

A Not-So-Gentle Invasion: Changes to Women's Participation in Public Service Workforces in the 1970s

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The increase in women's workforce participation is one of the most significant changes to labour markets in recent decades. This research considers the timing, circumstances and effects of the policy changes that affected the participation of women in the Queensland public service (QPS). It traces the construction of the barriers to women's participation in the early 1900s, and the dismantling of those barriers in the 1970s. It argues that the Queensland government had effectively created secondary labour market conditions for its female employees, through policies such as the marriage bar, restrictions on the quantity of female recruits and different career structures for women. Decisions to relax or remove these decisions required more than social acceptance, but also conducive labour market and economic conditions. Once the Queensland government removed demand-side barriers in the early 1970s and offered female employees the same pay and opportunities as male employees, women flocked into the Queensland public service – not slowly and gradually in response to preferences and supply-side choices, but dramatically in a short period. The proportion of female employees in the QPS increased disproportionately compared to the increases in the broader Australian labour market. By 1975, women comprised 60 per cent of all recruits to QPS, providing an early forecast of the proportion of women in the QPS today.

The increase in women's workforce participation is one of the most significant changes to Australian and other labour markets in recent decades. The prime indicator of these changes is the labour force participation rate (LFPR) which measures the proportion of the working aged population that is in the workforce. In Australia, the most dramatic of these changes occurred in response to policy changes in the 1970s: female LFPR increased by 14.8 per cent in the twenty years from 1969 to 1989 (from 37.1 per cent to 51.9 per cent) and a further 6.8 per cent (to 58.7 per cent) in the next twenty years to 2009.¹ The proportion of the workforce that was female increased from 31.1 per cent in 1969 to 45.5 per cent by 2009.

Theories regarding the change in female LFPR include economic theories that suggest demand-side and supply-side factors, and other theories that explain exclusion in terms of gender relations. Since removal of many structural barriers to female participation in the 1970s, much of the literature focuses on supply-side explanations for increasing female LFPR, such as increasing rates of educational attainment among women and the increasing propensity to work while raising young children.

This paper considers changes to female participation in the Queensland public service (QPS) before and after the landmark changes in the 1970s. How did the participation of women change over time, in what circumstances? To what extent is this change explained by supply-side theories about the changing choices and preferences of women? First, the paper provides a brief review of the major themes and theories regarding changes in LFPR. It then proceeds to examine changes in the QPS, from the construction of barriers to female participation in the early 1900s and the subsequent dismantling of those barriers in the 1970s. The research uses an historical-comparative approach and a mix of qualitative and quantitative data sources to provide a longitudinal perspective.² It draws qualitative data from documentary sources, including primary and subordinate legislation, human resource policies, annual reports of public personnel agencies and the secondary

literature. It draws quantitative data from a range of central personnel agency sources, and re-organises this data to meet the research aims. It draws on the Australian Bureau of Statistics for Australian labour force comparisons. The research is generalisable across Australian jurisdictions, and across OECD countries that have experienced similar social and economic trends.

The research finds that early public services effectively created a dual labour market, with a tenured career path for men, but routine and insecure jobs for women. The secondary labour market for women was justified due to both social conditions and economic circumstances – a dampening of demand for women rather than genuine labour market differentiation or supply side considerations by women. Further, it finds that decisions to relax or remove demand-side constraints on women's employment were associated with economic and labour market conditions rather than just social demands. Once governments began to dismantle this secondary labour market, women's participation in public service employment began to rise – not gradually due to changes in preferences and choices, but dramatically in a very short period as baby-boomer women rushed to take advantage of improved public sector opportunities. Women were simply ready and waiting to avail themselves of respectable conditions and opportunities and proper recognition and reward for their merits. Within five years, the recruitment rate of women increased by more than half, from 40 per cent to 60 per cent of recruits, at rates that foreshadowed the proportion of women currently employed in the QPS.

The term Queensland public *service* (QPS) is used to describe the core departments of government covered by public service acts, and includes largely clerical and professional roles. The term Queensland public *sector* is used to describe all Queensland public employment, and includes a broader range of occupations working in main roads, railways, public works, electricity, transport, health and education.

Female Participation

Much has been written about the reasons for the change in women's labour force participation, often drawing on economic theories to categorise change as a response to demand-side or supply-side factors. Demand-side theories suggest that employers preferred to employ males in jobs requiring a higher level of education – even if females had equal education, employers still perceived that they had lesser commitment to stay at work. Supply-side theories suggest that women were excluded or segregated in the labour market due to lower levels of human capital – this explained their choice of occupation and justified their lower pay and limited career paths.³ Hakim⁴ went further to suggest that labour market outcomes are driven by women's own choices and preferences. Subsequent scholars have questioned this notion that individual preferences guide labour market outcomes. Some criticise the approach as over-estimating the removal of demand-side structural constraints, as many women continue to be constrained by factors such as public policy, the availability of child-care, labour market segmentation and discrimination. Others have criticised these theories based on supply-side considerations, and whether individual choices are constrained by family, social, economic and other factors.

Economic theories fail to consider non-economic factors. Placing the blame on individuals ignores the gendered nature of relationships and the organisational processes that shape inequality. Economic theories are undermined by considering whether women are in positions simply because they choose to be, or due to attribution and allocation processes beyond their control. For example, women who demonstrated equal merit to men on objective criteria were often excluded due to a lack of other characteristics associated with traditional incumbents.⁵ Gender theories provide better explanations of how the

gendered relations of the private domain, where there are strongly held perceptions about masculinity and femininity, were reproduced in the public domain of the workplace. This was not just about difference but also about power, and distinctions between male and female spheres were created to maintain the domination of men and the subordination of women. Concepts of homo-sociability led to occupational segregation in several forms: segregated groups where women were excluded from the male workplace; or the subordination of women in mixed groups so as not to devalue masculinity.⁶

Since the removal of many of the legal and social barriers to women's employment in the 1960s and 1970s, many scholars now focus on supply side explanations for increased female LFPR. The literature suggests strong support for supply-side explanations and, in particular, agreement that increased female LFPR is largely due to increasing rates of educational attainment among women and the increasing propensity to work while raising young children. Some scholars also explain the increased participation rate in terms of generational differences. For example, DiNatale and Boraas suggest that women from the baby-boom generation (born 1945-65) could choose whether to accept the options raised by changing legislation and social conditions, while Generation X women (born 1966-75) are just expected to combine work with family.⁷

The research now proceeds to examine the particular case of the QPS, to consider the changes in female participation, and which theories might explain these changes.

Constructing Barriers to Women's Participation 1859-1969

The first period in this study is from 1859 to 1969. In this period, patriarchal attitudes affected hiring decisions by restricting female labour supply and creating other cultural limits on female employment.⁸ The QPS effectively created a secondary labour market for women through recruitment restrictions, occupational segregation and the marriage bar.

Restrictions on Female Recruitment

A key means of restricting women's participation was through discriminatory recruitment policies. The merit principle, which underpins public employment, was intended to give everyone access to public positions, with recruitment based on open competition in public examinations, promotion based on comparative merit amongst those within the public service, and protection of merit through appeal processes that allowed scrutiny of decisions.⁹ However, merit was implemented in gendered ways, based on gender stereotypes about women's strengths and weaknesses, and perceptions of their lesser need for work satisfaction and income. Discrimination thrived in the public service environment where, without a profit goal and dependence on low wage costs, employment policies could support the needs of the male breadwinner by channelling women into positions with lesser career opportunities. The shortage of women in Australia in earlier years reinforced gender stereotypes that women's place was in the home, and that there should be limited work opportunities.¹⁰

In the first 40 years to 1900, the QPS excluded women from applying for positions as clerks. The recruitment regulations required that successful examinees be placed on a strict order of merit list, and appointments were made from that list. However, the Board deemed the majority of positions as unsuitable for women, for reasons including their unsuitability for the tasks required, and the unsuitability of office accommodation which both required them to work alongside male employees and did not provide facilities for women. This perceived unsuitability of females for many positions, and hence being unable to be appointed from a strict sequential order of merit list, led to females being excluded

from sitting the clerical examination. The government streamed women into positions such as telephonists, secretaries and typists. In the 1890s, when economic circumstances led to the retrenchment of approximately 16 per cent of the QPS workforce, there was little scope for women to press their claims.¹¹

In the early 1900s, women gained new opportunities to compete for clerical positions. In 1902, the new Ministerial Board ruled that women could sit the clerical examination. The Board was surprised at their success and from 1904 declared separate numbers of vacancies for males and females. In the same year, economic circumstances began to deteriorate, and the QPS established a Royal Commission into expenditure reduction and retrenchments. Once again, the restriction of women's recruitment occurred alongside deteriorating economic circumstances that threatened the employment of men. Female candidates continued their success in examination results if not in obtaining positions – they comprised one-third of the people deemed to have passed the 1908 examination but were only allocated one-eighth of the positions. Their continued success in gaining appointments led to discontent amongst male employees, and further rule changes that allowed males and females to compete for immediate vacancies, but only males to be appointed to future vacancies. Females consistently gained most of the top five places at examinations but this did not translate into employment opportunities. These results confirm that the barriers to female recruitment were not due to any lack of capacity.¹²

The Marriage Bar

Alongside these restrictions on recruitment of women, governments prevented or interrupted the participation of women through another barrier – the marriage bar. In Queensland and other jurisdictions, the marriage bar both prevented the recruitment of married women, and required female employees to resign upon their marriage or be deemed to have forfeited their jobs. Such 'synthetic' turnover can be beneficial in an environment where remuneration is based on tenure-related salary scales, where learning curves peak early, where there is adequate replacement labour, and there is a normative climate that tolerates overt sex discrimination. The requirement to retire upon marriage became a justification for excluding women from jobs with career paths and long learning curves. This policy kept the participation rate for women low.¹³

Occupational Segregation

There were many examples of occupational segregation in this period. Prior to 1900, women were excluded from positions as clerks. From 1903, those women who passed the clerical examination but were not offered clerical positions were offered typist positions.¹⁴

The informal segregation of women within the clerical stream was evident from statements by a 1918 Royal Commission that introduced a new classification scheme. It suggested that female employment should be encouraged only in the general branches – the Public Service Commissioner thought such positions would satisfy females, but would not satisfy males who needed access to higher positions that suited their life, career and prospective family responsibilities.¹⁵ The gendered relations of the private domain were reproduced in the workplace and maintained the subordination of women.¹⁶ This informal segregation was announced in 1918, when the labour market was well supplied by returned service men, and the participation of women was not needed.

These informal restrictions on women's participation were entrenched in a formal policy from 1932. Under new regulations, only males would be able to compete for professional and clerical positions, and females would be restricted to appointments as clerk-typists rather than separately as clerks or typists.¹⁷ Coulter described this as 'a masterpiece of administrative timing – during the depression years, public opinion was in favour of the employment of men rather than women'.¹⁸ Governments, employers and

unions emphasised the career and income requirements of men, and community attitudes were generally negative towards women working outside the home.¹⁹ By 1959, less than one per cent held positions as clerks and access to career paths.²⁰

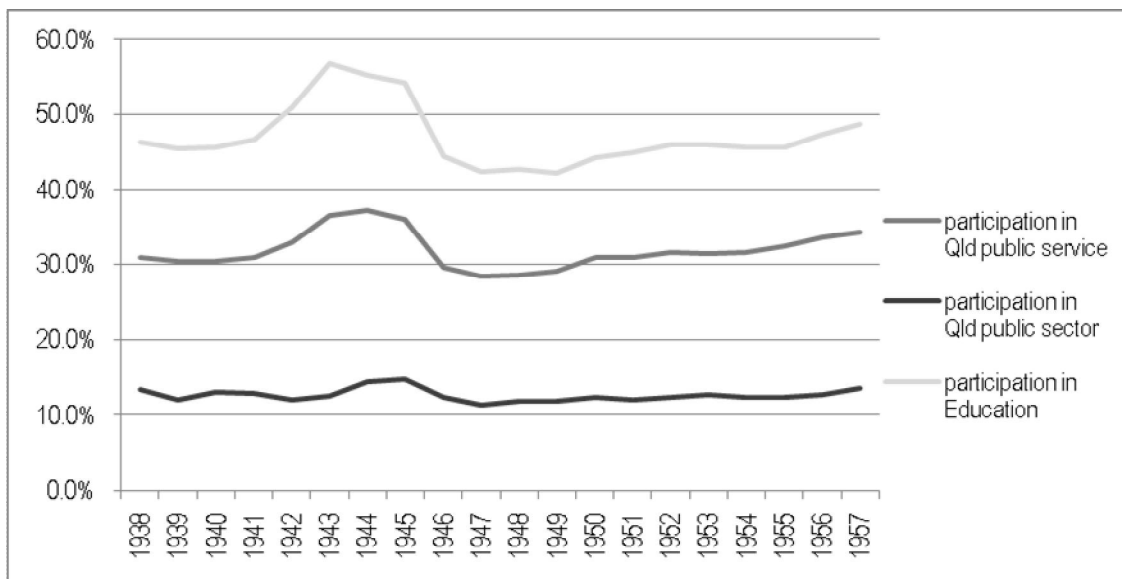
Women's Participation during World War II

The discriminatory nature of these barriers was evident during World War II, when governments readily relaxed their gender beliefs in the face of social and labour market concerns. Strachan notes that the *Manpower Regulations of 1942* required that single women under 45 years had to explain if they were not 'gainfully occupied', and this temporarily challenged the beliefs about women and their place in society.²¹

The QPS relaxed the age and gender restrictions to support greater female participation in its workforce. Women were still required to resign upon marriage, but were often re-engaged as temporary employees. The war also provided opportunities for female clerk-typists to be employed on more interesting and challenging clerical work. At the end of the War, legislation provided returned service men with rights to return to their pre-war positions or for preference in new employment. Women were forced out of jobs and by 1947 the proportion of women in the Australian workforce had dropped from a war-time peak of 25 per cent back to the pre-war level of 23 per cent.²²

The participation of women in the QPS before, during and after World War II was more dramatic, as demonstrated in Figure 1. There was a significant increase in the participation of women from the beginning of the war in 1939, particularly in education and the public service, and less noticeably across the whole public sector. There was also a sudden drop in participation at the end of the war, below the pre-war participation rates.

Figure 1. Women's Participation Rates in the Qld Public Sector, 1939-57



Source: Public Service Board Annual Reports 1939 to 1957

Summary

By the 1950s, QPS women were in a secondary labour market, with restrictions on their recruitment, a gender-limited career structure, and limited tenure dependent upon their single status. This made the QPS a less attractive choice than many private sector employers who were prepared to employ married women (and enjoy the economic benefits of their lower salary costs). Governments developed many of these barriers during harsh economic circumstances, such as the limits on the number of female vacancies during

the recession of the early 1900s, and the formalisation of streaming women into clerk-typist positions in 1932 during the depression. The artificiality and unjustified nature of the barriers was demonstrated when labour market circumstances changed, such as the relaxation of barriers during war-time but the immediate reinstatement of the barriers at the end of the war.

Breaking Down the Barriers from the 1970s

The government removed many of these structural barriers in the 1970s, in response to both social trends and labour market circumstances. Women were employed on a more equal footing, and were provided with many of the primary labour conditions enjoyed by their male counterparts.

Removal of the Marriage Bar

Women's participation in public services increased dramatically upon the removal of the marriage bar.

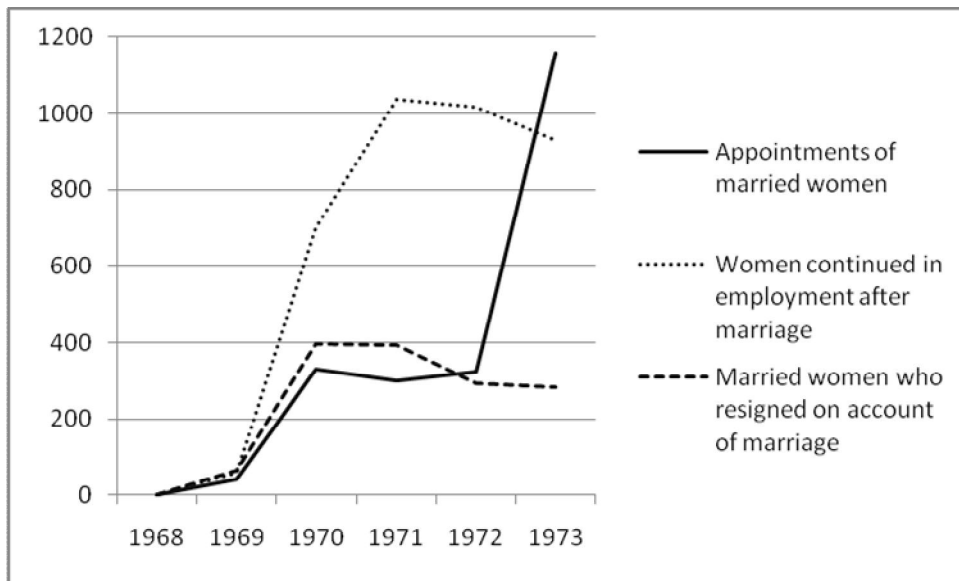
Despite increasing social pressure, the removal of the marriage bar in Australian public services was a protracted process. Sheridan and Stretton review the eight-year process for its removal in the Australian Public Service. In 1958, an inquiry into public service recruitment recommended removal of the marriage bar, as it was a waste of women's talent and training during a period of full employment. The Public Service Board investigated the proposal, and reported to government that there would be a balance of advantage, with better recruitment pools, minimal extra costs, and little effect on retention levels (based on experience in Britain, Canada and New Zealand, where one-half to two-thirds of women who took maternity leave did not return to work). However, rising unemployment and a looming election changed the economic and political climate by late 1960, and the government opted not to make a decision. By 1964, labour market circumstances had improved and census data confirmed the growing importance of married women in the private sector during further labour shortages. This paved the way for renewal of the original proposal, and approval to remove the APS marriage bar in 1966. Sheridan and Stretton's study demonstrates that economic and political currents were at least as persuasive as social conditioning.²³

The Queensland government followed and removed its marriage bar in late 1969. The new Queensland policy was two-fold, allowing for the recruitment of married women and for the retention of existing female employees after their marriage. During debate over the legislation, parliamentary speakers overwhelmingly supported the change, and many noted their frustration with losing good female employees to the private sector. One or two conservative government members opposed it, ostensibly for concerns about the impact on youth employment and the gateway for school-leavers into employment. The Premier dismissed these concerns. He claimed that the rate of young people entering the QPS was six times the rate of women resigning upon marriage, and the removal of the marriage bar would not displace youth employment.²⁴

The recruitment and retention of married women in the QPS grew quickly, as outlined in Figure 2. From 1970 to 1973, the appointment of married women represented approximately one-sixth of new recruits each year, although this figure included conversion of existing temporary employees to permanent status. In the same period, the number of married women who did not resign upon their marriage ranged from 700 to 1038 women, and was significantly more than the government prediction of around 200 women per year.

A small proportion of women still chose to resign upon marriage, ranging from more than one-third in 1970 to just less than one quarter by 1972 and 1973.

Figure 2. QPS Impact of Removal of the Marriage Bar



Source: Public Service Board Annual Reports 1969 to 1973

The removal of the marriage bar and other policies such as maternity leave contributed to the participation of women in the QPS.²⁵

Career Paths and Equal Pay

In the 1970s, the Queensland government changed traditional recruitment approaches due to a range of considerations. A prime factor was a change in economic and labour market circumstances, and the difficulty attracting high calibre junior level entrants in prosperous times and amidst increasing education levels in society. Other factors included questions about the appropriate level of education for the increasing complexity of public services, and questions whether school examination results were reliable as the major determinant in recruitment.²⁶

First, the government discontinued the recruitment of school leavers from the junior examination. Second, it split the clerical role into two streams: clerical assistants would have a junior education and perform routine work with reduced promotional opportunities; while clerks would have a senior education and progress more quickly into managerial and supervisory roles.²⁷

For the first time in 50 years, women were able to compete for entrance as clerks rather than clerk-typists. Existing female employees could sit special examinations for conversion to clerks in 1972 and 1973, and a total of 246 clerk-typists were converted under this process. New female recruits could compete for clerk positions from 1974. The QPS continued to recruit clerk-typists at the junior level, and accommodated them within the clerical assistant classification.²⁸

At the same time, progress was made on equal pay for women. The 1969 federal principle for 'equal pay for equal work' was soon supplemented with a more effective 1972 principle of 'equal pay for work of equal value', to be phased in by June 1975. The Queensland industrial tribunal adopted similar principles in 1974, and the QPS phased in equal pay by June 1975.²⁹

These rapid policy changes dramatically improved the attractiveness of public sector employment for women. Up to this point, educated women looking for careers were likely to have found the secondary labour market conditions of the QPS unattractive, and opted for white collar jobs in the private sector. Within a short space of time, women obtained the same tenure, career structures and pay rates as their male counterparts. The QPS recruitment focus up until 1989 was on base-grade level entry, with subsequent promotion often influenced by seniority as well as performance and protected by appeal rights. In this internal labour market, women had a high level of equality to their male counterparts.

Effects on QPS Recruitment

This action-packed four years from 1970 to 1974 led to dramatic changes to recruitment patterns in the QPS. Table 1 provides a summary of QPS recruits by qualifications, beginning two years before the reforms in 1967.

The table demonstrates how the policy changes affected male recruitment. Male recruits had an instant response to the 1971 decision to split the career path and restrict clerk positions to those with senior qualifications. The proportion of men recruited at junior level dropped by 75 per cent in three years (from 21.7 per cent in 1970 to 5.3 per cent in 1973). The proportion of male recruits with senior qualifications nearly doubled, from 16.5 per cent in 1970 to 29.6 per cent in 1973.

The more noticeable trend is in the proportion of female recruits. There were two turning points in the enhancements to female opportunities. The removal of the marriage bar might account for the small increase in the recruitment of women in 1970. The opportunity for female recruits to compete as clerks, for the first time in fifty years, led to dramatic and instant changes from 1974 – a drop in junior level female recruits from 43.5 to 26.5 per cent and an increase in senior level female recruits from 2.6 to 10.7 per cent. This growth in senior level recruits continued, increasing to 14.4 per cent in 1975 and 17.7 per cent in 1976, most likely as a result of the combination of career paths and equal pay.

The policy changes had a significant effect on the total recruitment of women. The proportion of female recruits escalated from 40 per cent before the reforms, to 45-49 per cent around the timing of removal of the marriage bar, and to 60 per cent upon the creation of equal career paths and equal pay. Women responded instantly to the removal of structural barriers and the offer of primary labour market conditions, and they flocked to public sector positions. This tipping in the gender balance of female recruits in the 1970s is similar to the proportion of female recruits 35 years later (around 65 per cent in 2009). The quantity of recruits in the mid-1970s (around 60 per cent) is reflected in the proportion of female employees in the QPS in 2009 (61.55 per cent).

The proportion of graduate entrants escalated from 1975, probably in response to the provision of more accessible tertiary education, and to the likelihood of more attractive pay once in the workforce. By 1978, the recruitment of female graduates had nearly tripled, and they were closing the gap between male and female graduate recruits.

Table 1. Entrance to the Queensland Public Service by Gender and Qualifications, 1968-88

	Grade 10 Public Service Examination			Grade 12 Senior Examination or Matriculant			Graduate			Post Secondary (Diploma Holders, Certificate Holders)			Other (Tech Exams, Not Specified)			Proportion of Recruits		Total Recruits
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	
1967	35.6%	33.1%	68.7%	10.7%	2.4%	13.2%	9.2%	2.3%	11.5%	2.9%	0.3%	3.2%	1.4%	2.1%	3.4%	59.7%	40.3%	1602
1968	25.8%	36.7%	62.4%	13.3%	4.6%	17.9%	10.9%	2.4%	13.2%	3.7%	0.7%	4.4%	0.6%	1.4%	2.0%	54.2%	45.8%	1896
1969	24.9%	36.4%	61.3%	14.4%	3.8%	18.2%	9.3%	3.1%	12.4%	5.3%	0.6%	5.9%	0.9%	1.4%	2.3%	54.7%	45.3%	2076
1970	21.7%	39.5%	61.2%	16.5%	2.6%	19.1%	8.7%	3.1%	11.8%	3.2%	0.9%	4.1%	0.6%	3.2%	3.9%	50.8%	49.2%	2173
1971	19.5%	30.7%	50.2%	25.5%	2.9%	28.4%	9.7%	3.6%	13.3%	4.7%	0.5%	5.2%	0.7%	2.3%	3.0%	60.1%	39.9%	1987
1972	10.8%	38.3%	49.1%	24.8%	4.5%	29.4%	9.5%	4.5%	14.0%	4.8%	0.3%	5.1%	0.4%	2.0%	2.4%	50.3%	49.7%	2070
1973	5.3%	43.5%	48.8%	29.6%	2.6%	32.2%	7.5%	2.1%	9.6%	3.2%	0.2%	3.4%	0.8%	5.1%	5.9%	46.5%	53.5%	2358
1974	8.0%	26.5%	34.5%	31.2%	10.7%	41.9%	6.7%	3.4%	10.1%	1.7%	1.3%	3.0%	0.7%	9.7%	10.4%	48.3%	51.7%	2611
1975	5.3%	26.4%	31.7%	24.6%	14.4%	38.9%	7.5%	4.2%	11.7%	2.4%	2.7%	5.1%	0.7%	11.9%	12.5%	40.4%	59.6%	3025
1976	4.3%	24.5%	28.8%	20.8%	17.7%	38.4%	8.6%	5.5%	14.0%	2.7%	4.3%	7.0%	0.4%	11.3%	11.7%	36.7%	63.3%	3278
1977	4.3%	19.0%	23.3%	21.0%	16.4%	37.4%	11.3%	8.4%	19.8%	2.5%	4.5%	7.1%	0.9%	11.6%	12.5%	40.1%	59.9%	2353
1978	3.3%	19.3%	22.6%	20.2%	15.1%	35.3%	11.7%	9.3%	21.1%	2.1%	8.3%	10.4%	1.4%	9.2%	10.6%	38.7%	61.3%	2087

Source: Public Service Board Annual Reports 1968-78

Note that this table reflects recruitment to the public service and not the broader public sector, and hence excludes female-dominated occupations such as nurses and teachers

Effects on Participation

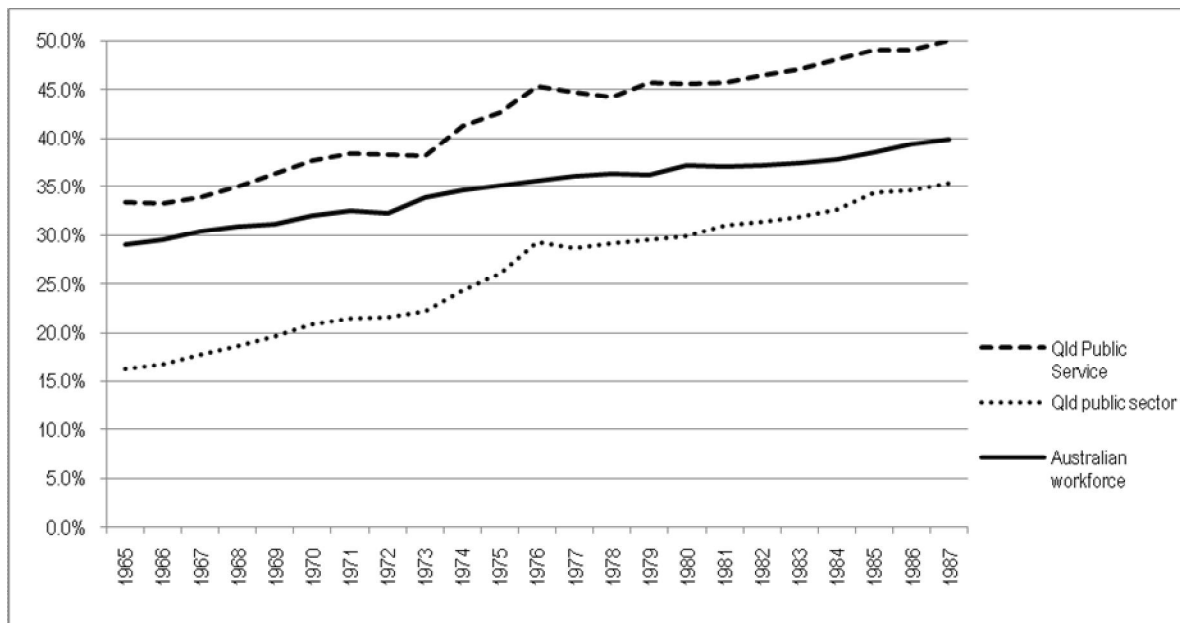
As a result of these policy changes, the growth in the proportion of women in the QPS began to outstrip the Australian labour force. Figure 3 outlines the trends in the proportion of women as employees in various spheres of Queensland public employment and in the Australian labour force from 1965 to 1987.

The proportion of women in the broader Australian labour force continued to increase at a relatively even rate. This even trend supports theories that the removal of demand constraints led to gradual changes in female employee behaviour and choices on the supply-side.

The trend in the Queensland public *service* is more distinct. The proportion of women in the QPS was approximately 33 per cent from 1965 to 1967, and had been relatively stable between 30 and 34 per cent since the end of the war in 1946. In 1967, there was a relatively small gap of 3.5 per cent between the proportions of women in the Australian labour force and the QPS workforce (30.4 and 33.9 per cent respectively). This gap widened marginally each year from 1968 to 1973, which may be associated with the discussions and eventual removal of the marriage bar in 1969, and the likelihood that federal decisions on equal pay in 1969 and 1972 would be adopted in the QPS. The gap widened significantly to seven per cent in 1974 and to ten per cent in 1976 with the introduction of equal career paths and equal pay.

Similar policies were adopted across the Queensland public *sector*, and similar trends are evident. The gap between the proportion of women in the Queensland public sector and the Australian labour market closed from 13 per cent in 1965 to six per cent by 1976 and to 4.6 per cent by 1987.

Figure 3. Women as a Proportion of Employees, 1965-87



Source: Queensland Public Service Board Annual Reports 1969-87; ABS year Book Australia (various)

These overall participation rates are an exciting start, but do not address less visible considerations such as career advancement or overall labour market segmentation, which are beyond the scope of this paper. Career advancement was less important at the time, given the focus on base-grade recruitment for everyone, and subsequent internal promotion. However, a review of the changing gender profile of agencies reveals several trends in

labour market segmentation between the mid 1970s and 1987. In those agencies that were female-dominated in the 1970s (such as health and education), the proportion of female employees escalated to more than 60 per cent of employees by 1987. In those agencies where female employees comprised one-quarter to one-half of the workforce (such as labour relations, justice, executive services, commercial development, and the Public Service Board), the proportion of women grew more rapidly between 9 and 18 per cent. However, traditionally male departments with low rates of female employment (such as railways, lands, local government, valuers, public works, police, forestry, irrigation and main roads) had a lesser influx of women, usually less than five per cent, and the proportion of women did not exceed 20 per cent. Occupational segregation would remain a workforce challenge.

Conclusion

This research traced the policies that changed women's participation in the Queensland public service and public sector. The research supports several conclusions.

First, the QPS and other jurisdictions introduced several barriers to the demand for female employees, such as restrictions on the number of vacancies available to female candidates, the marriage bar, and a truncated career path that streamed all women into clerk-typist rather than clerk positions. This effectively created a secondary labour market, where women did not have the same tenure, pay or career paths as male employees. Lower levels of female participation are not explained by supply-side theories about lower levels of human capital, as more talented women were excluded due to restrictions on the number of female vacancies. They are best explained by a combination of demand-side theories and gender theories.

Second, changing economic and labour market circumstances proved that these barriers were socially constructed. For example, the QPS abruptly relaxed these policies to take advantage of women's labour power during World War II, and as abruptly resumed them at the end of the war.

Third, the construction and removal of these demand-side barriers to female employment can be associated with labour market circumstances as well as changing social attitudes. Construction of the barriers to recruitment of women occurred during the recessionary times in the 1890s and 1900s, and the streaming of women into clerk-typist positions occurred during the depression in 1932. Relaxation of the barriers during World War II was due to labour market requirements. Women had pursued removal of the barriers for many years, but governments did not remove most barriers until it suited labour market requirements in the 1970s. While gender theories may better explain the social construction of these barriers, economic drivers led to the removal of these barriers.

Fourth, the removal of these barriers also removed the secondary labour market status of female QPS employees. Within a short period from 1970 to 1975: the marriage bar was removed; women were able to apply for clerk positions with career paths within an internal labour market rather than be side-lined into clerk-typist positions; and women were offered equal pay. Within an internal labour market, women had gained relative equality with their male counterparts.

Fifth, the removal of demand-side barriers and offering of primary labour market conditions led to an instant influx of women to the QPS. Educated women in the baby-boomer generation were immediately ready to access these improved conditions and opportunities. It is unclear whether this influx was from women in the private sector labour market who had previously found public sector conditions less appealing, or from women outside the labour market. But it is clear they were there and ready, and it was not due to

slow changes in women's aspirations or education levels. The proportion of female recruits increased by 20 per cent in a few years, from 40 per cent in 1967 to 60 per cent by 1975 – an influx of baby-boomer women, rather than a gradual change by later generations.

Sixth, the change in participation rates has been sustained. Women are winning QPS positions at similar rates in 2009 to those 35 years earlier – the proportion of female recruits in the 2000s at around 65 per cent is only marginally higher than the proportion of female recruits in 1975. The response to these early reforms foreshadowed the level of female participation to come, and is reflected in the current composition of the QPS workforce – in 2009, women comprised 61.6 per cent of the workforce. This suggests that theories related to supply side choices and preferences are not sufficient to explain the increases in the participation of women in public services. Rather, economic circumstances supported removal of the demand-side barriers to female participation, and led to a not-so-gentle invasion of women into public services.

In summary, the participation of women in the QPS changed dramatically due to changes in the 1970s. Supply-side theories of lower human capital are not supported. Economic theories are relevant in two ways. The removal of barriers required more than changes in gender relations, but also economic drivers that required the participation of women in the labour force. Further, the removal of barriers and access to primary labour market conditions lead to an increased female preference for public sector employment.

That is not to say that the QPS did not and does not face challenges in the employment of women. Women's increased participation was in female-dominated and more gender-neutral agencies and they made little headway in male-dominated agencies. Subsequent reforms after the 1980s also brought challenges, as the internal labour market was replaced by recruitment at all levels, and merit was no longer related to seniority but could be more subjectively interpreted. Nonetheless, the participation of women in public services remains higher than their participation in the private sector, as subsequent generations continue the engagement in public sector employment begun by women of the baby-boomer generation in the 1970s.

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Endnotes

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- * This conference paper (full version) has been double-blind assessed by two referees.
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