

The Changing Boundary Between Home and Market: Australian Trends in Outsourcing Domestic Labour

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**THE CHANGING
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HOME AND MARKET
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IN OUTSOURCING
DOMESTIC LABOUR**

by Michael Bittman, Gabrielle Meagher
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Tony Eardley
Editor

Abstract

It is widely believed that domestic outsourcing is booming. Many believe the growth of market services is a response to increasing time pressures arising from new responsibilities in the paid workforce, and to an inflexible sexual division of labour at home. The interpretation of the consequences of the purported growth of domestic outsourcing has been both divided and extreme. Paid domestic services have been declared: (1) a thing of the pre-industrial past; (2) a victim of self-servicing; and (3) the last frontier in the continuing advance of the market in post-industrial society. Consequently, the alleged boom in outsourcing has been viewed either as the resurgence of a pre-modern form of the exploitation of labour (possibly based on race or ethnicity), heralding a deeper and more intractable form of social stratification, or as the future engine of opportunity. Unfortunately all this discussion has run ahead of the facts. Two areas of research are vital: one is a study of the demand for outsourced domestic goods and services, and the other is wide-ranging comparative study of labour relations in the domestic outsourcing industry. This paper address the first of these areas. It describes a study of trends in expenditure on domestic outsourcing, drawing on an analysis of Australian Household Expenditure Surveys between 1984 and 1993-94. This information is then interpreted in the light of our knowledge of trends in time use over the same period.

1 Introduction

Households meet their needs through a combination of (unpaid) own account production, market purchases and transfers from the state. Examples of typical unpaid household productive activities are child care, cooking, cleaning, laundry, gardening, paying bills and shopping. The process of replacing unpaid household production with market substitutes has come to be known as ‘domestic outsourcing’.

Interest in domestic outsourcing lies at the conjunction of three important themes in contemporary social science. The themes are (1) the future of employment in post-industrial societies; (2) the mix of economic activity between the household, market and state sectors; and (3) the relationship between paid domestic labour and gender, race and ethnicity. Growth in ‘domestic outsourcing’ is widely believed to be taking place, and interpretation of its consequences has been both divided and extreme. However, this debate has run ahead of the facts. We use data from the Australian Household Expenditure Surveys (HES) to explore the nature of and the growth in domestic outsourcing.

Domestic outsourcing takes a number of forms. Some market goods or services substitute for domestic activity by replacing it entirely: for example, a restaurant meal replaces both home food and drink preparation and the clean-up activity after a meal. Domestic cleaning and child care are further examples of this kind of substitution, which is sometimes described as ‘the return of servants’. Other purchased goods and services are partial substitutes for domestic labour: examples here include pre-filled pasta or bottled sauces. Householders can also purchase domestic appliances and aids which raise productivity and increase convenience. Examples here include, from the minor to the more major, apple corers, blenders, and microwave ovens, which potentially substitute for some of the labour inputs in domestic production. In a reversal of the usual pattern, home production replaces market goods and service. Paradoxically, this process might better be called ‘insourcing.’ The economic and social consequences of domestic outsourcing vary according to the mix of home and market provision.

Our empirical focus is chiefly on the first two forms of outsourcing, although we also consider the third - insourcing or ‘self-servicing’

(Gershuny, 1983). The first section of the paper shows how each of the identified themes converges on the practice of domestic outsourcing. It also show how the various theoretical perspective give rise to conflicting predictions which cannot all be equally correct. The second section presents our findings and draws out their implications for competing perspectives.

2 Some Major Issues

Modernisation Theory and the Obsolescence of Domestic Service

For many decades, there has been sociological discussion about how public institutions - the market and the state - have been absorbing functions formerly provided privately by the family¹. The modern family household, it has been claimed, has been stripped of its functions of educating the young and providing welfare and health care, all of which have been transferred to specialised institutions such as the school, the welfare state, hospitals and other medical specialists. According to many theorists, the family household has lost its productive economic function as well, to become more and more purely a site of consumption.

Unlike most of his contemporaries, Talcott Parsons did not believe that modernisation would leave the family in crisis - an institution without significance or function. On the contrary, he believed that the differentiated modern family performs crucial roles in social reproduction. For Parsons, the family alone could secure and stabilise the personal identities of adults in the face of a world which judges them by abstract, universal, impersonal and affectionless standards. It did so by mediating between the impulse for anti-social gratification of infant

1 Modernisation theory since Herbert Spencer has argued that the process of modernisation consists of structural differentiation and functional specialisation of social institutions. Parsons (1966) argued that complex modern society is characterised by the impersonal processes of market allocation and bureaucratic organisation, and the relevance of kinship is strictly limited. With modernisation, stem or extended families containing many generations give way to an irreducible nuclear family. Following Weber (1968: 86-109), Parsons argued for the incompatibility of modern enterprises with methods of organisation characteristic of patrimonial household forms - modern society requires the separation of home and work. For discussions of these theories, see Lasch (1977); Harris (1983).

needs and the complex requirements for achievement and performance demanded in later life. Parsons' characterisation of the family as the circumscribed realm of the 'expressive' contrasted with the 'instrumental' world of bureaucratically organised work, had a strange alchemical effect on attitudes to housework, which came to be seen as a gesture of nurturance rather than as labour.

Coser's (1973) much quoted analysis of the demise of the domestic servant is firmly rooted in this evolutionary theory of modernisation. He makes explicit uses of Parsons' 'pattern variables' - universalism vs particularism, ascription vs achievement; diffuseness vs specificity; and affective-neutrality vs affect - to contrast the basis of modern social institutions with that of traditional social institutions. Noting the steep reduction in the proportion of workers employed in domestic service, he asks: 'what accounts for this precipitous decline?' (Coser 1973: 31). He answers his own question by saying that the servant role 'is rooted in a pre-modern type of relationship in which particularism prevails over universalism and ascription over achievement.' Furthermore, the servant role is 'pre-modern' because it is 'diffuse and lacks specialisation.'

The master-servant relationship is couched in the language of 'primordial' status deference - the servant role involves tasks 'that are defined as menial and hence below the dignity of the master' to perform (1973: 32). Servants were under the protection of their employers and treated on the model of children. Masters had the legal right to punish disobedient servants until the nineteenth century. At the same time good servants were supposed to be remembered in the master's last will and testament. Even when the master-servant relationship became formally contractual, 'ascribed status continued to define the servant role both legally and in actual fact' (1973: 32).

The pre-modern character of the servant role is perhaps most apparent in its failure to thoroughly separate work from the home: servants lived with their masters, and their labour commitment to their employer was not limited by time (1973: 32). The logic of the master-servant relationship permits the servant no competing social affiliations or loyalties. The very intimacy of the relationship exposes the master to the perpetual threat of disclosure and betrayal. The master 'greedily absorbs' the entire personality of servant and allows him/her no private self

independent of his/her role (1973: 35). Today we are inclined to call such forms of organisation ‘intrusive.’

These qualities, Coser argues, made the servant role structurally incapable of the kind of specialisation and differentiation that characterises the modern occupational order. The master-servant relationship is between social unequals, and so can survive only under circumstances where asymmetrical relations are seen as legitimate, or where ‘the exploited perceive no alternative to their present state of dependence and acquiescence’ (Coser 1973: 36). The diffusion of egalitarian social philosophies after the eighteenth century undercut the legitimisation of obedience to social superiors. More importantly, despite increasing demand for servants on the part of middle class households, a changing industrial labour market saw servants seek opportunities for independent, contractual employment in factories. The result was that the supply of servants, where it did not cease entirely, diminished to a trickle. Despite the bargaining advantages of a seller’s market and the passage of protective legislation, the occupation (with its uncertain hours, personal character and its constant exposure to employer surveillance) remained ‘stigmatised as a menial and unfree role in society’ (Coser 1973: 39). In contemporary America, only those suffering multiple status disabilities of gender, race-ethnicity and citizenship will take up domestic service: the servant role, says Coser, ‘is relegated to a underclass of social inferiors who have no place in the respectable scheme of things’ (Coser 1973: 39).

In the last paragraph of his essay, and following the conventions of his day, Coser notes that ‘in the modern world, labor-saving devices in the home, new marketing arrangements and other technological advances have led to a decline in the need for servants in the home. But they have not eliminated that need.’ Like other masculine admirers of the efficiency of domestic technology, Coser assumes modern housework requires only part-time labour, and anticipates that this might become the basis of ‘a new profession.’ ‘The diffuse tasks of the traditional servant may be provided on a specialized basis by caterers, dog-walkers, clean-up services and the like.’ However, these workers will not resemble the traditional domestic servant - ‘that role is dying’ (Coser 1973: 39).

Coser's emphasis on the pre-modern and exploitative nature of the domestic service, and his observations about the link between social stigma and the categories of workers recruited in outsourced domestic jobs (domestic workers), are shared by much of the contemporary literature (including feminist literature) on this topic. At the same time, his closing remarks anticipate the view that domestic occupations can be restructured in a modern marketised form and become the new frontier of economic progress. Let us briefly examine this strand of writing about social disadvantage and domestic outworkers before considering the thesis about economic progress.

Gender and Racial-ethnic Divisions of Domestic Labour

Time use surveys show that unpaid domestic labour is assigned on the basis of gender (Bittman and Pixley, 1997). On average, women spend twice as much time on domestic labour than men, and their time varies in response to relationships with others (husbands, children, elderly parents and so on). Men's time is not much affected by anything other than being without a woman to nurture them. Men make trade-offs between paid work and leisure: one hour less paid work means one hour more leisure and vice versa. By contrast, women trade-off paid and unpaid work, and not one for one. For women, an hour less paid work results in more unpaid work rather than more leisure, and even when a woman takes on an extra hour of paid work, her unpaid work is reduced by less than an hour.

During the last quarter of a century, most of the adaptation to women's increased employment for pay has come from women themselves (Bittman, 1995; Bittman and Matheson, 1996). In a pattern described as 'pseudomutuality' (Bittman and Pixley, 1997:145-171), modern men and women have enthusiastically embraced the idea of an egalitarian domestic division of labour, while in practice maintaining a very traditional pattern of sex-role segregation. Given women's increased participation in paid work over this period, this situation has resulted in women taking the matter into their own hands and unilaterally reducing the time they spend in housework, childcare and shopping. The historical pattern is one of the 'masculinisation' of unpaid work: women's time

spent in unpaid work is increasingly coming down to meet men's, rather than men's unpaid work-time rising to match women's.

The obvious question then is: how have women achieved this historic reduction? One answer achieving wide currency recently is that women have increasingly looked beyond the household to the market for a supply of goods and services to replace their own unpaid labour. The direct purchase of domestic labour services rather than the purchase of marketed services (such as restaurant meals) and manufactured goods has received the most attention recently. Specifically, a number of writers have commented that, (often explicitly) *contra* Coser, paid domestic employment is increasing throughout the developed world (Gregson and Lowe, 1994: 4; Gorz, 1994: 91; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994: 50; Wrigley, 1991: 318).

The alleged growth in the demand for paid domestic labour is generally explained as a consequence of the spread of feminist ideas and the growth of female labour force participation, or more precisely, the rise of a new category of highly paid women working in management or the prestigious professions. It is difficult to reconcile full-time work with keeping house and raising children because domestic work remains highly labour intensive. Men's failure to take 'equal responsibility for the household and children' (Romero, 1992: 164) and inadequacies in the level or kind of state- or market-provided substitutes for private domestic workers, particularly child carers, explain why private domestic employment emerges as the means of reconciling the competing demands of paid and unpaid work for women². A second source of demand for domestic labour services, one which receives much less attention in the literature, is elderly people living alone (Salzinger 1991:151). This source of demand is related to the previous, because women are primarily responsible for the care of aged dependants as well as the young.

2 See Arat-Koç (1989: 33) and Cohen (1991: 197) on Canada, Gregson and Lowe (1994: Chapter 4) on Britain, Romero (1992: 165) and Wrigley (1991: 318) on the United States. This supposition is shared by those who comment on the increasing scarcity of free-time because of the growth of excessive hours - overwork - among significant section of the paid workforce (Rogers and Rogers, 1989; Schor, 1991; Standing, 1997; Buchanan and Bearfield, 1997).

That this demand finds a supply of paid household workers is of primary concern in the predominantly feminist studies of domestic employment. These express anxiety about ‘women using other women’ (Ostrander, 1987) and generally condemn this ‘solution’ to inequality in the household division of labour³. Paid household work, according to this view, is one of the limited employment opportunities available to women of colour and immigrant women. Thus, the division of domestic labour becomes inflected with class and race-ethnicity, as middle-class white women pass on some of their domestic labour to minority women (Kaplan, 1987: 92). Low wages for paid domestic labour depend on the unrecognised domestic skills of women, often working without legal protection, or in circumstances of racial-ethnic discrimination. Paid domestic work becomes a ‘low skill’, low pay labour market ghetto, reproducing hierarchical relations of gender and race, from which there is little hope of escape. Most of the studies in this tradition have been based on in-depth observation of employment relations, occupational conditions and workers in these occupations. Their feminist writers, particularly in North America, reject Coser’s optimistic account of the supercession of domestic servitude by new ‘equalitarian’ ideas and practices: domestic employment practices too often reflect those he characterises as ‘premodern’ (1973: 37).

Feminist literature on contemporary ‘domestic service’ contributes a great deal to our understanding of inscription of hierarchies of class, gender and race-ethnicity through domestic employment relationships. However, growth is assumed, not demonstrated nor measured in these studies. One exception is an influential British study by Gregson and Lowe (1994). The study does present extensive qualitative analyses of the domestic arrangements of dual career professional couples, and the labour processes of paid domestic cleaners and nannies, based on surveys and in-depth interviews respectively. However, Gregson and Lowe also attempted to measure the demand for paid domestic services through the method of counting advertisements in *The Lady*, a journal long identified with advertisements for domestic workers.

On the evidence of a rising number of advertisements between 1982 and 1991, Gregson and Lowe concluded that there had been a boom in the

3 See, for example, Romero (1992: Chapter 7).

demand for paid domestic workers, especially nannies and cleaners. They identified an emerging 'service class' or 'new middle class' of dual career professional households as the primary source of this growing demand (1994: 83-4). Gregson's and Lowe's thesis presupposes a Thatcherite social policy regime which did little to redistribute wealth to the needy. In their view, the growing income disparity between double income professional households and low income households explained both the demand for paid domestic labour and the appearance of groups willing to supply it.

Gregson and Lowe's methods are subject to a number of criticisms. Estimating the demand for paid domestic workers by counting advertisements in *The Lady* assumes that the proportion of domestic services acquired through this journal - rather than through employment agencies, word of mouth or alternative media - is historically invariable. The special survey of dual career households lacked a comparison group, and hence there was no way of telling how the domestic outsourcing of this category of households was different from that of any other type of household. Furthermore, the sample was small and its representativeness open to question. The in-depth studies of a handful of cleaners, nannies and their employers provided invaluable information about employment relations, but cannot tell us whether these kinds of relationships are pervasive or typical. The factual basis for the claim of the 'resurgence' of 'domestic servants' remains to be established.

Domestic Outsourcing as the New Frontier of Economic Development

The modernisation tradition has also thrown up an account of economic development compatible with the continued existence of domestic employment, alongside other less controversial forms of domestic outsourcing.

Colin Clark (1940) was one of the first to describe a 'march through the sectors' universal model of economic progress. He argued that the economically active in those societies least advanced on the path to prosperity were mostly employed in agriculture (or primary industries), while more advanced societies employed their labour force in

manufactures (or secondary industries), and the most advanced societies had the highest proportion of their workforce in the provision of services (the tertiary sector) (Clark, 1940: 176-219). Historically, the diminishing workforce in the primary and secondary sectors resulted from a combination of the increasing productivity of those sectors along with the relative satiation of consumer demand for the products beyond a given income threshold. Expansion of the markets for these goods, and of the occupations producing them, are also constrained by demand, and as real income rises, necessities consume a smaller proportion of the household's money resources. This explains the shift from agriculture to manufacturing, and the same process is now affecting manufacturing. The shift from manufacturing to services has been a talisman for theorists of post-industrial societies up to the present (Kumar, 1995).

Australian business analyst and forecaster, Phillip Ruthven, elaborates on Clark's ideas by providing a colourful description of the whole gamut of Western history in terms of a process of commodifying what was once produced in the home - i.e. human history is the history of 'outsourcing.' This process began in earnest in the late 1600s during the 'modern Agrarian Age.' Ruthven summarises this process saying:

- We outsourced the *growing* of things to create the agrarian age industries
- We outsourced the *making* of things to create the industrial age of industries
- We are now outsourcing the *doing* of things (services) to create the infotronics age (1997: 2, emphases in the original).

Ruthven lists services already outsourced by contemporary households, as well as new areas of outsourcing. Sending messages, making clothes, collecting water, building, growing food, entertainment, burying the dead, making furniture, lighting, healing, bartering, travelling to school, preserving food, and brewing and wine-making are already outsourced. New areas include tourism, meals, gardening and pool care, laundry and dry cleaning, cleaning floor-coverings, painting, tutoring, health, child minding, security, cleaning outside surfaces, gutters and windows, car care, shopping and pet care. Ruthven predicts that in the next century

kitchens and laundries ‘will become “museum pieces” or fade into history’ (Ruthven, 1994: 5). Following the conventions of this post-industrial society tradition, Ruthven asserts that domestic outsourcing has the potential to soak-up unemployment deriving from the decline of manufacturing and more traditional service industries.

Is the Future ‘Insourcing’?

Perhaps because it is not intended to impress academics, Ruthven’s work has the advantage of stating boldly, not to mention colourfully, what many academic commentators have assumed. Jonathan Gershuny, sharing intellectual antecedents with Ruthven, provides an alternative view. Reversing Ruthven’s conclusions, Gershuny predicts that economic progress leads to a process whereby households eschew the services available on the market, and substitute instead goods and services produced at home with their own labour. By contrast with the term ‘outsourcing’, this process might reasonably be called ‘insourcing’.

Like Engel and Clark before him, Gershuny proposes that households have a hierarchy of needs and wants to satisfy - ‘food, shelter, domestic services, entertainment, transport, medicine, education, and, more distantly, government services, “law and order” and defence’ (1983: 1). As societies get richer they devote a smaller proportion of their national incomes to satisfying basic needs, and a larger share to more sophisticated, luxury categories. Gershuny also assumes productivity differences between different sectors of the economy.

In all this, Gershuny differs little from Clark. However, unlike Clark, he posits a *growing* productivity gap between the manufacturing and services sectors, which affects the *relative prices* of goods and final services. Over time, the gap between the relative costs of durable goods, produced by the manufacturing industry, and final services, the product of the service sector, has continued to widen. From the point of view of many households, the cost of purchasing anything in the market can be translated into the time spent in paid work to acquire the income equivalent to the purchase price. When a final service can be produced at home with the aid of some capital equipment (durables), households face

a choice between purchasing a final good or a service, or producing it themselves at home.

Household choices depend on the relative prices of the alternative modes of providing the service. The shadow price for home produced services depends on the opportunity cost of the labour time devoted to its production and the costs of equipment and raw materials (Gershuny 1983: 4). Householders also face a time constraint. For the highly paid, purchasing services (outsourcing) instead of using one's own unpaid labour, is cost effective. Thus, some demand for final services is income elastic. However, Gershuny argues that because durable goods have tended to become cheaper than final services, households have increasingly chosen at the aggregate level to provide their own final services. He lists transport, entertainment, and domestic services as those subject to the 'social innovation' of household self-servicing (Gershuny 1983: 2-3).

Gershuny's theory generates two predictions. At a single point in time, 'better-off households will spend a larger proportion of their disposable income on services than worse-off', and 'over time, households at each particular level will tend to decrease their proportion of income spent on services' (Gershuny 1983: 5). In other words, Gershuny's theory reverses what has become the conventional wisdom that the demand for final services increases with economic development, and predicts that it may sometimes decline.

3 Measuring Outsourcing With Expenditure Data

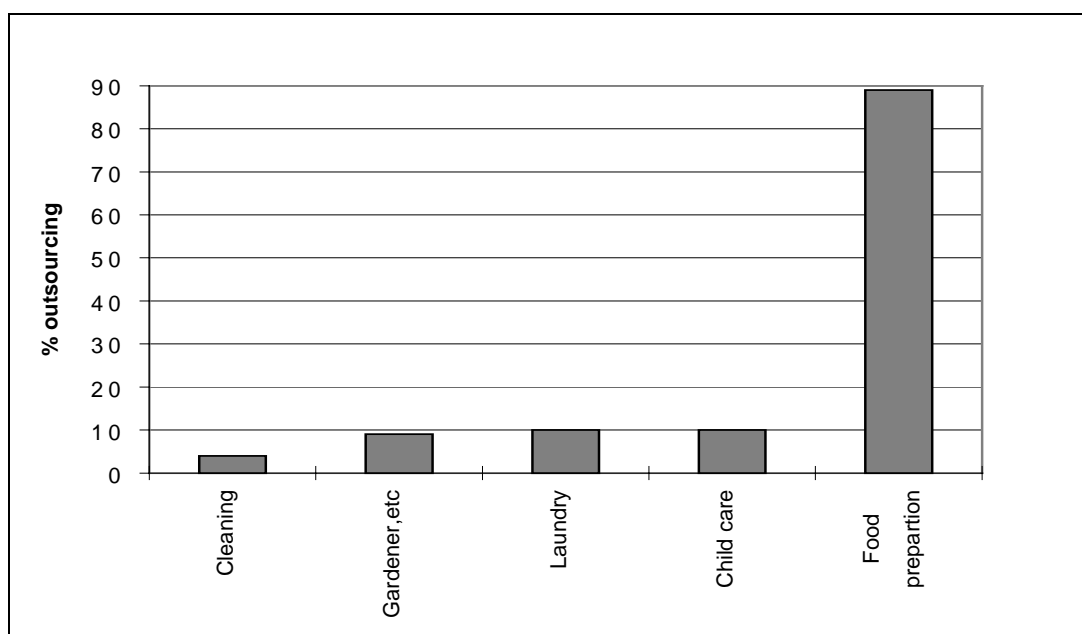
It would seem on the face of it that all these theories cannot be true at once. Are domestic service workers a thing of the past or the wave of the future? Are households outsourcing formerly domestic production, or replacing the purchase of market services with insourced home production of services? Information contained in the Household Expenditure Surveys (HES) conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 1984 and the financial years 1988-89 and 1993-94 can shed light on the questions and problems raised in debates about outsourcing. This section analyses the structure of and trends in outsourcing expenditure recorded in these three surveys.

The HES is collected by means of an expenditure diary, and contains detailed information about expenditure on all items consumed by households. For the purposes of processing the survey, over 5 000 separate commodities are grouped into a nested Household Expenditure Commodity Classification List (HESCCL) containing 400 separate commodity codes. Codes and definitions of outsourced goods and services are identical across the three surveys we use, and are given in Appendices A and B. In addition to expenditure data, detailed information about household income levels and sources, and some demographic information about household members, is collected, enabling linking of expenditure patterns to household characteristics.

Expenditure on Domestic Outsourcing 1984-94

Figure 1 sets out the most recent data (1993-94) on household expenditure on commercial goods and services which replace entirely tasks normally performed by unpaid domestic labour. It shows the proportion of households purchasing cleaning, gardening, laundry, child care and food preparation services in the two week period of the 1993-94 survey. Appendix A sets out the concordance between household activities and purchased services.

Figure 1: Proportion of Households Outsourcing Domestic Tasks (in the Last Two Weeks), 1993-94



Source: ABS Household Expenditure Survey (Unit Record File).

The first surprise is that the service receiving the most attention in the literature, cleaning, and occasioning the most publicly expressed distress, is least likely to be purchased. Only four per cent of households bought any cleaning services in the two week survey period⁴. However, nine per cent of households outsourced some gardening/lawn mowing, indicating that households were more than twice as likely to outsource the predominantly masculine activity of 'yard work' than they were to replace some portion of the predominantly feminine activity of cleaning. Ten per cent of households outsourced clothes care by making use of dry cleaning and laundry services.

About ten per cent of all Australian households living in private dwellings purchased some kind of child care. A more meaningful statistic is that thirty per cent of households with a child under 12 years old (the range used in the calculation of official child care statistics) spent some money on child care. This statistic only tells us about market based outsourcing of child care. However, specialised child care surveys show that 'informal child care', provided without payment by relatives, friends and neighbours, accounts for almost half of all child care in Australia.

Child care is obviously a significantly outsourced activity in Australia. These varieties of outsourcing are insignificant, however, in comparison with the purchase of food preparation services: meals out, take-away food and school lunches. In an inversion of the pattern for practically all other activities, fewer than ten per cent of households eschewed market replacements for home cooking in the two week survey period. Strangely, the low pay and poor working conditions of the many more

4 Unpublished evidence from Gabrielle Meagher's (1997) study of the Australian market for domestic services suggests that householders who purchase housekeeping and cleaning services regularly do so on a weekly or fortnightly basis. Thus, it can be assumed that the HES records most regular cleaning services purchases. The other issue is the whether the black market nature of some domestic employment might lead to some under-reporting of expenditure. By its nature it is difficult to capture the size of the black economy there are no indication that it particularly affect the reporting of expenditure. Moreover the estimates derived from these surveys is not fundamentally different from the estimates derived from the Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997 Time Use Survey or from Wave One of the Negotiating the Life Course Project.

women and immigrant workers in the restaurant industry are not subject to the same hand-wringing as those of private domestic workers⁵.

Both Clark-Ruthven modernisation theories and writing on domestic employment emphasise in different ways that outsourcing increases with income. The Clark-Ruthven model links secular increases in social income with the trend towards outsourcing, whereas feminist studies of domestic employment emphasise inequality between households at a given point in time. Economists distinguish normal, luxury, and inferior (or so-called 'Giffen') goods by the relationship between changes in consumption levels with changes in income. Consumption of normal goods increases with income: regardless of the level of income, when income increases a household consumes more normal goods. Luxury goods, as the name implies, are consumed only by those with high incomes and barely at all by those with little income. In economists' terms, when the proportional increase in the consumption of a good is greater than the proportional increase in income (when the income elasticity is greater than one), then we are dealing with a luxury good. In the unusual case of a Giffen good, consumption actually falls as income increases.

In all cases in the HES surveys, outsourcing of domestic goods and services increases as income increases. Further, outsourced domestic services are normal goods⁶. The most common bundle of goods are those replacing home cooking. The consumption of meals out, in restaurants, coffee shops, etc. appears to be a normal good, while take-away food is more popular among households with lower incomes. Although take-away food is not technically an inferior good, it appears that people

5 Evelyn Nakano Glenn's work is an exception here. She examines the continuities between women's employment in 'reproductive' labour in domestic and (public and private) institutional contexts (1992). However, the (discourse of the) intimacy of the domestic domain, and the taint of premodern servitude of employment therein continues to have a strong grip on the imagination of most feminist writers on paid household work. Their critique of modernisation theory does not extend to recognition that employment in non-domestic settings can also be organised around with personalism and status-bound relations. See, for example, Ram and Holliday's (1993) work on the family firm.

6 There is no case where the income elasticity of domestic outsourcing is greater than one, that is, none of these goods and services are luxury goods.

substitute meals out for take-away if they can afford it. Dual earner households, whatever their income level, are more likely than other households to outsource food, perhaps because of time constraints. What this pattern suggests is that, while those with more income do consume a greater quantity of these goods and services, those with lower incomes are not excluded altogether from consuming them.

Purchase of housekeeping and cleaning services is related to age and income. Incidence of purchase increases in the middle, prime income earning, years. However, the most striking features of the distribution of outsourced cleaning by age is the sharp rise among households in which the reference person is over 75 years of age. In this age group, the purchase of housekeeping services reaches a level many times higher than for any lower age group. The effects of age are more powerful than those of income. These irregularities in the distribution of demand are produced by the organisation of social services. State subsidised housekeeping, cleaning and personal care services are available to the aged who would otherwise be unable to afford them.

Nevertheless, the purchase of cleaning services rises with income. Only two per cent of households with incomes in the lowest three-quarters of the income distribution purchased cleaning services. However, thirteen per cent of households with incomes in the top decile did, while of the remaining households five per cent of households purchased some cleaning. Given the expectations established by the literature, this is a surprisingly low proportion even among the wealthiest groups.

The purchase of gardening services or laundry and dry cleaning by income follows a similar pattern. However, as noted earlier, the proportion of households participating in outsourcing laundry and gardening is more than double that for house cleaning services.

The purchase of paid child care among those with children under 12 years also increases with income, although less steeply than cleaning or gardening services. The incidence of child care purchase amongst households with incomes in the lowest decile was 24 per cent, rising to 40 per cent among the high income. The predominant form of child care service purchased is institutional (expenditure on child minding centre fees, creche fees, kindergarten or pre-school fees), while a smaller

proportion is spent on what the Australian Bureau of Statistics calls 'Child Care Services Not Elsewhere Classified (N.E.C.)'. These include baby-sitters' and child minders' fees and expenditure on nannies.

Gregson and Lowe (1994) and others claim that employment of nannies is booming. However, in Australia at least, this claim is not supported by expenditure data. On the (extremely conservative) estimate that to employ a nanny in 1993-94 would cost \$60.00 per week⁷, only 1.3 per cent of Australian households with a child under twelve years old employed a nanny in the survey fortnight. Raw data indicate that these households fall in the top third of the income distribution, but with so few cases, large standard errors preclude statistically significant association between expenditure on nannies and income.

Home cooking is the activity most frequently replaced by purchased goods and services. Seventy per cent of even the poorest ten percent of households bought a meal out, take-away food or a school lunch in the two week survey period. For households on middle incomes, the proportion was over eighty per cent, and among high income groups it was just a few percentage points below one hundred per cent. Two further points about the relationship between income and the outsourcing of home cooking are worthy of comment. First, the lowest income groups have to choose between meals out (in restaurants, coffee shops, etc.) and take-away food, whereas the highest income groups can consume many more meals out without reducing their consumption of take-away food. Second, as might be expected, expenditure on home cooking substitutes varies even more widely with income than the incidence of purchase. Low income households in 1993-94 spent an average of less than \$8.00 per week, while households in the top decile spent on average more than five times that amount (approximately \$46.00 per week).

Cross-sectional analysis of the incidence of and expenditure on domestic outsourcing indicates that some activities are much more likely to be replaced with purchased goods and services than others, and shows outsourcing is related to income and other social factors. However, most

7 In 1995, the going rate for an agency placed live-out nanny in Australia was approximately \$350 per week (Whelan 1995: 41). \$60 per week at this rate would buy a nanny for a day.

of the theories reviewed posited that some or all forms of domestic outsourcing were either growing or declining. We now turn to testing trends over time.

Australian Trends in Domestic Outsourcing, 1984-1994

We pooled the 1984, 1988-89 and 1993-94 Household Expenditure Surveys, and expressed the money values for all years in 1988 constant dollars, using the general movements in the CPI. A multiple regression analysis was used to control for change in the composition of the population⁸. Expenditure on each category of outsourced goods and services was regressed with reference to the number of adults in the household⁹, the age of the reference person¹⁰, the number and ages of children, gross household income from all sources, and the proportion of household income contributed by the reference person. Dummy variables for the period of the survey were included in the regression to test for change over time. Since some theories, such as that of Gregson and Lowe (1994), are based on the increasing inequality of incomes over time, we included an interaction term aimed at capturing the differential effect of being in the top income decile as time passes. The full specification of the regression model is represented in Table 1, and the results summarised in Appendix C. We then compared the results with

8 Over the course of a decade, the composition of the population changes significantly. In Australia between 1984 and 1994 the age structure of the population changed, average household size declined, and the proportion of children of varying ages also changed.

9 Preliminary analysis revealed that expenditure does not increase in a linear fashion with household size. The difference between one and two income households accounts for almost all of the difference in patterns of outsourcing expenditure among larger households. Having more than two adults in a household hardly affects expenditure. On this basis a dummy variable enabling the comparison of one adult households with households of more than one adult was employed as one the measure of household size. The effect of presence of children is captured by three variables measuring the number of children in the household by their (grouped) age.

10 The Australian Bureau of Statistics replaced the term 'head of household' with the concept of a 'reference persons'. However, for this sequence of surveys the reference person is the same person that under the superceded nomenclature would have been described as 'head of household'.

Table 1: Time Trends in Domestic Outsourcing: The Regression Model

Dependent variables (Expenditure on replacement service in constant 1988 dollars)	Independent variables	Comments on independent variables
Outsourced food preparation (238-240)	One adult household	Yes=1, No=0
Meals out	No of children aged 0-1	
Take-away	No of children aged 2-4	
School lunches	No of children aged 5-14	
House cleaning (415-416)	Age of reference person	
Housekeeping, Cleaning Services	Gross weekly household income from all sources	Expressed in constant 1988 dollars
Household services	Reference person's income as proportion of household income	ranges from 0 to 1
Gardening services (414)	1984	Yes=1, No=0
Child Care Services(417-419)	1988	Yes=1, No=0
Institutional care	1993	Yes=1, No=0
Child care (not elsewhere classified)	Top income decile in 1984	Yes=1, No=0
Laundry & Dry Cleaning (338)	Top income decile in 1988	Yes=1, No=0
Convenience foods	Top income decile in 1993	Yes=1, No=0
Raw as a proportion of all groceries		
Reduced preparation foods as a proportion of all groceries		
Convenience foods as a proportion of all groceries		

Bittman's (1995) analysis of time use surveys to assess which purchased goods and services can be reasonably assumed to replace unpaid domestic labour and to what extent they do.

Over the decade all forms of food preparation outsourcing increased. For a dual income family with a child aged three years and a household income of \$1,000 per week, expenditure on outright replacement of home cooking (both sit-down meals out and take away) increased by nine per cent. A shift in the balance between take-away food and meals out is also evident.

To test the proposition that more partial substitutes are being employed in home cooking to reduce labour time, detailed food expenditures codes were grouped into three ordinal categories: raw, reduced-preparation, and high-convenience foods. The raw category contains unprocessed foods such as raw, unwashed potatoes. At the other extreme are high-convenience foods requiring only the removal of packaging or, at the

most, reheating, before consumption. Examples include potato crisps and frozen prepared meals. The intermediate category is residual, composed of foods that are neither raw nor high convenience, but which require less preparation than raw foods. Examples include bottled sauces, pre-mixed salad dressings, pizza bases, and so on. The assignment of food to the three categories was based a small random survey of consumers. The table in Appendix B links these categories with the HES commodity codes.

Expenditure on raw foods as a proportion of grocery purchases has declined significantly over the decade, while expenditure on both reduced-preparation and high-convenience foods has significantly increased. This pattern of outsourcing food preparation (through outright replacements and partial substitutes) is consistent with analysis of time use changes between 1974-1992. This analysis revealed a rapidly accelerating, and astonishingly large, reduction in women's time spent in food preparation (Bittman, 1995). Since food preparation in aggregate occupies more hours of non-market work than any other 'household industry'¹¹, this represents the largest modification of the boundary between home and market provision¹².

The second great growth area in outsourcing is child care. For the same dual income family with a child aged three years used in the example above, expenditure on child care grew faster than home cooking replacement, rising more rapidly (15 per cent) in the period between the 1988-89 and 1993-94 surveys than in the five years before, when it rose by ten per cent. Over the whole decade there was a 27 per cent increase in child care expenditure. This growth has taken the form of an increase

11 See Bittman and Pixley (1997: 91) for an explanation of this term coined by Duncan Ironmonger.

12 Indeed, the economic rationality of the non-market home production of these items was always difficult to explain. As Cowan aptly puts it: 'Several million American women cook supper each night in several million separate homes over several million separate stoves - a specter which should be sufficient to drive any rational technocrat into the loony bin ... Out there in the land of household work there are small industrial plants which sit idle for the better part of every working day; there are expensive pieces of highly mechanised equipment which only get used once or twice a month; there are consumption units which weekly trundle out to their markets to buy 8 ounces of this nonperishable product and 12 ounces of that one'. (Cowan, 1979: 59)

in institutional child care, since expenditure on Child Care Services N.E.C. has not grown substantially over this period. These findings remain after holding constant age, household size and composition, spouse's earnings, and even real income.

Between 1987 and 1992, both men's and women's time devoted to primary face-to-face child care grew by a small but measurable amount. Purchased child care, then, is not displacing unpaid care by parents¹³. This continues what appears to be a century-long trend of investing more time in children (Bittman, 1995; Robinson and Godley, 1997; Vanek, 1974). This increase has been maintained in the face of falling family size. Household spending on child care has substantially increased without diminishing the time spent by parents. The growth in both money and time resources devoted to child care show the increasing investment in our children.

Outsourcing of gardening and lawn mowing is growing, but more weakly than food preparation and child care. Despite the many predictions to the contrary and the accompanying moral opprobrium, there has been no statistically significant change in the outsourcing of domestic cleaning services over the decade 1984-94. Real expenditure has remained constant. This may help explain why there was no measurable change in the time devoted to cleaning between 1987 and 1992 (Bittman, 1995). Although many presume that the first response to the extra time constraints arising from the demands of paid employment would be to clean less often and allow the house to become dirtier, this is not supported by the available time use evidence. It appears that Australian households, chiefly through the unpaid work of women, continue to maintain their own standards of tidiness and hygiene.

The outsourcing of laundry and clothes care has continued to move in the opposite direction to that of food and child care, that is, from the market to the household. Laundry is being 'insourced'. Social historian Ruth Schwarz Cowan (1983) drew attention to the fact that more laundry was performed at home after World War II than before it, and the results of

13 However, purchased child care services may be replacing informal care by other family members and friends.

this analysis suggest that this process is continuing as we approach the new millennium.

Gregson and Lowe's (1994) argument that growth in domestic employment is based on greater dispersion of incomes over the decade is not supported by expenditure analysis. The interaction terms designed to capture the effect of being at the top of the income distribution (in the 10th decile), over a period during which income disparities have become wider, show no significant association with expenditure on the service area which they allege is booming - that of domestic cleaning.

4 Discussion

Trends in outsourcing, or replacing unpaid domestic labour with purchased substitutes, are not consistent with the predictions of major theories. Employment of domestic workers continues even in the most 'advanced' industrial societies, though it is doubtful these workers are servants in the sense described by Coser (Meagher, 1997). Perhaps those concerned about the maltreatment of women of colour should search in food processing factories and restaurants as much as in domestic kitchens for sites of exploitation. Evidence shows that on average, cooking, the most time consuming domestic task, is being increasingly outsourced. If Ruthven and the post-industrialists he typifies are correct, cooking may be the first of many domestic tasks to be transferred to the market. However, the same theories would have great difficulty in explaining why households make less use of market laundry services than in the past. In this respect the theories of Gershuny receive some support from the evidence presented here.

How can we reconcile our findings with Gregson's and Lowe's published results? There are two broad alternatives. Either things are very different in Australia from the UK, or using advertisements in *The Lady* is a poor way to measure demand. Interestingly, Jean Gardiner's survey of findings on the consumption of outsourced domestic services in Britain are broadly consistent with the findings for Australia - an increase in expenditure on meals prepared outside the home and on child care (Gardiner, 1997).

In the case of child care, differences between the UK and Australia over the 1980s and early 1990s are likely to reflect political differences (Cabinet incumbency by parties with very different political programs), and consequent differences in the balance of state and market provision. While Australia significantly expanded and subsidised institutional child care places over this period, the United Kingdom did not.

In the case of cleaning, there is no immediately obvious reason for the differences between the UK and Australia. A cultural and historical analysis of attitude and class formation might support the argument that Britain's aristocratic past is more conducive to domestic service than Australia's symbolic commitment to egalitarianism. Alternatively, the methodological limitations of Gregson's and Lowe's study may have misled them. However, the answer to these questions will remain unknown until there is a similar systematic study of expenditure on domestic outsourcing in the U.K.

In general, that some domestic tasks should be increasingly outsourced while over the same period others are increasingly 'insourced' suggests that both more evidence and new arguments are needed. In the first instance, better information about the opportunity costs of home production versus the costs of market is necessary to test adequately the price-based substitution theories of Clark, Ruthven and Gershuny. However, price-based substitution models may themselves be limited, and the idea that trends towards outsourcing and insourcing should be unidirectional or mutually exclusive may require revision. Prices have political and cultural determinants as well as supply and demand, as feminist theorists of women's wages (such as Steinberg, 1990) and the domestic division of labour (such as Gardiner, 1997), among others, have long argued. So do decisions about divisions of activity between the market, state and household. Esping-Andersen (1993) has argued that we need to understand

... the importance of institutional forces in reshaping our employment structure: the role of the welfare state, education and industrial relations systems. The way in which these function have powerful repercussions on the transformation of the family

and on the relationship between self-servicing,
consumption and paid employment. (1993: 26)

This paper has pointed to some competing claims about the future of the social division of labour, and supplied some solid evidence on Australian trends. To further our knowledge, a cross-national study in which expenditure and time-use data are interpreted in tandem with the institutional framework within which household decisions are made is much needed.

Appendix A

Concordance Between Activities and Expenditure-Replacement Services

Activity ^(a)	Expenditure Items ^(b)
Cooking (110)	Meals in Restaurants, Hotels, Clubs etc., (238) Snack, 'Take-Away' Foods Not Frozen (239) School Lunch Money (240)
Cleaning (120)	Housekeeping, Cleaning Services (415, 416)
Laundry, (130)	Dry Cleaning and Laundering of Clothing (338) Clothing Repairs (339)
Garden/Lawn/Pool (141)	Gardening Services (414)
Child Care (211-280)	Child Care Services (417-419)
Notes: (a) Numbers in brackets refer to Time Use Activity Codes (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1988: 74-76)	
(b) Numbers in brackets refer to HESCCL codes.	

Appendix B

Grouping of Food Items in 1988-89 Household Expenditure Survey Commodity Classification List (HESCCL) According to Steps Required for Meal Preparation

Category 1 (Convenience Foods)	Category 2 (Reduced Preparation Foods)	Category 3 (Raw Foodstuffs)
151 Bread -Home Delivered	156 Cakes, Biscuits, Pudding & Bread Mixes	153 Flour
152 Bread -Not Home Delivered	157 Breakfast Cereals	158 Pasta, Noodles (raw)
154 Cakes, Tarts, Puddings	165 Processed Meat (frozen)	159 Rice
155 Biscuits	184 Butter	160 Cereals NEC
161 Ham	185 Powdered Milk	162 Bacon
163 Canned Meat	187 Margarine	164 Sausages
166 Processed Meat ^(a)	204 Frozen Vegetables	167 Beef and Veal
177 Canned and Bottled Fish/Seafood	205 Other Processed Vegetables	168 Mutton and Lamb
178 Processed Fish and Other Processed Seafood	207 Sugar	169 Pork
181 Fresh Milk - Home Delivered	211 Jellies and Desserts N.E.C ^(a)	170 Poultry
182 Fresh Milk and Cream -Not Home Delivered	216 Tea	171 Game
183 Cheese	217 Coffee	172 Offal
186 Dairy Product and Eggs ^(a)	218 Canned and Packeted Soup	173 Other Raw Meat
189 Fresh Citrus Fruit	219 Propriety Food Drinks N.E.C.	174 Meat Undefined
190 Fresh Stone Fruit	220 Spices and Herbs	175 Fresh Fish and Other Fresh Seafood
191 Fresh Apples and Pears	221 Sauces and Salad Dressings	176 Frozen Fish and Other Frozen Seafood
192 Fresh Fruit N.E.C.	222 Spreads and Mixes N.E.C.	180 Eggs
193 Fresh Fruit Undefined	230 Food Undefined ^(a)	188 Edible Oils and Fats N.E.C.
194 Canned, frozen and Bottled Fruit	235 Cordials	198 Fresh Potatoes
195 Dried Fruit	236 Milk Based Beverages Not Packaged or Bod N.E.C.	199 Fresh Onions
197 Nuts		200 Fresh Root Vegetables ^(a)
208 Marmalades, Jams and Conserves		202 Fresh Vegetables N.E.C ^(a)
209 Honey		203 Fresh Vegetables
212 Potato Crisps and Other Savoury Confectionery		206 Vegetables Undefined
213 Chocolate Confectionery		223 Food Additives N.E.C.
214 Iced Confectionery		229 Food N.E.C ^(a)
215 Other Confectionery		
224 Baked Beans and Canned Spaghetti		
225 Canned and Bottled Baby Foods		
226 Frozen Prepared Meals		
227 Prepared Meals N.E.C ^(a)		
231 Soft Drinks and Aerated Waters		
232 Fruit Juice		
233 Vegetable Juice		
234 Juice Undefined		
237 Non-Alcoholic Beverages Undefined		

Note: (a) Category contains a mixture of pre-processed categories and is placed in this category on balance.

Appendix C

Summary of Main Findings on Trends in Domestic Outsourcing 1984-1993-94 (Beta Coefficients - cents per week)

Independent variable	Outsourced food preparation	House cleaning	Gardening services	Child Care Services	Laundry and Dry Cleaning	Convenience foods as a proportion of all groceries (%)
One adult household	34.61	42.90**	40.71**	127.30**	11.55**	2.30**
No of children aged 0-1	-485.90**	20.35*	5.63	285.91**	1.98	1.33**
No of children aged 2-4	-415.46**	22.23**	26.70**	798.44**	-13.13**	1.02**
No of children aged 5-14	113.91**	12.43**	-4.00	29.53**	-9.35**	0.42**
Age of reference person	-28.71**	02.46**	1.97**	-0.45	-0.24*	-0.20**
Gross weekly household income from all sources	2.10**	00.19**	0.07**	0.30**	0.08**	0.00**
Reference person's income as proportion of household income	-1158.87**	30.94**	10.05	-195.05**	-8.25	-0.96*
1988	174.36**	-12.91	-16.00	61.77**	-7.56	1.15**
1993	379.67**	5.66	24.72**	153.93**	-10.32**	3.81**
Top income decile in 1984	838.94**	14.21	-3.93	-36.91	30.97**	-0.86
Top income decile in 1988	604.73**	28.48	25.36	-44.65	-0.97	-1.85**
Top income decile in 1993	924.25**	26.12	54.84*	128.75*	12.39	-2.04**
Constant	3040.00**	-221.85**	-102.75**	-133.36**	33.81**	62.16**
Adjusted R-squared	0.24	0.05	0.01	0.08	0.03	0.07

Notes: * P<.05

** P<.01

Source: ABS Household Surveys (1984, 1988-89, 1993-94 (unit record files).

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