'SIMPLY WASHED OUT BY A WOMAN':
Social Control, Status and Discrimination
in a Statutory Authority

Patrick N. Troy & Clem J. Lloyd

URU Working Paper No. 4
June 1988

SERIES EDITORS:
S.R. Schreiner and C.J. Lloyd
URU WORKING PAPERS

Established in 1966, the Urban Research Unit carries out studies in the social sciences on Australian cities. Work undertaken in the Unit is multidisciplinary and ranges widely over economic, geographic, historical, sociological, and political aspects of urban and regional structure and development.

URU Working Papers are issued on an occasional basis with the intention of stimulating discussion and making research results quickly and easily available. Most papers will be published in final form elsewhere. In some cases, material will be published which, although of specialist interest, has no ready outlet.

The views expressed in these papers are those of the authors and not the Urban Research Unit

Series Editors:
Shelley R. Schreiner & Clem J. Lloyd
ABSTRACT

This paper is part of a continuing program of work by the authors on the administrative history and practices of the Hunter District Water Board which is one of the principal statutory authorities in New South Wales. The program has been generously assisted by the Board. The centre piece of this series is a comprehensive administrative history of the Board since its establishment in 1892, scheduled for publication in 1989. An associated series of papers will cover a range of issues related to this core study. This paper deals with questions of discrimination in the organisation and administration of the Board. Companion papers will cover the statutory basis of the Board, its internal work practices and rituals, the Board’s relationship with trade unions, its pricing policies, and its attitudes to major industrial customers such as BHP.

'Simply Washed Out by a Woman' analyses questions of social control, status and discrimination in the day-to-day administration of the Board. It concludes that the most common forms of discrimination have been directed to religion, politics and gender. After briefly considering the limited evidence of religious and political discrimination, the bulk of the paper examines historical evidence of gender discrimination. It looks at occupational discrimination directed against women; discrimination in comparative career structures between men and women; discriminatory practices levied at married women; discrimination in the incidence of career-related benefits such as superannuation; dress constraints imposed on both women and men; the use of nomenclature which applies a discrimination against women and men; idiosyncratic working practices designed to imply an inferior status for women employees; gender discrimination based on pay differentials; and discriminatory allocation of high-status jobs between men and women.

The paper concludes that the Board’s attitude to its female employees has been generally conservative until recent years. A supplementary conclusion is that the Board’s Salaried Officers’ Association, which covers all salaried workers for the Board, in earlier years favoured the interests of its male members to the detriment of women. In total, the paper suggests that the Board’s administrative practice has shown discrimination against women until relatively recent years when genuine efforts have been made to redress a traditional imbalance and eliminate discriminatory practice.
Introduction: Forms of Discrimination

In looking at any organisation it is usually possible to identify a variety of practices and actions which reveal prejudice or discrimination in its administration. That is, we can usually identify practices and actions which are fundamentally unfair because they deny or take away individuals' basic rights. These practices and actions may also reduce efficiency or inhibit its improvement.

Discrimination and prejudice may take many forms. A study of the administration of the Hunter District Water Sewerage and Drainage Board (hereafter, the 'Board'), a major statutory authority in N.S.W., indicates that the most common discriminations related to religion, political beliefs and gender. There were practices and actions involving race, nationality and breaches of criminal law which, while important to the individuals concerned, were fewer in number.

In this paper, prejudice and discrimination are considered in social and historical terms. What is now be regarded as unacceptable behaviour may not have been so viewed in earlier years. Issues which might now be regarded as revealing prejudice and discrimination may have been treated differently by our

---

1 We would like to thank the Hunter District Water Board for their support of this Project. Alan Bradley and Shelley Schreiner in their different ways made the exercise feasible and for this we acknowledge our debt. Marian Sawer, Max Neutze and Peter Spearritt provided useful comments on an earlier draft of the paper.

2 The 'Board' means the Hunter District Water, Sewerage and Drainage Board (HDWSSB), as it was known from 1892 until 1938, and the Hunter District Water Board (HDWB) thereafter. 'Metropolitan Board' means the Metropolitan Water Supply Sewerage and Drainage Board which is responsible for the provision of hydraulic services in metropolitan Sydney.
forebears. The weight of available evidence varies and documentary evidence may be slight.

In the period under review, since the creation of the Board in 1892, there is no, or virtually no, written evidence about religious discrimination, but oral tradition and widely held views among the staff are too strong to ignore. Most claims of religious discrimination were assumed to be the discrimination of Catholics against Protestants or vice versa. At times the organisation has favoured Protestant recruitment, at others Catholics. More recently, staff of non-conformist religious affiliations have been favoured. At no time did the Board discuss the issue, let alone formulate a policy on this question, yet the patterns of affiliation in some sections has been so strongly either Protestant or Catholic that the results could hardly have been achieved by chance. As recruitment processes and practices have been codified, it has become harder to practice religious discrimination or to reveal prejudice.

Throughout the Board's history allegations have periodically been recorded that the executive of the organisation practised discrimination against union officials or manual and mechanical workers on political grounds. The allegations have always been denied but oral evidence from both salaried staff and wages men suggest that the denials have not always been accurate. Written evidence may not have existed at all but for the case in which the Chief Engineer, having suggested that the file should be rewritten and the original version destroyed, had his intention thwarted by an efficient clerk who inadvertently created a second file on which the incriminating evidence lay. As recently as 1972 the organisation denied promotion to the Salaried Division of a man alleged to have been a Communist in spite of arguments by the Chief Engineer that the person concerned was a most efficient, conscientious worker. As with religious affiliation, political preferences seem to have influenced patterns of appointment. A comparison of those appointed to the permanent staff with the total staff suggests that while the formal condition for transfer to permanent status was seniority, other criteria for selection or advancement also operated.

---

3 Board employees are classified in two categories: the Salaried Division and the Wages Division (formerly the Manual and Mechanical Division). The Salaried Division was subdivided into three parts (Professional, Administrative and Clerical, and General) which inhibited promotion because of the rigid classification of positions into one or other part. In 1963 Engineers were separated from other professional officers to form a fourth.
The evidence of prejudice or discrimination against women is different. For most of the Board’s history preferential treatment of men over women was not regarded as discrimination either in the Board or more generally. The Board’s records therefore contain rich and artless evidence of the many ways in which women were paid less, had fewer promotion possibilities, were required to resign on marriage and so on.

In its staffing policy and practices in each period the Board has faithfully, even slavishly, followed the most conservative of contemporary attitudes. It has never been a trend setter or leader. On occasions, its reluctance to adopt current practice could be described as reactionary. Its attitudes to the employment of women, to modes of dress and address, to distinctions between wage and salary earners and to unions and unionists provide useful insights into gender and class relations in an Australian industrial city.

**Discrimination Against Women**

When the Board was established in 1892 shorthand was taken by a male clerk and was considered a skilled clerical task. Today, this task is discharged almost exclusively by women. Although the earliest recorded woman applicant for a clerical position was in 1914 it was not until 29 March 1917 that a woman was employed on a clerical task and then as a ‘typiste’. While in all official accounts Olive Hutchinson is accorded the honour of being the first woman employee of the Board, in fact that distinction belongs to Jessie Cooper, who commenced work as the Head Office cleaner on 2 September 1892 and served in that capacity for fourteen years. She was followed by other women. The unacknowledged contribution of Jessie and the women who worked as cleaners is indicative of the class attitudes which prevailed then, which continue today and which are embodied in the Divisional structure of the Board. The attitude to the women who were cleaners was neatly summed up by the first Board Secretary, Mr Alfred E. Fry who, in giving evidence before a Parliamentary Select Committee

---

4 Until very recently ‘typiste’ was used instead of the more common ‘typist’. When responsibility for operating the Board’s telephone system was transferred to a woman, the position was designated as a ‘telephoniste’. Similarly, ‘comptometriste’ enjoyed Board usage. The words were spelled with the ‘e’ to feminise the jobs. Occupational gender-marking and its prolonged retention reflected the conservatism of the Board.
into the Hunter District Water Supply and Sewerage Board in 1896, enumerated the Board's staff. He did not include caretakers or cleaners. When asked by the Committee Chairman if there was a caretaker for the Maitland branch office he said: "No; the office is simply washed out by a woman." Officially, the contribution of these hidden people to the pursuit of public health goes unrecognised in spite of the Board's initial dedication to 'pro sanitate civium' – a motto which later became 'pro salute civium'.

**Occupational Segregation**

We cannot know the history of all the women who have worked for the Board. Complete staff records have not been kept. It has been possible, however, to reconstruct a record of all the women who worked in the Salaried Division of the Board. Between 1917 and 1984, 953 women worked for the Board in a variety of capacities (see Table 1).

Female employees are grouped into their main occupational categories. They are further grouped into four historical periods in which the social and economic conditions were significantly different. Prior to World War II, most women were appointed to typing/secretarial positions but this occupation has gradually become proportionally less significant as other opportunities have opened up, although since the Board's inception two thirds (66.4%) of all female employees have occupied positions under the classifications of 'shorthand-writer' or 'general office assistant'. Tracers, who comprised a fifth (21.1%) of the total female workforce, increased proportionally in significance until recently. The most striking changes in the pattern of women's employment has occurred since the Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 made discrimination unlawful. More than half of the recruitment of clerks was in the period 1982-84. Clerks enjoyed a higher status and better career opportunities than secretary/typists.

---

5 Virtually all women, with the exception of cleaners and a handful appointed since the mid-1980s to the Wages Division, have been white collar workers in the Salaried Division.

6 The insertion of Part IXA into the Act in 1980 required public sector agencies to develop equal opportunity management plans. Since 1977, and more significantly 1980, the Board has introduced structural and other reforms of its discriminatory practices. These include occupational restructuring, appointment of women to jobs previously held solely by men, the shift from a seniority to a merit system of promotion, and the introduction of maternity leave.
### Table 1: Occupation of Women by Period of Appointment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1917-39</th>
<th>1940-45</th>
<th>1946-76</th>
<th>1977-84</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secretary*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'n'</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total %</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>39.9</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comptometerist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'n'</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total %</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracer/Architectural Drafter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'n'</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total %</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineer/Mathematician/Chemist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'n'</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total %</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab Assist/Library Technician</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'n'</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total %</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephoneist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'n'</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total %</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'n'</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total %</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Processor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'n'</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total %</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Office Assistant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'n'</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total %</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'n'</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total %</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Trainee</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'n'</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total %</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Engineering Cadet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'n'</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total %</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'n'</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>532</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>55.7%</td>
<td>20.1%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Shorthand-Writer/Typist*
The recent practice of recruiting general office assistants instead of secretaries and typists provides the Board with some flexibility in managing its staff because general office assistants can be called on to discharge a variety of duties. It also represents a marked expansion in the career opportunities for women, who have historically been denied entry to clerical grades by their classification as secretary/typist. This recent period has also seen the appointment of women to a variety of other occupations. Several of these represent traditional female occupations (nursing and librarianship) and the newly emerging one of data processing. The actual expansion of opportunities for women has been 'unadventurous'. Recent changes may come to reflect the pattern described by Compton and Jones (1984: 46-47) following the introduction of computers into offices in Britain. Their study revealed that computerisation which requires large numbers of employees for routine batch work is likely to lead to 'deskilling' of non-manual office workers. Further, while minor decision-making is decentralised, control is centralised in ways that reduce worker responsibilities and skill.

**Career Structures**

Apart from the war years the Board had a steady pattern of recruitment of women (see Table 2). The level before the 1938 restructuring averaged 3-5 per annum and after 1938 it was 16-17 per annum until 1977 when the Board boosted the employment of women. In spite of the increased intake, the proportion of women staff remains low because of the rapid increase in both the Professional and General divisions for which few women have been considered.

The period of service for women has varied markedly as Table 2 reveals. Those commencing work in the 20 years from 1917 to 1936 worked for an average of 11.8 years and the pattern over the period was remarkably steady. The 'no-married-woman' rule in force until 1977, especially in this period of difficult economic conditions, encouraged those with aspirations towards independence to delay marriage and hold on to their jobs. In any event, because of high unemployment in the inter-war years the Board was able to select the very best and, presumably the potentially most career-oriented women who were likely to stay on. The expectations of those recruited late in the 1930s as economic recovery continued, and those following the 1938 reorganisation and expansion of the Board were different. In general, women in this and later periods married younger and served the Board for less than half the period of their
older predecessors. The well-documented employment preference for returned servicemen in the immediate post-war years led to a sharp drop in career length for women. As the Board progressively modified its policy on post-marital employment beginning in the 1950s, the average period of service increased.

Table 2: Mean Length of Service of Women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period Recruited</th>
<th>Years of Service</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1917-21</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922-26</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927-31</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932-36</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937-41</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942-46</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947-51</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952-56*</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957-61*</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962-66*</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967-71*</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972-76*</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977-81*</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Some women hired since 1954 have yet to complete their career. The projected mean for each period of recruitment is therefore higher than indicated above.

Marriage Bar
The first women to be employed in the Salaried Division were typists. Four years later, in 1921, the first woman tracer was appointed. It was not until 1938, when there was a major administrative reorganisation and re-equipment of the office, that the first female comptometer operator was appointed. This marked an increase in the range of job openings for women in the Board. The most important factor governing overall length of tenure was the rule prohibiting the employment of married women which was in force until 1977. Given this simple constraint, however, the continuity and experience of employment varied
significantly for women over time. We cannot offer final comments on those recruited after 1954 except to say that even though their careers are not finished their average service with the Board was already longer than any except those recruited before 1937. The removal of overt discriminatory practices and the entry of women into a more diverse range of occupations should mean that more of them will find more rewarding careers in which they will remain longer. The experience of women employed in the banking industry was similar to that of women in the Board. The 'marriage bar' was removed earlier and career opportunities were allegedly opened up but as Game and Pringle (1981) point out women have not appeared among the ranks of senior officers. The numbers of women involved for all occupations in the Board save typist/secretary are so small that we cannot offer firm conclusions about the length of service of different occupations.

Employment practice during the war years was anomalous. A small number of married women were employed by the Board as temporary staff. In 1952 there remained 11 married women and two widows. At this time, when it was not difficult to get single staff, the Board reverted to the pre-war policy of recruiting unmarried female staff. All women were required to note the decision. Earlier, in 1943, the Board's Salaried Officers' Association had sought a policy statement from the Board in regard to the continued employment of married women after the war and to the effect of their employment on the seniority of other (presumably single) women. None of the Board's officers nor the Officers' Association representatives who met with the President to discuss the issues were women. The President, C.S. Schroder, explained that after the war the Board would adopt government policy on the employment of married

7 Indirect and systematic discrimination has operated, and to some extent continues to operate. The way in which work was organised (for example, rigid working hours) assumed the existence of a domestic support system and the absence of demanding family responsibilities carried out by married and unmarried women, many of whom cared for aging parents and younger siblings. This is clearly illustrated by the kinds of reforms that have had to be introduced to accommodate family responsibilities characteristically shouldered by women: flexible hours, permanent part-time work, maternity leave, and so forth. The shift from a seniority to a merit principle of promotion has also mitigated the disadvantage experienced by women with interrupted career paths.

8 'Association' refers to the Hunter District Water Board Employees Association and generally, in this paper, the branch covering the Salaried Division of the Board. 'Branch' means the branch of the Association covering the Salaried Division.
women, and that the effect of married women on the seniority of junior officers
would be dealt with individually and on the merits of junior officers so affected.

Occasionally women attempted to subvert the 'no-married-women' rule by failing to advise the Board of their change in status. The penalty for failing to do so was instant dismissal. This draconian treatment was meted out on at least one occasion when the Secretary discovered that a typist had recently married without advising him.

The Association sought in 1956 to liberalise the 'no-married-women' rule, although in strictly limited terms. It requested that women who married while in the Board's service be allowed to continue in employment but only for two years from the date of marriage. The Board reaffirmed its policy and noted that it had only one married woman on its staff. She was only allowed to remain for a short time after her marriage because she was a specialist accounting machinist who was essential for the annual billing operation. The Board relied on the easy labour market, the fact that senior women leaving could be cheaply replaced by juniors and the argument that the employment of married women denied young women jobs or promotion. However, by 1966 the Board was arguing that its policy was costing it the loss of senior, highly trained women who, with an average of five to seven years service, were at their peak efficiency. Many were resigning prior to their marriage to take up jobs with employers who would allow them to continue working afterwards. Although women in the Sydney Metropolitan Board could work as long as they liked after marriage, the Board decided in 1966 that a woman could continue after marriage for a maximum of two years providing that she had worked for five before hand and had no adverse reports on her conduct or efficiency. The gratuitous insult and the fact that the Board was unaware how far it was behind the times reveals how firmly entrenched discrimination was in its administration.

The Association had no reputation as a crusader for women's rights but in 1968, following representation from many of its women members, it asked the Board to reduce the qualifying period from five years to two years. The Board agreed to a compromise reducing the period to four years. A year later, however, the rule about the two-year limit on post marital employment was reviewed, largely because the Board had lost most of its experienced shorthand writers and was losing other highly-qualified women. By that time several government
departments, the Newcastle City Council and other local government bodies were not only allowing married women to remain in employment indefinitely; they were also appointing them to jobs. Reaction dies hard. The Board was willing only to offer married women two years employment after their marriage providing they had worked for at least four years and were efficient. After that, their employment was to be reviewed yearly and was to be continued only if they exhibited 'good conduct, diligence and efficiency'. It should be noted that no male members of the Board's Salaried Division were subject to the same stringent employment conditions. We should also note that attitudes changed even more slowly on the engineering side of the Board where the Chief Engineer and his Deputy held the view that there was no necessity to allow married women to continue in employment for more than two years after their marriage. Even so, the engineers held no monopoly on reactionary views. In responding to Association requests in 1971 to reduce the qualifying period from four years to two, the Assistant Secretary and Secretary claimed that it required a minimum of four years service for shorthand-writers and typists to become proficient enough to warrant retaining their services after marriage.

It is difficult to imagine what transformations they felt came over a woman on marriage. It was as though some change was wrought on women by them sharing the connubial couch, but men clearly were not so affected. Married women, it was claimed, did not take the same interest in their work as single women and they took many more days sick leave compared with what they individually took before marriage, but no evidence was ever recorded which supported either claim. Perhaps it was a tacit acknowledgement that women bear the burden of domestic duties in most households.

Other considerations were important in determining the Board's policy. The first was the view among Board members and senior staff that once women were married and had someone to 'support' them they should give younger women a chance by leaving. That is, it was explicitly argued that married women were denying opportunities of employment for young school leavers. This argument was reiterated in each period of increases in unemployment. Secondly, it was held that married women ought to 'start their family' within two years of marriage and that in any event married women 'who knew what they wanted' were potentially a morally corrosive influence in the office. This latter view was not written down but was referred to by male officers in conversations with
the authors. It is a view about gender roles and moral values which are/were commonplace. The paradox in this implicit model of sexual expression is that men, on marriage, were believed to 'settle down' and present no danger to the moral climate of the organisation whereas women, on marriage, became a potently corrosive influence and a danger to the morals of all the men.

The Board employed 103 women in 1971, 64 of whom were shorthand-writers and typists and 25 were tracers. Although it was having great difficulty maintaining the required levels of skilled staff, especially in the secretarial/typing areas, the Board decided not to further change its policy on the employment of married women. We should note here that Jessie Cooper, and the women who followed her as cleaners, were married but that fact did not prevent them from being employed. Marriage was deemed as somehow reducing the capacity or ability of women engaged on other non-cleaning tasks, but it may have been a positive attribute for those with the responsibility to keep the place clean and tidy.

This may also have been a coincidental coalescing of class and gender ideas. Working class women have long performed duties considered 'unsuitable' for middle class women. In this case the cleaners were considered to be menials largely invisible and treated in much the same way as their male counterparts in the Wages Division. That is, they were not recorded as staff members nor did they work under the generous conditions of the Salaried Division.

By early 1976, the Board employed 109 women of whom 40 were married. Of the married women 33 per cent had been three years or more in the service, 30 per cent between two and three years and the remainder less. Following the passing of the New South Wales Anti-Discrimination Act in 1977, the Board realised that its policies were discriminatory and decided to allow women to remain in the Board's service after marriage without requiring annual written applications to continue. The President, A.C. Carmichael, also gave instructions to review any other procedures which might discriminate against women employees and, in particular, their entitlement to superannuation benefits.

*Conditions of Service: Superannuation*

The superannuation arrangements for men and women differed significantly. Men had always been entitled to contribute to the superannuation fund. They
could opt to contribute from the date they commenced work or from the date they were confirmed as permanent when it became compulsory for them to do so. Women, however, have been treated differently in different periods. Before 1938 they could contribute to the superannuation fund from the date they started work. After that date they could not do so until they were classified as 'seniors'. That is, they had to be over 30 years old and even then they did not have the classification as a right; they had to apply for permission to contribute and it was only granted if they were deemed suitable. Following Carmichael's 1977 directive to investigate the arrangements, the Board decided in 1981 to convert the remuneration of all women in the Salaried Division to an annual salary so that they would automatically be eligible for compulsory membership of the State Superannuation Fund, thereby removing one form of discrimination against them.

**Appropriate Dress: Respectability, Class & Social Control**

'Respectability' is a social construction, and 'being respectable' was an important criterion for white collar employment in the Board. As was common practice with public sector organisations until recently, young applicants for jobs had to produce a written reference from a Minister of religion. The characteristic codes of dress and speech also reveal much about the culture of this organisation. In its early days the Board's officers observed very strict dress rules. The men wore dark or sober suits with waistcoats and ties, a mode of dress deemed to be appropriate for the grave and cautious mien of those engaged in public service. The first women were also suitably attired. Although not formally written down the dress 'rules' were conservative. They were reinforced by the idiosyncracies of the senior officers of the Board, disagreements with whom on such matters of personal taste could have a damaging effect on career prospects.

Many a clerk, typist or tracer was berated or 'spoken to' about their inappropriate dress. Even contemporary staff can recount experiences of being ticked off for misdemeanours such as not wearing stockings even when the reason was that the person had a bad dose of sunburn, or being told that for a clerk to appear before the President without wearing a coat was disrespectful. Those members of staff who tried to express or dress themselves differently were marked down as 'not having the right attitude'. Conformism and
acceptance of authority were highly prized attributes, especially in the first 60 years of the Board.

The Board has been slow to fall into line with contemporary views on many issues. In few areas is this more obvious than in relation to dress. The Board's staff chafed (literally and figuratively) in their uncomfortable clothing for many years. In 1946 permission was sought from the Board for male staff to 'attend duty in sports clothes, i.e. sports trousers and soft open shirt if they so desire'. The Board conceded that summer conditions were sometimes such that it was appropriate for officers to exercise discretion in the removal of their coats or vests. Officers were reminded, however, that they were public servants and must observe the conventions. The wearing of shorts or open neck shirts were not permitted. Several times the Association sought further liberalisation, including an exemption from the necessity of wearing ties in hot weather, only to be met with a stern refusal. This was during the period of an exceptionally fastidious and autocratic President, C.S. Schroder

In 1966 the Association again sought permission for male officers to wear shorts and long socks in keeping with practice in comparable institutions. The request was refused and the Secretary and President deplored the increasing practice of officers not wearing a coat to the office. They were concerned that staff should dress to maintain the dignity of their employment in the Board, and pointed out that the air-conditioned office ensured that no personal discomfort occurred. They held the view that as the wearing of shorts and socks was not common practice in business and commerce, officers of the Board should not wear such attire.

The Board received a number of requests from Regional offices and the Association for dress reform, including a petition from 225 officers in 1968. Following evidence that the wearing of shorts and socks was permitted in a large number of public bodies and private firms in the region, the Board agreed to this mode of dress providing that it met 11 strict criteria and was judged by responsible officers to be appropriate. Conservative Bermuda walk shorts and socks could be worn with a business shirt and tie. The Board also attached one curious condition. It specified that underpants were to be worn. Those who wore shorts had to be prepared to present themselves to the Secretary (male) for inspection, and if they were not wearing underpants they were to be sent home.
Just why this piece of petty tyranny was insisted on is not clear. Men wearing ordinary trousers were not required to undertake similar inspection.

This liberalisation applied from 1 September through to 31 March each year and, following repeated representation and dispute, was extended to 31 May. In 1971 the Secretary advised male staff that the dress rules relating to the wearing of shorts were not being observed. In particular they were not wearing the correct colour shorts and were appearing in white socks! He reminded them that they could be stood down without pay for breaching the standards. The Association continued its campaign for individual discretion as to when shorts could be worn during the year, and in 1975 won this concession.

The dress rules affecting women were even more rigid. Women's shoulders and toes were not be seen. To display either or both was evidence of brazen behaviour. From the appointment of the first women to the Salaried Division their mode of dress was informally but tightly controlled. No uniform was required or issued until recently, and few have been willing to wear it. Tracers have always tended to wear a protective working smock over their street clothes but typists have not. Initially, women wore the sober garb of the day. As the years passed, the old men and, ultimately, the single older women of the Board's staff became the arbiters of taste. The younger female staff felt that the standard of dress was increasingly inappropriate to their life style and attitude.

In 1974 women sought some respite from the idiosyncratic enforcement of undefined dress rules, petitioning the Board to allow the wearing of slack suits or slacks and jumpers which were by then allowed in a number of state and local government bodies. The Board responded in mid-1974 by creating a Staff Dress and Appearance Standard Committee consisting of the Chief Accountant, a senior engineering officer, an officer from the Industrial Section, a representative from each of the Salaried Division Association, the Association of Professional Engineers of Australia (APEA) and the female staff. (Note that female staff were treated as a category separate from the Association of which they compulsory members). The President agreed that, pending the report of the Committee, 'dress suit slacks' could be worn. There is no record of the views of the staff about the need for such a Committee or appropriateness of its membership. Nonetheless the Committee recommended a mode of dress for
male and female staff which was endorsed by the Secretary, and issued a
directive on it to staff in July 1974.

The Committee was more liberal than the senior administration and, partly as an
act of rebellion against the views of the President, endorsed the proposal by the
Association that the wearing of ties should be optional. After a prolonged and at
times convoluted disagreement the Association simply advised the Board that,
from 9 February 1977, the wearing of ties would be optional. This led the Board
into an industrial dispute which was finally resolved when the Board withdrew
its opposition. In 1978 it adopted a policy similar to that of the Metropolitan
Board under which the wearing of ties was optional, but the Customer Service
Attendants were to be reminded that they had been issued with ties as part of
their uniform.

Men's dress had been a subject of contention for over 32 years. The Board, at
each stage, lagged behind contemporary attitudes. The belated Committee's role
of periodically reviewing dress in the light of changing fashions was not always
accepted, and in trying to defend its stance the Board absorbed many hours of
senior executive and staff time.

Following their success in obtaining permission to wear slacks the women also
sought other liberalisations in dress rules. These were progressively obtained.
By late 1982 there were few restrictions, and the Board accepted that the Staff
could be relied on to make their own decisions about mode of dress which was
comfortable without offending members of the public. In all this extended
debate, little concern was evinced for the dress of men in the Wages Division.
There were no dress rules for them and whenever they sought a uniform or
dress, including boots, for their jobs their claims were resisted, presumably
because of fears of costly precedents, not breaches of decorum.

'Officers', 'Men', and 'Girls': The Language of Hierarchy

The hierarchical and gender-differentiated structure of the Board has been
clearly evidenced in modes of address and reference. These distinctions are to be
found in different modes of direct address in speech, indirect reference in
speech and written reference. Most officers were simply referred to by the title
of their positions, e.g. Chief Engineer. The next ranking officers were given a
formal address, e.g. Mr Engineer Cooper and were so identified. In some cases the formal titles were almost comical in their detail but they precisely located the person in the organisation, e.g. Mr Sewerage Construction and Maintenance Engineer Smith. The most senior of junior officers were called by their formal titles as Mr Smith or Miss Jones, while officers below them were referred to by their position and surname, e.g. Foreman Brown. Wages Staff and junior clerks were referred to simply by their surname. No crucial function was discharged by the holder of a position without a title and incumbents recognised this. The desire by Mr G. Watson to be designated as 'Superintendent' in 1935 illustrates the way in which status is conferred and confirmed. In that case the functions and salary remained the same – only the title changed.

Salaried Division personnel were called 'officers' while Wages Division staff were called 'men'. These distinctions were not meant to refer to the gender of employees but were used to reinforce master/servant roles. Interaction between an asymmetrically related 'pair' of unequals reflected this. Canons of courtesy, respect and deference required the man in the trench to address the Chief Engineer or President as 'Sir' even though he was in turn addressed in the personalised form as 'Smith'. This ranking was also observed between senior officers. (In 1940 the President reminded a senior engineer that he should stand when the President entered the room). Generally the personalisation of address signifies juniority or dispensability in an asymmetrical relationship. However, in a relationship of equality, personalisation signifies common bonds. The documents of the Board reveal increasing depersonalisation with increasing status. This corroborates the claim of Foucault that as power becomes more anonymous and more functional, those on whom it is exercised tend to be more strongly individualised (Foucault, 1977:193). This intricate pattern which served to underline status and reinforce hierarchical relations was, and is, common in hierarchic authoritarian organisations.

The form of address reserved for women deserves separate comment. As we have seen, apart from the hidden cleaners, up until World War II all the women in the Board were single and were always addressed as 'Miss'. During the war, some married women were employed and they were correctly addressed as 'Mrs'. Down to the present, however, all of them, regardless of age, status, occupation or experience, were referred to as 'girls'. This form of diminutive address served to emphasise their junior status and to heighten the paternalism of
the men. (The women themselves use the term as an invocation of laterality: the 'girls' is a group of female friends. Its use, nonetheless, is conditioned by the structure of domination). Until recently, there were no women with a titled position. The first name mode of address further personalised the status of women and could be taken as denying them a fundamental place in the organisation.

The Female Supervisor

By 1950 there were 65 women on the Head Office staff, three quarters of whom were typists. In that year the Board decided that the time had arrived when the younger women employees should be given guidance and instruction in shorthand and typing. It further held the view that this training should be supervised by a senior shorthand writer-typist on the Board's staff and that she be given the responsibility for the 'general oversight' of the female staff. This supervisor would ensure that the women were 'informed as to what was expected of them, both in working hours and in the time allowed for tea and luncheon breaks'. This vague statement of responsibility created the opportunity for the Supervisor Female Staff to exercise a significant degree of control over women, especially in matters relating to dress and deportment. Many of the younger women smarted under the exercise of authoritarian control from someone who they felt simply did not understand them or their point of view.

The responsibilities of the Supervisor were gradually specified and extended to include the conducting of shorthand and typing tests, attending to all complaints received from female staff and arbitration on disagreements among them, arranging for care and/or transport of females who became ill while at the office and the supervision of female recreation rooms. In 1977 the Industrial Officer could defend the position on the grounds that the Supervisor was a woman to whom 'the girls can come to for advice and with whom they can discuss any problems which are worrying them'. She was 'the buffer' for many minor industrial problems that occurred with female staff and a 'Mother Image' advisor to younger and less experienced girls'. This 'mother' role was reinforced by the fact that the Supervisor also had the duty to clean the refrigerator and stove in the recreation room used by women staff – a duty which Supervisors did not protest about until 1979. This was the only classified position for women on the salaried staff yet it had domestic cleaning duties.
By 1978 the Supervisor's duties were recast to remove responsibilities for the conduct of shorthand and typing tests and the position was much more that of a Sergeant Major specialising in kit inspections. This led in turn to demands for clearer definitions of division of responsibility between the Supervisor and the Dress Committee of the Board.

Ambiguities and difficulties in the Board's staffing and management policies became evident when, in 1980 on the retirement of a Supervisor, the next most senior woman prepared to accept the position was a tracer in the General Division and not a female officer from the Administrative and Clerical Division. The difficulty arose because of the rigidities forced on the Board's structure and organisation by the need to locate each position in the Industrial Agreement. In turn this meant that the Board management had to secure agreement from the Association before it could act to appoint the tracer.

At no time did the Association question the need for a women's Supervisor nor was there ever any proposal to create such a position for men. The position of Supervisor of Female Staff still exists but is clearly anachronistic. Some senior male officers recognise this and they refer to the position derisively as 'Mother Superior'. One recent occupant of the position, commenting on the changed circumstances and attitudes which have reduced the 'need' for the position, said: "I only help the girls with their knitting".

**Office Practices, Perks and Prohibitions**

Another minor issue of personal taste and habit which reveals something of the Board's administrative style relates to smoking. The issue of smoking, both direct and passive, and its relationship with the incidence of lung cancer and other illnesses creates a complex set of issues which we will not explore here. Suffice it to note that before 1957 only senior men were permitted to smoke in the office. This petty restriction on what was then seen as an issue of personal freedom simply meant that many hours were lost as numerous of the more junior men 'went for a walk' or took refuge in the toilets to enjoy a cigarette – the pleasure heightened, no doubt, by the awareness that they were breaking the rules. The most costly and potentially dangerous subversion of the 'no smoking rule' in terms of numbers of men involved and the time taken up involved a large number regularly visiting the records repository then housed in old air
raid shelters in the grounds. Younger male officers organised an extensive roster which enabled them to visit the repository in turn for periods of 20-25 minutes. Other officers took turns to keep the shelters under surveillance so that, on sight of a senior officer approaching, telephone warnings could be given. Similar arrangements were made to advise the next in turn when someone had left the security of the shelter. Carrying a file to and from the records section was frequently a cover for illicit pleasure but certainly added nothing to the efficiency or safety of the filing system or, indeed, the operation of the Board. We have no firm evidence of the smoking habits of women before 1957. Following the liberalisation of the smoking rule there was an initial upsurge in the number of staff who were openly smokers but this now has dramatically fallen—due no doubt to the general campaigns against smoking.

There is one incident where women were able to enjoy a minor advantage because of the stereotypical sexist views of the male hierarchy. According to a Board circular of 1951 male officers were first given the right to take morning tea, at their desks. Women were not so treated. In fact, a customary practice had developed for women officers to 'retire' to the 'girls room' or 'rest room' at mid morning where, in the privacy of their sanctum, they brewed a pot of tea which they shared. The custom was never challenged; to do so would appear as having a prurient interest in 'women's matters' which was not proper for decent men. But it was also another expression of the patronising way in which women were treated.

The rest room had toilets for women and it was furnished with a sofa and limited kitchen facilities. It was strictly out of bounds to the men so that when a man was discovered in the room one evening in a delicate situation as a guest of one of the women, the sense of outrage it occasioned was compounded because his presence was seen as violating the privacy of a female staff sanctuary.

The men had a lunch and recreation room which was equipped at union expense with a table tennis table and darts boards. These facilities were virtually barred to female staff. The women decided that they would enjoy having a dart board in their rest room and approached the Association to purchase one. This simple and seemingly reasonable request was treated by the Committee of Management as though it was a major item, provoking lengthy debate in which a range of views about the dangers of darts and the need for backing boards were
canvassed. The debate was conducted as though women could not comprehend that a modicum of common sense was required when such games were played. The men may also have felt that dart throwing was an 'unladylike' pursuit. The women's request was refused. Association funds could be used for men's, but not for women's, recreation.

**Unequal Pay, Unequal Careers**

Perhaps the most revealing aspect of the Board's attitude to women is summed up in its employing them as tracers and shorthand/typists. Under the first Industrial Agreement covering the Salaried Division, men joining the Board as general clerks had a 24-year automatic career grade. Women joining as tracers – positions requiring superior educational qualifications – had a six year career grade. Tracers started on a salary equal to that of general clerks but by their fifth year their salary was only 76.5 per cent that of a general clerk in his fifth year. Shorthand/typists of educational attainment roughly equivalent to that of the clerks started at 90 per cent of their salary and had an 11 year automatic career grade, at the end of which their salary was 68 per cent that of clerks. During their 11 years they had to accept two separate two-year periods without automatic annual increments. Female tracers were stereotypically regarded as better than men. They allegedly had a superior natural aptitude for the tasks but were judged to have reached their peak at age 21, when they were paid less than men, but more than typists. Their career prospects in the Board were limited after that and typists gradually caught up and passed them.

These discrepancies in the employment trajectories and experience of tracers and typists, compared with one another and with men, persisted through the Agreements for the period 1921-1938. Typists were located in the Administrative and Clerical Division whereas tracers were in the General Division. The rules of promotion were based on seniority, and income was the relevant measure. This meant that women could never be promoted out of the tracer or typist grades – even if they made a career choice to remain single. This was analogous to the 'boxing in' situations which later prevailed elsewhere in the Division.

By 1938, however, women tracers had somehow lost their natural advantage. In that year a new Agreement covering the Salaried Division provided for the
appointment of men as tracers as well as women, with women being paid less than the men. The differential increased each year. This disparity was further exacerbated because men could expect an automatic annual increment for three years into adulthood (age 24). Women had to be appointed to and serve through two grades to reach their maximum salary. The shortest period in which this could be done was six years. This Agreement also changed the relationship between the salaries of tracers and typists. Previously tracers enjoyed the higher salaries, but under the 1938 Agreement typists were given salaries significantly higher than those of women tracers.

The 1950 Agreement continued to differentiate between men and women. The minimum salary for female tracers and typists at age 21 was 54 per cent of the minimum salary for male general clerks at the same age. No women were appointed as general clerks. Moreover tracers and typists were now given the same career path of automatic annual increments over 12 years. Male tracers could still attain their maximum salary at 24 years of age, and it was 41 per cent higher than a woman tracer of equal experience and 22 per cent higher than the maximum salary for a woman even after she worked for another five years. Subsequent Agreements continued to equate tracers and typists and to provide for men to be paid at a higher rate. Under the 1958 Agreement there was no provision for men to be employed as tracers but the 1961 Agreement introduced a new grade of 'Drafting Assistants' with a ten year career path. This grade was for men only. One of its significant features was that despite virtually identical starting salary and selection criteria as those for women tracers, it provided opportunities for the men to be promoted out of the Drafting Assistant grade in the General Division to Draughtsmen positions in the Professional Division. Similar opportunities did not exist for women tracers. Such limitations in occupational mobility for women have also been noted by Game and Pringle (1981 and 1983) in their work on white collar employment in Australia, and Baran (1985) for the American insurance industry. We have dwelt on the experience of tracers because they possessed valued abilities and aptitudes and discharged duties clearly similar to categories of male staff, but men could progress in ways systematically unavailable to their female counterparts.
Until the Anti-Discrimination Act of 1977 the overwhelming proportion of jobs in the Board were preserved for men. Women were limited in their employment opportunities because the only occupations open to them had limited career possibilities. This was reinforced by the otherwise enlightened policy of refunding a significant proportion of fees and expenses for various educational courses leading to qualifications as Secretary, Accountant, Draughtsman, Engineer, etc. This concession was not available to women. Although women are now, in principle, eligible for such educational support, few are able to avail themselves of the opportunity because the courses do not relate to their present occupation. For example, typists cannot claim reimbursement of expenses incurred in attending a part-time course in accountancy or engineering under the present rules because neither course could be said to relate to their present job.

One illustration of the attitudes of the Board and its Association to women is the experience of Marjorie Williams and her claim for equal pay. Marjorie joined the Board as a typist on 30 November 1925. She was made permanent in February 1939, progressed to shorthand/typist and had a 42 year career typical of many of the single women who remained with the Board. Similar to other shorthand/typists she was required to undertake duties other than shorthand and typing although these were never officially acknowledged until the Public Service Board reviewed the Board's operations in 1982.

Marjorie was a talented, industrious and conscientious worker who mastered all of the challenges facing her in the Purchasing Section. She gradually found that in addition to her shorthand and typing she was carrying out the duties and functions of a Chief Clerk. She satisfactorily discharged these duties, and became the first Female Supervisor in May 1950. She was required to act as Purchasing Officer in late 1958 and again in 1959 during the absence of the permanent officer. There was a £212 per annum difference between her salary and that of the position. She enlisted the aid of the Association in an approach to the Board to be paid for the periods during which she held the higher duties. Her action caused consternation in both Board and Association.
The Association wanted to help and it did! It explored the case with the Board and reached agreement that if one of her duties was taken away from Marjorie she clearly would not be doing the same work as a man and therefore would have no equitable claim for equal pay. Everyone was satisfied – save Marjorie. She was clearly a reliable, mature, loyal officer who was doing more than equal work but her application was refused. In partial recognition of her 'special duties' the Chief Accountant recommended that she be paid an additional allowance as well as the special increment she received due to the special nature of her duties in the Purchasing Section and the salary loading as Female Supervisor.

When Marjorie re-applied in 1963 for equal pay she again sought the help of the Association. There were claims that Marjorie was not really doing the same work as a man (many of the duties she discharged are now carried out by an engineer) but it was difficult to assert this. She could demonstrate that she was doing the job, and she had been designated as relieving the Purchasing Officer and had frequently acted as such. This time the Association refused to support her claim.

For the Association the case was more than a simple claim for wage justice. It was an implicit challenge to the rigid demarcation system it had spent much energy over a long period in building up, and it was complex because the jobs were in the one division. The Association was clearly embarrassed. One of its members was being exploited yet if they took up her case the ambiguity of their position would be revealed. They could 'wear' the decision to redefine the job by taking away one of the duties, and treat Marjorie as an anomaly covered in the Award or Agreement because that course presaged no attack on the job classification system.

The case was a challenge for the Board because a number of the women it employed were doing similar multi-purpose jobs, giving the Board a modicum of staffing flexibility and having the advantage that they were cheaper to employ than men. Equal pay would have opened a can of worms. Before the war the Branch Secretary had argued in an application for a new award that in order to discourage employment of women on clerical work, they should be paid male rates of pay. The inference was that women would be unsatisfactory in clerical or administrative jobs but the argument was ignored by the Court. The wartime
need to employ women to discharge duties normally within the province of men, such as cash handling (but even then only married women were allowed to handle small sums), dispelled the myth about their unsuitability but created an air of apprehension among male officers. Women had been employed as typists and tracers on the assumption that their career with the Board would be short and limited to those occupations. The enlistment of women from the Board in the armed services created a problem because it implied the expectation by them of a longer association with the Board than had previously been assumed. Further, the need to employ married women because of staff shortages worried the Association because of the precedents that might be set. Accordingly, on several occasions it sought the assurance of the Board that the pre-war conditions would prevail when the emergency was over.

The dilemma of the Association was brought into high relief by requests it received from a number of women for wage justice. Several women usually employed as secretaries carried out a wide range of clerical and administrative duties partly out of personal interest but largely because of management requests. This was a practice which had developed before the war but had been ignored by the Association. During the war the practice became obvious, and as soon as the women sought some recognition for their work they created a problem for the Association. In most cases the women simply sought promotion to the next secretarial grade but occasionally they sought a clerical grading. The Association usually appealed to the Board in support of the proposed secretarial promotion, usually without success. In some cases the women were carrying out duties substantially the same as male officers and without exception they had worked for the Board for long periods. The Board responded by reallocating duties to reduce the force of the claims or by paying small higher duties allowances until a male returned from the war and could take up the tasks. Frequently the women effectively voted with their feet, enabling the Board and its Association to ignore the tide of social change which was rising because of the necessities of the war and its aftermath.

An illustration of the dilemma facing the Association lay in the appointment by the Board of Alexandra Kolmakow. Kolmakow was a widowed 'Displaced Person', or 'New Australian', which was liability enough. She was a graduate in civil engineering with uncommon expertise in soil mechanics. Despite the acknowledged 'objection to the appointment of a woman in an engineering
capacity' because of 'the difficulty involved in field work', the Designing Engineer felt there was 'ample office and laboratory work' that Alexandra could do. He recommended that 'the natural reluctance or prejudice to departing from an accepted rule might be waived and an offer made of a position as Engineering Assistant Grade 2'. Alexandra took up duties in October 1950 with a guarantee of two years employment. She proved to be a 'problem' because within that period she remarried and this limited her employment. Alexandra was promoted through Engineering Assistant Grade 1 over the next six years. Although her abilities were recognised she was never given any assurance of continued employment, and usually only received extensions of six months at a time in spite of the fact that the Board acknowledged it faced difficulties in obtaining qualified staff.

Alexandra Kolmakov appealed under the provisions of the Staff Committee to the President on 21 June 1956 because her seniority had been adversely affected by promotions of junior officers over her, which she felt to be unfair. She had given efficient and conscientious service and was happy working for the Board. Her appointment was due to terminate on 30 June 1956 but she felt that the conditions under which she was leaving cast a slur on her status. She considered that she should be promoted to Engineer Grade III so that she could leave the Board's service at an appropriate level. The Board accepted her claim and she appears in the records as having been promoted to Engineer Grade III backdated to 7 March 1956 although she never actually worked at that level. At the end, the Board was humane in recognising Kolmakov's concern over her professional status, even if it felt it could not relieve her of difficulties which it had created because of her marital status.

Alexandra's departure was something of a triumph for the Association; on several occasions it had expressed opposition to the Board at her promotion and urged her replacement by a male officer. This opposition was renewed with vigour when she was promoted to Engineer Grade III. Alexandra was duly replaced by a man. She was better qualified than many of the engineers and they and other members of the Salaried Division, saw the employment of women professionals in general and married women in particular as a threat. They were worried as much by her marital status as by her gender.
Conclusion

The Board's attitudes to the employment of women have been consistently conservative within prevailing limits of community attitudes and opinion. What emerges clearly from the record is that the Association displayed little in the way of reforming zeal to improve the lot of its women members. The Industrial Agreements were agreements of spirit representing a concordance of male values about women workers reached between the Board and the Association. There is little to suggest that the Association actively fought for the women who were compelled to be members. The picture which emerges confirms that the Association was concerned to protect, preserve and otherwise enhance the privileges and prospects of the men of the Salaried Division.

In writing history it is easy to be wise after the event. The story we have recounted paints a picture of discrimination against women. The evidence is largely culled from the Board's own files. The files are, of course, cultural artefacts which reflect the values of that organisation in particular social and historical periods (Wolff, 1977). In the case of the Board, the files provide a valuable reminder of how far it has come in reducing discriminatory practices, encouraging those who wish to eliminate the remnant of discriminatory practice and prejudice.
References


