

'I Mean, You Want to be There for Them': Young Australian Professionals Negotiating Careers in a Gendered World

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Abstract

Popular opinion suggests young Australians are no longer interested in families and/or careers. This longitudinal study of Australian university graduates reports early findings about career orientations, associated long working hours and the work/family nexus. Most participants seem to be what Hakim (2000) regards as 'adaptive' in terms of work and family preferences. It appears more that they are pursuing fulfilling careers while negotiating new and traditional expectations of gender and family. Most seek equalitarian partnerships of shared care-giving and meaningful careers for both partners, with children typically part of their life goals.

1. Introduction

Some contributors to contemporary debates in the media and politics suggest major generational shifts by 'youth' away from the work ethic and interest in careers to consumption and 'tribal' identities (Mackay, 2001). Declining marriage rates and fertility levels are attributed to a flight from commitment by men and a 'baby strike' by young women because of the financial, time and career costs of having a family (Sherry, 2002, p. 15; Summers, 2002, p. 13; Manne, 2002, p. 25). The recent push in Australia for a national paid maternity leave scheme is, to some extent, one response to these claims. Others include organisational work and family programs.

We would argue that 'generational shift' and 'baby strike' suggest too great a change in values and actions. More importantly, they gloss over the complexity in decision making and the contradictions that arise when decisions and 'choices' are being made without knowledge of their full consequences, if indeed plans, decisions and choices are being made at all. To say this is not, however, to argue deterministically but rather to emphasise the constraints within which decisions and choices are made.

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This article reports on early findings from the first two rounds of interviews carried out with young Australian professionals. The first round in 1997-8 was conducted within a year after they had graduated with a follow-up round conducted in 2001-2. Most attention in this article is addressed to the data on working hours and their implications for family formation and family life as the participants define and desire it. The first section of the paper will discuss the theoretical approach we have adopted for this longitudinal study. The second part will outline details of the study. This will be followed by qualitative evidence on working hours and their implications for other aspects of social life and decisions to establish families. We will attempt to account for the factors shaping the long hours worked by many of our sample and their perceived consequences for combining paid work not only with family responsibilities but also with other interests and priorities. We will then compare this to the theories of Catherine Hakim in relation to the 'choices' available to women in the twenty-first century and the 'revolutions' she claims have made these unprecedented lifestyle and employment choices possible. Finally, we will consider whether there may be signs that young Australian professionals are attempting to negotiate a new moral order of shared care.

2. Researching Careers

Two key concepts in this research are 'career' and 'professional'. 'Career' here refers both to the 'traditional' meaning of a 'set of organising principles around which ... [people] structure both ... professional and private lives' (Wajcman and Martin, 2001, p. 560). We acknowledge that many professionals, employers, colleagues and others have some influence on career development as well as 'luck or chance' (Swanson and Fouad, 1999, p. 5). We leave open the potential for both traditional, organisational-bureaucratic and 'portfolio' careers as careers are increasingly 'enacted' in the context of greater competition, risks and flatter organisational hierarchies (Arthur, Inkson and Pringle, 1999, p. 12).

The concepts 'professional' and particularly professional identities are similarly open and contested. Again, this relates to new meanings and interpretations within corporate 'designer cultures' with their 'designer employees' (Casey, 1995). While old theoretical debates concerning professional projects, strategies and power are relevant, newer debates about identity formation based in experience, including the gendered nature of professions and professional identity, are also taken into account (Mieg, 2002; Salling Olesen, 2000; and Dent and Whithead, 2002). Professional careers, then, may have very different implications, meanings and outcomes both within and between social entities called 'men' and 'women'.

Mainstream research on work and employment has taken the male worker to be the archetype. From the 1970s a major body of research on women's experiences of work has developed. Many researchers on women's employment have analysed gender segregation and discrimination as the driving factors in women's less favourable career outcomes (see for example,

Barron and Norris, 1976; Crompton and Jones, 1984; Hartmann, 1976; and Rubery, 1980). Others have noted the organisational processes that manipulate opportunity structures and processes on gender lines which favour male workers and frustrate women's efforts to succeed in the workplace (Burton, 1991; Cockburn, 1991; and Eveline, 1994; 1996).

Catherine Hakim (1995, 1996) sparked controversy when she argued that the horizontal and vertical division of labour, including the preponderance of poorly paid part time work undertaken by women, can be explained largely by the career and work choices of women. She argued that the 'unpalatable truth' is that women accept the sexual division of labour and that this acceptance 'underlies fundamental differences between the work orientations, labour market behaviours and life goals of men and women' (Hakim, 1996, p.179). This argument, however, flies in the face of other, particularly qualitative longitudinal research which shows that women without a strong career commitment at the early stages of paid work may develop it later and that men's career orientations may also be variable over the life-course (Poole and Langan-Fox, 1997).

Hakim's work has been strongly criticised by many researchers, particularly in the United Kingdom (Bruegal, 1996; Crompton and Harris, 1998; and Ginn et. al., 1996), but other researchers elsewhere have also suggested that women actively make occupational choices which result in gendered career outcomes, albeit with different emphases to Hakim (e.g., Probert, 1997). Probert has identified the ways in which choices about work, parenting and child-care are shaped by gender culture or gender ideology – in different ways at different times (as well as in different countries). Her research shows the strong divisions between husbands as breadwinners and women as care-givers in the 1950s in Australia. In the 1990s, however, the situation is more complex and uneven with a dominant view that women should be in the workforce but no clear ideas about how children should be cared for. The young women in her study expressed a preference for both career and children resulting in differences between self-actualisers who see work as central to their identity and others who see working mothers contradicting 'the element of the gender culture that still insists that caring should be done in the home' (Probert, 2002).

In other words, 'traditional' family ideology persists in late modernity and young Australian households are engaged in on-going processes of negotiation over the allocation of paid and unpaid work and community participation – who does what, when, where, how much and on what basis (Richards, 1997, pp. 161-186; Bittman and Pixley, 1997). While this takes place between individuals, these are not 'individual case stories – there are gender, generation and cultural systems interacting with ... labour market structures' (Salling Olesen, 2000, p.11). That is, while experienced as personal and individual and surrounded by much ambiguity, ambivalence and variation in context and action, there are discernible emergent institutions or structures which can be investigated.

In her research, Hakim continues to emphasise voluntarist premises of choice (i.e., 'preference theory') and clear-cut divisions between self-actualising career-oriented working women and others. She has argued recently that twentieth century 'revolutions' in 'rich modern societies' in contraception, voluntary childlessness, equal opportunities, the expansion of white-collar and service work and the creation of jobs for secondary earners provide women with 'real choices as to how to live their lives' in the twenty-first century (Hakim, 2000, p. 82; 2002, pp. 428-459).

It is possible that more is at stake in the negotiations of younger professionals than changes in the relative proportions of paid and unpaid work within families and new and different strategies for dealing with work and family demands. Kathleen Gerson has framed these dilemmas of earning and caring as 'moral dilemmas', implying a 'concern with the rules of right conduct' when making 'a difficult, perplexing, or ambiguous choice between equally undesirable (or desirable) alternatives' (2002, p. 12). Researching a United States cohort of a similar age to our Australian graduates, she locates their priorities within the changes in gender, work and households wrought by the social movements, rising divorce rates, declining birth rates and new family forms and relationships emerging from the 1970s (2002, pp. 8-28). She identifies 'a growing desire for a social order in which women and men alike are afforded the opportunity to integrate the essential life tasks of achieving autonomy and caring for others', recognising that this is not easily achieved (Gerson, 2002, p. 25). The negotiations about working and caring (and other aspects of social life), then, are about an attempt by a new generation to redo and undo gender (Gerson, 2002, p.13) in order to negotiate a new moral order for a future society.

Crompton and Harris (1998) have been prominent critics of Hakim's voluntarist explanations of women's career outcomes. They draw on structuration theory (Giddens, 1980, 1984) to argue that women's choices and their orientations to work are not independent but the product of women constructing their 'work life biographies in terms of their historically available opportunities and constraints' (Crompton and Harris, 1998, p. 119). In other words, decision-making may be voluntary but the available choices are limited. Moreover, previous choices not only limit future choice but shape the individual's frame of reference. It is, however, difficult to examine these processes using conventional social science survey methodologies. Probert and her colleagues used in-depth interviews with couples; others (e.g., Salling Olesen, 2000; Gerson, 2002) adopt life history approaches to allow for specific attention to subjectivity and the integration of context and meaning. A single life history interview, however, may allow for too much re-interpretation. A longitudinal approach, while not entirely escaping this limitation, allows for re-interpretations of experiences and the meanings attached to them to be tracked diachronically.

Structuration theory is a useful means of conceptualising the relationship between structure and agency in the context of both women's and men's

career (and other lifestyle) choices. While structuration theory has its own limitations and critics (Gregson, 1989), in this instance it has the advantages noted by Crompton and Harris and is compatible with a longitudinal qualitative study examining decisions and choices made over time and the accounts social actors give of their experiences. It provides an open-ended framework through which to explain the actions of individuals without losing sight of their negotiation and interconnectedness.

3. The Study

This study began with a questionnaire sent to a randomly selected sample of nine hundred and ninety-three graduates aged twenty-five years or less who finished their courses in 1996 at four Australian universities. The four discipline areas chosen (*viz.*, engineering, business, social work and library / information studies) were selected because the majority of their first degree graduates go directly into the workforce in a wide range of employing organisations. For example, seventy per cent of engineering graduates in Australia join the profession immediately after graduation (Ayre, 2001, p. 2). Three hundred and twenty-nine or thirty-three per cent of the questionnaires were returned and one hundred and twenty or thirty-six per cent of the respondents agreed to be interviewed for the longitudinal study. Interviews were arranged with one hundred and six or thirty-two per cent and a first round of interviews was carried out in 1997-8. While self-selecting for interview, our analysis shows that there were no major differences in the major variables between the questionnaire and interview respondents (Castleman and Coulthard, 1998). A second round of interviews was carried out in 2001-2002 with eighty-four respondents. This represented seventy-nine per cent of the 1997-98 participants. All but one of the participants in Round One who were not included in Round Two were unable to be contacted; only one person declined to participate. These two rounds of interviews are the basis for the data analysis presented here. The composition of the groups interviewed in each round are set out in table 1.

Table 1 Round One and Round Two Respondents by Degree and Gender (per cent)

<i>Degree</i>	<i>Round One (n=106)</i>			<i>Round Two (n=84)</i>		
	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Total</i>
Business/Commerce/Law	30.2	69.8	52.4	46.9	53.1	54.2
Engineering/Science	66.6	33.4	17.4	71.4	28.6	17.4
Social work/Arts/Information Science	0.0	100	29.7	0.0	100	28.1
Total	38.6	61.4	100.0	45.2	54.8	100.0

While interviews are wide ranging addressing employment and career plans as well as plans and aspirations with respect to household, work and family, the data analysis presented here is limited mainly to working hours and their impact on other aspects of life, such as plans for family formation. The transcripts were analysed using the 'meaning condensation' technique

outlined by Kvale (1996). Meaning condensation involves paraphrasing interviews into more concise formulations. The researcher attempts to understand the responses from the point of view of the respondent and to summarise and thematise the responses (Kvale, 1996, pp. 193-196).

We expect to carry out a third round of interviews in 2005-2006 (approximately four years after Round Two) when the majority of respondents will be around thirty years of age and decisions about parenting will be increasingly pressing. It is also the time when most workers are entering or preparing to enter their 'golden decade' of consolidation of their working identities which crucially shapes future life chances at work and beyond (Arthur et al, 1999, p. 81; Bernard, Itzin, Phillipson and Skucha, 1995).

4. Grounding Decisions about Work and Family

New graduates in engineering, business, information studies and social work reported working long hours. The norm was a ten hour day:

I was still doing an inspection at seven-thirty; now that's not normal, I must admit, most nights I'm home by six-thirty, which is probably no different to anyone in Melbourne in the industry, so yes, you've got to be prepared to put in the hours six days a week and that's about it.

(Male, regional city real estate)

The public and community sectors were more likely to support nine-to-five hours as were information and social work careers. As well, there was a tendency to work either at home after office hours or to expect to stay back after hours:

(A)t the moment I stay in after hours. I might do nine, ten hours. Putting more of an effort in, I s'pose. ... But I mean, if you want to boost up, you've got to put in the extra effort. ... I'd love to be able to come home and still be doing work. I thrive on work ... It's just finding a job that will allow you to do that.

(Female accountant, underemployed)

Added to this was the after-hours socialising in some organisations, particularly those with large cohorts of young adults such as public practice accounting, particularly on Friday evenings.

Engineers appeared to have the least social but possibly most flexible hours, working shifts and on-call arrangements:

I'm in to midnight one night and the next day I may come in at lunch time and my boss is pretty cool about that. ... (Interviewer: What do you like least?) ... Getting called at three a.m. to come and fix something.

(Male process engineer)

While I'm actually on site ... , I've been doing twenty-four hour shifts, because it is peak season and they can't get anyone else to come in and help me, so it's challenging trying to stay awake for twenty-four hours. The plant works twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. ... (I) I have done a twenty-four hour shift and have had a sleep and go straight back to Melbourne, the ... manager says take a couple of days off and come back refreshed ... because a couple of guys ... were getting burnt out.

(Female engineer, undertaking a research degree in industry)

The overall impression from our first round of interviews was of enthusiastic young professional graduates 'choosing' this level of involvement in their careers, especially young women seeking to establish a level of experience and organisational rank and reputation in their field. There was also evidence of pressure for long hours of work, particularly in public practice accounting, through procedures of time accounting which both intensifies effort in normal working time and creates pressures to extend working hours at the end of the day:

Productivity becomes such an important word because (a) you've got deadlines and (b) you know even when I get a job someone's always saying this is what it should cost you. Now that actual fact that it should cost you this much might mean that I'll have to work back tonight to finish it and (b) maybe not charge it.

(Male, public practice accountant)

Ideally they say, 'If you've got too much, say no, say you can't do the work'. But I think it is more stay back late and finish it off. They don't care if you've got commitments.

(Female, accountant)

There was a widespread view that current hours expected in these employing organisations are not compatible with family responsibilities, by both men and women, a point we take up below.

While there was some evidence of sexism in the treatment of women graduates, there was very little evidence of direct discrimination. Rather there appeared to be more subtle pressures at work as in work allocation and gendered work practices:

(S)omething I don't really like doing, we have only got three administrative staff and when they have been away on the same day and the front reception desk needs minding they have asked me to do (it) rather than any of the men at work or any of the older females and I feel that is probably because I am the youngest. We have had two junior male accountants come on board and let's say they are about twenty-four, twenty-five and as far as I am concerned one of them should be trained as well to answer the phones. For me to go up to the front I have to stop what I am doing or bring it up to the front and its disruptive so the quality of work goes down. I don't feel that's fair. ... Although they say equal opportunity employment, if it was really equal it would be rostered around and shared.

(Female accountant, small firm)

There were some complaints, mainly by women, that youth was a disadvantage in the contemporary workplace. Most female graduates, however, appeared to feel empowered by their education and other experiences to date to deal with overt sexism at work.

By the second round of interviews in 2001 (three to four years later), most participants appeared to have gained greater control over their working hours. This was sometimes expressed in terms of refusing to work weekends or after hours. They have no doubt also become more acclimatised to professional working hours and thus less likely to complain about forty-plus hours per week. There were instances of time out for travel, changes in jobs and/or occupation; changes in direction within employing organisations and changes of employers as a consequence of greater workplace experience. Nevertheless young women, particularly those who were partnered, co-habiting or married, were beginning to look at their work context in terms of the possibility of children and intentions to take time out to care for them in their pre-school years:

That's always been a worry. You always seem to be shooting yourself in the foot. You know, you study and work hard and get yourself to a level. And then you go, 'Okay, I'll have children now.' And then you go, 'Oh, how does that work?' sort of thing. What I want to do is try and position myself as much as possible before I have children – to work from home and work part-time and then gradually get back into it. Try and make those options so that my break is insignificant enough for me not to move down.

(Female, finance industry product relationships manager)

By this time, more had established partnerships although some have had broken relationships and divorce. Only two had begun to establish their own families. Two women engineers with children at the time of the second round interview were already working reduced hours with the support of their employers. They felt it was appropriate for them to have children at this time.

While by no means of concern to all, at the time of the second round of interviews, as at the first, many voiced (unprompted) the view that long hours are unsustainable over the life course for both men and women to have families and care for children appropriately as well as in terms of (occupational) health:

A few of my mates have got (kids) ... but you've got to follow your career as hard as you can until then, because you've got to step back if you've got family commitments, you can't devote as much time to your work as you could otherwise. ... When I do have children I don't want to be staying out at work until seven-thirty or anything like that, I mean you want to be there for them.

(Male, real estate manager)

I just don't know how they [other employees] can put in the long hours all the time and expect it won't have an impact on their family life, health or

anything else. To me that's a very short-lived approach. You can put in twelve hours a day but unless you take some time or get some exercise or something those twelve hour days are gradually going to take their toll and it's almost as if while people are doing that they're just too tired to know.

(Male, investment banker)

Unlike those workers from shop floor to management in Skinner's (2002) study, we found a greater tendency to protest against perceived employer demands on employees' time, despite their enthusiasm for involvement in careers. By the second round of interviews they were more aware of organisational politics - the need to know 'how to play politics', to be 'outgoing and to the point, aggressive in a sense' as well as needing good contacts and networks. While some were disappointed they were not taught this at university, others thought this could only be fully understood when experienced in the workplace. Their experiences at work, through travel and via peer and other networks had alerted them to the uncertainties of career progression, including but not only as it related to choices and decision-making about family which many expected to confront in the next five years.

5. Understanding Young Professionals' Choices

To understand the decisions and 'choices' young women make about career and family it is important that we first understand why these young professionals are working such long hours. The literature on working hours arrangements suggests three important reasons shaping the practice of long working hours in Australia.

Firstly, those putting in the longest hours are employed in occupations, industries and organisations with little or no Award coverage. As Iain Campbell points out, Australia lacks the type of statutory regulation of 'maximum daily and weekly hours and maximum overtime hours' (2002, p. 100) which would limit long or extreme working hours. It is noteworthy that, whilst many professionals in Australia work outside of industrial relations regulatory frameworks, this is more the case for the private sector than it is for the public sector.

Secondly, there is a culture of long working hours in Australia. This culture of long hours developed during the early 1990s when downsizing, restructuring and re-engineering of organisations to reduce middle-management numbers and positions took place. While employment insecurity led to this culture (those with work taking on more and more tasks and responsibilities), during the period of economic recovery it has become part of the taken-for-granted world of professionals, managers and lower status white collar workers who also work unpaid overtime. There may also be effects from the competitive pressures of globalisation and increased emphasis on individual performance as the basis of career progression (see Wharton & Blair-Loy (2002, p. 33) for further discussion).

In other words, while a large share of long hours appears voluntary in Australia these same hours have become an organisational imperative for career-oriented professional and managerial employees (including those aspiring to managerial positions such as those in our sample). In the case of our interview respondents it is noteworthy that most of them entered the workforce at the height of the development of this culture of long hours.

A third and important reason underpinning the growth in long hours and associated work intensification is the proliferation of technologies that facilitate 'taking work home' and other after-hours work activities like client visits. These include (but are not limited to) mobile phones, laptop computers and cars. A good example of this in the case of our young professionals is of an engineer working in the public sector who is not required to work outside nine-to-five but does off-site and interstate visits to clients and potential clients. He takes files home or on interstate trips on his laptop computer to peruse during evenings prior to meetings. Another young woman whose accounting career has spiraled downwards due in part to excessive work responsibilities early in her career, claims to work only mandated hours of nine-to-five now, but does client visits after five p.m. until ten p.m.. As Burgess and Strachan (2002) point out, this 'flexi-working' is highly ambiguous and has the potential to extend working hours without the costs of overheads and penalty rates or other regulatory scrutiny. It is interesting here to note how little research attention these sorts of technologies have received in relation to work design and aspects of worker versus management control given the major emphasis on computerised production systems during the period of the 1980s when labour process studies of technological change were at their peak (see also Wright, Williamson, Schauder and Stockfeld, 2003.)

So it is not surprising that most young women and some men are questioning how to retain a stake in the labour market and their careers while assuming a major (but not sole) responsibility for child-care. As Probert (1997) and Gerson (2002) have noted, we find a major shift in terms of young men as well as women questioning the compatibility of long working hours and parenting responsibilities. There is strong support by both young men and women for involvement in parenting but also for one parent taking time out of the labour force to care for children on a full time basis in their early years. This is not a straightforward allocation to women as mothers. Some women clearly assign this role to their male partners and some men are willing to accept more than token caring (particularly when their female partners have higher incomes and/or higher status jobs). The three extracts below illustrate these sentiments.

I have this problem with having kids and then going back to work. I can't see the point in having kids and then putting them in a crèche all day and going back to work, so I'm not having any unless my husband can look after them.

(Female engineer, undertaking a research degree in industry)

My partner and I are pretty liberal. One of us will either stay working full-time and one of us will either stop for a short time or work part-time. A day or two a week. We have discussed it. We wouldn't want our kids coming up all alone. We work out one full-time and one part-time.

(Female accountant, underemployed)

I don't know whether I want children. ... It would mean that one of us would have to stay at home and care for the children or we would have to find child-care which would probably be one of our parents. ... (M)y girlfriend is not very career minded so think if anything she would probably stay home and forego a career.

(Male, marketing)

'Traditional' family ideology (i.e., from the 1950s) persists into the 1990s. There is a fairly negative view of child-care centres in favour of a parent and/or some other family member (e.g., grandparent) as carers. Family ideology that if you have children then you have to 'be there for them' is strongly held in the absence of any experience with formal day care centres. At the same time, as Probert (2002) and her colleagues found, there is strong support for women's continued careers, that is, they believe that women should be able to continue in paid work after the birth of children. In Probert's terms, then, it does seem that there is an 'element of the gender culture that still insists that caring should be done in the home' (Probert 2002). Similarly, Gerson's (2002) findings of a 'gender gap' here cautions against undue optimism about men undertaking major responsibility for child-care unless women are earning substantially more income than them (which is a possibility in some of our data). While Gerson's data are from the U.S., there is similar evidence of a gender gap in attitudes to traditional parenting among youth in Australia (see White, 2003, p. 154). As a result of this confused gender ideology/culture, it is mainly young women professionals who are looking to find ways to manage career interests and family responsibilities in ways that seem to them to be a realistic appraisal of current available choices.

It is worth noting here that paid maternity leave for limited periods (e.g., 14 weeks) is fairly marginal to this calculation. This is not to say that paid maternity leave is not important to most women workers, particularly those on low incomes. There is also a general lack of knowledge of work and family entitlements in their employing organisations and more widely on the part of our respondents. This is not surprising as these are often more in line with employer preferences than workers' aspirations and there is diversity in employee preferences depending on stage of life course and other social factors (Thornthwaite, 2002). In other words, they may not know because they are not yet looking seriously for a specific policy.

Time out for child-care is also influenced by other considerations. Our interview participants are in varied locations around Australia (and also overseas) so do not all face the more prohibitive costs of living in Australia

(e.g., Sydney). A number see themselves as being 'good savers' able to put aside money to support an absence from the labour force; others are willing to make compromises in their material standard of living (e.g., size of house) to support their family ideals. They (including some men) also express interest in various alternatives to on-site work such as off-site locations (i.e. work from home), contracting and consulting. While believing that children in their pre-school years require some alternative arrangements to full time employment as it currently exists for both parents, this does not mean that women in our sample have a preference for family over career in the long term.

Despite the lack of evidence of widespread discrimination, women's careers do face obstacles not readily attributable to men. Women's careers are more likely to be punctuated by at least one substantial break for child-care. While this may occur for some young men, it is still an open question whether, how and to what extent values about parenting will be translated into action for them. The practice and culture of long working hours in employing organisations militate against continuity of full- and maybe even part-time paid work for carers. On the other hand, extending the technologies of working from/at home may assist reduced hours working within one's field and mitigate the worst consequences of a career break.

It is worth noting that one of the two mothers discussed above is already working reduced hours on-site in the same job as before her maternity leave (as well as a 'hobby' business on Saturdays) while the other expects to return to reduced hours (also three days per week) contracting work after a period of child-care also with her former employer. They both retain an interest in their professional engineering careers while not seeing this as their sole life interest or only source of satisfaction. While all professionals have concerns about getting back into their careers if they exit them completely, engineering is the profession with the strongest reputation for making it difficult for breaks from full-time work to allow for resumption of a career due to the requirement for one year's full-time employment in three to maintain registration (Ayre, 2001).

How, then, does this evidence and analysis relate to the theories of Catherine Hakim (2000; 2002)? In particular what are the implications for her more recent emphasis on the basis of 'preference theory' rather than her empirical data categorising different 'types' of women, specifically the twentieth century 'revolutions' in 'rich modern societies' in contraception, voluntary childlessness, equal opportunities (EEO), the expansion of white-collar and service work and the creation of jobs for secondary earners (Hakim, 2002, pp. 433-4)?

Firstly, we agree that there has been a revolution in contraception and that voluntary childlessness is a real possibility for this cohort of women. There are some women in our sample who are clear about not wanting children but this has more to do with experience and attitudes to men than career,

although it can be an impetus to career involvement. Most of the women (and men) in our study are not planning in any strict sense for children or indeed for careers. Those who are planning are somewhat unclear about exactly how they are going to go about achieving things they are planning in their personal and professional lives. But it is clear that, unlike the time before more reliable contraception became available, irretrievable 'accidents' do not happen. Choice, for example, is involved both in a decision to become pregnant and a decision to continue an unplanned pregnancy and the two women in our sample who had children demonstrated both types of choice. The overall assessment of career-family plans seems to be towards finding the optimum time to have the family most expressed a desire to have in their first interviews.

Hakim sees full-time work status at age thirty-five as indicative of work/career orientation, but it is possible that these professionals may not have resolved the question of whether/when/how to fit children into their career/family trajectory before this stage. There is every likelihood that some may never find the optimum time to take the break they assume at least one parent would require. It is doubtful, therefore, that this could be regarded as 'voluntary childlessness' in Hakim's terms. Either our entire sample fits Hakim's 'adaptive' group (which is possible) rather than her work or family centred groups or qualitative in-depth interview data reveal a more complex picture than a 'parsimonious' single question in a large-scale survey interview (Hakim, 2002, p. 428). This study cannot and does not make the claims to representativeness of Hakim's research. Given her criteria for 'rich modern societies' it is also possible that Australian women face different contingencies to their U.S. and U.K. contemporaries. Australia, however, has one of the attributes (e.g., jobs for secondary earners such as part-time, temporary and casual work) which allows for 'choice' in relation to paid work and home making but which precludes Sweden's inclusion as a 'rich modern society' in Hakim's schema (Hakim, 2002, p. 455).

There is, however, little evidence that the new white collar jobs and service work (including part-time and casual work) in the Australian labour market fit the caring responsibilities of women as these are also subject to extended hours and work intensification, if somewhat more industrially protected than similar work in the U.S. and U.K. (Bittman and Rice, 2002; Campbell, 2002; and Skinner, 2002). This leaves the revolution in Equal Employment Opportunity claimed by Hakim.

There is sufficient evidence in our data (e.g., lower average salaries for women in the initial quantitative questionnaire data (Castleman and Coulthard, 1998), comments about the apparent absence of EEO in the first round of interviews, discussions about the need to learn about organisational politics and their consequences in the second round of interviews) to question the extent of workplace change. While Australia does meet Hakim's criterion of anti-discrimination legislation and specific EEO legislation, to date this has not transformed organisations as many

people hoped when the legislation was enacted in the 1980s. The original legislation applied to private sector organisations with 100 or more employees thus excluding many employers and with amendments following the latest review, it is becoming more voluntarist in approach (Strachan, Burgess and Sullivan, 2002). While not wishing to posit widespread discrimination from our data, we can see signs that gendered careers may be emerging among our sample. Women reported more career barriers than men, though whether they are simply more attuned to subtle discouragement and apparent inequities is hard to tell.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Our sample of professionally educated Australians is strongly oriented to achievement in a career. But for only a small minority of both men and women is this a sole priority. Career is strongly emphasised but interests extend to travel, leisure pursuits and citizenship activities and especially to relationships – with families of origin, peer group and at work. Many are keen to ensure that these are not too subordinated even as they throw themselves into the challenges and goals they embrace in their early years of professional employment.

Our participants have goals for the future which appear to include partnerships, marriage and family for most but not all. Because some elements of 'traditional' family/gender ideology/culture remain strong, they hold a mixture of conservative attitudes along with progressive views about the equalitarian combination of paid work, career achievement and family arrangements. These views appear appreciably different from those of a generation ago. We find many of the same confusions about who provides and who cares that Richards (1997), Probert (1997) and others (e.g., Bittman and Pixley, 1997) found in the 1980s and 1990s. Our findings are notably at odds with the premises of 'preference theory' of Hakim (2000, 2002). Choices are being made, but a structuration approach reveals more complex conditions (e.g., finding the desirable job in some cases; negotiating career opportunities for self and partner in others; managing planned and unplanned pregnancy, etc.) and less revolutionary change in the workplace (e.g., long hours, unequal opportunity, etc.) than envisaged. In the absence of detailed information on which to base plans and some reluctance to invest too much in one direction of action, young women especially are working hard to establish a position from which a career might be maintained and resumed even after a break of some years for child-care.

It appears that young Australian professionals under the diversity of influences that have shaped middle class values and aspirations in the late twentieth century are engaged in comparable processes of negotiation of gender culture to those identified by Gerson (2002) in the U.S.. The danger she finds, however, is greater than the confusion identified by Probert (2002). For Gerson the failure to negotiate a more egalitarian moral order may result in men opting for a 'traditional' division of labour at the expense of women's desire for continued participation in public pursuits such as employment

(Gerson, 2002, pp. 20-21). While Gerson's data are from the U.S., recent research with Australian youth indicates similar gender differences in relation to partnering and parenting (White, 2003). Rather than opting for a moral order where women 'adopt the moral strategies once reserved for men', she argues for finding ways 'to enable everyone, regardless of gender, class, or family situation, to balance care of others with care of self' in the sense of career and economic independence (Gerson, 2002, p. 26). She is looking toward a more humanistic 'healthy society, where all citizens are able to combine love and work in the ways they deem best'.

Longitudinal qualitative in-depth interview-based research suggests caution in relation to generational shifts and transformative change as posited by Hakim. Other researchers who have attempted to test Hakim's theories (e.g., Marks and Houston, 2002) advocate longitudinal research that begins before women become mothers to disentangle ideological beliefs from experiences. Structuration theory promises to allow this sort of analysis to proceed. It is early days yet in the decision-making processes of young professional Australians. Generational shifts, lack of male commitment and female baby strikes appear to overstate the extent of change to date. It may also be that the ideal of the new moral order outlined by Gerson which appears to offer much to both men and women is unachievable without wider social change, particularly at the workplace.

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