the independent ‘unsexed’ factory woman. ‘The female factory hand who has... no other resources than her own energy, is in a truly sad plight... her worst enemy is her half-supported sister’. Tracy cast the breadwinning woman factory worker as a dependent woman, deserving of pity, as opposed to the independent factory woman whose worrying degree of autonomy warranted disdain. Commissioner Piddington’s

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183 Ibid., p.243.
184 Royal Commission on female employees, p.xlv.
recommendation that these women should be allowed to work in factories, as opposed to their younger counterparts who were to work in domestic service, can be seen to have resulted, in part, from the fact that dependent married women factory workers did not transgress dependent womanly norms.

Akin to dependent factory women, sweated women were presented as materially deprived, husbandless women who were burdened with dependent children. The Lone Hand found that their familial situations forced them into sweating. The reporters stated: ‘It may be asked why such girls do not go into fair wage factories or to domestic service. Generally, there is some good reason – invalid relations... In the case of married women it is generally children that force them into the grip of the sweater. It was to keep an invalid husband that the next woman we interviewed had worked for ten years’.186 Sweated women were presented as being driven to engage in piecework within their own homes as they had dependents to nurture. The Daily Telegraph, in its one-off article on sweating in Sydney in August 1910 entitled ‘Sweating in Home Work’ presented the circumstances of sweated women in a similar manner. The investigator interviewed a women who engaged in outwork in ‘G._Road’ whose ‘husband had deserted her and three young children’.187 The familial situation of sweated women dictated that they had no choice but to undertake piecework in their homes. The daughters of sweated women, who were discovered to engage in outwork were also

187 Daily Telegraph. ‘Sweating in Homework’, p.11.
found to lack volition as their piecework was essential to supplement the household income. A daughter of a sweated woman interviewed by the *Lone Hand* told that her family was ‘very poor’ and that she was compelled to undertake outwork to prop up the miserly wages her mother obtained.\(^{188}\) If the problematic independent factory women were positioned according to a moral discourse, the outwork of sweated women was explained in the language of political economy.

The appended reports to the Royal Commission, as outlined above, went to great lengths to detail the poor wages paid to sweated women.\(^{189}\) Their perilously low wages, in combination with the fact they had dependents to tend to, were found to compel them to work excruciatingly long hours. The *Lone Hand* reporters interviewed a sweated woman who stated that ‘We need every penny for food and shelter… The youngest child has been ill’.\(^{190}\) Money, for sweated women was not about freedom, but about need. The sheer scale of the task of caring for dependents with such poor wages without the breadwinning assistance of a husband was epitomised by the predicament of a sweated woman who informed the *Lone Hand* that she had ‘slaved for years, and brought up six small children’.\(^{191}\) In marked contrast to allegedly ‘independent’ young and single factory women like May Outch, sweated women were not ‘free’ to engage in any social activities in the public sphere, as they had to labour day and night to provide basic essentials to their many children. Their familial and material situations

\(^{188}\) Barr and Jeffries, ‘The Hidden Shame’, p.357.

\(^{189}\) Royal Commission into female employees, p.lv.

\(^{190}\) Barr and Jeffries, ‘The Hidden Shame’, p.356

\(^{191}\) Ibid., p.358
determined that they were incapable of being independent. In a context in which women’s womanliness was premised on their ‘dependence’, sweated women maintained their womanhood. The *Lone Hand* concluded that sweated women who cared for their children in spite of their material privations were the epitome of womanhood. They were ‘women, made to be worthy mothers of men’, who ‘Rather than put them to the State and go into domestic service themselves, where they would have no worries and good food and time to enjoy themselves… cling to their children, battling magnificently to keep them together in one family. These women are fighting the bravest battle that can be fought – to keep the home intact’.

The condition of sweated women was further exacerbated by their social background. The *Lone Hand* investigators stated that ‘Another reason why these women cannot go to domestic service is because they do not belong to the working class proper. They are the remnants of families that were once better off’. William Lane’s representative outworker was also a woman of the middle-class, fallen on hard times. Nellie described Mrs Sommerville’s situation to Ned: ‘Her husband used to be well off, I fancy, but had bad luck and got down pretty low’. For the *Lone Hand*, the class status of sweated women ruled out domestic service as an acceptable option: ‘Many of them are gentlewomen in the highest sense of the term, to whom domestic service would be

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193 Ibid.
intolerable, and who would sooner commit suicide than work for another woman’.\textsuperscript{196} For middle-class women, however fallen, subservience to a mistress was intolerable. Domestic service was fine for factory women, but only because they were from the ‘working-class proper’.

The notion of appropriate womanly dependence was therefore thoroughly infused with class discourse. Working-class women were womanly so long as they were behaviourally dependent. It was irrelevant whether their dependency flowed from being married, having dependent children or being in service. Middle-class women could only be dependent on a husband, or by having to care for dependent children. Submission to a mistress was not a possibility for women of the middle-classes.\textsuperscript{197} For a middle-class woman with no money and no support, outwork seemed to be the only option.

\textbf{Independent Sexualities}

The factory was also painted as an environment that drove young women to engage in ‘immoral activities’. Commissioner Piddington was so concerned about the ‘moral’ implications of factory work that he devoted an entire section of his final report to the

\textsuperscript{196} Barr and Jeffries, ‘The Hidden Shame Part III’, p.156.  
\textsuperscript{197} Ibid.
'Morality of Workers in Factories'. The factory was constructed by the various medical deponents and the Commissioner as a sphere in which young women’s sexuality was unleashed. Doctor Worrall testified that ‘Crowding the two sexes together like that stimulates the sexual system, which ought to remain in abeyance as long as possible; and I think that things are said, and things are seen when the two sexes of that age are thrown together that have a most pernicious effect on the character’.

Releasing young women’s sexuality was found to inevitably lead to the birth of children outside of marriage. Doctor Blue attested to this in an exchange with the Commissioner:

24. Q. Does your practice enable you to speak in general terms of the morality of factory life? A. I do not think the morality would be very high in that class, anyhow, because if they are walking out together – a boy and girl – generally something happens before very long, even the young ones, 16 or 18.

25. Q. Do cases come under your notice of that? A. Yes: I have seen several girls of 15, three or four this year, who went their full time, and they were not married. They had babies.
At the beginning of his final report, Piddington noted that over 24,000 women were employed in factories.\textsuperscript{201} The three or four girls whom Doctor Blue alleged had fallen pregnant could hardly be seen to establish that the factory environment invariably loosed young women’s sexuality. The mere fact that this connection, however unlikely, was made, is indicative of the apprehension the factory caused these men. The Commissioner hence dismissed the evidence of Doctor Burfitt who had testified that factory ‘girls are as highly moral as the girls you will come across elsewhere’\textsuperscript{202} on the basis that the other medical men had unanimously expressed the view that the morality of factory working women was not akin to other classes of workers.\textsuperscript{203}

Young factory women who were said by the Doctors and Commissioner to have sex prior to marriage necessarily did so for pleasure and not procreation. This necessitated that a separation occurred between the avowedly natural and appropriate ‘maternal’ and the inappropriate and dangerous ‘sexual’ aspects of sex.\textsuperscript{204} The embrace of the ‘sexual instinct’ by factory women was an act of ‘independence’ that occurred outside the parameters of marriage for a non-procreative purpose. The separation of the maternal and sexual aspects of sex conveyed that the ideal marital relationship of a breadwinning man and a dependent woman was undermined.\textsuperscript{205} Young, sexually active factory women therefore shunned norms of womanly dependence.

\textsuperscript{201} Royal Commission into female employees, p.1141.
\textsuperscript{202} Ibid., p.30.
\textsuperscript{203} Ibid., p.xlvii.
\textsuperscript{204} Murphy, ‘Very Decidedly Decadent’, p.228.
\textsuperscript{205} Murphy, ‘Very Decidedly Decadent’, p.229.
The Commissioner, in the section of the report on ‘Married Women in Factory Life’ extracted Doctor Blue’s response to a question about the effect of factory work on married women. Doctor Blue stated that: ‘a woman’s working in a factory has the tendency to prevent her having children… if they do become pregnant the tendency is to finish the pregnancy’.206 Piddington surmised that the employment of women in factories was ‘an encouragement to the practice of prevention’, that is, an encouragement to the use of contraception.207 No rationale or evidence was submitted to support this assertion, nor were the economic situations of working-class women considered as impacting upon their decision to utilise contraceptives. Married women, as well as young women were found to be separating the sexual and maternal functions of sex. Married women were, however, confining their sexuality to the marital relationship. Their use of contraceptives can be seen to be problematic as it diminished the birth rate. Their knowledge of contraception was, nonetheless, particularly troubling as they were prone to interact with young, unmarried women in the factory.

In listing the objectionable results of married women working in factories, the Commissioner, again without any apparent rationale, stated that ‘The influence of married women with the unmarried girls is often far from good’.208 In support of this finding he quoted an English report by a Mr J. Ramsay Macdonald on employer’s opinions of married women in factory work. One employer ‘Dislikes having them

206 Royal Commission into female employees, p.xliv.
207 Ibid.
208 Royal Commission into female employees, p.xliv
because their influence is bad’, and another reported that ‘There seems to be a pretty widespread objection… to the moral influence of married women in the workshop’. Likewise ‘Mr _ objects to the employment of married women. He dislikes the way they talk to the unmarried girls’. The supposed negative influence exercised by married women can be explained in the context of Piddington’s assertion that factory life led to ‘the practice of prevention’. Factory women appear as women who were apt to disseminate ‘immoral’ knowledge about contraception to their younger counterparts. The factory was thus a doubly dangerous sphere as young women were informed of the means to separate the sexual and maternal aspects of sex.

At the back of the Commissioner’s mind when he concluded that factory work encouraged contraceptive use was the testimony of Nellie Wilson, a former employee of three factories, Lever Bros, Elliot Bros and Pattinson’s. Nellie had testified that when she worked for Elliot Bros she was engaged in manufacturing objects that were ‘very objectionable’. Nellie was reticent about divulging what these ‘objectionable objects’ were, but after being urged by the Commissioner eventually revealed that she and a group comprising both ‘boys and girls’ were often required to work in ‘the special room’ making pessaries. When questioned as to whether the girls knew what pessaries were Nellie replied ‘yes’ and stated that ‘I have heard them talk about it. That

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209 Ibid., p.xlv.
210 Ibid.
211 Ibid., Minutes of evidence p.35.
212 Ibid., p.37.
213 Royal Commission into female employees, p.37.
is another thing that is dangerous to the girls’.\textsuperscript{214} Nellie’s evidence established that factory work itself informed young women of the possibility of separating sex from procreation. The factory was thus a troubling sphere as young women’s sexuality was loosed and they gained dangerous contraceptive knowledge.

In marked contrast, the sexuality of sweated women was not mentioned. Their confinement to the private sphere of the home, acute dependence, helplessness and enervation appear to explain the dearth of discussion on their sexuality. Similarly, the fact that they were already mothers who had, or had had husbands, ensured that they had not allowed their sexuality and childbearing to escape the confines of the marital relationship. Sweated women thus did not violate the prescribed independence/dependence gender dualism.

The respective constructions of women factory workers and women sweated labourers as independent and dependent women were a consequence of prevailing conceptions of appropriate womanliness. Factory women posed a ‘gender’ problem, whilst sweated women did not. Because sweated women were suitably womanly, Inspector Duncan and the \textit{Lone Hand} appear to have been able to recommend that outwork should be regulated by the introduction of a Wages Board to provide minimum rates of pay for women outworkers and to improve the materially deprived status of sweated women.

\textsuperscript{214} Ibid.
and their families. Conversely, the ‘problem’ of behaviourally autonomous factory women was confronted by proposals that were undergirded by the proposition that women should be eliminated from factory work, except those who had ‘worthless’ husbands. Commissioner Piddington concluded that ‘girls obliged to work for a living… should be allowed to take up factory work only upon proof that no domestic employment could be obtained’. Notwithstanding its obviously negative health implications, domestic service was to be the lot of young working-class women. It would ensure their dependence. Domestic service was not an option for sweated women because of their class statuses and could not form part of the solution to the problem of sweating. Dependent factory women, who did not transgress norms of dependence, were also to be allowed to labour in factories. The alternative constructions of factory and sweated women, as respectively independent agents and dependent automatons manifests prevailing notions of appropriate womanliness and illuminates the alternate responses to and prescriptions for women’s participation in these two types of labour.

This chapter has shown that deviation from gender norms helps explain why factory women were seen as a problem. Sweated women who did not depart from ‘dependence’, however, did not pose a ‘gender’ problem in 1911. Notions of civilisation determined that factory women were far more than a gender problem and underpinned the intense anxiety about sweated women’s condition.

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215 Lone Hand 10, no.55 (November 1911), ‘Mrs Kate Dwyer’, pp.28-30.
216 Royal Commission into female employees, p.xxxvii.
CHAPTER 3: Indolent Men and Civilised Male Breadwinners

If Piddington was troubled by the entry of young girls into factory work, he reserved his ‘gravest objections’ for the employment of married women.\textsuperscript{217} If one raised the spectre of the independence of women, the other suggested a still deeper malaise – idleness in men.\textsuperscript{218} Sweated women presented no gender problem, but their condition disturbed the \textit{Lone Hand} reporters, who found that ‘a distinct class of white slaves’ was being produced in downtown Sydney.\textsuperscript{219} Idle men and slave-like white women evoked a fear that civilised white men had reverted to a state of primitive manliness.

Piddington grumbled that the employment of married women ‘in factories... encourages idleness and extravagance in men’.\textsuperscript{220} The slothfulness and profligacy of men whose wives earned wages in factories was not canvassed in the evidence presented to the Commission. Piddington appeared to base this conclusion on an English article written by a Mrs Tennant for a publication entitled ‘Dangerous Trades’. He extracted a portion of Mrs Tennant’s article in the section of the report on ‘Married Women in Factory Life’: ‘The father accepts the obligation of bread – winner; he is ashamed that his wife should work outside the home... poverty conjures excuse, and a man is not ashamed to claim his wife before her time in the hospital is over, that she

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\item \textsuperscript{217} Royal Commission into female employees, p.xliv.
\item \textsuperscript{218} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{219} Barr and Jeffries, ‘The Hidden Shame Part III, p.157.
\item \textsuperscript{220} Royal Commission into female employees, p.xliv.
\end{itemize}
may come out and earn his bread’. Mrs Tennant’s statement evidences a central tenet of labourist political economy, namely, the degrading effect of unrestrained capitalist relations of production on men’s manliness. Glasgow men were enticed by their wives extra-domestic work to neglect their manly breadwinning obligations. Their manliness had been undermined to the extent that they compelled their wives to return to work almost immediately after they had given birth.

Married women who earned income for their husbands cannot be said to have been independent women. They were necessarily in a relationship of dependency with a man who, as in Mrs Tennant’s example, may have coerced them to be his breadwinner as well as his domestic drudge. These women did not pose a ‘gender’ problem by departing from norms of appropriate womanly dependence. Rather than being ‘independent’ like the factory girls, or ‘responsible’ like the sweated women, these women were represented as being actively exploited by their husbands. Enticing their husbands to compel them to earn their bread did not simply produce a gender problem by emasculating male breadwinners. The fact that Piddington raised it, without any evidence from any of the witnesses, conveys that it roused a far deeper fear. The discourse of civilisation, prevailing in the early twentieth century, underpinned the Commissioner’s profound distaste for married women’s engagement in paid work in factories.

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221 Royal Commission into female employees, p.xliv.
222 Lake, ‘Socialism and Manhood’, p.58.
In 1906, Australian Prime Minister Alfred Deakin, seeking to rationalise the imperative for the Commonwealth Government’s White Australia policy argued that the British Empire was ‘broadly divided in to two parts, one occupied wholly or mainly by a white ruling race, the other principally occupied by coloured races who are ruled’. He went on to declare that ‘Australia and New Zealand are determined to keep their place in the first class’. The power of racial domination Deakin accorded the white race, in an early twentieth century milieu, was legitimised by a discourse of civilisation that stressed that the white race had accomplished civilisation and that ‘coloured races’ were yet to attain civilisation and remained in a primitive state of non-civilisation. As Gail Bederman has argued, this transnational discourse of civilisation was premised on an understanding of human evolution, which postulated that human societies progressed or regressed from a state of savagery to a state of civilisation. Civilised societies were identified primarily by what Theodore Roosevelt contended to be their capacity for ‘self-government’. The white race was portrayed by ‘great men’ like Roosevelt and Deakin to be the only race that had attained ‘civilisation’ and was able to govern itself.

224 Ibid.
The capacity for self-government exemplified the ‘gulf’ between the white and coloured races and had dramatic geo-political consequences. It rationalised the imperial conquest of ‘uncivilised’ non-white peoples and became an integral part of the self-conception of white peoples and avowedly white nations.\textsuperscript{229} Being in a state of civilisation also performed a legitimating function for settler-colonial nations such as Australia that had been founded on the dispossession of an ostensibly uncivilised ‘coloured’ indigenous populace.\textsuperscript{230}

The concept of civilisation was fundamentally informed by gender. Civilisation was said to be principally identified by the degree of differentiation between men and women.\textsuperscript{231} Gender differentiation was established primarily by a division of labour between men and women. This was explicitly expressed by John Castieu who wrote in response to Beatrix Tracy’s analysis of women in industry in the ‘The Sunrise’, a souvenir publication of the Labour Fair of 1908: ‘one may safely say that civilisation began as woman began to be freed from drudgery... the ideal condition would be one in which the men were all husbands and workers, and the women all wives and mothers’.\textsuperscript{232} Castieu constructed a continuum of civilisation whereby civilisation was achieved when women performed domestic and procreative roles in the private sphere and men performed a wage earning role for their wives and families by labouring in the

\textsuperscript{229} Bederman, ‘Manliness and Civilisation’, p.188.
\textsuperscript{230} Lake and Reynolds, ‘Drawing the Global Colour Line’, p.154
\textsuperscript{231} Bederman, ‘Manliness and Civilisation’, p.188
public sphere. Castieu thus established that women being freed from non-domestic labour was a critical marker of a society’s civilised status.

The importance of the position of women was further articulated in the work of T. Athol Joyce and N.W. Thomas, fellows of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Britain, in their work published in 1907 in London, Paris, New York, Toronto and Melbourne entitled *Women of all Nations: A Record of their Characteristics, Habits, Manners, Customs and Influences*.\(^{233}\) Joyce and Thomas’ work was a catalogue of studies and accounts of the condition of women by anthropologists in various societies throughout the world. In their introduction they asserted that ‘Taking a broad view of history, we may say that in one aspect it is the story of how woman has ceased to be the slave of man, as she is among the peoples on the lowest planes of culture, and has become his help-meet’.\(^ {234}\) Australian Aboriginal women were found to be in a state of uncivilised womanhood as ‘the wife has to do all the hard work while her lord and master occupies himself with the pleasant business of hunting. To the woman’s lot falls the provision of wild roots and vegetables, the building of huts, the transportation of burdens, and children on the march, and so on’.\(^ {235}\)

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\(^{233}\) T Athol Joyce, and N.W. Thomas, *Women of all Nations: A Record of their Characteristics, Habits, Manners, Customs and Influence*, (Melbourne: Cassell and Company, 1907).


Married women’s factory work was unsettling for the Commissioner as it ostensibly encouraged white men to revert to an uncivilised condition like that of the Australian Aborigines, in which women were compelled to labour so men could preoccupy themselves with the pleasant task of loafing around the home. Justice Higgins, in his decision in the Fruitpickers Case, epitomised the notion that the capacity of men to care for their dependents was instrumental in establishing the civilised status of the white race and Australian nation: ‘Fortunately for society, however, the greatest number of bread winners are still men. The women are not all dragged from the homes to work while men loaf at home’. Women’s factory work, which was depicted by Piddington to coax men to ‘loaf at home’ and abandon their breadwinning obligations not only goaded men to become emasculated as Marilyn Lake has argued, but presented a threat to the civilised gender division of labour and to the civilised standing of the Australian nation.

By contrast, no discussion occurred on the impact of women engaging in sweated labour and the breadwinning inclinations of men. This can be seen to have resulted from the portrayal of sweated women as women whose husbands had died or deserted them, or whose husbands were invalid and incapable of breadwinning. Breadwinning by sweated women for husbands who were physically unable to work to support their families, such as that undertaken by the woman interviewed by the Lone Hand reporters

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236 The Rural Workers’ Union and United Labourers’ Union v Mildura Branch of the Australian Dried Fruits Association and Others (The Fruitpickers Case), volume 6 Commonwealth Arbitration Reports 1912, p.72.  
237 Lake, ‘Socialism and Manhood’.
who ‘to keep an invalid husband... had worked ten years for a Syrian factory’,\textsuperscript{238} was not found to constitute a threat to the civilised gender division of labour.

Also bound up in Piddington’s dislike of married women’s factory work, was the fear that women who undertook non-domestic labour posed a latent threat to men’s capacity to garner a sufficient breadwinning wage. Although not explicitly identified by Piddington in the recitation of his ‘grave objections’ to the employment of married women in factories, this fear abounded in the public discourse on the employment of women in factories. Jessie Ackermann found that ‘although women in Australia enjoy partial equality with men in relation to citizenship, a sense of justice has never extended so far as to include the same standard for the sexes... in pay for services’.\textsuperscript{239} Beatrix Tracy enunciated the implications of the lower rates of pay afforded to women: ‘any employment that does not yield that living-wage must be condemned as parasitical’.\textsuperscript{240} ‘The female’ – who as Tracy and Ackermann noted received wages below those of men – was adjudged by Tracy to be ‘almost invariably a parasite’.\textsuperscript{241} Women’s engagement in factory work was objectionable as their lower rates of pay threatened the capacity of men to be effective breadwinners. Women’s participation in factory work not only encouraged men to loaf at home, it undercut men’s ‘living wage’ and capacity to provide for their dependents.

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\item[\textsuperscript{238}] Barr and Jeffries, ‘The Hidden Shame Part II’, p.470.
\item[\textsuperscript{239}] Ackermann, ‘Australia from a woman’s perspective’, p.252.
\item[\textsuperscript{240}] Tracy, ‘The Factory Girl’, p.594.
\item[\textsuperscript{241}] Ibid.
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Whilst Lake has accurately identified that the ostensibly ‘parasitical’ effect of women’s work was conceived by labouring men to perform an emasculating function, her study of ‘Socialism and Manhood’, which deals with the late nineteenth century, does not investigate the link between the gendered division of labour and the discourse of civilisation. Writing about early twentieth century Australia, Jill Roe has argued that the democratised notion of chivalry that mandated that working class men were knights of labour who were entitled to a living wage so that they could be ‘gentlemen’ by providing for their dependents, necessitated the exclusion of women from the workforce. Whilst she correctly identifies the barrier the discourse of ‘chivalry’ erected for women to enter the non-domestic labour market, she does not consider that the notion of male chivalry, which was in part contingent on the capacity to win bread, was the outcome of the gender infused discourse of civilisation. By incorporating the ‘civilisation’ dimension into an assessment of male chivalry and the ‘manly’ imperative to be a successful breadwinner, we can better understand what ‘threats’ to these male prerogatives entailed and why they elicited such intense interest.

Castieu pondered the problem for civilisation posed by women who launched themselves into a sphere ‘so foreign to their abilities’: ‘the inclination of the modern woman to be ‘independent’... would still have to be considered... this very selfishness

242 Lake, ‘Socialism and Manhood’, p.56.
244 Ibid., p.406.
of woman, would have to be taken into account’. The selfish desire of factory women for independence, as has been shown, lured them to the factory. To counter the independent inclinations of factory women, Castieu proposed an economic solution: ‘Make female labour as costly as male labour, male labour will be preferred and female labour will go… as a further and final result, male workers will be able to make wives and mothers of the discarded female workers’. The notion that men would be preferred to women was based on Castieu’s understanding that ‘From the beginning of things man has been the food-getter. He has had centuries of start over woman in that capacity. This evolutionary gap… combined with physical disparity, is practically unbridgeable’. Justice Higgins in the Fruitpickers case had decided that when women and men performed work ‘of the same character’ they were to be afforded equal wages so that women would not undercut the male ‘living’ wage. In instances where work was solely carried out by women a ‘fair minimum wage’ for these women based on them supporting themselves only and not a family of dependents was mandated. The provision of differential wages in the latter case and equal wages in the former case was a means to ensure that men remained the sole breadwinners.

Women’s inclination to be independent not only posed a gender problem by threatening men’s manliness, it also presented a tacit threat to the civilised gendered

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245 Castieu, ‘Women as Workers’, p.31.
246 Castieu, ‘Women as Workers’, p.32.
247 Ibid., p.31.
248 Fruitpickers Case, p.73.
249 Ibid., p.72.
250 Hearn, ‘Securing the Man’, p.20.
division of labour. Commissioner Piddington’s initial finding that women comprised almost a quarter of the New South Wales workforce and that there had been a pronounced tendency in certain occupations for women ‘to take the place of male workers’,251 can be seen to be particularly problematic in a context in which a gendered division of labour was a central index to the civilised status of the white Australian nation. Whilst the Commissioner did not promote the payment of equal wages to attend to the ‘civilisation’ problem of women undercutting men’s wages, his recommendations that overtime for women be banned and that married women be proscribed from employment except in instances of a ‘worthlessness of husband’, can be seen to have been influenced by the threat women’s factory work presented to the male breadwinning wage and civilised white Australia.

No discussion took place about the possible impact the lowly wages of sweated women had on the wage rates and breadwinning capacity of men. This can be seen to stem from the construction of outwork as an occupation exclusively undertaken by women. The Lone Hand reporters described sweated labourers as ‘Australian women’,252 and stated that ‘The victims of sweating are women’.253 No men appear to have been engaged in outwork. Whilst it would appear self-evident that sweated women’s piece-work would operate to keep down the wages of male workers, this economic connection was not drawn by the reports appended to the Royal Commission or by the Lone Hand reporters.

251 Royal Commission into female employees, p.1141.
253 Ibid.
The failure to make this economic connection appears peculiar, but can be explained, in part, by the fact that sweated women did not appear to compete with men for wages and that their condition was disturbing in other, far more menacing ways.

**Maternal Instincts and Civilisation**

In the section of the Commission’s report on married women, Piddington bewailed that ‘perhaps the most disquieting consideration now that girls in New South Wales are turning so largely away from domestic life to factory work is the terrible effect upon the very nature of married women themselves when their employment in factories becomes a substantial feature in the life of the industrial class. In a more primitive age, and amongst a less civilised race than the English, it was thought a convincing way of illustrating the impossible to say ‘Can a mother forget her suckling child’? But in modern England, where mothers take part in great numbers in factory work, that impossibility has become a normal occurrence’. Piddington’s lament expresses the anxiety that the advance of society from ‘a more primitive age’ to an allegedly civilised one had been at the expense of women’s ‘maternal instinct’. Women from less civilised races cared for their children. Something was deeply awry in ‘civilised’ England and Australia if factory women had lost their inclination to nurture their ‘suckling child’. Factory women’s apparent loss of the ‘maternal instinct’, occasioned, according to Piddington, by their rejection of domesticity and embrace of factory work,

254 Royal Commission into female employees, p.xlv.
was profoundly problematic in a context in which the position and condition of women were vital indexes to the civilised status of the Australian nation.

The importance of women’s maternal instinct in the schema of civilisation was evinced by Doctor Chisholm Ross, in an article published in the *Australian Nurses Journal* in 1912, entitled ‘The Maternal Instinct’. Doctor Ross wrote that ‘as we draw nearer the apex of the animal kingdom the spectacle of a protective maternity comes into view. It is doubtful whether in the earlier stages of evolution there was any maternal love’. The inclination of women to bear and rear children was presented by both Ross and the Commissioner as something less civilised races possessed. The unselfish and protective impulse of mothers was something developed by women from higher order societies. Societies that had ascended the chain of civilisation had ‘freed’ their women from drudgery, that is, from labour in the public sphere, so that an unselfish and protective ‘maternal instinct’ could flourish in the private sphere.

The alleged tendency of factory women to return to factory work ‘when their baby is perhaps a week or two old’ and ‘abandon breastfeeding’ thus not only presented a ‘race suicide’ problem but a problem for ‘civilisation’. Similarly, married and unmarried factory women who practiced contraception not only reduced the birth rate and were worryingly independent, they also demonstrated that they had repudiated their maternal instinct to bear children. Factory women who had ‘turned away from the

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257 Ibid., p.364.
258 Royal Commission into female employees, p.xliv.
domestic life’ and lost their maternal instinct by forgetting their ‘suckling children’ appeared even less ‘maternal’ than women from ‘lesser’ races. Lured to the factory by the ‘temptation of reward’, these women fundamentally called into question the civilised condition of the Australian nation.

As we have seen, sweated women, and factory women who were husbandless or had invalid husbands were compelled to engage in non-domestic paid labour. Commissioner Piddington concluded that married women ‘separated from their husbands’ and married women who were the chief support of the family ‘through illness or misfortune or worthlessness of husband’, were to be the sole class of women authorised to engage in factory work. Similarly, the Lone Hand reporters found that sweated women who undertook paid labour were a ‘brave, moral, self-sacrificing type of women’. Factory women without a breadwinning husband and sweated women were patently not ‘freed from drudgery’ and were arguably akin to the supposedly uncivilised Australian Aboriginal women who had to ‘do all the work’.

Notwithstanding this, Piddington concluded that these women could continue to work in factories and Annie Duncan and the Lone Hand reporters decided that women’s outwork should be regulated, not proscribed.

Sweated women, as outlined above, were found to be ‘already mothers’ – women who had borne children. One of the sweated women encountered by the reporters had raised

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259 Royal Commission into female employees, p.xliv.
261 Royal Commission into female employees, p.xlvi.
six children. They were declared to be a ‘noble class’ of mothers who battled adversity so that they could keep their children from being billeted out to the state. Sweated women were argued by the Lone Hand reporters to exemplify the maternal instinct: ‘the bulk of the women who are subjected to this form of sweating are mostly deserted wives and widows left with young families. And – all praise and glory to them for it – they will not part with their little ones’. The absence of a male breadwinner in the above statement also appears to be crucial to sweated women being found to have achieved and maintained a ‘higher order’ maternal instinct. Sweated women and factory women whose husbands had died, deserted them, or become invalid, leaving them with the responsibility for providing for their families, epitomised the maternal instinct. They laboured against all odds so that they could continue to nurture their children. Doctor Ross identified what he determined to be the ‘female instinct of self-preservation’ as a pivotal element of the maternal instinct, noting that ‘the mother stands as the champion of what she has conceived, nurtured before and after birth, in season and out of season’. Their paid labour, unlike that of factory women, did not appear to problematise the civilised gender division of labour or the capacity men to be chivalrous breadwinners, as it was essential to allow them to nurture their dependents.

Jan Kociumbas, in her work on infanticide in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Australia has argued that the discourse of the ‘maternal instinct’ was deployed

by the medical profession and the state to chastise and discipline working-class women whose material situations necessitated that they foster out their children. She has contended that the deployment of this ‘mothering theory’ by these elites was a means to rationalise state intervention to compel women to maintain and ‘scientifically’ rear their babies. She has argued that underpinning these interventions was the notion that the white Australian nation was threatened by ‘race suicide’. Whilst race suicide was necessarily a very real fear, Kociumbas’ analysis can be furthered by assessing the centrality of the ‘maternal instinct’ to the discourse of civilisation. White women who avoided conception or abandoned breastfeeding not only threatened the continuance of the nation but its status as a superior civilisation. The treatment of sweated women also illustrates that ‘maternal discourse’, or ‘mothering theory’ was not merely a rhetorical device employed by the state and ‘medical men’ to coerce women to become scientific mothers. It was fundamentally bound up in notions of civilisation. Attention to the discourse of civilisation is thus imperative to achieve a more nuanced understanding of the deployment of the notion of the ‘maternal instinct’.

White Woman Drudges and Unchivalrous Uncivilised Men

As we have seen, sweated women’s lack of a male breadwinner, responsibility for dependents and measly wages determined that they were dependent women who did not transgress gender norms. The dependent status of sweated women was found to be

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268 Ibid., p.155.
269 Ibid., p.140
270 Ibid., p.152.
aggravated by the physically and mentally enervating combination of outwork and child rearing. The *Lone Hand* observed a sweated woman who embodied helplessness: ‘When the pallid-faced woman bade us enter the room it seemed as if the personification of Hopelessness had beckoned from the doorway of Despair... No light was in her tired eyes, no brightness of expression crossed her face’. The condition of sweated women was expressed by Kate Dwyer in her 1912 article in the New South Wales Union Movement’s ‘Eight Hour Souvenir’ to be one of ‘helpless womanhood’. The helplessness of sweated women, according to Dwyer, presented an almost insurmountable obstacle to their industrial organisation. Sweated women also did not repudiate their ‘maternal instinct’ like their factory counterparts. Sweated women were women who did not pose a ‘gender’ or ‘civilisation’ problem. The abject poverty of these ‘noble women’, the fact a class of men took advantage of their helplessness and their relationship of dependency with these men were nonetheless profoundly disturbing for the *Lone Hand* reporters.

Male sweaters were discovered to exploit the helpless situations of sweated women. The reporters bemoaned that ‘the worse circumstances of the family the lower the rate offered... if he can squeeze another ounce of blood out of his wretched slaves he uses it to under-cut his rival sweaters’. The incapacity for organisation of sweated women and their vulnerable predicament permitted sweaters to pay them any rate they deemed

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273 Ibid.
appropriate: ‘these poor creatures are so helpless... that they cannot refuse whatever wage the sweater kindly offers’. Sweaters were also found to manipulate the market to perpetuate meager wage rates so they could maintain sweated women in a condition of material dependency. The *Lone Hand* reported that sweaters colluded to fix prices so that no sweated woman received wages in excess of one pound a week. The reporters were aghast that ‘If the worker earns a larger sum than that... Then the rate is cut’. The result of sweater’s actions was the production of ‘a distinct class of white slaves’. The use of the noun slave is significant, as it connotes that sweated women were in relationships of absolute dependence and subservience with male sweaters. The *Lone Hand* reporters concluded that the slave-like relationship between sweated and sweater was perverse. Sweated women’s dependence on a sweater was distinct from appropriate relationships of dependency between a woman and her husband and between a working-class woman and her mistress. The situation of sweated women and their relationship with sweaters and not sweated women themselves roused the fury of the reporters, men ‘to whom the doctrine of white Australia [was] a holy thing’.

As we have seen, intrinsic to the gender infused notion of civilisation was a conception not only of a civilised condition of ‘womanhood’ but of a civilised condition of ‘manhood’. Bederman has noted that this condition in pre-1930’s America was

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276 Ibid.
277 Ibid.
279 Ibid.
predominantly one of manliness as opposed to masculinity. Lake, writing in an Australian context, has also noted a shift from manliness to masculinity by the 1930’s. ‘Manliness’ was constructed as being predicated on men possessing Victorian ideals of male chivalry, self-restraint, sexual control and a will and capacity to care for dependents, defined as women, children and uncivilised ‘savage’ races. Masculinity, however, referred to traits allegedly intrinsic to all men such as aggression, physical strength and an unbridled sexuality. Notions of manliness were democratised in the newly federated Australian nation to the extent that all men, whether of the labouring or upper classes, aspired to attain a state of ‘manliness’ that was premised on their ability to tend to a family of dependents. Justice Higgins, in his judgement in the Fruitpickers case in 1912 stressed that he had based the minimum ‘living wage’ ‘for a man... in the first instance... on ‘the normal needs of the average employee regarded as a human being living in a civilised community’... I fixed the minimum... by finding a sum which would meet the normal needs of an average employee, one of his normal needs being the need for a domestic life’. The capacity for a man to have a ‘domestic life’, that is, to be a breadwinner for a family of dependents as we have seen, established that the he and the nation in which he dwelt had achieved civilisation.

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286 Fruitpickers Case, p.71.
Civilised manly men not only obtained the power to tend to a family of dependents and work in the public sphere without competition from women, they also incurred obligations to protect ‘civilised’ womanhood.\textsuperscript{287} The manliness of men was constructed in the discourse on civilisation to be an essential precondition for the civilised womanliness of women. Joyce and Thomas argued that ‘the advance of woman from the lowest grade to the place she occupies among us to-day’\textsuperscript{288} was the result of ‘modern, no less than by mediaeval chivalry’.\textsuperscript{289} Castieu also maintained that the civilised status of women was dependent on the manliness of men: ‘Humanity has risen through a chivalry which safeguarded the woman for the task of motherhood’.\textsuperscript{290} The chivalry of men was essential to render women from a primitive state of slavery and drudgery, and into a state of domesticity and civilisation. Joyce and Thomas went on to locate the primary function of ‘manliness’ in allowing women and society to attain civilisation by arguing that the primitive slave-like status of women in Australian Aboriginal society resulted from these women being ‘as much the victim of circumstances as of sheer masculine selfishness’.\textsuperscript{291}

Roe has argued that the concept of male chivalry necessitated that men incurred an obligation to work to support their families.\textsuperscript{292} By assessing the effect the gender infused notion of civilisation had on this obligation, we can better understand the responses to

\textsuperscript{287} Bederman, ‘Manliness and Civilisation’, p.28.
\textsuperscript{288} Joyce and Thomas, ‘Introduction’, p.2.
\textsuperscript{289} Ibid., p.1.
\textsuperscript{290} Castieu, ‘Women as Workers’, p.30.
\textsuperscript{291} Joyce and Thomas, ‘Introduction’, p.22.
men’s ostensible failures to be manly, chivalric and protective. The link between the notion of manliness and the conception of civilisation is evidenced in the discussions of women engaged in sweated labour.

The existence of sweated women in a condition of abject poverty and ‘slavery’ in ‘civilised’ Australia demonstrated a general failure of manliness and undercut white Australia’s civilised status. The dependence of sweated women on male sweaters was deeply troubling because civilised men were supposed to alleviate women from drudgery. Male sweaters, however, perpetuated and exacerbated the drudgery of sweated women by manipulating the market and paying sweated women trifling wages. In the context of the discourse of civilisation, sweated women’s relationship of dependency with a male sweater was perverse. The Lone Hand reporters expressed the stark implications of the existence of white women in a relationship of slavery for Australian civilisation: ‘If the conditions we have seen are the only ones under which White Australia can go, then better the Pacific rolled over where White Australia stood’.

Disturbingly, ‘Asiatic’ Chinese and Syrian men were found to be prominent sweaters by the Lone Hand reporters and by Annie Duncan. The participation of men of ‘Asiatic’ races in sweating was acutely distressing in the context of the racially infused discourse of civilisation. In the discourse of civilisation, uncivilised, non-white men failed to free

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women from drudgery and instead selfishly compelled them to engage in non-domestic labour.296 Embracing the logic of manliness and civilisation, the Lone Hand stated that ‘The Syrian is a sweater by instinct... It is this sweating instinct that has led to his persecution and butchery in every country in which he has settled’.297 The presence of uncivilised ‘Asiatic’ men in Australia who had not freed their women from drudgery and instinctively compelled women into a state of slavery, presented an unambiguous threat to the civilised condition of the white Australian nation. Alfred Deakin’s rationale for the white Australia policy exemplified this fear: ‘these people do differ from us in such essentials of race and character as to exclude any possibility of any advantageous admixture’.298 Their exclusion, Deakin contended, was vital ‘if we are to maintain the standards of civilisation’.299 The presence of non-white, uncivilised men in Australia presented the possibility that women, the critical index to the civilised status of a society, would be forced into drudgery. The implications of this for the Australian nation were noted by the reporters: ‘The Syrian... sweater... having destroyed his own country by his abominable practices... is now helping destroy ours’.300 The fact that Syrian and Chinese men were found to engage in sweating women provided concrete proof that men of non-white, uncivilised races were ‘sweaters by instinct’. The sweating of white women in downtown Sydney thus spoke to deep seated fears about race and civilisation.

296 Bederman, ‘Manliness and Civilisation’, p.28.
298 Alfred Deakin quoted in John Andrew La Nauze, Alfred Deakin, a biography, (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1979) p.280.
299 Ibid.
By allowing white women to be sweated, Australian men had failed to discharge their
duty of care toward white women. This failure was exacerbated by the fact that these
women were sweated by men from decidedly ‘uncivilised’ non-white races. The *Lone
Hand* in its April edition on sweating entitled ‘The Syrian Sweater’ began by stating that
‘Racial pride – and racial savagery – are roused by the thought that our Australian
women of British descent should be the virtual slaves of these Asiatics, till one feels a
pogrom is the quickest and most effective method of reform’. 301 By having been able to
coerce white women into a state of slavery, racially inferior Syrian men posed an
explicit racial slight to the manliness of white Australian men. This racially suffused
affront to white men’s manhood was so great that the reporters were moved to consider
that a pogrom was required to re-assert civilised white manhood. The reporters
eventually decided that ‘the safety of Australian nation demands a clamp upon his
methods... by the legislative machine’. 302

Whilst the existence of Syrian and Chinese sweaters incited the *Lone Hand* reporters to
ponder a pogrom, the most disturbing aspect of their re-discovery of sweating was that
sweated women were in a relationship of dependence with sweaters still more
monstrous and iniquitous. 303 They bemoaned that ‘this is the part that hurts : All of the
women who were questioned told us that if possible they always work for the
Chinaman, and if not for the Chinaman, then the Syrian, in preference to the hardest

sweater of all – the Christian White Australian’. In the continuum of sweater ‘chivalry’, white sweaters ranked last after Syrian and Chinese men. The heinous nature of these white men was evinced by a sweated woman interviewed by the reporters, who contrasted white sweaters with Syrian sweaters: ‘If I could have my own choice I wouldn’t work for white factories; and there’s lots more like me. I’ve seen the time when a Syrian boss would save one of his work-women who had got behind on her rent from being thrown out on the street by the landlord. It happens again and again that the Syrian will help you; but I’ve never seen the boss of any white factory that I’ve worked for in Sydney help a sick dog’.

The presence of ‘Christian White Australian’ sweaters conveyed that a caste of white Australian men had regressed into a primitive state of selfishness, much like Aboriginal men, by compelling women into a condition akin to slavery. The fact that they were more exploitive than their Syrian counterparts, who assisted sweated women evicted by their landlords, was profoundly troubling in the context of the discourse of civilisation. Uncivilised ‘Asiatic’ sweaters were evidently more manly and civilised than Christian white Australian men.

The complete lack of chivalry of white sweaters was further substantiated in an interview conducted by the reporters with a Chinese sweater. The reporters sought out

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this particular Chinese sweater because he ‘was spoken well of by the wretched women who worked for him, but had recently cut his prices’. He replied that ‘I found that I had to. Australians (with a curious smile) – white Australians cut the price and made the poor women buy their own cotton; and the saving they made they passed on to their customers as a reduction to secure the trade… Strange that so patriotic a people allow the worst of the manufacturers to play the tune which we must all dance to’. The reporters faced the indignity of being shamed by his reproach: ‘The remark hurt, and there was a very obvious answer’. The Chinese sweater provided this obvious answer: ‘The best of the manufacturers cannot be very averse to this sweating, or they would unite to put it down. They will unite among themselves to see that the unionists do not force wages too high, but they won’t move a finger as a body to remove this reproach from the whole body of them’. White men, not Syrian and Chinese men, were ultimately responsible for the material privations and perverse dependence of sweated women. Their avarice determined that they cut the wages of sweated women and forced them to purchase their own materials so they could undercut the comparatively beneficent Chinese sweater and monopolise the market. The rapacity and misanthropy of ‘Christian White Australian’ sweaters stood in horrific contrast to the benevolence of the allegedly uncivilised primitive ‘Asiatic’ sweaters.

307 Ibid.
308 Ibid., pp.158-159.
309 Ibid.
The Chinese sweater’s remark that it was strange that ‘so patriotic people’ would permit the sweating of women conveys that the existence of predatory white sweaters had implications for Australian society generally. His statement that if white Australian manufacturers disapproved of sweating women they could eliminate it immediately, implies that Australian employers were quite comfortable rejecting their chivalric obligations to free women from drudgery so that they could pursue their own material gratification. In a context in which manliness was a fundamental element of civilisation, the existence of a class of rapacious ‘white slavers’ undercut Australia’s position at the apex of civilisation.

Distressed and humiliated, the reporters decided to confront a Christian white Australian sweater who ‘had a bad name among the workers’.311 They interrogated him: ‘would you expect your own daughter… to live properly on 18s. 6d. per week?’312 He responded that ‘If I thought my daughter would have to earn her living at that work I’d give her an overdose of laudanum’.313 The malevolent sweater, who was ‘a cheerful ruffian, and quite unable to appreciate himself at his proper value’314 alleged that sweating was a fiscal as opposed to social problem.315 He attributed the existence of sweated women to the fact that some well organised branches of labour were currently overpaid and that ‘these losses have to be made up’ and they were made up amongst

312 Ibid., p.160.
313 Ibid.
314 Ibid.
315 Ibid.
women who were ‘too disunited, or too hungry to kick back’.\textsuperscript{316} To the reporters, sweating was far more than an economic problem. A caste of white men, who would rather kill their daughters than allow them to earn their living sweating, had been found to exploit and exacerbate helpless white women who were too hungry and disunited to resist. These white men fundamentally challenged the advance of civilisation because they had fallen away from civilised, manly standards.

Annie Duncan, in the conclusion of her report recommended that amendments be made to the Factories and Shop Acts to deal with sweating, a problem she deemed to warrant ‘special attention... (as) a class of women, helpless through poverty and want of cohesion and legislative protection, is made large use of by manufacturers and warehousemen, at most inadequate rates of pay’.\textsuperscript{317} Duncan did not propose the proscription of outwork or the institution of better working conditions as the Commissioner had with factory work, but the regulation of outworker wages. She recommended, among other things, that ‘special conditions of payment be laid down by a Wages Board... Rates of payment for each class of article to be specified beforehand to the outworker in writing... a provision that piece-rates for the making and finishing of articles be based on an hourly rate for each operation... All sewings and materials to be provided by the employer... Carriage or delivery of work to be provided one way by the employer’.\textsuperscript{318} Duncan suggested that a safety net wage structure be instituted to

\textsuperscript{317} Royal Commission into female employees, p.lv.
\textsuperscript{318} Royal Commission into female employees, pp.lv- lvi
forestall the continued race to the bottom in outworker’s wages and to prevent vile ‘cheerful ruffians’ manipulating the market. She stated that ‘Instead of letting the most callous of this type fix the standard of conditions and wages, it should be done by the law’.\textsuperscript{319} White middlemen and manufacturers who sweated and encouraged the sweating of women could not be trusted to pay these women civilised rates of remuneration. State intervention was required. Outwork would continue, but it would be regulated and paid at an hourly rate ‘necessary for the protection of the worker’ from the wicked practices of uncivilised sweaters.

By analysing the discourse of civilisation we can see why sweated women’s condition was greatly distressing. Sweated women did not transgress gender norms and maintained a ‘civilised’ maternal instinct. The uncivilised, unmanly Christian white Australian and Asiatic men who exploited white women were, however, a horrendous problem. The discourse of civilisation not only allows us to see how these men were worrying, it furthers our understanding of why married factory women’s alleged tendency to undercut male wages and entice men to ‘loaf at home’ was troubling. Furthermore, it allows us to see that factory women’s alleged departure from the ‘maternal instinct’ problematised civilised white Australia and was more than an elite tool to justify intervention in working-class women’s lives.

\textsuperscript{319} Barr and Jeffries, ‘The Hidden Shame’, p.354.
CONCLUSION

On the 26th of November 1912, the new Factories and Shops Act received royal assent. The new act would have disappointed the Commissioner. Piddington and his medical witnesses had wanted ‘girls’ under the age of sixteen to be prohibited from working in factories so they could learn domestic economy and physiology. The new Act maintained the minimum age for factory work at fourteen and allowed ‘girls’ over thirteen years of age to work in factories after obtaining permission from the Minister.320 Married women whose employment in factories Piddington had found ‘open to the gravest objections’ and recommended that they should only work in instances when they were their family’s only breadwinner, were not mentioned. The current provision providing that a woman could return to work four weeks after giving birth was maintained.321 Piddington and the medical men had recommended eight. Women’s bodies were to be protected from the allegedly injurious consequences of factory work only insofar as factories that employed ‘females’ were to provide adequate seating that ‘females’ would be able to make use of ‘at all reasonable times during the day’.322 Women were also not to be employed continuously for a period of over five hours without a thirty minute meal break.323 Piddington had decided that three and half hours was the maximum time a woman should be engaged in continuous factory work. He may have taken some consolation from the fact that the Minister could now prohibit

320 Factories and Shops Act 1912 (New South Wales) section 40.
321 Ibid., section 48.
322 Ibid., section 26.
323 Ibid., section 42.
women from working in certain classes of factories ‘in which he considers it undesirable that they should be employed’. Nonetheless, all women over 14 were to have unfettered access to the ‘freedom of the factory’ unless the Minister decided that a certain class of factories was not suited to them.

The *Lone Hand* reporters and Annie Duncan would have been more pleased with the New South Wales legislature’s response to outwork. Contractors, principals and sub-contractors who engaged sweated women were to fall within the purview of the Factories and Shops Act and be subject to regulation and supervision by factory inspectors. They would also have to keep records of wages and piece rates paid to outworkers. Sweaters were not banned outright, but the encouragement of sweating was made illegal. Finally, the new legislation adhered to Duncan and the reporter’s recommendation that sweated women have their wages fixed by law and not the most ‘callous’ of white men. Outworkers were grouped with factory workers and received a statutory minimum wage, thus escaping the tyranny of market manipulating sweaters.

Women continued to remain an integral part of factory life in New South Wales after the Piddington Commission and the new Act. Although their employment would not

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324 Factories and Shops Act 1912 section 41.
325 Ibid., section 17.
326 Factories and Shops Regulations 1912 (New South Wales), section 38.
327 Factories and Shops Act section 66.
328 Ibid., s.65
reach 1911 levels again until after the Second World War, it seemed that Piddington and the medical men’s moral caveats could not contain the need of capital intensive manufacturing enterprises for women labourers. Piddington could privilege the voices of those who shared his views on women at work in his final report, but he could not stem the economic imperative for women to work in factories. In this sense, the Commission is important not so much for what it achieved, but for what it revealed. The Commission is not simply to be read as an arena where ‘masculine liberals’ vented their prejudices about working-class women working in the public sphere. Piddington’s and the medical men’s musings illustrated that women’s factory work was not merely a problem because it allegedly decreased the birth rate, or because it allowed women to transgress norms of womanly dependence. Women’s engagement in factory work problematised the civilised standing of white Australia itself.

The transnational discourse of civilisation has been assessed by historians such as Gail Bederman, Henry Reynolds and Marilyn Lake as legitimating and making essential white nations’ imperial ambitions and racist domestic policies. The impact of this discourse on responses to women’s and men’s work has, however, not received sufficient scholarly attention. As this thesis has shown, the notion of civilisation fundamentally underpinned elite responses to women’s engagement in factory work. The conflation of ‘race suicide’ and ideas of appropriate gender roles ensured that

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women’s factory work was troubling in 1911. The discourse of civilisation determined that it was profoundly troubling. ‘Race suicide’ and notions of appropriate womanhood do not explain why women’s sweated labour suddenly became an intense problem in 1911. By analysing the discourse of civilisation, we can see why sweating required rigorous legislative regulation. The ‘problems’ of women’s factory and sweated labour thus cannot be understood as ‘problems’ in 1911 without assessing the discourse of civilisation.

The analytical category of gender vitally transformed and reinvigorated Australian labour history and labour histories around the world after its adoption by historians such as Marilyn Lake and Mark Hearn in an Australian context,331 by Anna Clark in a British context332 and by Alice Kessler-Harris in an American context.333 If this paper contributes anything to labour history, it is my hope that it encourages historians to see early twentieth century responses to women’s and men’s engagement in the labour market in the wider context of the discourse of civilisation. An understanding of the discourse of civilisation better enables us to see why factory women, who allegedly repudiated the ‘maternal instinct’, transgressed gender norms of dependence and undercut male breadwinner’s wages, were so problematic. It also allows us to see the ‘maternal instinct’ as far more than a ploy by elites to intervene in the lives of working-

333 Alice Kessler-Harris, Gendering Labor History, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007)
class women. Furthermore, it lets us to see why men who failed to be adequate breadwinners were viewed with such trepidation. These men were not merely emasculated by sending their wives out to earn income, they fundamentally undermined the notion of white Australia as a suitably civilised society. Finally, the discourse of civilisation lets us conceptualise why exploitative practices by employers were so deeply distressing. White sweater’s rejection of their manly obligations was not only an affront to gender norms, but an affront to civilised white Australia. Only by looking at sweating in terms of civilisation can we see why it became the object of the Lone Hand’s attention and why Piddington found that it was a matter ‘so important’ that he had the Department of Labour append reports on it to the Commission’s final report.

A thorough history of outwork in Australia is yet to be written. Sweating and outwork demand scholarly attention, not merely to recover the voices and experiences of the women and men engaged in this most exploitative type of labour, but because the scandalous or non-scandalous nature of outwork at any particular time is indicative, as this thesis has shown, of a wider context of fears, anxieties and imperatives. Sweated women appear to have disappeared from public discourse after 1911 and only re-emerged in mainstream public discourse in the early 1990’s, after a campaign by the Textile, Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia and Asian Women at Work highlighted that the deregulation and elimination of tariff protection for Australia’s textile and clothing industry had established economic conditions ripe for the
exploitation of another group of marginalised women. The current group of outworkers differs from those discovered to be distressingly dependent in 1911 in a variety of crucial ways. These women are predominantly Asian and are not women of the ‘fallen’ middle-classes. The concern about gender and ‘good’ women, about the nation and its continuity and about civilisation are evidently not present today. Whilst these factors appear to have determined that factory and sweated women were ‘problems’ in 1911, the concern expressed about sweated women’s condition was necessarily a concern about the worst excesses of unregulated capitalism – the exploitation of atomised and disempowered workers to procure profits. Whilst sweated women’s material exploitation was often viewed as indicative of their non-departure from gender norms and their need for chivalric male protection, a concern with their economic exploitation was also held by ‘benevolent liberal patriarchs’ like Piddington and the reporters. Blinded by distressingly independent, maternal instinct repudiating factory women, these actors were unable to see the comparable wages paid to factory women as a problem. The congruence of the discourse of civilisation, anxiety of race suicide, prevalence of gender norms of womanly dependence and fact that sweated

women experienced the excesses of the unfettered free market determined that the state decided that sweating was to be regulated. The *Lone Hand* reports and the appended reports on sweating were crucial not only for what they reveal, but also for the state responses that followed them.
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