

Gendered, aesthetic and emotional labour in Australian department stores across the twentieth century

Matthew Bailey

Macquarie University, NSW, Australia



ABSTRACT

This article examines the historical exploitation of female labour in Australian department stores. These stores extracted significant value through gendered, aesthetic, and emotional labour. Female employees were systematically underpaid in relation to male workers. They were expected to maintain appropriate and prescribed appearances, provide personalised customer service, and possess detailed product knowledge. Retailers worked hard to constrain wage growth: during progress towards equal pay legislation from the 1950s onwards, they deployed a range of strategies to minimise costs, including job reclassification and casualisation. This coincided with increasing feminisation of the workforce. The emergence of discount department stores employing labour-efficient, self-service models in the 1970s, further disrupted traditional department stores that relied on intensive customer service. By the 1990s, casualisation and part-time work had transformed the sector. The story of department stores has often been narrated in terms of male entrepreneurial drive and will. The business model, however, was fundamentally dependent on cheap, highly skilled female labour.

Rachel Menken (Owner, Menken's Department Store): 'Why do I hire young girls?'
Don Draper: 'Because they cost practically nothing.'¹

Introduction

In a message to shareholders in 1976, Myer department store Group Managing Director, Kenneth Steele, reported on a recent tour of retailing in the United States. He declared that 'the department stores gave a feeling of impersonality. Staff were hard to find, and when you did [find them],' he wrote, 'they seemed too busy with other things to take care of the customers.'² Steele was focused on the present, but his statement foretold changes in the service cultures of Australian department stores that were already

CONTACT Matthew Bailey  matthew.bailey@mq.edu.au  Faculty of Arts, Macquarie University, NSW, Australia

© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

underway. He urged his shop-floor staff to reinvest in his firm's slogan – 'For value and friendly service' – by finding ways to make customers feel welcome. At the time, Myer, like all Australian department stores was experiencing disruption from new forms of competition and wage inflation after dominating retail geographies for almost a century.

This article traces a history of female employment in Australian department stores. In doing so, it contributes to a burgeoning literature on the country's retail history. This scholarship builds on work begun in the 1990s that explored gendered, urban and cultural dimensions of Australian retail and shopping history.³ More recently there has been a growing body of work on shopping centres, department stores, discount houses, arcades, Chinese shopkeepers and immigrant entrepreneurs.⁴ This article extends such research by examining department store's reliance on under-priced female labour throughout the twentieth century. This provided a foundation for labour-intensive business models that by the 1970s had become too costly for Steele and other retail managers like him to maintain. Across the twentieth century, retail firms consistently fought against increases in pay for employees, including opposing the development of equal pay. When equal pay was legislated, labour management strategies were deployed to reduce costs. These practices intensified in response to price competition by discount chains that applied labour-efficient business models to sell department store goods, fundamentally disrupting the industry. From this point on, casualisation and precarity became defining features of retail employment. In department stores, these strategies to cheapen labour were accompanied by the increasing feminisation of shop floor workforces.

Across this time frame, retail firms extracted significant value from female staff through gendered, aesthetic and emotional labour. Aesthetic labour is a form of disciplining within organisations, requiring staff to 'look and sound right'.⁵ It involves employers actively drawing on the embodied attributes of employees, and mobilising, developing and commodifying these for competitive advantage.⁶ It has been a consistent feature of retail organisations internationally, particularly in stores where status and taste have been leveraged for market positioning.⁷ Retailers have also proved adept at extracting significant emotional labour from employees. This term was coined by Hochschild in 1983 to describe how service sector employees 'worked on people' rather than things.⁸ She defined emotional labour as work that 'requires one to induce or suppress feelings in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others'.⁹ For department stores, this meant inducing in customers a desire to consume goods and to mediate the emotional dynamics of exchange and purchase within stores. Retail managers and business owners were acutely conscious of the value of aesthetic and emotional labour, working consistently to normalise its performance within the culture and logics of department store work and training.

Female labour in department stores

Throughout the twentieth century, women working in retail were paid less than men. The right to maintain this imbalance was fiercely defended by retailers and their representative organisations. The extent of the pay gap varied over time and by employee's age and rank, as well as between states, urban and regional areas, types of shops, individual firms, and even within single stores.¹⁰ But it was a pervasive feature of Australian industrial relations generally and retail employment specifically. In 1919, the basic award wage

for female workers in all occupations was set at 54 percent of the male wage.¹¹ This created a legal discriminatory framework that continued previous formal and informal practices of underpaying women.¹² The disparity in wage rates was justified by an idealised social structure of heterosexual, nuclear families, in which male breadwinners supported female 'dependants' and their children.¹³ The legislation directly benefited department stores, which operated labour-intensive business models and employed a large proportion of women on their staff. When the notion of equal pay was suggested by female activists as early as 1905, it drew little support, even from women.¹⁴ It was also strongly opposed by retailers and their representative organisations. But it raised the issue, early, of the value of work being undertaken by women in businesses that had some of the largest workforces and most prominent buildings in Australia's central business districts – not to mention the myriad smaller department stores situated in suburban and regional high streets.

The majority of female labour was deployed on the lower rungs of the employment hierarchy, although there were many examples of women managing departments in areas of women's fashions and accessories, and working as buyers of these same products categories. Beyond this, however, opportunities were limited because Australian firms, generally, did not consider women to be executive material. As Catherine Bishop has shown, this even became the case for businesses such as Anthony Hordern & Sons and Farmer & Co., two of Sydney's largest department stores, that had been founded by women. Male family members became the public faces of these enterprises, filled their executive ranks with other men, and erased the names of female founders.¹⁵ On the shop floor, however, women were everywhere. The preponderance of female shoppers and staff led early retail historians to describe department stores as 'women's stores', and at least one retailer to describe their store as an 'Adamless Eden'.¹⁶ In Australia, female employment grew strongly during the rapid scaling of department store firms in the first quarter of the twentieth century when they became some of the largest employers in the nation. The quality of customer service defined the reputation of both small and large firms.¹⁷ The cost of providing this service was closely monitored, tightly supervised and belligerently protected by, mostly, male executives.

Female labour was cheaper than men's and women contributed gendered knowledge as well as aesthetic and emotional labour that was critical to the service cultures of stores. In part this was because retailers knew that the vast majority of their customers were women.¹⁸ According to one industry commentator, women did most household shopping because 'the average man ... [was] very susceptible to the opinions of his women-folk', who also – because they were the ones who always shopped – had far more expertise in selecting suitable items. This commentator also suggested that, at least in terms of buying small everyday items, men might have been 'too lazy to do it for themselves.'¹⁹ Because women did the domestic labour of shopping, and female staff were assumed to have a natural understanding, shared experience and insight into other women's needs and wants, they were highly useful employees.²⁰ One estimate in the mid-1920s suggested that women comprised the vast majority of department store workers, out numbering men four to one.²¹ Variations between stores and locations make accurate figures difficult to determine, but there is no doubt that female labour had become fundamental to the business operations of most department stores.

Shop work was physically demanding. In 1928, writer and activist, Mary Gilmore, wrote in the *Australian Worker* that:

Half the women who marry today have been shop girls who have done so much standing that the leg veins become distended and weakened. When they come to have children the weakness and distention are made permanent so that every step extra that they have to take in a day adds to their trouble. Multiply those extra steps by fifty-two weeks and the weeks by years, and as each year passes and each baby comes there is more and more suffering, more and more weakness to be endured.²²

Retailers, too, saw the pathway from shop to marriage as a problem, although for different reasons. A male representative of the NSW Retail Traders' Association claimed in 1936 that 'women earn their living only as long as they have to, and they all look forward to being married ... [moreover] girls who, by their intelligence, give the most promise of becoming valuable workers are the very ones to leave their jobs to be married.'²³ In this world view, there was a natural overlap of skills required for domestic and customer service roles: those women most suited to the latter were also most suited to, and likely to take up, the former. In the mid-1920s, Sylvia Stafford Walker, who worked for Farmer & Co., declared that, in fact, experience working in a store produced a better type of housewife – a woman who found her new regime of housework 'enthalling', had developed tact, insight and efficiency in the store environment, and could empathise with her 'brain-weary' husband's challenges at work. Her reflections won Sylvia first prize in the 1924 City [Retail] Houses Essay Competition, reflecting their alignment with an industry view that women had a natural affinity for emotional labour that department stores could develop and hone.²⁴

Cultural associations linking gender to certain types of goods became embedded in legislation in the late-1930s. In 1937 an inquiry, undertaken by the Industrial Commission of N.S.W. in response to union agitation, identified 'male' and 'female' departments based on the types of goods being sold.²⁵ 'Male departments' included groceries, hardware, menswear, men's footwear, furniture, carpets and sporting goods. Some of these departments sold expensive goods on which commission was earned, further skewing the remuneration between male and female sales staff.²⁶ Women's departments were those in which customers were almost exclusively female and where there were cultural expectations about female expertise that could be linked in practical or imaginative ways to domestic roles. These departments included women's shoes and clothing, children's wear, babywear, baby furniture, perfumery, haberdashery, handbags, toys and jewellery.²⁷ In addition to making a cultural demarcation, the legislation was an attempt to re-masculinise department store workforces, limit the exploitation of 'cheap [female] labour', and increase the proportion of adult males employed in big retail stores.²⁸ A by-product of the legislation when it was introduced in 1938, was that women were granted equal pay if they worked in male departments.

Retailers predicted that the legislation would produce a decline in female employment.²⁹ While it did increase male employment, very few women lost their jobs. However, only a small proportion received an actual pay rise. Carol O'Donnell argues that there was a constant battle between the union and retailers over the refusal to pay eligible women the male hourly rate.³⁰ Many women were shifted into departments where the female rate was paid. Elsewhere firms used creative methods of job

classification to avoid paying the higher rate. This continued during the Second World War. Many women working in male-designated departments due to labour shortages continued to be paid at female rates or less than the male rate.³¹ In 1940, the male president of the Employer's Federation declared that 'as a general rule, men are more valuable to the employer than women ... usually women are employed only because their wages are lower.' While this was cast as an insult, it also indicated the big stores' dependence on cheap female labour: department store executives at the time declared that equal pay for women would be 'quite unworkable' in their enterprises.³²

The gendering of certain goods kept open the space for some women to develop careers in women's 'natural sphere', buying fashion.³³ Their roles could include international travel to acquire merchandise for the large city stores. Carrie Simmons 'Cissie' Lowry, who bought high fashion hats for David Jones, served the company for 56 years before retiring in 1963.³⁴ Muriel Bethune started working for Cox Brother's small Adelaide department store in 1925 before moving to Melbourne in 1933 as the firm's fashion controller. She travelled nationally and internationally for 20 years in that role.³⁵ Sheila Scotter joined Myer as a fashion buyer in 1949, before moving to Georges department store a few years later as a buyer of high fashion and accessories.³⁶ These women, and others like them, pursued interesting and rewarding careers. However, in many cases they were also probably paid less than their male counterparts and were celebrated as exceptions in male dominated working worlds. Photos show Cissie Lowry as the only woman in rooms of men, or alongside a male business associate laughing uproariously at a remark he just made.³⁷ Celebrated as David Jones' 'wonderful girl', she joked on her retirement that she was leaving her heart behind and half-regretted her decision. The male Personnel Manager quipped back, 'Don't worry – we can always find you a job as a casual, at Brookvale' suburban branch store.³⁸ This did not reflect a low regard for Lowry within David Jones – she was acknowledged by store leaders as an exceptionally valuable employee and culture setter who set professional standards for the firm.³⁹ But to those reporting on the event, the joke worked because it indicated a more recognisable career path for a female department store employee, which stood in sharp contrast to the glamour and exceptionality of Lowry's.

As the big city department stores grew in size and scope, it became necessary to implement training systems to manage employees and extract as much value from their labour as possible. When these shops were first established, often as small drapery businesses, management was direct, daily and personal. Scale and technology produced mass-selling systems, introduced specialisation of employee functions, led to the adoption of metrics for measuring performance, and resulted in customer complaints about impersonal service. Multi-storied department stores employing thousands of workers thus required bureaucratic management systems to ensure that staff could represent and reproduce the store's brand and reputation.⁴⁰ Sophie Loy-Wilson has shown that prescriptive training regimes disciplined the big stores' feminised work forces to appear sincere and personable to the multitude of customers they served daily.⁴¹

Department store managers viewed religious virtues of honesty, prudence, compassion, and sincerity as a means of appeasing customers, humanising social relations, and offsetting the disenchantment of modern commercial life in an era of mass distribution.⁴² In this performative aesthetic, sales staff were expected to not only hold these values but to represent and display them to customers; a prescribed outward

countenance indicating a willingness to accommodate and serve. One 1930s training manual, for example, suggested that female staff members should 'be schooled in the art of smiling and smiling sincerely.' Managers were told that 'the sincere smile is more than half your battle and if you can convince the new staff member that she will use it every day because her job is pleasant, then you have done well.'⁴³ Sales staff were thus required to develop internal emotional discipline so that they could present a sunny disposition to customers during the act of exchange.

Training regimes from the 1930s to the 1950s inculcated employees in the mannerisms, sales techniques and etiquette likely to increase sales and positively represent the brand of the store. Training also schooled employees in detailed product knowledge and a full understanding of the store's operations and layout.⁴⁴ Sales staff were reminded that the value of a product depended upon knowledge of its uses. Communicating this knowledge effectively increased the value of that item to shoppers. Training manuals from the time also suggest a spread in invisible, unpaid work. In 1953, for example, sales trainer Gladys Rippingale advised staff to 'read carefully every advertisement inserted in the newspapers by your firm'. Further, the advertisements of competitors should be studied just as carefully so one could persuasively answer customer queries about comparative value when making a sale.⁴⁵ A single store could advertise in several papers and magazines each week, making this preparatory labour impossible to complete whilst engaged in customer service during paid working hours.

Extensive training rarely led to executive roles for women. The masculine norm in management was assumed and unquestioned.⁴⁶ An article promoting management training in 1957 asked executives 'how many of you can say that your company has now a man equal to taking the top executive post? ... The most important relationship in any business relationship is between a man and his immediate manager.'⁴⁷ Internal management documents referred to their readers as 'gentlemen.'⁴⁸ Training booklets assumed staff supervisors and department heads were male, even though many women held roles at this level.⁴⁹ Those who did took many years to rise to supervisory roles. Miss L. Booth, who obtained a sales job in Grace Bros. in 1911 worked for the company for 42 years. It took 26 years to be promoted to Senior Saleswoman and a further 12 years before she took on the role of Shopwalker. She combined this last role with the first aid duties and care role of Staff Matron.⁵⁰ Administrative staff experienced similarly short climbs over long time periods. Alyce Holloway began work in Grace Bros. customer inquiry office in 1898. After several years she was appointed to manage the office, a role she kept for the remainder of her 45 years of service. A later obituary noted that she could 'always be relied upon to give a helping hand on every occasion', contributing her own time to organise company events and charitable drives.⁵¹

Controlling appearances and behaviour

In Australian department stores, female employees' clothing, appearance, demeanour, personalities and behaviour were monitored, recorded and used to assess potential and actual performance. Loy-Wilson has noted the importance that male department store managers placed on the appearance and behaviours of female staff in the inter-war period. They were expected to be charming to customers, defer to male authority and adopt 'middle-class values of respectability.'⁵² Reekie notes the importance of appearing

'ladylike ... attractive and refined'.⁵³ Similar expectations continued after the war. Training guides included sub-sections such as: 'Your bearing as a store representative'. These highlighted the importance of correct speech, dress, behaviour, manners and deportment, and encouraged staff to internalise store discipline through self-regulation.⁵⁴ Brochures reinforcing these values and dress codes were regularly distributed to staff. These specifically defined the required colour, fabric and style of clothing. Black was the most common colour for sales staff, sometimes complimented with a white blouse, cuffs or collars. Bright colours were generally frowned upon. Some neat and tasteful jewellery 'in good taste' was usually permitted, although this varied across time and place. In the 1930s, for example, David Jones did not permit employees to wear earrings, brooches or anything other than pearl necklaces. Later in the century, rules about jewellery became less prescriptive. Many stores offered staff discounts that could be used to purchase appropriate clothing and accessories from within the store.⁵⁵

Dressing correctly was one part of presenting well, but physical attractiveness was also considered important. An industry commentator suggested in 1940 that 'a gentle grace, a happy and sincere smile, exposing clean white teeth, dignity in dress and hair arrangement or intelligent fashion are the primary requisites for the good salesperson'.⁵⁶ This appears to have been a widely held view, because department store managers assessed and recorded their staff's physical attributes in company files. These files included commentary about female employee's appearance and personality, explicitly linking these to their aptitude and capabilities.⁵⁷ Handwritten Myer staff cards, for example, note that Miss Walker who worked in the cafeteria was 'attractive, well-dressed, artistic'. Miss Wellings was 'critical of people and methods'. Miss Whaite in Frocks and Dresses was 'v. pleasant, not too snappily dressed, and welcoming'. Miss Loxon in Sportswear was 'attractive, alert, keen' and looked 'smart and efficient'. Other women were variously described as attractive, pleasant, petite, slight, dollish, ordinary, plump, plumpish, round faced, homely, lacquered, young, youngish, fair, pleasing, and unbent.⁵⁸

Melbourne's Ball & Welch formalised the recording of employee appearances in some of its staff record cards, which contained typed headings with space to record data such as: Build, Height, Glasses, Eyes, Mouth, Nose, General Appearance, Skin, Teeth, Hair. Mary Pincott who worked in Hosiery in the Melbourne store was 5'6" and had brown hair, which she wore in curls to her shoulders. She had an 'oval face, broad cheek bones [and a] wide mouth, [that was] well shaped.' Eugenie Platt, a university student who took on a Christmas job with the firm was lightly freckled, with a round face and a mole on her left chin. She had unplucked eyebrows, brown eyes, wide nostrils and 'full thick lips'.⁵⁹ Some stores provided make up training for their female sales staff 'to avoid the effects of over enthusiastic application'.⁶⁰ Female staff were sometimes asked to model clothes and even put on fashion parades.⁶¹

While male employees were also policed on dress codes and behaviour, they were much less likely to have information about their physical appearance recorded in company files – although Mr Wallace, a Myer ticket writer, was described as a 'glamour boy' and Mr Wells had a moustache and a lisp. Mr Wyatt in hardware was a 'rough diamond'. Mr Temby was ambitious and wanted to run his own department. A few select women were indicated as being on a 'man's salary'. Comments against their names such as 'self-assured' and 'equable' indicate the attributes valued by male retail executives. We do not know how these executives discussed female staff privately, but

their public commentary occasionally descended into voyeuristic fantasy. In 1964, American Peter Glen, who had been working in Australian fashion retailing for two years, lamented the lack of imagination in promotions. ‘Someday,’ he said, ‘somebody will devise a ... shop that will sell only things for women at Christmas and only men will be allowed to shop there. The salesgirls will serve Scotch and cigars, and they will wear negligees.’⁶² Glen’s commentary provides a window into the imaginative world of retail management at the time, and its blindness to gendered inequities and the vulnerability of female staff.

Working as a ‘sales girl’ was a demanding role that involved internalising the disciplining requirements of the firm with constant attentiveness to customers. This, again, included significant emotional labour. One job description of the ‘sales girl’ role in 1955, for example, noted that: ‘Throughout the whole day the girls are constantly approaching customers, offering help and pointing out the highlights of the merchandise the customer is inspecting.’⁶³ Female shop assistants were expected to align their selling approach to current promotions, wrap and package goods, unobtrusively observe any potential shoplifters, identify types of shoppers and their needs and habits, employ initiative in upselling, avoid wasting time on customers unlikely to make a purchase while still leveraging any opportunity to sell to them, accommodate obnoxious customers, mediate disputes between arguing customers, express themselves ‘without being talkative’, be interested in their merchandise, develop a taste and appraisal of fashions, know their store’s history, understand its policies, navigate its systems, complete lengthy manual paperwork accurately and efficiently when recording sales, and maintain an awareness of stock balances, all while exhibiting poise and confidence. Before juniors were engaged in such work, they were required to undertake lengthy periods of menial duties concerned with the care and control of stock, such as dusting and cleaning.⁶⁴

Suggesting continual industriousness without the possibility of significant advancement, a writer for the *Retail Merchandiser* declared in 1955 that ‘a person desiring a constant job without responsibility and yet renewing interest daily will find what she wants in retailing.’ They suggested that:

‘Little girls love playing ‘houses’ and ‘shops’, and the sales assistant is one worker well known to children as they grow up. When they reach the end of their school life ... many young people retain their interest in shops, and, with their parents, decide which store offers the scope which appeals to them individually. They can work ... with an infinite variety of merchandise, though girls, almost naturally, move towards fashion and fancy merchandise [where work was paid at the lower female rate].’⁶⁵

Such narratives invariably depicted or imagined Anglo-Australian employees. In doing so, they overlooked the growing multi-culturalism of department store workforces. The extent of this shift is difficult to quantify, but by the 1950s there are numerous examples of immigrants working in the bigger city stores that reflected an industry-wide change as post-war immigration began re-shaping Australian economic, social and cultural life. Marina Josipovic worked in her parents store in Belgrade before immigrating to Melbourne around 1951. Known to fellow Myer staff members as ‘Mrs Joss’ she worked in sales but also helped translate queries from shoppers from non-English speaking backgrounds.⁶⁶ Her colleagues included Mrs Liesis from Lithuania, Miss Greichen from Germany, Dora Levas from Greece, Ferdie Giagnocova from Italy, and Marion

Kozak from Hungary. Staff newsletters celebrated these 'new Australians' as 'dinkum Aussies' and included snippets of their stories in staff newsletters. Some worked in back-end roles while they improved their English in the hope of moving into sales positions. Like many other staff, articles about their job invariably included commentary on their attractiveness and physical appearance.⁶⁷ All were also white Europeans, indicating some of the racial boundaries of Australian multiculturalism at the time, and the interests of the department stores in presenting a particular brand of white feminine respectability.⁶⁸

Department store responses to equal pay

The complexities and skills of department store sales work began to be dismantled as the cost of providing it increased. In the 1950s, women continued to experience 'legally sanctioned discrimination' through workforce segregation and lower pay, but over the next quarter of a century the wage gap for sales staff began to slowly close.⁶⁹ This happened at the same time as women's participation in the paid work force increased enormously, including as retail sales staff which continued to be a concentrated area of female employment.⁷⁰ In 1954, just 29% of women between the ages of 15 and 64 were employed in the Australian workforce, comprising less than a quarter of working Australians. By 1978, 46% of all women in that age bracket were employed in paid work, equating to 35% of all workers. The growing proportion of women staying in the workforce after marriage was one of the major features of this development.⁷¹ In 1949–50, the National Wage Case increased the basic female award wage to 75 per cent of the male rate for all occupations.⁷² This flowed through to state-based awards, including for retailing. The release of the Equal Remuneration Convention by the United Nations International Labour Organization in 1951, generated further public pressure for progress on equal pay during the decade. The States responded to this before the Federal government, beginning with New South Wales in 1958. Queensland followed in 1964, then Tasmania (1966 for public servants), South Australia (1967), and Western Australia (1968).⁷³

When the N.S.W. Labor Government placed equal pay on its agenda in 1958, retail industry commentators argued that because of the feminisation of the workforce, and the reliance on customer-facing staff, their industry would be impacted more heavily than any other.⁷⁴ The Retail Traders' Association (RTA) lambasted the government's policy direction, claiming it would 'impose an additional burden on N.S.W. industry.'⁷⁵ The RTA declared all Labor Governments 'notoriously bad economists' and claimed that the proposed 'vote catcher' legislation that provided a 'hand out to females' would drive up inflation.⁷⁶ The Australian Council of Retailers issued a statement saying it was 'seriously disturbed by proposals made for the introduction of equal pay for the sexes.' It argued that the decision was being made for political ends, and adoption of them would immediately result in higher prices for goods and services. Further, wages rises were likely to flow through to other states, which would harm the national economy and increase unemployment.⁷⁷ The government proved willing to listen to their arguments about the 'inherent dangers' of the legislation.⁷⁸ When the Industrial Arbitration (Female Rates) Amendment Act was passed in December 1958, the female basic wage remained at 75 percent of the male wage, although some fixed deductions on this rate were removed.⁷⁹

The Act, however, did include a concept of equal pay for equal work. According to the secretary of the N.S.W. Trades and Labour Council, Mr J. D. Kenny, this reflected the fact that women were 'weary of being a source of cheap labour in the community.'⁸⁰ The Chairman of the Australian Council of Retailers, however, reassured (male) retail executives that: "equal pay for equal work" is a very different proposition to "equal pay for the sexes" [and] legislation ... providing for equal pay for equal work has been the result of a great many decisions, very few of which had awarded equal pay in fact.'⁸¹ The assessment of what constituted 'equal work' included the condition that the work was 'of the same or a like nature.' This meant that when making a determination the Industrial Commission had to examine the complexities of a wide range of working practices, outputs, roles and conditions, and if those showed variations between what men and women did then the work could be paid differently.⁸² In department stores, gender remained attached to certain goods as well as to cultural understandings of service roles, meaning that most female shop assistants still earned less than their male counterparts.⁸³ Again, practices of 'careful classification' were deployed to maintain the lower female rate. Retail organisations openly reported on this approach, emphasising the imperative of sharing knowledge to mitigate industry-wide wage increases.⁸⁴ During the 1960s, then, department stores continued to benefit from under-priced female labour, although to a lesser degree and with more labour management required than previously.

The momentum towards equal pay culminated in two decisions by the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission in 1969 and 1972. In 1969, the Commission adapted various State principles of equal pay for equal work for a national benchmark, although this did not apply if the work was usually performed by females, even if men were also employed in those roles. And it only applied if women were doing the same work as men and were likely to displace them. This meant that few women actually benefited from the decision:⁸⁵ unions and women's organisations claimed that only 18% of the female workforce had seen an increase in wages as a result of the 1969 legislation, leading the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission to redefine the concept of equal pay to mean 'equal pay for work of equal value' in 1972.⁸⁶ This was, again, open to interpretation and implemented on an ad hoc basis through applications by individual unions on behalf of their members. In department stores, this was still conditioned by the gendering of products.⁸⁷ However in 1973, such distinctions were abolished with an agreement to eliminate the difference between the male and female basic wage in retailing. Parity was achieved across three instalments beginning in September 1973.⁸⁸ This occurred in conjunction with significant overall wage inflation, greatly increasing the cost of customer service in stores.⁸⁹

In addition to the increases in basic wages and a general upward wage spiral, the 1970s also saw the introduction of more penalty rates in the retail industry for work outside of standard business days. Weekend work had always been a part of retailing. For much of the twentieth century these shifts were paid at the regular rate of pay. Attempts to introduce the 'heavy burden' of weekend penalty rates was strongly opposed by retailers, although, again, incremental change on this began in the 1950s.⁹⁰ In 1971, the union struck an agreement with the six largest retailers for a closed shop arrangement in which it obtained sole representation for all union members employed in those firms. This required concessions from retailers, but it also kept more militant unions out of their businesses. One of the concessions was the granting of the five-day week in 1971/

72, which meant that weekend work attracted penalty rates.⁹¹ The effect of this, in turn, was magnified by the de-regulation of trading hours which were extended unevenly at a state level during the 1980s and 1990s, producing further labour costs to stores.

Rationalising retail labour

Increases in labour costs coincided with significant industry disruption in the form of a new selling format: large-scale discount stores, which brought intense price competition to the sector in the 1970s. These stores had emerged and expanded rapidly in the United States in the 1950s. They applied the self-service logics of supermarkets to the sale of department store merchandise. Discount Department Stores (DDSs) were the most refined version of this model. Like supermarkets, DDSs operated on a low-margin, high-turnover model in a highly rationalised format. Customers selected their own goods using trolleys in single-floor stores that had wide aisles, banks of cash registers, and minimal sales staff.⁹² In 1957, commentators in the United States suggested that having gained entry to the market through low prices, discounters would be forced to offer full customer service in order to stay in business.⁹³ This proved untrue, with customers adopting new shopping practices in return for the lower prices. By 1965, DDSs had surpassed the total annual sales of traditional department stores in the United States.⁹⁴

The customer service skills required in this retail environment were very different from those of traditional department stores. Service was far more transactional: contact with customers was concentrated at the point of payment rather than during the selection of goods, which had traditionally involved improvised discourse about products.⁹⁵ Staff were no longer employed to 'engage, entice and advise customers in personalised and thus inherently varied ways.'⁹⁶ Tasks were routinised. Efficiency was paramount. And while friendliness was expected, selling techniques declined as a form of human capital. 'Salesmanship', which had been the subject of such intense concern and investment for most of the twentieth century had little place in the DDS selling model. Product knowledge became increasingly unnecessary as it was outsourced to marketing and advertising. Deskilling was further accelerated by the introduction of new technologies such as bar-code scanning.⁹⁷ In a Coles company presentation in 1969, L. R. Robinson summed up the 'new concept of selling,' arguing that lower capital investment, 'better' wage structures, more advertising, higher unit sales, constrained product ranges, and single floor stores allowed for lower prices, attracted more customers, reduced labour costs and produced 'more profit'.⁹⁸ The shoppers to whom labour had been passed via self-service were predominantly female as were the check-out operators to whom they brought the goods they had selected for purchase.⁹⁹

Australian retailers were well aware of the impact of DDSs on traditional department stores in the United States. A retail trade presentation in N.S.W. in 1961, noted that in the five years previous, 5,000 established department stores had been driven out of business in the United States, largely as a result of competition from DDSs. The presenter told the almost 100 men and less than five women present that 'in Australia if we are to combat this type of [discount] operation we must start now to lower our selling costs.'¹⁰⁰ Australia's three largest retailers also began planning the development of their own discount chains. Kmart (1969), was a joint venture between the Australian Coles supermarket firm and S.S. Kresge, which operated Kmart stores in the United States. Target (1970) was

introduced by Myer, which chose to cannibalise its own department stores sales rather than lose those sales to a competitor. The Woolworths supermarket chain followed these with Big W (1976). Their scale allowed these firms to quickly develop national store networks. By the late-1970s, DDSs were the fastest growing segment of Australian retailing.¹⁰¹ In 1985, just 16 years after the first DDS was built in Australia, the Kmart, Target, and Big W chains comprised, respectively 103, 71, and 41 stores.

The timing of DDS development in Australia meant that a labour-efficient retail form was introduced in direct competition with labour-intensive department stores when wages were rising steeply. In addition to this, the general economic climate of high inflation and rising unemployment dampened consumer spending and amplified price competition between retailers. This all incentivised rationalisation in traditional department stores.¹⁰² Retail executives were advised to respond with ‘drastic and constructive action’ to ‘develop a more modern and progressive form of trading’.¹⁰³ This meant learning from the DDS selling model, which showed that the ‘alarming’ rise in costs resulting from equal pay legislation and the broader wage spiral could be offset by operational restructuring and labour management strategies.¹⁰⁴ As early as 1974, Philip Luker, the editor of prominent industry journal, *Inside Retailing*, argued that self-service would spread throughout the retail industry.¹⁰⁵ His observation echoed Mary Gilmore’s insight more than fifty years earlier in her writings for the *Australian Worker*. Assessing the impact of the new ‘pick and carry’ stores which initiated the evolution of self-service, she wrote:

[With] no hands beyond the pay clerk and the checker at the turnstile ... thousands of pounds of stuff may be sold in a day ... If these multiply, what of the wage earners? If they multiply in great numbers all the other shops will have to come into line ... These stores are simply enlarged chocolate machines. How ... to compete with all these? ... At what cost?¹⁰⁶

Managers of traditional department stores argued that the way to compete with the machine-like DDS format was for sales staff to ‘make a real effort’. Staff were urged ‘to recapture some of the old-fashioned virtues of courtesy and service,’ and reminded of ‘the importance of the personal attitude and contribution of each’. Male executives in contrast were singled out as exemplars of ‘hard work’.¹⁰⁷ The rhetorical allocation of responsibility for customer satisfaction failed to alter shifts underway in shopping patterns. As early as 1979, customers were said to be shopping on ‘value’ rather than ‘quality’. Value was a general term that suggested a trade-off between relative quality and price. This meant that the cheaper products sold in DDSs could be of inferior quality but still be ‘good enough’ to satisfy customers. Customers also quickly adapted to the transactional trade-off of less customer service in return for lower prices. Moreover, some claimed that after a decade of ‘constructive’ action on labour costs, the service in traditional department stores was no longer any better than the discounters anyway.¹⁰⁸

Table 1 demonstrates the impact of labour management strategies that lay behind such customer assessments. It shows how employment in the department store sector was restructured between the 1960s to the 1990s.¹⁰⁹ In the 1970s, traditional department stores began retrenching staff, employing more juniors, increasing casualisation and introducing elements of self-service.¹¹⁰ Table 1 shows a clear rise in casualisation and

Table 1. Australian Department Store Employment: 1962–1992.

	1962		1979/80		1985/86		1991/92	
	Employees	%	Employees	%	Employees	%	Employees	%
Full Time - Male	24192	43%	21270	38%	16010	34%	8276	29%
Full Time - Female	31975	57%	35161	62%	30432	66%	20226	71%
Full Time - Total	56167	94%	56431	61%	46442	48%	28502	33%
Other - Male	453	12%	6922	19%	9226	19%	12676	22%
Other - Female	3288	88%	28604	81%	40248	81%	45398	78%
Other - Total	3741	6%	35526	39%	49474	52%	58074	67%
Total - Men	24645	41%	28192	31%	25236	26%	20952	24%
Total - Women	35263	59%	63765	69%	70680	74%	65624	76%
TOTAL	59908		91957		95916		86576	

part-time work between 1962 and 1992. These two employment modes were aggregated as a single ‘other’ category in available data sets, although industry commentary suggests that casual employment was the more common of the two. Non-full-time work was comparatively rare in 1962, comprising just 6 percent of department store jobs. By the early-1990s, it had become the predominant mode of employment with more than two-thirds of workers engaged on a part-time or casual basis. These modes of employment increased precarity and limited career opportunities for staff engaged in retail sales work.¹¹¹

Industry concentration accompanied labour rationalisation strategies and the feminisation of the workforce.¹¹² The decline in total department store employment from the mid-1980s, occurred despite the ongoing proliferation of DDSs, because they forced the closure of many small, labour-intensive high street department stores in suburban areas and country towns. Between 1985 and 1995, K mart alone added 60 new stores nationally to bring its total store numbers to 163.¹¹³ Store closures and acquisitions placed more retail floor space within fewer hands, increasing the market share of a small number of companies. These were headed by Myer, Coles and Woolworths – the three firms operating the discount stores that were re-shaping industry employment patterns and shopping cultures. When Coles then acquired Myer in 1985, it became one of the largest retail firms in the world, employing 130,000 people in 1,368 stores. It owned two of the three largest department store chains, Grace Bros. and Myer, and the two biggest discount department store chains, K mart and Target.¹¹⁴

Between 1962 and 1992, women were far more likely than men to be employed in part-time or casual work in department stores.¹¹⁵ And as these forms of employment became more common, department stores became more reliant on women’s labour. By 1992, women accounted for 76 percent of department store employment. This gender imbalance was even more pronounced on the shop floor. And where women were employed as branch or section managers they were not always paid at the full rate for the job. Again, firms could classify jobs in terms that perpetuated under-payment. One union report in 1976 noted that female branch managers who had not been ‘confirmed’ in their position were being underpaid. This meant lower wages as well as missing out on benefits received by other managers such as company cars, company shares, additional annual leave, access to home loans and invitations to managers’ functions.¹¹⁶

More women did make their way into management, although significant obstacles to advancement remained unaddressed for decades. There were too few female role models in senior management, women lacked access to ‘old boy’ networks, were likely to undertake the majority of domestic labour and child-care work in their households, and were

Table 2. Coles Myer Share of Management Positions by Gender, 1993.¹²⁴

Job Grades	Junior		Middle		Senior		Total
	4–7	8–13	14–17	18–20	21–23		
Female	49.9	37.9	11.1	0.9	0.2		100%
Male	21.6	45.7	26.5	4.5	1.7		100%

seen as a risk by male executives charged with hiring. Men in senior positions were enculturated to traditional breadwinner social models, often didn't view women as 'promotional material', and didn't have to balance domestic roles with their careers. Organisations didn't provide child-care facilities or flexible working arrangements.¹¹⁷ Some female managers claimed that it was impossible for women to have children as well as a retail management career.¹¹⁸ In 1980, Jacqueline Huie, a Governor of the Law Foundation of N.S.W., suggested that women seeking management positions could avoid male fragility by adopting 'the role of mother/leader ... [in] a maternal leadership role' to keep 'awkwardness to a minimum.' This would mean 'more compassion shown and less bullying; more persuasion and less ordering and probably less pomposity and more informality.' This approach, Huie argued, enable people in the corporation to relate to female managers instead of 'thinking of you as a bit spooky.'¹¹⁹

Strategies such as Huie's as well as more progressive approaches by department stores brought incremental increases in the number of women in management positions during the 1980s and 1990s. However, even in 1994, Catherine Harris, the Director of the Affirmative Action Agency singled out the retail industry for criticism, claiming that 'very few women reach senior management levels or are offered the same career opportunities as men.'¹²⁰ In 1993, Coles Myer produced a report on female representation across its businesses. While it aggregated figures across a broad range of retail formats, not just department stores, the data reflects the broader under-representation of women in retail executive roles at the time (Table 2). The report showed that only a little over a third of roles described as 'career' positions were filled by women. Most of these were at the lower end of management: almost half of all female managers were employed at the lowest managerial grade. Just 0.2 percent of all female managers were employed in the highest grade. This equated to 6 roles across the entire company, which by this point employed approximately 140,000 people nationally. Seventy-two percent of sales and service staff were female. Women accounted for 88.6 percent of part-time and casual employees. The report noted that 'in most job grades women predominate at the lower end of the salary scale.'¹²¹

Conclusion

Throughout the twentieth century, sales staff bore the responsibility for the reputation of department store service cultures. The majority of these were women who were required to provide emotional, aesthetic, and gendered labour to organisations in which most had constrained opportunities for advancement. Until 1950, they were paid a little over half the male wage for doing so. This underpayment allowed department store firms to create business models around attentive and finely honed customer service. When the cost of providing this labour began increasing towards the end of the post-war boom, department store managers introduced labour management strategies to control costs,

fundamentally altering the nature of their businesses. The disruption produced by competing chains using labour-efficient shopping formats accelerated this trend. After a decade of staff cuts and casualisation questions about the future of department stores began being raised in the late-1970s.¹²² Their market share has declined progressively since. Competition and new technologies played a significant role in this downward trend, but so, too, did the cost of labour. Customer service had been the public face of department store brands and integral to the big store's relationship with customers. The rise of department stores has traditionally been told as a story of 'male initiative and entrepreneurialism',¹²³ but they were built on cheap, highly skilled female labour, that when priced equitably, produced cracks in the foundations of the business model.

Notes

1. Lions Gate Television Inc.; Weiner Bros.; created by Matthew Weiner; executive producer, Matthew Weiner, Scott Hornbacher. *Mad Men*, Season 1, Episode 3, Marriage of Figaro (Alliance Films, [United States], Canada, 2008). My thanks to Clare Monagle for suggesting this quote.
2. Coles Myer Archive (CMA), Box 340, The Myer Emporium Limited 1976 Special Report for Staff, n.p.
3. Gail Reekie, *Temptations: Sex, Selling, and the Department Store* (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1993); Beverley Kingston, *Basket, Bag, and Trolley: A History of Shopping in Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994); Kim Humphery, *Shelf Life: Supermarkets and the Changing Cultures of Consumption* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Peter Spearritt, 'Suburban Cathedrals: The Rise of the Drive-in Shopping Centre', in *The Cream Brick Frontier: Histories of Australian Suburbia*, edited by Graeme Davison, Tony Dingle and Seamus O'Hanlon (Clayton Vic: Monash Publications in History, 1995), 88–107.
4. Matthew Bailey, "'Bringing the City to the Suburbs": Regional Shopping Centre Development in Sydney, 1957–1994', PhD, Macquarie University, 2010; Matthew Bailey, 'Retailing and the Home in 1960s Sydney', *History Australia* 11, no. 1 (2014): 59–81; Matthew Bailey, 'Shopping for Entertainment: Malls and Multiplexes in Sydney, Australia', *Urban history* 42, no. 2 (2015): 309–29; Matthew Bailey, 'Absorptive Capacity, International Business Knowledge Transfer, and Local Adaptation: Establishing Discount Department Stores in Australia', *Australian Economic History Review* 57, no. 2 (2017): 194–216; Matthew Bailey, 'Urban Disruption, Suburbanization and Retail Innovation: Establishing Shopping Centres in Australia', *Urban history* 47, no. 1 (2020): 152–69; Matthew Bailey, *Managing the Marketplace: Reinventing Shopping Centres in Post-War Australia* (London: Routledge, 2020); Sophie Loy-Wilson, 'Rural Geographies and Chinese Empires: Chinese Shopkeepers and Shop-Life in Australia', *Australian historical studies* 45, no. 3 (2014): 407–24; Sophie Loy-Wilson, 'The Gospel of Enthusiasm: Salesmanship, Religion and Colonialism in Australian Department Stores in the 1920s and 1930s', *Journal of contemporary history* 51, no. 1 (2016): 91–123; Nicole Davis, 'Nineteenth-Century Arcades in Australia: History, Heritage & Representation', PhD, University of Melbourne, 2022; (2023). Nicole Davis. "'One of the Sights of the Colony": Australia's Nineteenth-Century Arcades', *History of Retailing and Consumption* 9, no. 3 (2023): 255–75; David Merrett, 'The Making of Australia's Supermarket Duopoly, 1958–2000', *Australian Economic History Review* 60, no. 3 (2020): 301–21.
5. Jan Ch Karlsson, 'Looking Good and Sounding Right: Aesthetic Labour', *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 33, no. 1 (2012): 51–64.
6. Chris Warhurst and Dennis Nickson, 'Employee Experience of Aesthetic Labour in Retail and Hospitality', *Work, Employment and Society* 21, no. 1 (2007): 107.
7. Richard Hall and Diane van den Broek, 'Aestheticising Retail Workers: Orientations of Aesthetic Labour in Australian Fashion Retail', *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 33, no. 1 (2012): 85–102.

8. Peter Ikeler, 'Deskilling Emotional Labour: Evidence from Department Store Retail', *Work, Employment and Society* 30, no. 6 (2016): 966.
9. Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983), 7.
10. 'Basic Wage: Shop Assistants' Pay Rise', *The Wiluna Miner*, July 8, 1938, 4.
11. Katherine Keirs, 'Class, Gender and Cold War Politics: The Union of Australian Women and the Campaign for Equal Pay, 1950–66', *Labour History* 117 (2019): 159.
12. *The Draper of Australasia*, 27 Sept 1907, 354–6.
13. Raelene Frances, Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster, 'Women and Wage Labour in Australia and Canada, 1880–1980', *Labour* 38 (1996): 55.
14. Gale Reekie, 'Sydney's Big Stores 1880–1930: Gender and Mass Marketing' (PhD diss., University of Sydney, 1987), 134–5.
15. Catherine Bishop, 'Behind Every Man ... The Unheralded Female Origins of Australasian Department Stores', *History of Retailing and Consumption* 9, no. 3 (2023): 276–92; Catherine Bishop, *Minding Her Own Business: Colonial Businesswomen in Sydney* (Sydney: NewSouth, 2015).
16. Reekie, 'Sydney's Big Stores', 3–8.
17. Gladys Rippingale, *Certainly Madam* (Melbourne: Pitman, 1953), 5.
18. 'Modern Expression and the Retail Store', *Journal of the Retail Traders' Association of N.S.W.*, February 10, 1938, 37. On capitalism's dependence on female household labour, see, Eileen Boris and Kirsten Swinth, 'Household Matters: Engendering the Social History of Capitalism', *International Review of Social History* 68, no. 3 (2023): 483–506.
19. 'Does the Average Man Buy For Himself?', *Journal of the Retail Traders' Association of N.S.W.*, January 10, 1938, 34–5.
20. Reekie, 'Sydney's Big Stores', 120–1; 'Why Do Women Shop', *Journal of the Retail Traders' Association of N.S.W.*, December 10, 1937, 42.
21. Sophie Loy-Wilson, 'The Gospel of Enthusiasm: Salesmanship, Religion and Colonialism in Australian Department Stores in the 1920s and 1930s', *Journal of Contemporary History* 51, no. 1 (2016): 98.
22. 'Extracts of Dame Mary Gilmore's Writings from The Australian Worker', *Voice*, November 1974, 6.
23. 'Male or Female? The Value of Shop Assistants', *The Evening News*, October 29, 1936, 8.
24. Sylvia Stafford Walker, 'Does the Business Girl Make the Best Housewife?', *The Draper of Australasia*, 25 January 1925, 22.
25. 'The 35th Annual Report of the RTA of NSW', *Journal of the Retail Traders' Association of N.S.W.*, July 11, 1938, 8; CMA, Box 145, Letter from R.N. Henderson & Taylor to the Secretary, Retail Traders' Association of N.S.W., 19th January 1960.
26. Carol O'Donnell, *The Basis of the Bargain: Gender, Schooling and Jobs* (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1984), 130.
27. 'New Award May Cost Many Shop Girls Their Jobs', *The Sun*, October 10, 1937, 3.
28. 'Obligations of Employers', *Journal of the Retail Traders' Association of N.S.W.*, March 10, 1938, 1–2.
29. 'Women in the Fight for Equal Wages', *Labor Daily*, October 15, 1938, 8.
30. O'Donnell, *The Basis of the Bargain*, 129–31.
31. *Ibid.*, 130–1.
32. 'Would women lose jobs?' *Argus*, April 3, 1940, 8.
33. 'A Woman's World', *Retail Merchandiser*, September 1955, 24.
34. David Jones Archive (DJA), *David Jones Store News*, May–June 1963, 2.
35. 'A Fashion Controller Looks Over Her Shoulder', *Retail Merchandiser*, December 1954, 26.
36. 'Fashion Identity Leaves Retailing', *Retail Merchandiser*, January 1955, 23.
37. DJA, Cissie Lowry File, Photograph with Royal Milliner Aage Thaarup, c.1956.
38. DJA, 'Presentation to Miss C. Lowry', *David Jones Store News*, May–June 1963, 2.
39. DJA, Cissie Lowry File, Letter from David Lloyd Jones to Miss Lowry, 10th May 1961.
40. Reekie, 'Sydney's Big Stores', 111.

41. Loy-Wilson, 'The Gospel of Enthusiasm', 91–100.
42. Ibid.
43. Cited in Loy-Wilson, 'The Gospel of Enthusiasm', 92–3.
44. CMA, Box 962, G. Conning, Exercise book - Staff training homework, Myer Emporium, 1935.
45. Rippingale, *Certainly Madam*, 10–11.
46. 'Courting the Customer', *Australian Retailing*, May 1967, 10.
47. 'People and Profit', *Journal of the Retail Traders' Association of N.S.W.*, October 1957, 39.
48. CMA, Box 494, Variety Conversion Stores – Manager's Conference 16 October 1974, 14.
49. CMA, Box, 2663, Your Future: A Booklet Presented for Your Guidance, c. 1947.
50. CMA, Box 360, Grace Bros. Store News, May 1953, 3.
51. CMA, Box 360, Grace Bros. Store News, March 1941, 2.
52. Loy-Wilson, 'The Gospel of Enthusiasm', 105.
53. Reekie, 'Sydney's Big Stores', 120.
54. CMA, Box 2663, Your Future: A Booklet Presented for Your Guidance, c. 1947.
55. CMA Box 2037, *Myer News*, 22 April 1939, 1; CMA Box 2038, *Myer News*, May 1962, 1; CMA Box 195, Farmer and Company Limited Supervisor's Manual, nd; DJA, Staff Training Manuals and Guides, Staff Guide, David Jones Ltd Training Department, 1935, 6; John Martin & Co. Limited, *Welcome to Johnnies* (Adelaide: The Company, c1991).
56. 'Shop Assistant or Retail Saleswoman?', *The Draper of Australasia*, 30 September 1940, 9.
57. My thanks to Catherine Bishop and Nicole Davis for putting me onto these sources.
58. CMA, Box 2663, Myer Employee Staff Cards, c. 1947.
59. University of Melbourne Archives, Records of Ball & Welch, Box 1983.0074, Unit 31, Employee Record Cards.
60. B. Stevenson 'My Job – the Sales Girl', *Retail Merchandiser*, December 1955, 23.
61. CMA, Box 340, 'Myer on Parade', *The Shop Window* (Myer staff newsletter), September 1979, 1.
62. Peter Glen, 'Impressions of Australian Retailing', *The Retail Trader* March 1965, 7.
63. Stevenson 'My Job', 23.
64. Ibid. See also, Rippingale, *Certainly Madam*.
65. Stevenson 'My Job', 23.
66. CMA Box 2038, *Myer News*, November 1958, 7.
67. CMA Box 2038, *Myer News*, November 1955, 7; February 1956, 3; July 1960, 6; April 1963, 2.
68. My thanks to the reviewers for raising this point in their feedback.
69. Glenda Strachan, 'Still Working for the Man? Women's Employment Experiences in Australia Since 1950', *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 45, no. 1 (2010): 118.
70. Frances, Kealey and Sangster, 'Women and Wage Labour', 54; Stuart Rosewarne, 'The Political Economy of Retailing into the Eighties - Part 2', *Journal of Australian Political Economy* 16 (1984): 76.
71. W. McLennan, *Australian Social Trends*, Catalogue No. 4102.0 (Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1998), 111.
72. Jeff Borland, 'The Equal Pay Case—Thirty Years On', *The Australian Economic Review* 32, no. 3 (1999): 265.
73. Christine Short, 'Equal Pay – What Happened?', *Journal of Industrial Relations* 28, no. 3 (1986): 318.
74. 'Talking Shop', *Retail Merchandiser*, April 1958, 6.
75. 'Editorial', *Journal of The Retail Traders' Association of N.S.W.*, April 1958, 1, 6.
76. 'Research Bureau Reports', *Journal of The Retail Traders' Association of N.S.W.*, November 1958, 23.
77. 'Australian Council of Retailers: Summary of Conference Resolutions', *Retail Merchandiser*, May 1958, 23.
78. 'Talking Shop', *Retail Merchandiser*, September 1958, 6.
79. 'Industrial News', *Journal of the Retail Traders' Association of N.S.W.*, January 1959, 3.
80. 'Equal Pay Awarded to Women', *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 26, 1960, 6.

81. 'May Council Meeting', *Journal of The Retail Traders' Association of N.S.W.*, June 1958, 27.
82. CMA, Box 145, Letter from R.N. Henderson & Taylor to the Secretary, Retail Traders' Association of N.S.W., 19th January 1960.
83. 'Equal Pay for the Sexes', *Retail Merchandiser*, January-February 1960, 12.
84. 'Australian Council of Retailers: President's Report for Year 1960-61', *Retail Merchandiser*, May 1961, 35.
85. Strachan, 'Still working for the man?', 121; 'Equal Pay - Background to the Decision', *Australian Retailing*, June 1969, 18; 'Equal Pay: The Decision and the Reasons', *Australian Retailing*, July 1969, 18.
86. Short, 'Equal Pay', 319.
87. 'Wage Rates - Retail', *Voice*, April 1974, 24.
88. Barry Egan, 'Comment', *Voice*, December 1973, 3.
89. Iain Ross, 'Discussant Remarks on 'Wage-Price Spirals: What is the Historical Evidence?', RBA Annual Conference - 2023, <https://www.rba.gov.au/publications/confs/2023/>
90. 'Talking Shop', *Retail Merchandiser*, April 1958, 6; 'Talking Shop', *Retail Merchandiser*, September 1958, 6.
91. Brett Heino, 'Award Regulation and the New South Wales Retail Sector, 1971-88: Crisis and Experimentation amidst Changing Models of Development', *Labour History* 109 (2015): 80-1; Rosewarne, 'The Political Economy of Retailing', 79.
92. Clayton M. Christensen and Richard S. Tedlow, 'Patterns of Disruption in Retailing', *Harvard Business Review* 1 (2000): 43.
93. 'Discount House or Department Store', *Retail Merchandiser*, February 1957, 7.
94. Barry Bluestone, *The Retail Revolution: Market Transformation, Investment, and Labor in the Modern Department Store* (Boston, Mass.: Auburn House Pub. Co., c1981), 18.
95. Rosewarne, 'The Political Economy of Retailing', 77.
96. Ikeler, 'Deskilling Emotional Labour', 973.
97. O'Donnell, *The Basis of the Bargain*, 136.
98. CMA, Box 493, Overhead projections for a talk by L. R. Robinson, 1969.
99. CMA, Box 494, Report on Conversion of Store No. 192 Kew to Self Service Operation, 24 June 1974, 3; 'Courting the Customer', *Australian Retailing*, May 1967, 10.
100. B. L. G. Cooper, 'The Retail Revolution', in Retail Traders' Association of N.S.W. Conference, 1961, Ritz Hotel, Laura, 10th - 14th July, 1961.
101. CMA, Box 494, Variety Conversion Stores - Manager's Conference 16 October 1974.
102. Peter Robinson and Robert Gottlieb, 'The War of the Retail Czars', *The National Times*, March 3, 1979, 13-14.
103. CMA, Box 494, Variety Conversion Stores - Manager's Conference 16 October 1974.
104. P. M. J. Fisher, 'Assessing Economic impact in the Australian Retail Industry: Some Extra Spatial Considerations, An Examination of the Institutional Setting for the Introduction of New Technology', in R. Stimson and R. Sanderson, *Assessing the Economic Impact of Retail Centres: Issues, Methods and Implications for Government Policy*, AIUS Publication no. 122 (Canberra: Australian Institute of Urban Studies, 1985), 45.
105. CMA, Box 494, Variety Conversion Stores - Manager's Conference 16 October 1974.
106. 'Extracts', *Voice*, November 1974, 6.
107. CMA, Box 340, The Myer Emporium Limited 1978 Special Report for Staff, n.p.
108. *Inside Retailing*, 25 June 1979, 10-12.
109. Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, Census of Retail Establishments and Other Services Year Ended 30th June 1962, Bulletin No. 1, Australia, 52; Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Census of Retail Establishments and Selected Service Establishments, Details of Operations by Industry Class, Australia 1979-1980, 10; ABS, Retail Industry: Details of Operations, Australia 1985-1986, 16; ABS, Retailing in NSW 1991-92, Appendix 1: Final National Aggregates, 33.
110. P. M. J. Fisher, 'Assessing Economic impact', 45; 'Retailing Will Be One of the First Industries to Recover', *Inside Retailing*, no. 206, 19 January 1976, pp. 8-9; Robinson and Gottlieb, 'The War of the Retail Czars', 13-14.

111. 'Married Women – their attitudes to working', *Australian Retailing*, May 1971, 10–11.
112. Rosewarne, 'The Political Economy of Retailing', 76–7.
113. G.J. Coles & Coy Limited Annual Report, 1985; Coles Myer Limited Annual Report, 1995.
114. Jill Margo, *Frank Lowy: Pushing the Limits* (Pymble, NSW: Harper Collins, 2001), 196.
115. Rosewarne, 'The Political Economy of Retailing', 77.
116. Edna Ryan, *Women Unions 1976* (Sydney: W.T.U.C., 1976), 9.
117. *Canberra Times*, 9 June 1994, 15. [247 of 420]
118. O'Donnell, *The Basis of the Bargain*, 141.
119. CMA, Box 3394, Jacqueline Huie, 'A Call for a Sexist Détente in Business', Paper presented at the Enterprising Women – 1980 conference, Melbourne Hilton, 14–15 October 1980.
120. Megan Peard, 'Retail Accused of Being Slow to Recognise the Feminine Factor', *Australian Retail Business*, Summer 1994, 27. [245 of 420]
121. CMA, Box 2682, Coles Myer Human Resources Committee, Equal Opportunity in Coles Myer Ltd, 23 November 1993.
122. *Victorian Shopping Centres Association News*, October 1982, 10.
123. Bishop, 'Behind Every Man', 276–7.
124. CMA, Box 2682, Equal Opportunity in Coles Myer Ltd.

Acknowledgements

This research was funded by an Australian Research Council Grant: DP220100943.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

Dr Matthew Bailey is one of Australia's leading retail historians. He is Associate Professor and Discipline Chair of History and Archaeology at Macquarie University. Dr Bailey has published widely on retail and retail property history, and his book, *Managing the Marketplace: Reinventing Shopping Centres in Post-War Australia* (Routledge, 2020) is the first to comprehensively examine Australian retail history. Email: matthew.bailey@mq.edu.au