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AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE CURRICULA OF TWO SECRETARIAL COURSES AND THEIR  
RELATIONSHIP TO A SOCIALLY CONSTITUTED IMAGE OF THE SECRETARIAL FUNCTION

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## ABSTRACT

### AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE CURRICULA OF TWO SECRETARIAL COURSES AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO A SOCIALLY CONSTITUTED IMAGE OF THE SECRETARIAL FUNCTION

VALERIE GIBB

This investigation outlines the secretarial function and popular images of the secretary. The curricula of two secretarial courses within one particular technical college are described and analysed in relation to both the secretarial function and also socially constituted images of the work.

The central focus of this work is Post GCE 'A' Level and Postgraduate young women studying on secretarial courses. A sample of these students, together with their teachers, was interviewed and responses are analysed to provide information on the effects of knowledge transmission in the classroom on individual students' beliefs and ideas about secretarial work. The tacit teaching of values and expectations within the hidden curriculum is also explored. The theoretical analysis of the curricula in question discusses the extent to which the curricula function, both officially and unofficially, to perpetuate and recreate the popular image of the secretary. The theoretical discussion is also concerned with an analysis of the secretarial function and possible explanations for the maintenance of gender differentiated occupations in the office culture.

Three empirical studies concerning secretarial work in Great Britain have been carried out during the past decade, and data from these sources has been used in the current investigation. However, no other work has been found which concentrates on secretarial knowledge and its transmission in the classroom. The work which has been carried out by other researchers explores various aspects of secretarial work itself. Therefore no other research appears to have been conducted from a standpoint with any similarity to the current investigation.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Background Information

A number of factors combined to provide the impetus for this investigation. The fundamental issue which formed the starting point was the general observation that, while women constitute an overwhelming majority of employees in the white-collar sector and clerical work is the single most common occupation among women, there is a dearth of serious literature about this area of work and its participants. It was, however, considered that a more precise focus of attention was necessary than was possible with the generic term 'clerical worker' and secretarial work was selected as of particular interest for a variety of reasons. In the first place, a substantial number of female office workers are categorised both officially and unofficially as 'secretaries'. Secondly, the majority of Technical Colleges, together with a number of private colleges, offer secretarial courses, whereas courses for clerical workers are far less numerous. Furthermore in contrast to the lack of serious research data, there is an abundance of information on secretaries and their work provided by the popular press, television, radio and the cinema. The three main elements of this investigation are, therefore: the nature of secretarial work; the popular images of the secretarial function; and the extent to which secretarial curricula function as intermediary operants in the perpetuation and recreation of the socially constituted secretarial function.

The central theme of this work is the analysis of knowledge transmitted on two specific secretarial courses. Originally it was envisaged that the

curricula would be analysed in an isolationary manner and then related to theories of ideology and the sociology of knowledge. However, as enquiries progressed it became clear that the curricula could be considered in a meaningful way only in relation to other sources of information on the secretarial function. It was, therefore, deemed essential to include information on the nature of secretarial work and the publicly depicted image of secretaries, in order to provide a backcloth against which curricula knowledge could be assessed. Furthermore the theoretical issues, as originally defined, were found to be rather distant from the empirical data and any links which could be made between the two elements of the investigation were tenuous and difficult to sustain. The theoretical area was therefore redefined and perceived as emanating directly from the analysis of empirical data. Thus the theoretical element of this work is taken at a more fundamental level than suggested initially. While the main pivot remains secretarial curricula, a greater emphasis is now put on background information which assists the contextualisation of the curricula and the theoretical discussion has direct contact with contemporary secretarial curricula and the secretarial function. The research and composition of the final document has therefore been an evolutionary process and theories have been derived from empirical data. Glaser and Strauss discuss this method and state:

"We believe that the discovery of theory from data - which we call grounded theory - is a major task confronting sociology today, for .... such a theory fits empirical situations, and is understandable to sociologists and laymen alike. Most important, it works - provides us with relevant predictions, explanations, interpretations and applications."<sup>(1)</sup>

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(1) Barney G Glaser and Anselm L Strauss, The Discovery of Grounded Theory, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1968, p 1.

The particular focus of this study is young women, training for secretarial work, having already achieved GCE 'A' Level or University Degree qualifications. From personal involvement with this level of trainee secretary over a number of years, it appeared that this type of student tended to adhere to the popular image of the secretarial function and the traditional role of women generally. This point was considered of particular interest since, with the growth of the feminist movement, the Equal Opportunities Act of 1975, and the stimulus of an increase in the current discussion of women's position generally in society, it might be supposed that such young women would begin to question their personal position in relation to a traditionally gender orientated and segregated area of work. In addition, while some research (eg Silverstone, *The Office Secretary*<sup>(1)</sup>) has sought to indicate that office work is an avenue of upward social mobility for many women, this thesis cannot be sustained in relation to the sample of students selected for empirical observation. The sample comes predominantly from social class II backgrounds and therefore, with secretarial work classified as IIIa, their prospective employment represents downward social mobility. There is, of course, a fundamental problem with the classification of women, as they are usually ascribed their social class position according to the occupation of their father or husband. If, later in her life, a woman is categorised according to her own working situation, then the criterion for the judgement has been changed. It is in fact possible that the sample of women students used in this study, will maintain their class position by marrying men in social class I or II, and the downward social mobility suggested may be misleading.

It is appreciated that the sample of students selected is not representative

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(1) R Silverstone, *The Office Secretary*, PhD Thesis, City University, London, April 1974.

of the majority of office workers, both from the point of view of social class and educational background. There is the additional factor that the sample constitutes a self-selected group since they had all already embarked on secretarial training prior to being interviewed in connection with this research. However, these students are particularly worthy of enquiry since they illustrate the potency of popular images of secretaries as well as women's traditional role. For many female office workers there may be few practical alternatives in terms of employment. Yet for the students in question lack of educational attainment had not proved to be a barrier; they are located in the London area where job opportunities in general terms have been the most extensive in Great Britain in recent years; and their family backgrounds exemplify achievement orientation. The personal circumstances of the sample suggest that these students are in an advantageous position to break away from traditional patterns of female work should they desire to do so. For this reason, the student sample does serve to illustrate that traditional female roles remain positively acceptable to many, and that it is not practical circumstances which force them into an inevitable participation in gender determined activities.

One aspect of this study is concerned with ideas and beliefs that trainee secretaries have about their future work. This is a complicated area of investigation since it is extremely difficult to recreate images of complex social situations which individuals carry in their minds. Problems also arise in attempting to attribute causation to systems of belief and changes in personal schema. The observations made in this study about students' beliefs and ideas about secretarial work were derived from information obtained during interviews with the students. It must be acknowledged that these observations are, to some degree, subjective



interpretations on the part of the observer as well as the observed, which may lead to criticisms of this work on grounds of subjectivity. It is contended, however, that the methods used and interpretations made are appropriate in complicated areas such as people's perceptions of the world. This study explores 'taken for granted' beliefs and assumptions about secretarial work and both the researcher, as a teacher of secretarial studies, and the interviewees, as secretarial students, had a common understanding of this area of knowledge which rendered the interviews meaningful to both parties. As Berger and Luckman state:

"I know that there is an ongoing correspondence between my meanings and their meanings in this world, that we share a common sense about its reality. The natural attitude is the attitude of common-sense consciousness precisely because it refers to a world that is common to many men. Common-sense knowledge is the knowledge I share with others in the normal, self-evident routines of everyday life."(1)

The empirical data used in this study is of a qualitative rather than a quantitative nature and it is considered that the observations made can be defended as both meaningful and evidentially appropriate.

The acquisition of any data referring to an individual's attitudes and beliefs necessitates in-depth enquiry. This investigation is, therefore, small in scale, concentrating on two groups of students in one educational establishment, namely Greenfields College of Technology. However, since similar students undertake comparable courses in many other colleges, it is reasonable to suggest that these findings may illuminate the situation of other secretarial students.

Secretarial curricula have developed in recent years to produce multi-subject courses. Many textbooks and examination boards' handbooks are geared to assist students and teachers in the acquisition of knowledge

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(1) Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman, The Social Construction of Reality, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1966, p 37.

and skills appropriate to the secretarial function. Embedded in much of this literature is information on the behavioural norms, values and attitudes necessary in the secretarial role. These normative requirements of prospective secretaries conveniently coalesce with the popular depiction of secretaries, and assumptions have been made (eg McNally, *Women for Hire*<sup>(1)</sup>) that they are representative of overt transmission of knowledge in the classroom. However, value orientated objectives did not figure as a dominant theme in the operational curricula investigated. In spite of this, it will be argued that the curricula do act as vehicles for the perpetuation of a complex of attitudes and beliefs which will be described as the socially constituted secretarial function, but that this takes place in a more subtle manner than suggested by some other researchers. The necessity to enquire into covertly transmitted knowledge within the hidden curriculum is thereby highlighted as an important aspect of effective inculcation of values.

From the initial stages of this research, it was apparent that normative knowledge would be a particularly pertinent area of concern. Originally it was envisaged that values transmitted in courses geared to work in commercial business would be contrasted with the valuative features of the medical secretaries curricula. The behavioural expectations of secretaries destined for commercial business were depicted in textbooks in terms of smart appearance, cleanliness, politeness, pleasant speaking voice. Much of the similar area of knowledge for medical secretaries was related to how to cope, for example, with people who might be very ill, or had received news of serious illness, and the necessity not to disclose

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(1) Fiona McNally, Women for Hire, MacMillan Press, London, 1979.

doctors' prognoses to patients. It was therefore envisaged that a theoretical analysis of this knowledge would disclose the reasoning and basic assumptions which lay behind its integration within the curricula. It appeared at first sight that there may be human and defensible reasons for the inculcation of specific normative requirements in medical personnel, while the theoretical underpinnings of predetermined patterns of behaviour in secretaries in commerce and industry related more to deference to authority, an unquestioning acceptance of societal organisation, and an emphasis on superficial appearances rather than basic abilities and knowledge.

On completion of pilot investigations on the comparative lines described above, it became clear that the propositions were simply too wide in scope for an investigation of this nature. The point that no previous research had been carried out on secretarial curricula exacerbated the situation, since extensive descriptive accounts of curricula would be necessary to clarify later analyses for the reader. Therefore, in order to proceed to the necessary depth of investigation to produce meaningful and worthwhile data, the decision was taken to concentrate exclusively on curricula and students involved in preparation for the general world of commerce.

### Summary of Research

This study attempts to assess some of the reasons why well qualified young women decide to pursue work of a traditionally female nature, how socially constructed images of the work impinge upon their personal beliefs, and the manner in which official curricula effect a coherent

pattern to individual belief systems while simultaneously operating as intermediary agents between the social image and the world of work. Theoretical analysis of the empirical data indicates the need to consider gender related working roles in relation to other areas of life which rely on gender specificity and the theoretical discussion aims to show how the secretarial function is maintained in its current gender differentiated location. The proposition is also propounded that the secretarial function operates as a reinforcing agent to women's traditional roles in society, creating a forceful and almost impenetrable circular argument to substantiate conservative views of women and society.

#### Survey of Literature

Very little investigation has been carried out to date regarding secretarial knowledge, and none is known which adopts a stand-point with any similarity to the current investigation. A computer search was made in the ERIC database to retrieve references relating to the transmission of knowledge in secretarial courses and the search yielded 200 references. However, all references were concerned with methods of teaching secretarial subjects, rather than any theoretical analysis of the subject matter or its relationship to the secretarial function. Therefore no further investigation of the references obtained was made since they did not, in essence, bear comparison with the intention of this study.

Part of this study concerns examples, particularly of empirical observations, which are taken from three recent British studies concerning secretaries and their work, although again none of these

is concerned with the training of secretaries.

Fiona McNally produced a work entitled Women for Hire - a Study of the Female Office Worker<sup>(1)</sup>, based on her PhD thesis. The main focus of this work is temporary secretarial work. Temporary work in offices is circumscribed by many features which do not impinge on the permanent employee. Therefore the discussion and empirical evidence of work undertaken by temporary secretarial workers was not considered pertinent to this enquiry. However, the general analysis of women in the office proved extremely relevant, as it contains specific references to the role of secretaries in general. Statistical evidence on secretaries, used by McNally, is drawn from reliable sources such as the Department of Employment. She also outlines briefly the kind of training courses available, but produces neither detailed information on the subjects studied nor analysis of the influence of training on an individual's perspective or performance as a secretary. Indeed McNally draws some rather superficial conclusions about secretarial teaching which are contested in this investigation. Nevertheless many of her points of discussion also arise as an integral part of this study and in these areas references are made to McNally's work.

In her general discussion of office work, McNally drew to some extent upon Silverstone's findings. Silverstone has written a PhD thesis entitled The Office Secretary<sup>(2)</sup> in addition to several journal articles directly derived from the thesis. Silverstone's data on the secretarial function is probably the most reliable of any of the three serious research findings examined. One reason for this is that not only is it

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(1) Fiona McNally, op cit.

(2) R Silverstone, op cit.

the most extensive in terms of size of sample, but it also draws upon information from secretaries throughout Great Britain. Silverstone's data was obtained from two separate sources: a sample of 200 employers in Central London and all the secretaries they employed, and the nationwide membership of two organisations of secretaries, namely the Institute of Qualified Private Secretaries (IQPS) and the National Association of Personal Secretaries (NAPS). Enquiries produced valuable empirical data on the work undertaken by practising secretaries, which to a great extent coincided with information gained from ex-students of Greenfields College and therefore serves to corroborate information obtained from the much smaller and more selective sample used in this investigation.

Silverstone's main thesis concerned the relationship between the secretary's job and occupational and social mobility. She did conclude that for many, secretarial work represented upward social mobility. As has already been stated, this is not the case for the very selective sample in this enquiry, but other features of these individuals' backgrounds render them particularly interesting in relation to the main areas of examination.

Most of the information from IQPS and NAPS members was acquired by Silverstone by means of postal questionnaires. Silverstone suggested that these secretaries had more responsible positions than her sample of London secretaries. However, concern is felt about this conclusion as Silverstone does not discuss the possibility that membership of an organisation of secretaries might suggest that these individuals identify themselves and their jobs in a rather different fashion from

many other non-member secretaries, as members of these organisations are likely to have a special outlook and view their jobs from a particular standpoint. Subjective interpretation factors need to be taken into account particularly in view of the fact that the combined total membership of these two organisations is only approximately 250 in Great Britain, which suggests specialist issues relate to this sample.

The third source is Vinnicombe's 'Secretaries, Management and Organizations'<sup>(1)</sup> a book which is based largely on a PhD thesis completed in 1978 at Manchester Business School. The main concern of the author is the efficient utilisation of secretarial staff to maximise productivity of organisations. Although the theoretical issues pivoted on a very different axis from that of this study, the empirical observations of the secretarial function have been used as illustrative of the nature of secretarial work.

Vinnicombe conducted her enquiries in two ways. First within one large business organisation in London employing 143 secretaries, where she interviewed members of management, held group discussions with secretaries and analysed diaries in which all secretaries recorded their activities over a period of two weeks. Secondly she held in depth interviews with five secretaries working in different organisations in London. While the information gained by Vinnicombe has been utilised in this study, the caveat must be made that Vinnicombe's sample was restrictive in terms of location and numbers, and may not therefore be representative of secretaries in general.

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(1) Susan Vinnicombe, Secretaries, Management and Organisations, Heinemann Educational Books, London, 1980.

While some reservations must be made concerning the data from other sources used in this investigation, nevertheless it has been of value. In the first place, so little investigation has been carried out in the area of secretarial work that any empirical data collated in a serious manner cannot be ignored. Further, individual collection of similar material would require extensive time and resources which were not available within the circumstances of this current research.

Material is also cited in this study from textbooks specifically geared to secretarial students. A great variety of these books has been published over a number of years. It was therefore considered reasonable in the context of this work, to consider only those specifically recommended to the students at Greenfields College, in addition to those available for reference in the College library.

The survey of literature did indicate that the lack of analytical research in the area of secretarial work leaves many aspects of the function unconsidered in spite of the fact that many women spend a major part of their lives in the office environment. This investigation seeks to illuminate one selective aspect of secretarial work, although it is appreciated that many other lines of enquiry may result in fruitful analysis, discussion and understanding of the position of women in society today.

#### Organisation of Thesis

The areas investigated in relation to this thesis fall into two



distinct sections. In the first place consideration is given to an overall view of both the nature of secretarial work in general and popular depictions of the secretary and her work. Secondly, empirical data is amassed about two secretarial courses.

Part I of the thesis deals with features of the work which are common to many secretarial posts. An outline is given of the tasks and activities involved, the location of the secretary, and the structure of relationships which are found in many office organisations. Statistical evidence is provided to indicate the current proliferation of secretarial jobs and the sexual division of labour within offices. This information is contained in Chapter I.

In Part I, Chapter II, material is drawn from the popular press, radio and television, to illustrate both the extent and manner in which the secretary and her work are portrayed to the general public. These popularised images are described in this work as the socially constituted secretarial function.

A theoretical discussion and analysis of the secretarial function is contained in Chapter III, Part I. This analysis provides a theoretical basis for the investigation of specific secretarial curricula and consideration of their contribution to the perpetuation of popular images of secretaries.

Part II of the thesis concentrates on the empirical data collected specifically for this investigation. It begins, in Chapter IV, with

general background information on the development of secretarial work, and secretarial courses. This Chapter also describes Greenfields College, within which the curricula investigated are in operation.

Chapter V outlines the structure and operation of two secretarial curricula at Greenfields College. Empirical data obtained in interviews with teachers, concerned with these particular courses, is used to illuminate the content of the courses and teachers' perspectives of students' career prospects.

A sample of current students was interviewed in connection with this enquiry to obtain data on the images and beliefs that trainee secretaries have about their future work and programme of training. The methodological approach used for the interviews and an account of the information obtained is contained in Chapter VI.

To assess the working realities which current students might encounter when they entered office employment, questionnaires were sent to a sample of past students of Greenfields College. Chapter VII is therefore devoted to an account of the procedures adopted for the compilation and analysis of the questionnaires and to an analysis of the information given on completed questionnaires.

Finally the empirical data, which constitutes the major element of Part II of the thesis, is developed in a theoretical manner in Chapter VIII. Theoretical issues are discussed in relation to the extent to which the curricula seek to recreate and perpetuate the socially constituted secretarial function.

PART I

THE SECRETARIAL FUNCTION

## CHAPTER I

### THE NATURE OF SECRETARIAL WORK

At the present time more than two million women in England and Wales are employed as clerical workers. According to official statistics collated after the 1971 Census, there were 747,400 typists, shorthand writers and secretaries in England and Wales, of whom only 10,100 (1.4 per cent) were male<sup>(1)</sup>. Department of Employment figures indicate a growing number of girl school leavers under 18 years of age entering clerical work. In the late 1960's 40 per cent of girls under 18 went into this kind of work, while in 1973 this was the occupational choice of no less than 60 per cent of girl school leavers<sup>(2)</sup>. According to the Careers Encyclopedia, virtually a quarter of all school-leavers go into office work of some kind<sup>(3)</sup>.

Some school leavers select further education rather than direct entry into work. Of these in 1977, 1,950 girls with GCE 'A' Level passes chose full-time secretarial courses and a total of 18,300 girls without 'A' Levels also went on to study secretarial subjects in full-time further education. These figures indicate that nearly one third of all girl school leavers who proceeded to full-time study in 1977 went

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(1) Census, England and Wales, Occupational Tables, 1971.

(2) DE Gazette, Young Persons Entering Employment, 1973, May 1974.

(3) Statistics of Education 1977 Vol 2, HMSO London, 1979.

into secretarial training. However, only 600 boys elected to study on secretarial courses, none of whom had achieved GCE 'A' Level qualifications at school<sup>(1)</sup>.

Secretarial training is also undertaken by some University graduates. In 1978 22,766 women obtained first degrees from Universities and 907 of these went directly to study on secretarial courses, while of the 3,817 women obtaining higher degrees, only 3 opted to take a secretarial course. Of the graduates obtaining a first degree, 367 went directly into secretarial and clerical work<sup>(2)</sup>. No male graduate entered a secretarial course in 1978. (Figures were not obtainable for those graduating from Polytechnics).

The picture emerges of clerical work as a predominantly female occupation. While the work appears to become less popular when the school leavers have obtained higher levels of formal qualifications, secretarial training is still relatively popular with girls with 'A' Levels as the following table indicates:

<u>Type of Full-Time Course</u>	<u>No. of Girl Entrants with GCE 'A' Levels</u>
Degree Courses	20,530
Teacher Training	4,530
Secretarial Courses	1,950
HND/C	1,210
GCE 'A' Level	1,070
Nursing Courses	450
Catering Courses	320

(Table derived from: Statistics of Education 1977 Vol. 2, HMSO, London, 1979)

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(1) Statistics of Education 1977 Vol 2, HMSO London, 1979.

(2) University Statistics Record, Cheltenham, (telephone information).

One of the major difficulties in interpreting the statistics is the fact that clerical workers are assumed to be a homogeneous category of employee, and that courses which include any type of skills applicable to office work are categorised as secretarial. However, female clerical workers are highly stratified. There are significant differences between the copy typist/filing clerk at the lower levels and the executive secretary at the apex of the continuum. The differences are not only in terms of their social and educational background and degree of training for their work, but also in terms of their status, pay, work situation and in particular with regard to their relationship with their employers. A copy typist, for example, may work in a pool, with a female supervisor, and have very little personal contact with managers, while secretaries may not only work in close physical proximity to managers, but also develop a personal working relationship with various members of the management structure of the organisation. This point must be stressed as a most significant factor in any analysis of the nature of the secretarial function.

According to a British Association for Commercial and Industrial Education (BACIE) working party report, within the secretarial frame of reference alone, various categories of work may identified<sup>(1)</sup>, viz:

- 1 typist
- 2 audio/shorthand typist
- 3 secretary
- 4 senior secretary
- 5 executive secretary.

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(1) BACIE Journal, Vol 28 No. 7, 'The Provision of Vocational Education and Training for Private and Personal Secretaries,' July 1974, p 87.

This is but one indication of the conceptual confusion which surrounds the terminology of office employment and particularly that of secretarial work. Many may not agree that, for instance, typists should be categorised as secretarial workers. However, many female office workers do refer to themselves as 'secretaries' in spite of the fact that their duties may not surpass copy typing or filing. No doubt, this is occasioned by the higher status accorded to the title secretary. The Careers Encyclopedia points out that:

"Around a million women refer to themselves as secretaries, but for many the actual work they do does not warrant the title: more usually they are performing the duties of a typist, whether it be copy typist, audio typist or shorthand typist."(1)

Job advertisements frequently refer to vacancies for secretaries, when the post in question requires little more than typing and answering the telephone and job descriptions are rarely issued. Furthermore, titles with indefinite specification, such as Personal Assistant, have become common currency in the last decade. An article in the Sunday Times confirms the imprecision of job titles in office work:

"I wanted to hire a junior shorthand typist a little while ago.

'You mean a secretary', said the agency.

'No, I only want a girl straight out of school. Of course she could become a secretary later.'

'Um, well for our purposes you'd better call the vacancy secretarial.'"(2)

One factor which may add to the confusion is that certain skills are

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(1) Audrey Segal, op cit, p 220.

(2) Ann White, 'The Secretary Circus', in The Sunday Times, 16 April 1972.

common to different categories of worker. The ability to type is undoubtedly necessary for the copy typist as well as the executive secretary, and shorthand remains a desirable skill for high level secretaries as well as junior shorthand-typists. The differentiation of levels of employment lies in the extent to which these skills are used, the nature of the other tasks undertaken, and the relationship with the employer.

The major tasks of the shorthand typist are to take dictation and transcribe her shorthand notes. The secretary may also undertake these activities, but they are a less dominant feature of her work, which may include a variety of other duties. The secretarial function is represented diagrammatically in *Essential Secretarial Studies* and this representation of the function is reproduced on the following page of this study (p.21). This textbook goes on to suggest that:

"Audio-typists and shorthand-typists are usually expected to be able to perform any of the duties listed under PRIMARY FUNCTIONS on THE SECRETARIAL FUNCTION chart. If, in addition to these duties, they need to know how to carry out work covered by two or more of the headings listed under SECONDARY FUNCTIONS their work may fairly be described as secretarial and they may call themselves secretaries."<sup>(1)</sup>

The BACIE working party defines the executive secretary as one who:

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(1) Stanwell and Shaw, Essential Secretarial Studies, Edward Arnold, London, 1974, pp 13-14.



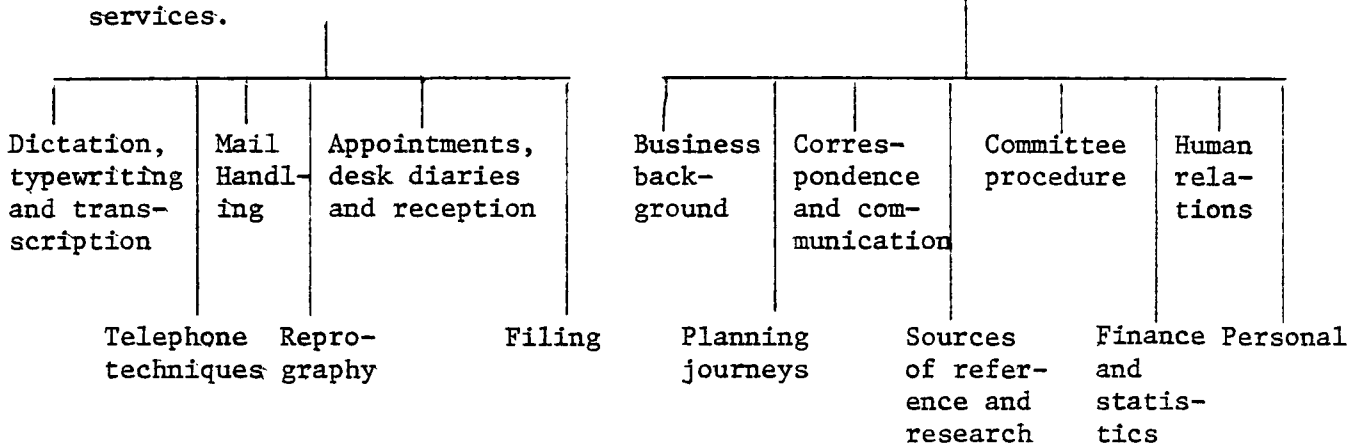
## THE SECRETARIAL FUNCTION <sup>(1)</sup>

### PRIMARY

To assist in the performance of the clerical processes of the office - the most important of which are the receipt, reproduction, transmission, storage and retrieval of information, instructions and decisions - by providing the following skills and services.

### SECONDARY

To ensure the smooth-running of the office and to take responsibility for as much routine work as possible by making the fullest use of personal qualities and attributes, and by applying knowledge of the following topics.



(Source: Stanwell and Shaw, Essential Secretarial Studies, Edward Arnold, London, 1974, p 13.)

(1) This diagram has been selected as it encapsulates concisely the areas of knowledge incorporated in the curricula analysed in Chapter V of this study and is known to be currently used by many secretarial teachers as a reliable reference.

"Handles all correspondence, prepares papers for her chief, answers letters herself or passes them on to subordinates. Deals with queries on the telephone, passing only essential calls to her chief. Initiates the filing system and maintains it. Keeps her chief prepared to meet deadlines, plans the use of time and takes care of all necessary arrangements. Liaises with her chief's colleagues and subordinates. Entertains visitors and acts as his hostess. Attends meetings and takes minutes. She may accompany her chief on business trips, she undertakes research projects for him. She acts as his ambassador both within the company and with external contacts."(1)

A variety of duties may therefore be involved in any secretarial post. However, only rarely does any specific job involve all the areas of work suggested in these outlines of the secretarial function, as secretarial work is an extremely diverse occupation. Secretaries are employed not only throughout the business world, but also in hospitals, colleges, local and central government offices, manufacturing concerns, large stores. In fact wherever an office exists, there is usually a secretary somewhere at work. The type and size of an organisation also affects the working conditions and kind of work a secretary might be expected to do. Further within one organisation several people employed as secretaries might have quite varying jobs and responsibilities. The variable nature of this sphere of employment leads to the unique character of each post and may well militate against the secretary's identification with other secretaries, or indeed with office workers in general. However, the crucial point to be made here is that:

"in fact, it is difficult to define exactly the rôle of the secretary, since most employers and individual secretaries have their own, usually fairly firm, views on what it should be."(2)

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(1) BACIE Journal, op cit, p 88.

(2) Audrey Segal (ed), op cit, p 222.

The tasks which any secretary is called upon to undertake depend predominantly on the demands of her immediate superior, commonly referred to in office parlance as the 'boss'. It is obvious for instance that if the boss does not have to travel as an integral part of his duties then the secretary will not be called upon to make travel arrangements. Moreover, to a great extent the secretary's work will depend on the willingness of her boss to delegate. Vinnicombe, in her interviews with secretaries in a large establishment in London, found that:

"Most secretaries felt that copy typing accounted for the major proportion of their working day. A number of secretaries saw this as a task requiring low-level skills and one that could easily be undertaken by copy-typists. While they appreciated that it was difficult for their bosses to delegate many tasks to them, owing to the technical nature of the work, they still felt capable of accepting more responsibility."(1)

It could be contended that the work of these interviewees was not actually of a level which warranted the title secretary. Since these employees were located within a single establishment, they may not be representative of secretaries in general, particularly as it is pointed out that the work of the organisation was of a technical nature. However, Silverstone found that routine tasks were frequently mentioned when respondents to her postal questionnaire were asked to list all jobs undertaken as integral elements of their secretarial work. The activities most frequently mentioned included typing, telephone, taking shorthand, filing and making appointments<sup>(2)</sup>. In addition the questionnaires completed in relation to the current study and discussed fully in Chapter VII, indicated that routine tasks constituted a substantial element in many secretarial jobs. The routine tasks specified were typing, filing and photocopying. The vast majority of respondents had found shorthand and typing to be

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(1) Susan Vinnicombe, op cit, p 26.

(2) R Silverstone, The Office Secretary, op cit, p 213.

very useful in their work and it is reasonable to assume that if such a majority found these skills so useful, then they must have been called upon to use this knowledge to a reasonable extent. The conclusion must be drawn that many workers categorised as secretaries perform routine tasks, which in many instances constitute a major element of the function.

While any list of activities which may be involved in the secretarial function suggests initially a job with a good deal of variety and responsibility, this must be tempered in relation to individual situations. One senior secretary, in outlining her activities indicates the level of tasks which may be involved:

"I'm still making the coffee! Correspondence is usually dictated to me unless he's on holiday when I cope with it myself. The job entails most of the usual secretarial duties, such as making appointments for him, taking messages and booking tables in restaurants. But there's no need to make any travel arrangements. When he travels, which isn't often, I just ring up the travel agency where the firm has an arrangement. I give them all the necessary details and they do the rest. However, I have to collect the tickets and make sure he has them when he leaves - plus passport and money of course."(1)

Secretarial jobs may in fact be characterised by more routine activities than suggested by any list of activities incorporated in the secretarial function, as outlined in textbooks. This was also indicated by the five secretaries interviewed by Vinnicombe during her research. The major aspects of their work load were described as follows:

Secretary No. 1

"Typing took up a lot of her time, closely followed by photocopying. The largest proportion of her day was spent dealing with the constant personal interruptions."

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(1) Gillian Morton, The Secretary Game, Edward Arnold, London, 1975, p 4.

Secretary No. 2

"Most of her time was taken up in scanning the incoming mail. She also arranged travel and lunches for her boss."

Secretary No. 3

"She was only handling most of the chairman's outgoing mail".

Secretary No. 4

"When her boss was in the office most time was spent handling correspondence. She emphasised that one of the most important tasks of her job was looking after boss's diary."

Secretary No. 5

"Sorting incoming mail, taking dictation."<sup>(1)</sup>

This sample of five secretaries is extremely small and therefore not necessarily representative, but is nevertheless worthy of note since the observations attempt to quantify approximately the extent of routine work. No quantification is available in any other empirical data.

Individual secretarial jobs may therefore be relatively routine functions. This is also illustrated by the fact that employers advertising for secretaries frequently specify standards of secretarial skills required, but do not often indicate other desirable skills or knowledge. Silverstone claims that:

"most employers operate with a set of minimum requirements with regard to the education and secretarial qualifications of potential secretaries. Furthermore, they tend to place much more emphasis on ability in such traditional skills as typing and shorthand than on business acumen or knowledge of finance, banking or economics."<sup>(2)</sup>

Not only do the tasks performed by the secretary depend on the activities of the boss and his desire to delegate, but great stress is also put on

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(1) Susan Vinnicombe, op cit, pp 38-50.

(2) R Silverstone, 'Just a Sec?', in Personnel Management, Vol 7 No 6, June 1975, p 35.

the influence of the boss/secretary relationship as an overriding factor in the secretary's working situation. The sexual division of labour is particularly exemplified by office work. While it has been shown from official statistics that the majority of secretaries are female, in contrast the majority of their bosses are male (83 per cent<sup>(1)</sup> - as this figure included general administrators, the number of male bosses is probably greater than this.) Perhaps this very rigid male/female division of labour is one of the features of the secretarial role which has led to the secretary's unofficial title of 'office wife'.

In most instances a secretary works for one man and she therefore has a one-to-one relationship with her employer, which is rare in other spheres of employment. Perhaps the only comparable work which involves a similar relationship is that of the agricultural worker<sup>(2)</sup>. In spite of the fact that the secretary and her boss are often referred to as a team, it is inevitable that it is an unequal partnership. Often the secretary has sole responsibility only for the more routine aspects of the office, such as the filing system. The low level of activities for which she may have responsibility is illustrated in the Careers Encyclopedia, which states:

"she should be able to take a certain amount of responsibility for day to day affairs, and so relieve her employer of the more mundane and time-consuming minutiae of working life. Mostly, she will deal with his (or her) correspondence, drafting the less demanding replies herself, filing and appointments."<sup>(3)</sup>

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- (1) G S Bain and R Price 'Union Growth Revisited: 1948-1974 in Perspective' in British Journal of Industrial Relations Vol XIV No 3, Mimeo 1976, pp 339-551.
- (2) Howard Newby, The Deferential Worker, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1979.
- (3) Segal (ed), op cit, p 222.

While the majority of respondents to the questionnaire initiated for this research declared that they were required to use their initiative either 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' as secretaries, specific examples indicated a low level of activities where initiative and responsibility were involved. These areas included devising a filing system, obtaining stationery and office equipment, arranging transport, dealing with telephone enquiries and re-organising filing systems.

Any decisions which the secretary may be called upon to make when, for example, answering telephone enquiries, or arranging meetings, have to be made in accordance with the wishes of her boss. Her judgements have to be exercised according to the criteria laid down by her employer, and she must defer to his judgement. An executive's statement as to the reasons why he felt able to describe his secretary as 'perfect', illustrates this:

"She will deal with callers and customers in exactly the same way as I do because she is an interpreter of my mind. She has a happy knack of knowing just what I am likely to do in any given circumstance."<sup>(1)</sup>

Vinnicombe refers to the notion of team work but goes on to indicate the inequality of the dual members of this partnership:

"This kind of secretary works very closely with her boss, and indeed, her success depends vitally on maintaining this co-ordinated team approach .... The effectiveness with which she carries out the latter (initiating work-based activities) depends on how well she knows her boss and can anticipate his needs .... Such secretaries frequently pride themselves on being able to predict precisely what the boss's reaction is going to be in any given situation."<sup>(2)</sup>

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(1) Eva Roman, The Secretary, Her Boss, and Her Job, Business Books, London 1975, p 79.

(2) S Vinnicombe, op cit, p 10

The prime responsibility for creating and maintaining a working relationship appears to rest with the secretary. This is exemplified by a statement addressed to the potential secretary:

"You must remember, too, that the boss is at liberty to lose his temper; you aren't. Bosses are most resentful of bossy women."<sup>(1)</sup>

Delegates to a conference for Senior Secretaries, held in December 1980,<sup>(2)</sup> were told that they should attempt to compensate for and cover up any weaknesses displayed by their bosses. If, for instance, he was rather moody, then she must remain pleasant and smile in spite of his moods; should other members of the workforce suggest that he was not altogether a pleasant person and rather difficult to get on with, then she should suggest to them that perhaps it was only that he was rather shy. Vinnicombe found that the boss tended to be regarded as the model for the secretary, rather than the secretary imposing her own model of how a secretary should perform<sup>(3)</sup>.

The very essence of the secretarial function is that it is work which is carried out on behalf of another person. While a manager may not necessarily have a private secretary, the secretary cannot function without a boss, who is usually a manager. Her position is contingent upon that of her boss and it is basically a supportive role. One aspect of the conference, referred to above, emphasised this, as the secretaries were asked to discuss and report on how they could help to make their

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(1) Eya Roman, op cit, p 72.

(2) Symposium for The Senior Secretary, Kingston Regional Management Centre, 10 and 11 December 1980.

(3) S Vinnicombe, op cit, p 54.



boss more successful. It was not a matter of secretaries being more effective in their own activities, but rather that the various aspects of their jobs should be carried out in a manner which would facilitate another's effectiveness and success. It is interesting to note that one group decided that a major contributory factor to their boss's success was their willingness to make plenty of cups of coffee for him and this emphasises the supportive nature of the secretarial function.

McNally uses the concept of the office wife to indicate the personal qualities of the secretary, which are deemed necessary in her job:

"The perfect secretary is expected to combine in herself a mixture of abilities and qualities in much the same way as the perfect wife. Not only must she be capable of certain minimal speeds on the typewriter and when taking dictation, just as wives must display a certain bare level of competence with the frying pan, but she must also 'understand' her boss, just as a wife must be sensitive to her husband's whims and moods."<sup>(1)</sup>

The social skills required of the executive secretary were reported in the BACIE paper as follows:

"Poise and a good cultural background are very important. She must feel at ease and be accepted in her chief's social environment. She must take an intelligent interest in industry, government and the City so that she fully comprehends her chief's business objectives and is competent to help meet them. She must also have a common touch to enable her to interpret her chief's instructions to other staff and act as a feedback mechanism for any complaints or useful information."<sup>(2)</sup>

This suggests that the secretary may often act as a 'go-between' and even a mediator between the social classes, but that her primary allegiance is to her boss, and that her duties are that of a surrogate rather than

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(1) Fiona McNally, op cit, pp 55-56.

(2) BACIE Journal, op cit, p 88.

an individual in her own right. Since her boss will usually be part of the management structure of the organisation, then she is called upon to ally herself with management and their decisions. Undoubtedly this may lead to false consciousness, where she assumes managerial status herself, without possessing any of the powers and rights inherent in this role. The crucial distinctions between employer and employee in terms of power, status and reward are thus mystified and this illustrates further why many secretaries relate to management rather than other office employees.

The more elevated an individual is in terms of management structure, the more likely is it that he will have a personal or private secretary, while those in the lower echelons may have to content themselves with pool typists or at best sharing a secretary with a manager of similar rank. Vinnicombe notes that the allocation of secretaries was not linked to any formal rational analysis of work-load, but rather that on achieving a certain status in the organisation a manager is automatically given a secretary<sup>(1)</sup>. The secretary, therefore, performs the function of a status symbol for her boss, just as the company car he receives on attaining a certain status. When the boss gains promotion or even moves to another organisation, he may take his secretary with him, just as he takes the ink stand from his desk. This had in fact been the case for one of the secretaries in Vinnicombe's investigation. While the relationship is very personalised, it can nevertheless lead to the reification of the secretary, as part of her function is to operate as a symbol of success and prestige for her boss. Vinnicombe concluded that her case study showed that:

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(1) S Vinnicombe, op cit, p 13.

"secretaries are all too often regarded by management as items of expenditure on the payroll rather than as individuals who are seeking challenge and self-fulfilment in their jobs."<sup>(1)</sup>

Silverstone suggested that some secretaries felt that they were used as a status symbol and this could be a source of dissatisfaction:

"Many of them (secretaries) are conscious that they are human status symbols - there to buttress their boss's ego rather than to play a significant part in the execution of his duties."<sup>(2)</sup>

Many secretaries not only perform work in relation to the formal business of the organisation, but are also called upon to undertake personal tasks for their boss. In Vinnicombe's sample these personal tasks ranged from paying his Diners Club Card and looking after his bank statements, to handling the legal and administrative aspects of purchasing a house or stocks and shares on his behalf<sup>(3)</sup>. This invasion of the personal affairs of the boss into the work situation is not uncommon and many secretaries regard it as a natural and acceptable part of their duties. One survey discovered that 80 per cent of secretaries were willing to run errands, and 74 per cent were willing to do the shopping for their bosses and their families<sup>(4)</sup>. In the course of an informal conversation one secretary stated that she had accompanied her boss when he was admitted to hospital for a routine operation. Such tasks underline the traditionally female aspects of servitude required in the job and also the personal relationship which may ensue. It is difficult however to quantify the amount of time each secretary spends

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<sup>(1)</sup> S Vinnicombe, op cit, p 36.

<sup>(2)</sup> R Silverstone, op cit, pp 430-431.

<sup>(3)</sup> S Vinnicombe, op cit, p 67.

<sup>(4)</sup> G Greer, Female Eunuch, Paladin, Great Britain, 1970, p 123.

on personal tasks, as it must depend again on the boss's requirements, although it is worthy of note that one of Vinnicombe's respondents spent 90 per cent of her time on her boss's personal business. One unusual and perhaps extreme example of the secretary's acceptance of responsibility for the personal affairs of her boss is cited in the Secretary Game:

"Last year when the Chairman was on his yacht, I had a phone call to say that the contract for his new house was being drawn up and it had to be signed immediately or he'd be gazumped. I traced his yacht and told him he had to come back. He said he couldn't leave his guests and told me to bring it over. That afternoon I trotted off home to pack a bag, rang my husband to say I wouldn't be home for a few days and flew off to the south of France. Four days later I came back with the signed contract."<sup>(1)</sup>

This is another example of the unique nature of the secretarial function, in that the personal affairs attended to by one secretary for her boss may vary enormously compared to those carried out by a secretary in another position. Lumley believed that the close contact between the secretary and her employer generated a strong feeling of company loyalty on the part of the former and militated against her identification with the office proletariat<sup>(2)</sup>. The low number of clerical workers who belong to trade unions reinforces this view. In 1970 30.7 per cent of female white-collar workers were said to hold union membership<sup>(3)</sup>. However, this figure refers to clerical workers in general and specific figures for secretaries are not obtainable. Of the senior secretaries attending the conference referred to previously, none was a member of a union, and the majority suggested that they considered it inappropriate to belong to a union. In addition only very few of past Greenfields' students

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(1) Gillian Morton, op cit, p 18.

(2) Lumley, White-Collar Unionism in Britain, Methuen, London, 1973, p 36.

(3) R Price and G S Bain, 'Union Growth Revisited', op cit, p 349.

were unionised and only one of these was a member of a clerical workers union. Silverstone found that only 6 per cent of her respondents belonged to a union and nearly all of the union members worked in the newspaper industry.

It has been shown then that the secretarial function is simultaneously personalised and privatised. In spite of the fact that both secretary and boss may be employed officially by the organisation within which the team is operational, the secretary nevertheless identifies the boss as her employer and invests in him the powers of the official employer. He determines the nature of the work that she undertakes and even her hours of work may be allocated in relation to his activities, as was instanced by a secretary in Vinnicombe's sample. This secretary worked from 8.30 am to 6.00 pm when her boss was working in the office, but 9.30 am to 4.00 pm when he was absent from it<sup>(1)</sup>. Therefore, although the boss may not be the official employer, he very often controls his secretary's conditions of employment in a manner that suggests private ownership of his secretary.

Not only does the secretary have a very personalised relationship with her employer, but she usually also works in close physical proximity to him. This means that her office is often located within the executive suite of offices. Although the office trimmings may not be of the precise standards of those of her boss, they are frequently of a similar standard in terms of working environment. Vinnicombe found that in the majority of cases in her study, the private secretary's office was immediately adjacent to that of her boss. The physical location of the

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(1) S Vinnicombe, op cit, p 44.

secretary therefore stresses patterns of identification with management, and often contributes to job satisfaction in the high standard of surroundings within which she is located. Although questionnaire responses obtained for this particular research indicated that secretarial work was not always what had been envisaged during training, the majority of the sample of ex-Greenfields' students categorised themselves as 'very happy' or 'quite happy' in their secretarial jobs.

Conditions of employment for secretaries also have more in common with those of management than, say, factory workers. The secretary rarely has to clock on or even sign in and has a certain amount of autonomy in the organisation of the routine work of her office. Payment for sickness and holidays is the norm. Many organisations also operate a flexi-time system whereby office staff can choose, within certain bands, their time of arrival and departure each day. Luncheon vouchers are often given and schemes also exist for interest free loans for season tickets to travel to and from the office. Unsocial hours are not usually required and office employees normally work a 35-hour week. However, it was interesting to note that of the five secretaries interviewed by Vinnicombe, three stated that they often worked until 6.00 pm. For one of them it was stated:

"Julia always came in at 9.00 am and stayed until 6.00 - 6.30 pm; she never left the office before the departure of both bosses."(1)

Until the present time, office work has proved to be a secure form of employment. In spite of the fact that in October 1980 there were over

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(1) S Vinnicombe, op cit, p 71.

two million unemployed, a survey of secretarial and clerical salaries reported:

"experienced, qualified secretaries, audio-typists, and other skilled categories .... still have no problems in job-finding in London and other conurbations."<sup>(1)</sup>

Indeed in the 1970's there was a dearth of secretaries particularly in the large cities, such as London. The pay may be considered to be quite good for college leavers in comparison with that of their peers entering other areas of employment. However, on the whole there is no extensive incremental pay scale through which secretaries may progress as they gain experience. For example, in the case of respondents to the Greenfields questionnaire, it was found that the majority of those willing to disclose salary were earning between £4,000 and £4,999 per annum (survey conducted in January 1980). There was no apparent relationship between years of experience and higher salary, which at least indicates that although salaries might have increased since leaving College, such salary advances had, in the main, only kept pace with inflation.

It is, of course, difficult to make a comparison of male/female salaries in this area of work because so few male secretaries exist that any sample may be considered unrepresentative. However, it is noted that data included in the New Earnings Survey 1977, showed that overall hourly earnings for adult male full-time clerks was 167.1p, compared with 129.3p for women. The July 1980 weekly salaries for Secretaries and Shorthand Typists were reported to be:

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<sup>(1)</sup> Alfred Marks, Statistical Services Division, Survey of Secretarial and Clerical Salaries, October 1980, p 5.

July 1980 Weekly Salaries

	Age Group					
	16-17	18	19	20	21-24	25 up
Secretaries and shorthand typists	£	£	£	£	£	£
Lower Quartile	58.75	66.50	70.00	74.25	81.25	86.50
Median	64.25	72.50	76.00	80.50	87.50	95.25
Upper Quartile	69.00	77.00	81.50	85.50	94.00	100.50

(Source: Alfred Marks, Statistical Services Division, Survey of Secretarial and Clerical Salaries, July 1980, p 12)

Another advantage of office work for many women is the fact that they have been able to select temporary work and part-time work, so that to some extent their hours of work can be adjusted to accommodate family commitments.

One of the results of the personalised nature of the work is that secretaries often receive small gifts from their boss, although formal bonus systems are not usual. An example of this occurs in the United States where a National Secretaries' Day is held, when the tradition is that, on that day, the boss takes his secretary to lunch and buys her roses<sup>(1)</sup>. Moreover training for secretarial qualifications is short in comparison with that of many other occupations, the opportunity cost of training therefore being relatively low. The work is clean and special protective clothing is unnecessary, although personal appearance appears to necessitate special consideration in the secretarial function, as indicated in the

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(1) Vivian Raineri, 'Rises not Roses', in The Morning Star, 29 May 1979, p 4.



advice contained in the Careers Encyclopedia:

"it is a convention that they should .... conform to particular standards of appearance and behaviour. A great deal also depends on the office or secretarial worker's accuracy and neatness and appearance is frequently thought, rightly or wrongly, to reflect this."(1)

The Careers Guide reinforces this when it observes that the personal characteristics required include:

"a smart appearance and good grooming."(2)

Generally secretarial work is seen as respectable and a particularly suitable job for girls.

It is particularly notable that a set of values underlies secretarial work and that this often supersedes in importance the nature of the tasks performed. Silverstone, for example, found:

"when they (secretaries) described what they felt their jobs ought to be, they frequently expressed what the secretary as a person, and her attitudes, ought to be. For instance, a secretary should be 'loyal', 'understanding', 'respectful', 'sympathetic'. The emphasis which was given to such qualities, as if they were primary functions, suggests that many secretaries considered their actual work to be secondary to their supportive role."(3)

It may well be that values attributed to the work are one of the important aspects which determine the respectability of the work.

Although it is clear that office workers are highly stratified, there is no clear career structure for secretaries. Many of Silverstone's and Vinnicombe's respondents had worked their way over a number of years from being a pool typist to senior secretary. However, nowadays many college leavers, particularly those with GCE 'A' Levels and

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(1) A Segal, op cit, p 223.

(2) HMSO, Careers Guide, Autumn 1979, Careers and Occupational Information Centre, p 245.

(3) R Silverstone, op cit, p 249.

Degrees, do obtain posts as secretaries in their first jobs. For them it may be possible to proceed to senior secretary, but the distinctions between these two categories are unclear. The senior secretary may simply be another title and the work may bear little significant difference from that of secretary. In fact the information supplied by past students for this investigation showed that 62 per cent of respondents, who had left College between 1971 and 1979, had obtained no progression in status from that of secretary.

Silverstone noted that the fact that college leavers can obtain posts as secretaries causes many older women anxiety. This may have been because it eroded the career structure which these older women had identified and pursued in their own working lives, as about half of the sample of secretaries in Silverstone's investigation had progressed by way of the typing pool.

Throughout her study, Vinnicombe talks of promotion in terms of obtaining a secretarial position for a boss of higher status. This demonstrates that the secretary may only gain in status by way of the ranking of her boss rather than as recognition of her own standards of competence. It is therefore a case of second-hand status and promotion. This factor was demonstrated in Vinnicombe's study:

"promotion up the organisation usually depends upon the boss's promotion. In other words, bosses opt as to whether or not to carry their secretaries up the hierarchy with them."(1)

This situation may again be analagous to that of the wife whose status is categorised in accordance with her husband's working situation.

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(1) S Vinnicombe, op cit, p 13.

Silverstone accounted for a feeling of disillusionment among some of her secretarial respondents in terms of the lack of promotion opportunities. She also showed that most employers do not consider that there is a natural progression from secretarial to executive duties, and any such movement necessitates a specialised form of training<sup>(1)</sup>.

A similar point was made by Sally Denholm-Young in her book about the Super Secretary:

"the job of being a secretary does not really constitute a preliminary to anything higher up the ladder in the way that, say, a junior executive can regard himself as being in training to be a middle, then senior manager. There is no well-trod path, indeed no ladder at all in that sense, stretching away upwards. This job is its own *raison d'être* and it is a peculiarly self-contained and self-sufficient one."<sup>(2)</sup>

The secretarial function is, therefore, for the vast majority an end in itself. It is related in no small measure to the traditional role of women, in that it concerns the maintenance of a support system for a male. The secretary becomes a subordinate partner and confidante in his working life just as the traditional wife supports him in the home environment. The traditional office skills required in her work are relatively easy to acquire in terms of the number of avenues available for such skill acquisition and in the length of training required. Aside from these specialised skills, her activities are again akin to many tasks carried out in the home. Filing, for instance, may be likened to keeping his shirts in a certain cupboard, while socks are 'filed' in a specific drawer. Even areas such as travel arrangements are activities which enter into most people's domestic life when, for

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(1) R Silverstone, 'Just a Sec?', op cit, pp 35-36.

(2) Sally Denholm-Young, Super Secretary, Villiers Publications, London, 1980, p 154.

instance, they are booking summer holidays. Therefore, the secretary can lay claim to only a small area of highly specialised knowledge, a factor which may influence her lack of professional status. The personal attributes which are said to be necessary, such as tact, loyalty, discretion, stem from the personalised relationship between the boss and his secretary, whereby deference must be accorded to his decisions, methods of work and judgements, in order that he may be successful. A secretary may only be judged successful in terms of the success of her boss, and credit and status are therefore only attributable via another individual.

The rewards for the secretary are not purely in terms of monetary compensation, as certain emotional rewards may also be identified. It is particularly important in this area of work to look beyond the official contract of employment in order to identify the structure of rewards which operates to give job satisfaction in many instances. Satisfaction may be gained from assisting another's effectiveness and success. This is similar to the rewards which many wives are encouraged to seek - that is to take full responsibility for the more mundane domestic duties in order that her male partner may devote his full energies and attention to achievement in his career. For some, working in close proximity to a high status, or even famous, man in a position of some power, may reap its own rewards. Receiving an occasional compliment or personal gift from such a boss is sufficient gratification to maintain the submissive stance of some secretaries.

It is important not to overlook the implicit powers which some secretaries exercise in spite of the fact that they are not part of the official

policy making process of the organisation. Their function is to filter the communication process, in its various forms, to their boss and they may therefore have the power to deny access to him for certain individuals or in certain circumstances. The secretary may be the only avenue by which her boss can gain access to informal information or, in other words, 'office gossip' which may on occasions influence the decision making process. Secretaries may also compensate for inadequacies in their bosses, which according to Tracy is a feature of greater relevance as the boss progresses up the hierarchy. Tracy's principle is that of the Productive Para-hierarchy and he states:

"In order to survive a dominant hierarchy must create and maintain a para-hierarchy composed of members of a subordinate class to whom the Peter Principle does not apply."<sup>(1)</sup>

Therefore in spite of the fact that she is subordinate, the secretary's power and influence may increase if her boss finds that it would be extremely difficult to function in her absence. She may then be identified as the 'power behind the throne'. In an article in Top Secretary, Eccles refers to these powers:

"Is there any reader who doesn't know of situations where it is more important to be well-in with the secretary than with the executive himself? Are there no cases where the enquirer gets better, more useful, information from the secretary? .... The executive depends on her for the receipt of authentic information. She is adjacent to the circulation of people in the corridor and may well see more of them than he does .... She may have much greater contact with the day to day network in the organisation."<sup>(2)</sup>

Secretaries in Vinnicombe's study indicated how such powers were invested in their positions. Some reported the fact that they were used by the boss's subordinates as a barometer of the boss:

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(1) L Tracy, 'Postscript to the Peter Principle', in Harvard Business Review, July-August, 1972.

(2) A Eccles, 'Wanted: Personal Manager, Preferably with Typing Skills', in Top Secretary, May 1974, pp 44-45.

"They know that if she thought the ideas were worth mentioning to the boss that she would act as the effective 'go-between'. 'They plant the seeds with me and I water them', said one secretary .... She may not be used simply for evaluating and carrying ideas; it may be a case of deciding when is the best time, for example, for the marketing director to talk to the boss about his proposals .... she is more aware of his moods than anyone else."<sup>(1)</sup>

It cannot be denied that some secretaries carry out tasks involving responsibility and decision making. They may administer very busy communication processes and supervise junior staff. Their knowledge and ability contribute to the smooth running of the office. However, an overriding element which emerges as a critical factor in the secretarial function is that of gender differentiation between boss and secretary. It is not simply a matter of the capabilities of an individual to carry out specific tasks, but concerns rather relationships, which are influenced by assumptions regarding appropriate gender behaviour. It may therefore be considered appropriate female behaviour to acquire satisfaction from deference to male authority, while adopting a posture of submissiveness. McNally states that:

"If one ignores gender-based interaction in the office, one is likely to overlook the possible significance of sexual liaisons. There can be little doubt that members of the office do enter into sexual relationships with each other, ranging from mild flirtations to alliances of a more adulterous nature .... I am .... convinced that it is of considerable relevance for an understanding of many of the antipathies, frustrations, commitments that are found here .... sociologists have tended to assume that we inhabit a world where sex is something which only occurs in bedrooms."<sup>(2)</sup>

A letter in The Times, 19 December 1980<sup>(3)</sup> states that American surveys

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(1) S Vinnicombe, op cit, pp 87-88.

(2) F McNally, op cit, p 183.

(3) Anne Boyefsky, Pembroke College Oxford, 'Protecting Women at Work', in The Times, 19 December 1980, p 13.

conducted in 1975 and 1976 by the Working Women United Institute and Redbook magazine found that at least 70 per cent of women had experienced sexual harassment in the workplace. The aspect of gender may therefore be of relevance to areas of work other than the office. However, the important point to be made is that, whether or not the secretarial function includes flirtatious or adulterous relations, the officially recognised role bears very closely upon the traditionally accepted characteristics of acceptable female behaviour. The role therefore becomes acceptable and rewarding because the participants are fulfilling the behavioural norms of their gender, as prescribed by society generally and transmitted in their various patterns of socialisation. The publicly stated role of the secretary epitomises conventional female characteristics; the consequences of unofficial gender differentiation in office life may have more far reaching implications. The dominant position of gender related aspects of the function contribute to a relatively low status and lack of attention to the very real abilities necessary in the work of some secretaries.

## CHAPTER II

### POPULAR IMAGES OF THE SECRETARY AND HER WORK

A distinctive and remarkable feature of office work is the public availability of the secretarial role. There are a great variety of reasons for this. First, as shown in the previous Chapter on the nature of the secretarial function, there are only a few areas of knowledge or skills which constitute a specialised element in the work, and these skills are themselves available to many without a previous high level of educational qualification. Secondly, there are few constraints on anyone wishing to acquire such skills. There is therefore relatively easy access to the knowledge required to perform the secretarial function. An advertisement which frequently appears, particularly on the London Underground, denotes to the travelling public the ease with which secretarial skills can be learnt. The advertisement's main slogan is written in a notetaking system of abbreviated longhand and states:

"if you can read this, then you too can become a secretary".

Obviously the majority will experience relative ease in reading the slogan, or this mode of tempting the public to enrol for the secretarial course in question would not have been selected by the advertisers as an appropriate means of communication. Although the traditional shorthand system may not be a skill which is as simple to learn as



this advertising literature suggests, nevertheless it illustrates how the general reader may be coerced into believing that there is even less knowledge, skill and ability necessary to its acquisition than most actually experience. In addition, office employment has been an expanding area of the job market in recent years and the number of women referring to themselves as 'secretaries' has continued to increase. Most people have, therefore, within their family or acquaintance network, a female who works as a secretary and who supplies role patterns both informally and formally. Informally, and perhaps unconsciously received information, will include aspects of the role such as that all secretaries are female and dress in a certain way to go to their offices. Perhaps certain personal characteristics will be observed and identified with the role in that the secretary may be a well organised person, relating easily to others. In the formal sense she may speak overtly about her work and thereby supply information from which the images of secretaries and their work are produced.

During the twentieth century there has been an enormous expansion of office jobs in both absolute and relative terms. Not only is the number of white-collar workers increasing, but so also is the proportion of these workers in the labour force as a whole. Between 1911 and 1971 the number of white-collar employees increased by 203 per cent, while the comparable number for manual workers was a decline of 2 per cent. The white-collar section of the labour force increased from 18.7 per cent to 42.7 per cent of the total between 1911 and 1971 while the manual share decreased from 74.6 per cent to 54.7 per cent<sup>(1)</sup>. Crozier

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(1) G S Bain and R Price, op cit, pp 339-355.

points out that:

"These changes which occur in all industrial societies have been slow and almost imperceptible, but their cumulative effects allow one to speak of a veritable administrative revolution of the twentieth century."(1)

This expansion in the administrative structure of society makes it increasingly likely that every individual will come into contact with a component part of that structure in their day-to-day activities. Very often it will be the secretary who deals with their telephone enquiry about, say, an insurance policy, answers their routine enquiry to the school regarding their child's holiday dates, or greets them when they enter the estate agent's office to obtain details of houses for sale. Even where the representative of the organisation encountered may not hold the official designation 'secretary', because she is female and works in an office then the public often bestow this title upon her. Everyone can therefore claim to have contact and dealings with a secretary and, from this personal experience, constructs a concept of the role. Because this secretary is very often able to give the enquirer access to information sought, she is frequently identified with the decision making process which brought about the policy decisions relating to the information, although in reality she is only the 'gate-keeper' of the information. She is, however, seen to have considerable power and influence, particularly when she will not permit access to the manager to whom the enquirer requires to speak. Thus although most white-collar employees occupy subordinate

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(1) M Crozier, The World of the Office Worker, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1971, p 1.

positions in the organisation, they are associated:

"with the part of the production process where authority is exercised and decisions taken."<sup>(1)</sup>

The socially constituted concept of the secretarial function may, therefore, fail to distinguish the power and authority of the secretary from that of her boss, particularly because her role derives from the managers in the organisation, who hold positions of authority and are traditionally associated with the process of decision-making.

Apart from first-hand experience in contacts with secretaries either in their work situation or in their informal friendship network, a further influential source of knowledge which affects concept formation, particularly since the 1950's, is that of television. It is perhaps surprising that no series has yet been devised which centres around the secretary and her working environment, similar perhaps to those which take the role of nurses as their central theme. However, in spite of this, secretaries do feature in a variety of television programmes. The main male characters of plays and films are frequently depicted in their offices with their secretaries playing either a minimal or significant part in their lives and in the story line. The importance of this is that these secretaries are seen as working in close proximity to a character of importance to the plot and the secretary's status may be enhanced by this very proximity. The secretary can be seen to be situated 'where the action is'.

In comedy programmes the sexual aspect of the role may be emphasised

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(1) G S Bain and R Price, 'Who is a white-collar employee?', in British Journal of Industrial Relations, Vol X No. 3, 1972, pp 325-339.

with secretaries in revealing clothes giving rise to comedy aspects with particular sexual connotations. Even fleeting references may instil a certain image in the mind of the viewer. For example, in a recent comic dissertation, Ronnie Barker held up a photograph of a glamorous blonde young woman and stated that of course that was a picture of his secretary. The secretary may therefore be associated, from such depictions, with glamorous females whose gender and eternal youth create a special element in their working role. However, the secretary is not often shown carrying out any specific working activities in these fictional roles. The stress is on the glamour of the secretarial situation, in that she is in contact with important men, close to the decision making process, and providing herself a glamorous and attractive element in office life.

The aspect of gender differentiation in the secretary/boss relationship does undoubtedly enter into the socially constituted secretarial function. This was particularly illustrated in a documentary programme on Radio 4 on 16 December 1980 entitled 'If Only Jack Could Type Like Jill'. A male secretary was interviewed and asked about the responses he received when he said that he was a secretary. He reported that invariably the first question was 'how do you get on with sitting on your boss's knee?'

Quiz programmes and particularly sports reporting on Saturday afternoons also show women carrying out clerical work. In the former it may be a woman keeping the score or handing over the questions, and in the latter women typists are a backcloth to the latest sports results. In the generic use of the title, these women may be identified again as

secretaries. It may be that the actual tasks performed are not particularly exciting, but they are seen as an integral part of the glamorous industry of television and a constituent of the leisure and pleasure activities of the viewers, so that the role is seen as desirable as an entry into such glamorous spheres of entertainment. The tasks themselves may not be analysed except in conjunction with the industry within which they are located and, as stated previously, the proximity to a famous man or exciting situation. All of this confers a glamorous image to the secretarial function.

This point is borne out by a survey made by Williams and Root which concluded that prospective secretaries had very clear preferences regarding the type of employers for whom they would like to work. At the bottom of the list were building societies, building firms, gas and electricity offices, London Transport and trade unions, none of these being mentioned as desirable by any trainee. The authors state:

"The reasons for the overwhelming popularity of the top ten employers are probably fairly complex, but their frequent exposure in the mass media, linked with glamorous situations and young people, may be an important contributive factor."(1)

Details of the type of employer which trainee secretaries would most like to work for are as follows:

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(1) R Williams and M Root 'Has your company got secretary appeal?' in Personnel Management, November 1971, p 35.

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Employers</u>	<u>Number of mentions of 'popularity'</u>
1	Airlines	70
2	Travel Agencies	51
3	BBC	50
4	Film companies	47
5	Fashion houses	36
6	Advertising agencies	26
6	Newspapers and magazines	26
8	Hospitals	25
9	Hotels	21
10	Doctors and Dentists	16
10	Oil Companies	16

(Source: R Williams and M Root, 'Has your company got secretary appeal?' in *Personnel Management*, November 1971, Table 1, pp 33-35.)

The information contained in the above table is interesting as it appeared, from personal experience, to coincide with the views of many secretarial students encountered in the classroom. Williams and Root used a sample of 171 students taking secretarial courses at three large London Colleges of Further Education. However, the authors do not state, for example, whether the students were of a specific educational standard or how the three colleges were selected and some reservations must therefore be made about the findings. Nevertheless corroborative evidence for Williams and Root's findings was cited in *The Daily Telegraph*:

"the three types of firm students most want to work in are travel (49 per cent), publishing etc (31 per cent), advertising/PR (29 per cent). Areas in which the majority will, in fact, end up, come way down the popularity list; manufacturing etc 9 per cent, accountancy 2 per cent."(1)

A further point to be made concerning the variety of organisations in which secretaries are employed is that this factor may conceal the high proportion of routine activities which are entailed in the secretarial function. The avenues available for secretarial employment are legion

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(1) Ruth Miller, 'What and Who is a Secretary?', in *The Daily Telegraph Careers Information Service*, September 1978.

and become synonymous with the work itself, while in reality in many locations the secretary spends the major part of her working day on routine activities such as typing, answering the telephone and filing. The task of filing, for example, may not be ameliorated by filing documentation such as film scripts rather than invoices. The myth is therefore created that the secretarial function entails a wide variety of activities whereas in reality the tasks are standard but can be carried out in a variety of organisations.

Newspapers and magazines also communicate information about the secretarial function. In both fictional stories and topical news items, ideas about secretaries are conveyed which contribute to the public concept. It is interesting that this written image is not confined purely to the popular 'women's' press since many articles also appear in general newspapers. For example, the Daily Mail began an article on 'How to be a Super Secretary' with:

"Four top secretaries have revealed the qualities it takes to join the élite corps of ladies who help keep Britain's high-powered executives ticking over. To begin with you need elegance, coolness and the ability to make big decisions."<sup>(1)</sup>

This emphasises the glamour to be obtained from being in close proximity to 'high-powered executives' and also refers to the importance of appearances, 'elegance' being the first quality mentioned. There is no indication or further reference in the article to how 'big decisions' are an element of the job. Each of the secretaries interviewed makes particular reference to the relationship with her boss as an important component in her job satisfaction and effectiveness:

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(1) Howard Foster, 'How to be a Super Secretary', in Daily Mail, 23 June 1980, p 3.

"in the end when all else fails and it has been a rotten day, what your boss really wants to see is a friendly face, a ready smile.

He expects to have everything completed the moment he's mentioned it. But he's an entrepreneur with a heart, and there aren't many of them around.

The important thing is to be happy in your work and to like the person you are working for."<sup>(1)</sup>

No mention is made of the tasks which each 'super secretary' has to perform, but rather the personal aspects of the function are underlined, and the hand-maiden notion is signalled as important and a positive attribute to the popularity of this kind of employment.

'Secs rear their pretty heads' in the Observer, indicates immediately the gender assumptions about the secretarial function. This piece lists a number of secretarial jobs which were currently vacant. Salaries were quoted, and other aspects of the rewards of the jobs such as 'includes a grooming allowance since it involves working for the chairman of a well-known fashion house', but no mention was made of the actual work involved in each vacancy. The opening paragraph is particularly noteworthy in relation to the sexual connotations of the work:

"The precepts of the Sex Discrimination Act aside, nobody in his right mind is going to think about 'attractive secretaries' in any other shape but that which has bumps in its shirt. So shall we proceed along the lines that secretaries to top business people are traditionally persons with those specially-shaped shirts? Girls, in fact."<sup>(2)</sup>

It is interesting that the statement implies that all secretaries work for 'top' business people, which leads one to believe that the lower level managers do not have secretaries or that their secretaries are male, both

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(1) Howard Foster, op cit, p 3.

(2) Michael Dineed, 'Secs Rear Their Pretty Heads', in The Observer, 4 February 1979, p 24.



conclusions, of course, being completely untenable.

However, not all newspaper journalists take such an uncritical stance in relation to the secretarial function. Katherine Whitehorn questioned the role in her report on a conference in London for secretaries and their managers:

"the big question remained unanswered: why is it that every little man in any office feels entitled to his own personal woman? For if she isn't typing his letters (her ostensible reason for being around) then what is she doing? I suspect the true answer would please neither bosses nor secretaries: she's making him feel good. She's making him feel there's someone he's superior to, someone who's on his side; someone with whom he can let his hair down - or even admit how he feels about losing it."(1)

Although some aspects of the role are being assessed more critically and the subordinate position of the secretary is posited, nevertheless the author retains the traditional concept of the secretary as a vital back-up to management, when she goes on:

"if the word (secretary) covers the girl who is but one up from the rubber plant, it also covers the woman who runs the firm and the woman who runs the man who runs the firm .... what would happen to management if you took away their security blanket? Do we really want an even more neurotic bunch of chaps scrambling up the power ladder, without anyone to calm them down and make them feel peaceful before they start on the long crawl home? I can't help feeling that, if we did do anything halfway sensible about secretaries, it would mean the end of civilisation as we know it."(1)

Thus, while Whitehorn begins with an initial scrutiny of the role, she concludes by justifying retention of the status quo on the grounds that an important aspect of the function is to keep male managers effective in their jobs; she thus indicates to the reader the significance of the

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(1) Katherine Whitehorn, 'Still Cast into Type', in The Observer, 18 November 1979.

contribution of the supportive element of the role. The supportive aspects are not depicted in terms of the skills which secretaries may possess, such as typing, which the boss may, as a matter of fact, be incapable of performing, but in the personal contribution of 'calming down' which is closely related to the cultural customs of wives or even, in this case, mothers.

Another assessment of the secretarial function was made in the Guardian. This article aimed to predict the future for secretaries in relation to the challenge of mechanical word processors. It suggested that more women would be in managerial positions:

"the young women who .... carry their PhD's as easily as in my generation we carried our certificates of matriculation are, naturally and without fuss, going to dictate rather than be dictated to. I hope they will make partners of their personal secretaries, as home making women have learned to make partners of the women they pay to help with their household chores. I never expected any secretary of mine to make my tea or coffee. Why should I? .... Such secretaries can have great power without overt responsibility. That used to be how the role of the harlot was described - but in our day, few people would really resent being dubbed Mr (or Mrs) Fixit." (1)

It is interesting that analogies are drawn with other traditionally female roles of household cleaners and harlots and that although making the tea is dismissed as an inappropriate part of the secretarial function, the second-hand power implicit in the work is condoned, in spite of the fact that the lack of overt responsibility may in reality make the work less attractive to many practising secretaries and contribute to their resultant lack of status.

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(1) Mary Stott, 'I never expected any secretary of mine to make my tea or coffee. Why should I?', in The Guardian, 12 March 1980, p 9.

Magazines also deal, in a variety of guises, with the secretarial function. Some fictional stories are set in offices and give brief instances of office activities. 'My Stanley - who is perfect' was one such story. This covered the conversation of office staff on the engagement of one of its members. It suggests that little interaction in the office concerns the work in which all are supposedly participating, but rather that the care of their male partners is of paramount importance. The office is depicted as a cosy female enclave where time is available for typically and traditionally female chatter. One of the office girls is married to a male employee in the office, indicating the romantic attachments in this working situation. Romantic associations are stressed, which override the mundane and routine office activities referred to, so that filing is seen as an opportunity to display the engagement ring on the girl's left hand, rather than as a routine and monotonous activity:

"Rosemary dropped two boxes on to Karen's desk.

'You can file these today ....'

Karen's left hand drifted nervously over the larger card box. The little diamond twinkled .... Karen reached, with her left hand, for an index card, and began to slide cards into place ....

For the next hour the office was quiet. The only sounds were my typewriter, Karen as she sorted the fifteen hundred cards in those boxes, and Rosemary's red heels as she went back and forth from our office to the next .... her voice stopped. We both looked up, surprised, and saw Rosemary shining. She smiled at her Bill, the tall man in the brown corduroy suit who stood in the doorway (of the office).

'Coffee?' he asked. Rosemary gave a little shake and hurried across the room, red heels tapping, face glowing. They strolled down the hall, holding hands."<sup>(1)</sup>

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(1) Ila Sprague McGinnis, 'My Stanley - who is perfect', in Woman, 13 September 1980, pp 54-55.

McNally makes the interesting observation that the perpetuation of the notion that women enter office work primarily because it is a fruitful area in which to acquire a husband, assists the maintenance of the current lack of status and promotional prospects for secretaries:

"It is time that this ridiculous perception of the female secretary as office predator is dismantled once and for all. While it persists, it constitutes part of the ideological ammunition of those who wish to keep the secretary in her place."<sup>(1)</sup>

Articles about secretaries often appear in women's magazines which are primarily geared to the younger reader. Anna Raeburn began her treatise on secretaries in one of these magazines with a list of activities which she had been called upon to carry out when she was a secretary:

"In ten years as a secretary, I have hired domestics for my boss, ordered provisions, babysat his distraught girlfriends, collected children, deposited dry cleaning, walked dogs, kept wives apart, maintained three different versions of a story for three different pairs of ears, chosen his presents, scored dope and gone to bed with him .... In the meantime of course I've typed all day, every day, and sometimes part of the night. I've reorganised the filing, taken letters from faulty tape recorders and illegible notes, cut stencils, worked switchboards, made photocopies, brewed endless tea and coffee and built up a fine set of biceps shifting boxes of stationery and filing cabinets."<sup>(2)</sup>

She goes on to compare this with her current situation of being a boss and employing a secretary:

"My second secretary was great, a woman of my age with no shorthand, but typing as good as mine at its best, well read, funny; loyal, supportive, hard-working and totally reliable .... we had two and a half years together and we still joke that without each other we'd never have got this far. What's more, I think it's true."<sup>(2)</sup>

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(1) F McNally, op cit, p 65.

(2) Anna Raeburn, 'On Secretaries', in Cosmopolitan, February 1980, pp 26-27.

The opening list of tasks certainly includes many of the more mundane activities which many secretaries are called upon to undertake. However they are presented in an amusing and witty manner, by an ex-secretary who has achieved sufficient fame to be recognised by all, which may influence the perception of the tasks by the reader. Furthermore the list does hint at great variety being an integral part of the work, indeed many may not be averse to being paid for walking dogs, shopping and looking after children - activities which women have traditionally come to accept as occupations for which they have a special aptitude. Raeburn also speaks of her secretaries in a manner which suggests their vital role in a partnership of equals, rather than as the secretary being a subordinate extension of another individual. She also quotes the case of a legendary American 'esconced in the Hilton' whose secretaries were required to have particularly high levels of ability in the skills and says:

"I doubt if the girls had time to think, but they made a great deal of money".(1)

The glamour of working for 'a legendary American in the Hilton' is drawn to the attention of the reader together with the obvious reward of high salary. Another example cited, illustrates the rewards to be reaped from being in a situation of indispensibility:

"a doctor I knew went through two years of trauma when his efficient secretary retired because although he could find women who could handle his patients and women who could keep accounts and women who could take dictation, he could not find a paragon who could do all three."(1)

The relationship between the secretary and her boss is assessed as precarious in that:

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(1) Anna Raeburn, op cit, pp 26-27.

"at best, the boss/secretary relationship is one of complementary working partners, each secure enough to acknowledge that their contributions are different but equally important. At worst, it's a marriage without sex, a power game leading to loyalties without reward, sublimation and confusion all the way round."<sup>(1)</sup>

The article quoted above was a more sober analysis of the secretarial function than an earlier one by Margaret Fishley in the same magazine, which overtly glamorised the possibilities for secretarial work:

"By no means does every secretary want to change her role. There can be a lot of thrills, and even a chance of travelling, if you are secretary to a film star, business tycoon, or best-selling author. Which would you prefer? Roving the world with Elizabeth Taylor, or holding a responsible, administrative job in a grey industrial town? And think of the responsibility you could have if you were a secretary in the Prime Minister's office. You may have access to confidential information which Fleet Street reporters would give their eye-teeth to know."<sup>(2)</sup>

The image is constructed of a world of famous and glamorous figures, each seeking a secretary, who would partake of the romance and excitement of the stars. Yet many low level managers work in 'grey industrial towns' and they, too, seek secretaries. Even if secretarial posts with film stars were full of 'thrills', the opportunities for acquiring such a position must be limited statistically. The glamour is derived from the person for whom the secretary works and the important distinction between the work itself and the prominence of the person for whom such work is performed is mystified.

McNally refers to the 'Marcia Williams Myth'<sup>(3)</sup> of work which involves affairs of national importance, and she suggests that the work itself

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(1) Anna Raeburn, op cit, pp 26-27.

(2) Margaret Fishley, 'The Secretary Trap', in Cosmopolitan, February 1979, pp 69-70.

(3) F McNally, op cit, p 53.

may be much more humble than the image created from first impressions. It was, therefore, of interest that the Sunday Times devoted a page of its colour supplement to describe a day in the life of Marcia Williams. The details of her work for Harold Wilson exemplify the personal nature of the work and contain explicit illustrative material of the transference of household activities to the working role of some secretaries. Yet these issues are transmitted to the reader as worthy and notable activities, particularly because of the high-powered men around whom they revolve:

"I've been connected with his (Harold Wilson's) constituency for 25 years now so I do know Huyton. I haven't had to discuss things with him while he's been ill; I can guess the sort of things he would like done. He and Mary are coming to lunch today to meet Humphrey Berkeley who's doing a book on him. I've been giving more business lunches than usual for him here because he doesn't want to go trekking round restaurants at the moment. Mary's had a tough time looking after him so it's a day off for her to come here, too. Ironically, after years of helping him to slim, we're trying to feed him up."<sup>(1)</sup>

This amply illustrates the reasons why secretaries have been dubbed 'office wives'.

The magazine Company invariably includes in its monthly issues an article about work with specific reference to women. In October 1979 it produced a questionnaire concerning secretarial work, which readers were requested to complete. The preamble to the questionnaire suggested that one problem was the low status of secretaries and that one of the reasons for this was that secretaries undervalued their own abilities:

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(1) Pauline Peters, 'A life in the day of Marcia Falkender', in The Sunday Times Magazine, 28 December 1980, p 54.

"'You see, I'm not very clever ....', 'I haven't any qualifications at all', 'There's very little else I could do'. Yet all this from girls doing exceedingly responsible work, trusted to guard their boss's secrets, to be loyal, to arrange complicated schedules, to type letters and memos, to correct bad grammar and spelling .... I know countless people who couldn't do their work: some because they can't type, can't write English well, don't understand filing, are hopeless on the phone and can't organise diaries .... some because it takes a fair amount of good nature, good humour and an ability to get on with others to be a secretary. These qualities don't carry O-levels but they do deserve credit.'"(1)

The magazine was apparently attempting to make a serious analysis of the secretarial function, yet it could not resist the opportunity of portraying the traditional image of the secretary as a woman with few formal qualifications, carrying out responsible work, within a framework of traditionally feminine personal qualities. Rather than suggesting that the secretary could be invested with responsibility and consequent recognition for more areas of administrative tasks, it only makes the plea for more recognition of the tasks and particularly the role, which the secretarial function has traditionally entailed. Yet these activities are almost totally supervised and carried out in accordance with the directions given by another - a situation which generally does not carry high status. Furthermore secretaries are unable to claim a monopoly of the body of knowledge and skills upon which their function has developed. Young suggests that the extent to which a body of knowledge is socially valued depends on the extent to which there is restricted access to this knowledge and opportunities for those who do have access to it to legitimise its higher status and control its availability<sup>(2)</sup>. From this it must be estimated that improved status will not result simply from claiming recognition for the traditional secretarial role,

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(1) Sally Adams, 'Could secretaries do better?', in Company, October 1979, pp 47-51.

(2) M Young 'An Approach to the Study of Curricula as Socially Organised Knowledge' in Knowledge and Control, (ed M Young), Collier-MacMillan, London, 1971, p 33.



but rather that a radical reform of the very nature of the function must be sought.

All the documentary evidence cited tends to stress, to a greater or lesser extent, the glamorous aspects of the secretarial function and the important female attributes necessary in the work of keeping the boss calm and efficient. The secretary's duty is to remain cool, smiling and pleasant to all comers at all times. There has been little recognition of the subordinate, submissive and sometimes servile stance that may be necessary to carry out such prescriptions of the function. Naturally, alternative views are propounded, but these tend to be in more specialist magazines with smaller circulations, and, therefore, it is estimated that their impact on the socially constituted image may be minimal in comparison with the mythological concept generally created by the popular press. For example, Spare Rib, a feminist publication, produced an article 'Are you a typewriter' concerning secretarial work. This stated that there was a horizontal division of labour, where the boss undertook the higher level activities which provided responsibility and interest, while the secretary was allotted the low level tasks which were routine and monotonous:

"too often it's (secretarial work) unbearably boring, there's overwork with no overtime pay, there's responsibility for mistakes but no credit, and there are conditions and pay scales no man would accept."(1)

The article also points to the general image which emerges from the media as an unrealistic but alluring picture for young girls deciding on work opportunities:

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(1) Clare Cherrington, 'Are you a typewriter?', in Spare Rib, Issue No 69, April 1978, p 6.

"Besides the pressure from home, and school, the media shower glittery images about secretarial work on young girls - images the polar opposite of any real situation the girl is likely to encounter. Magazine stories promise marriage with the boss, the colleges promise interest, the ads as always promise everything."(1)

It is important not to ignore the power of advertisements in the creation of the secretarial image. A plethora of office vacancies appears daily in most newspapers, many of which are for secretarial posts. While it is true that many of these advertisements make a simple statement of job title, age of applicant, qualifications required and salary, on the other hand a great many are devised to excite the imagination in relation to the prospects, office atmosphere, and personalities of those employed in the particular organisation. Frequently the advertisements are personalised in such a way as to suggest a reflection of the relationships to be found for the successful applicant. No other category of jobs appears to be advertised in this manner, but there are similarities with the way in which many houses are described in sales advertisements, a matter which has received considerable publicity in recent years. It is perhaps significant that The Times heads the secretarial category of vacancy as 'La Crème de la Crème'. This suggests top level, female jobs, where perhaps all applicants are expected to be in the mould of one of Jean Brodie's girls<sup>(2)</sup>. The following sample, taken from one edition of this newspaper, illustrates the terminology used and the glamorised image presented:

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(1) Clare Cherrington, op cit, p 6.

(2) Muriel Spark, The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, MacMillan, London, 1961.

"You will be assisting a charming Deputy Creative Director of this well-known London advertising agency. Although you will need those sec.skills, including some fast typing speeds and shorthand, you will mostly need a real ability to be a PA, manage his diary, assist him in his creative projects and generally become involved in his work.

We have to replace Lesley, who is leaving after ten eventful years. We're a small, busy advertising agency in pleasant offices just off Regent Street. Your potential colleagues are talented, but volatile, so you will need both a sense of order and a sense of humour. Impeccable fast typing and reasonable shorthand are essential. You will take your share of reception duties (fortunately our clients are all charming people) and generally help us all make good advertising and a decent standard of living. It would be nice if you could come to see us soon so that Les can help us make sure we'll all be happy together.

Newly established firm of West End Estate Agents offer terrific opportunity for first class PA/Sec seeking job satisfaction, to be directly involved in running a rapidly growing business. Previous experience helpful, but personality and driving licence essential.

A well-known property company needs a well-groomed, tactful and efficient secretary able to hold the fort in the Chairman's absence. You will work in luxurious offices in W.1.

You will be working for an Account Manager on a well-known film account and you will be very much his assistant. You will need your sec. skills, but your ability to deal with people, especially aggressive, creative, film people, will stand you in good stead. Very fast working atmosphere, sometimes unusual time keeping, not for the clock watcher."<sup>(1)</sup>

Many of these advertisements were placed by secretarial agencies rather than directly by the prospective employers. These agencies play a dominant role in secretarial employment, both in terms of their numbers

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(1) The Times, 11 December 1980, p 24.

and their part in the creation of the secretarial image. In 1977 there were about 5,500 agencies, of which the largest single group dealt with office staff<sup>(1)</sup>. The agencies usually occupy premises in the high streets of every large town and display tempting secretarial job advertisements in their shop windows. Labour Exchanges were originally intended to provide the service, which private employment agencies now claim to do, of bringing together employers and suitable applicants for vacancies. However, the Labour Exchanges in the 1930's became associated with unemployment registration, and subsequently they gained a reputation for dealing with the placement of unskilled and semi-skilled manual workers. Their historical associations tended to make them less attractive to those who were seeking white-collar employment<sup>(2)</sup>. In spite of the fact that a new image was attempted by the Government in the creation of smart, modern Job Centres in town centres in the 1970's, with an executive register, private agencies continue to flourish and few trainee secretaries consider approaching Job Centres for employment advice, but rather consult private agencies or apply direct to employers.

Because of both the prominent sites occupied by office employment agencies and the nature of their extensive advertising, they may be considered to have made an important contribution to the mythology of secretarial work. It has been demonstrated by citing examples of advertisements, that they present tempting visions of future employment in glamorous industries, luxurious surroundings, with exciting people. Much more information is given about the prospective applicant's

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(1) DE Gazette, September 1977, HMSO London, p 981.

(2) NBFI Report, Office Staff Employment Agencies: Charges and Salaries, HMSO London, 1968.

working environment than about the work itself, thus emphasising and enhancing the importance of this aspect of the work. The underlying assumption is also made that it will be necessary for the secretary to make the relevant adjustments to her personality to fit in with other members of the office team and particularly her boss, rather than that the boss will need to adjust in any way whatsoever to produce a viable working partnership. The onus is laid solely upon the secretary. This feature of the advertising literature, however, becomes subsumed by the glorification of the prospective boss and the industry to which he is attached. The proliferation of advertising material containing secretarial job descriptions such as 'initiative necessary', 'responsible position', 'variety', 'fantastic promotional prospects', not only influences the image of the work, but defies the reality that the majority of secretarial jobs, by their very nature, do not exhibit these characteristics. Much of the frustration experienced by many secretaries may be exacerbated by the expectations generated by this advertising jargon.

It is of interest that recent advertisements for another traditionally female occupation, namely nursing, attempted to lay bare the mythology surrounding the secretary. The picture showed a girl carrying a tray of tea cups entering the Conference Room with the slogan 'is this what you struggled to get your 'A' levels for?' It went on:

"The feeling that you're in a cul-de-sac rather than a career. That although you're always busy, you don't actually achieve a lot. And you wonder why all those exam certificates don't equip you for more than making appointments and endless cups of coffee."(1)

The cynic may interpret it as asking girls to exchange the tea cups for the bedpan.

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(1) The Sunday Times Magazine, 28 October 1980, pp 74-75.

The promotional prospects for secretaries are also alluded to in many advertisements. However, it is not simply as a result of such literature that there is a commonly held assumption that secretarial jobs are an entrée to other spheres of employment, particularly that of management. In *Girl About Town*, a magazine donated, free of charge, to railway travellers at London's main-line termini, a Sarah Hodge is quoted as saying:

"A growing number of girls now see secretarial work as the entrée to a managerial or professional career .... excluding graduates, four in five girls over 21, seeking work as secretaries or personal assistants, were capable of fulfilling junior executive roles .... she expected a growing demand for senior secretaries and shorthand typists who could take on other than secretarial work from most companies."(1)

Sarah Hodge herself may be intended to exemplify these promotion prospects becoming reality as she was being interviewed on her appointment as chief executive of a recruitment consultancy organisation.

Another woman who may be deemed to have made the transission into management was Mary Overton who opened an agency for Female Executives and was featured in the *Telegraph Sunday Magazine*. She is quoted as saying:

"The kind of woman I can help will be about 32. She has proved that she has staying power. All her job movements will have been logical steps in a career. She is now ready to stop being someone's top secretary and step on to the executive ladder."(2)

Bernard Marks' book '*Once upon a Typewriter*' tells of twelve secretaries, eleven of whom have become managers. One of these says that a secretarial post is a particularly good vantage point from which to learn management techniques:

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- (1) 'Smarter than the boss', in *Girl About Town*, 3 March 1980, No 374, p 3.
  - (2) 'Ladies, Choose your weapons on the Executive Ladder', in the *Sunday Telegraph Magazine*, 15 March 1980, pp 10-12.

"You can learn what managers do simply by listening to them at work. Many a 21 year old man would give his eye teeth for such an opportunity - girls earn the opportunity with secretarial skills".(1)

However, in his introductory remarks Marks does point out that only 4 per cent of managers are in fact women and goes on:

"This means, of course, that our twelve successes represent the very small minority of women who have pushed their way through some of the career barriers. Nonetheless, they all stress that what they have done, others can also do. It will be interesting to see how long we wait for that 4 per cent to grow to 14 per cent and beyond."(2)

A careers magazine also suggests that secretarial work is a form of management training, implying that it leads to prospects of employment at managerial level:

"it is a supportive role to management but managers are becoming more enlightened and trained to delegate .... to treat their secretaries with the respect they deserve, to think of them as part of the management team .... what better training for junior management than to work alongside senior management?"(3)

The figures for women in employment were given in the Sunday Times as follows:

"50 per cent of women work, what of them? Indeed, what of them. Only 11 per cent are managers, 3 per cent are directors, 1 per cent are bank managers and 7 per cent are solicitors."(4)

Whichever statistics are selected, although many vary in percentage terms, it is inescapably apparent that few women do hold management positions. Of these, some may indeed have begun their working lives as secretaries,

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(1) Bernard Marks, Once Upon a Typewriter, Arrow Books, London, 1974, p 2.

(2) ibid, p 4.

(3) Edna Body, 'The Changing Face, Function and Future of the Secretary', in New Sixth, Vol 12 No 3, November/December 1978, p 4.

(4) Audrey Slaughter, 'Life and Death of Superwoman', in The Sunday Times, 7 December 1980, p 39.

yet the current situation must suggest that the likelihood of transferring directly from a secretarial to a managerial position is slender. Yet through the medium of advertising, newspapers, magazines and television, the myth is perpetuated that this is a reasonable aspiration for the competent secretary. McNally speaks of the fostering of ambitious hopes and relates this to the following quotation:

"Promotion opportunities for secretaries are legion. The fascinating world of business is alive with endless possibilities for still greater advancement. Secretarial experience is often the 'way in' to interesting and highly paid posts in big firms and organisations. Many prominent women in the advertising world started their working lives as secretaries, and the knowledge they gained during those early years led to the wider horizons of advertising .... Women executives in senior Government positions have graduated from the ranks of secretaries. A large percentage of successful business women also started life in this way."(1)

Even for those who are content to remain within the secretarial sphere of employment, the great variety of job titles which has been coined in recent years suggests that a career structure exists, which when experienced provides nothing more than different titles for very similar jobs. There is simply no clearcut differentiation between the duties, pay or status of a personal secretary, executive secretary or personal assistant. Yet the titles suggest to the uninitiated a promotional structure within secretarial work. No doubt this is one of the reasons why secretarial workers are encouraged to define their own promotion in terms of that of their boss's position in the hierarchy. This obscures the lack of prospects which many secretaries in fact experience. McNally claims that:

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(1) B Rowe, The Private Secretary, London Museum Press, 1967, pp 14-15 quoted in F McNally, op cit, p 53.



"in many ways she (the secretary) is the twentieth century version of the male clerk of a former age - a picture of uncomplaining servitude made tolerable by never-to-befulfilled aspirations for the future."(1)

Even where a secretary accepts promotion in terms of obtaining an appointment to a higher status boss, this may not in fact result in more interesting or demanding work for the secretary. This point was made by a practising secretary:

"The next step up now is to someone higher up the hierarchy. I was secretary to the Sales Manager, then to the Financial Director, then to the MD and now to the Chairman. In this system you never use the knowledge you acquired in the previous job - it's expertise wasted. Your scope doesn't increase as you move up. On the contrary the higher up the ladder the boss, the less chance for the secretary to make decisions. The boss will have someone lower down the management ladder to delegate to, rather than to the secretary."(2)

Yet the implication of many secretarial job advertisements is that the most rewarding and interesting jobs are those where the secretary is attached to a high-ranking official of an organisation.

Perhaps another aspect of the popular literature on the secretarial function results from unconscious desires to mystify the work itself. This is the emphasis that is placed on both the appearance of the secretary and the attractiveness of her surroundings. As was shown in the job advertisements quoted earlier, the appeal of the office within which she will be working frequently receives mention. While it is recognised that pleasant surroundings may be an asset in any situation, nonetheless the significance of this aspect of the working situation is

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(1) F McNally, op cit, p 59.

(2) Ruth Miller, 'What and Who is a Secretary?', op cit.

not of prime or paramount importance in contrast with the actual work to be performed. Indeed it has been recognised that people doing extremely monotonous or routine jobs, such as those in centralised audio typing pools, need to be given improved amenities and surroundings in order to compensate for the nature of the work. The attempt to recruit physically attractive secretaries relates not only to the desire of men to possess status symbols which are in part categorised in terms of their sexual appeal, but also to the desire of women, propounded in many magazines, to possess an attractive appearance. Many magazines carry articles on current fashion trends and often present suggestions on suitable clothes to wear to the office. These contribute both to the suggestion that personal appearance is a primary concern for women in office work and also to the notion that this is a feature of life which should particularly interest women. Whitcomb suggests:

"an attractively turned-out secretary is not only a decorative asset; her tasteful appearance marks her as being pretty smart - and the boss as quite a clever fellow for having chosen her."(1)

Secretaries and their work are a recurrent theme in the various communication processes of the mass media. Since this situation occurs in general fields of communication, the world of the secretary appears to be a popular topic for discussion, not only in specialist magazines and books for practitioners or trainees, but also for the general public. It is possible to distil from the vast amount of material produced, a generalised image of the secretarial function. The picture emerges of a romanticised and idealised notion of office life and in

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(1) H and J Whitcomb, Strictly for Secretaries, Hurst and Blackett, London, 1959, p 44.

particular of the secretary's situation. The enticing illusion is created of a glamorous form of employment, rubbing shoulders with famous, important and authoritative men who are at the power-base of commerce, industry, government or leisure industries. The secretary's traditional female attributes and qualities come to the fore in this situation, as she smooths the furrowed brow of anxious executives in turmoil. With serenity she tackles an enormous variety of tasks, in her luxuriously appointed office. Her grooming and attractiveness reflect on her boss, whose effectiveness and status are enhanced by her presence. With experience her competence will be rewarded by promotion to top level secretarial posts, where she will be attached to managers of increasingly high level status and authority. The alert secretary will use this experience to learn about the managerial function into which she will eventually be promoted.

In spite of the fact that many practising secretaries may recognise such descriptions as fallacious, this view continues to be propounded and serves to denote the secretarial function as socially constituted.

### CHAPTER III

#### THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF THE SECRETARIAL FUNCTION

The following discussion focuses on theoretical issues which may be derived from the accounts of the nature of secretarial work and popular images of secretaries, which were the concern of the preceding two Chapters. The theoretical issues which are explored and developed relate to gender and patriarchal relations in the office culture. Other conceptually separate, but inter-related theoretical issues also illuminate the secretarial function. These will also be discussed and include vertical solidarity, mental/manual division of labour.

The secretarial function has been shown to be an essentially supportive and submissive role undertaken almost exclusively by women, which is in sharp contrast to the public image of the secretarial function, which defines both the important elements of the work and also how people think secretaries ought to behave. This public definition of the role relates closely to the expectations of female behaviour generally and although it can be argued that differences between men's and women's roles have diminished in recent years, they have by no means disappeared. On the whole it is still anticipated that men will be aggressive, achievement orientated and dominant, while women are expected to be passive, gentle and submissive. Cultural pressures from society encourage people to behave in specific predetermined ways. A great deal of literature exists about the socialisation of men and women, but it is believed appropriate

in the context of this investigation, to concentrate on those aspects which relate directly to secretarial work. For instance, Harriet Holter points out that once roles become established society tends to reward participants for conforming to them and to punish those who do not:

"When a man takes the initiative, for example, the social approval he earns serves as a primary reward which confirms his feelings of masculinity and reinforces his conformity with the norms of his sex role. Initiative can also earn secondary rewards such as success in the job, economic gain, and political power. A woman who is passive and seeks protection thereby earns a primary reward, the high esteem of her femininity by herself and others. She may also gain a secondary reward such as a husband who provides for her economically."(1)

It is clear that very similar rewards may be achieved by those who conform to the stereotyped version of the 'ideal secretary', where an aggressive woman striving to gain promotion into the businessman's world may be socially punished with the stigma of being labelled 'masculine'.

There is a high degree of compatibility between women's roles in society generally and behaviour expected in the secretarial function. Therefore, an important contributory factor in the potential and practising secretary's acceptance, to a great extent, of the socially constituted image of her role is that she may be actively seeking to accord to behavioural norms prescribed by her cultural background. She comes to feel that it is the 'natural' position of women to play a supportive and subordinate role in relation to a dominant male boss.

Korda illustrates traditional attitudes and interpretations of personal qualities befitting women when he states that the characteristics which

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(1) H Holter, Sex Roles and Social Structure, Universitetsforlaget, Oslo, 1970, pp 34-35.

would be rewarded in an aspiring young man would be severely censured in an aspiring young woman:

"A man is assertive, a woman is bitchy; a man shows signs of knowing when to take the initiative, a woman always wants her own way; a man requests the opinions of his more experienced colleagues, a woman is a troublesome nuisance who has no confidence in her own judgements."<sup>(1)</sup>

According to Korda, if a woman is not permitted to progress up the career ladder by displaying those attributes which are required of men, she is obliged to use feminine wiles to get her there. For this, she will be accused of being temperamental and emotional, and told to stop acting like a woman<sup>(2)</sup>.

There are in fact two major contradictory elements in the popular depiction of the secretarial function. In the first place the image is created of secretaries with 'natural' and appropriate feminine qualities such as charm, tact, diplomacy, loyalty; while at the same time it is forcefully implied that secretarial work is a promotional springboard to managerial and executive status. However, managers are generally expected to be assertive, quickwitted, dynamic, innovatory - qualities which are not described as being at the heart of the secretarial function. If, therefore, secretaries are called upon to display only traditionally feminine orientated qualities, they may have little opportunity to expose those qualities and abilities which would demonstrate their eminent suitability for promotion to an executive post.

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(1) M Korda, Male Chauvinism: How it Works, Barrie and Jenkins, London, 1974, p 39.

(2) These interpretations of gender orientated qualities are, of course, man-made evaluative judgements, rather than objective assessments, but do serve to illustrate gender differentiation in personality assessments which have a strong bearing on the secretarial function.

A more detailed theoretical exploration of the secretarial function indicates the potency of the popular secretarial image and provides plausible reasons as to the apparent acceptability of both the image created and reality experienced by practitioners.

Evidence has been given which highlights the paradoxical situation of the public availability of the function, while at the same time the secretary's job in reality lacks specificity. Each individual situation is open to negotiation and governed by an inter-strata personal relationship. The issues which permeate every area of theoretical discussion are gender differentiation and the patriarchal relations<sup>(1)</sup> which are engendered in the office culture in general and in the secretary's location in particular.

The socially generated mythological projection of the secretary provides ideological ammunition for its gender classification. It is depicted as clean, glamorous, non-physical, mental labour, yet not overtaxing intellectually, and any male undertaking the work attracts dubious attention. Any sphere of employment which bears the label of 'women's work' carries with it connotations of inferiority, since the feminine characteristics which are thought to be necessary in the work are not ones that are highly valued in society generally. Status disparity for the secretary is surmounted both by the generalised ideological

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(1) Patriarchal relations is used in the sense adopted by Rowbotham:

"Patriarchal authority is based on male control over the woman's productive capacity, and over her person."

S Rowbotham, Woman's Consciousness Man's World, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1973, p 117.

concept of the 'natural' location of women in a subordinate relationship to a dominant male, as well as by means of specific gender induced incentives which pervade many boss/secretary relationships. The latter include flattery, small gifts, and the reassurance of indispensability in fulfilling their caring role as women. In other words the working partnership is governed by patriarchal relations.

Each secretarial position is unique and depends primarily on the individual requirements of the boss who circumscribes the normative values as well as the nature of the tasks undertaken by the secretary. Job descriptions are rarely established and therefore within this personalised and privatised relationship a negotiable partnership is subsumed. The extent to which a situation can be said to be ill-defined determines the area available for negotiation and in this particular working situation results in a complex relationship where gender factors may often subscribe to the exploitation of the secretary. The dominant position of the male permits the horizontal division of tasks and activities, whereby the secretary is usually allotted the lower level routine activities. When she is permitted to contribute to more responsible tasks, such as the compilation of reports, these are invariably attributed to the boss. Little overt recognition is therefore accorded to the secretary by those outside the working team and the crucial part which some secretaries play in their bosses' success goes unrecognised. Although the secretary's conditions appear to contain major elements of alienation the situation is essentially maintained by the patterns of personalised gratification exhibited by the boss, and the fundamental reinforcing agent of satisfaction gained from fulfilment of the normative requirements of womanhood in caring, nurturing and serving.



The bond created between the boss and his secretary is contingent upon the establishment of patriarchal control. The confidentiality, tact, diplomacy and loyalty exhibited by the secretary are essential both to the creation of a viable working couplet and to the provision of fertile conditions for an almost automatic compliance with the patriarchal nature of the relationship. Yet such a relationship between employer and employee is indeed rare in the workplace. The situation creates a unifying force, to be called vertical solidarity, between workers from different strata of the organisation. The usual patterns of allegiance and identification within the working framework are undoubtedly in relationships with working peers, to be called horizontal solidarity.

The main proposition in this debate is that horizontal solidarity amongst secretarial workers would suggest an inherently oppositional positioning to the intrinsic features of their day-to-day activities. The axiomatic situation of the secretary is dependent on secrecy, protection and intimacy in terms of both information and relationships. Therefore, it is contended that a necessary, essential and inevitable feature of the boss/secretary relationship is the formation of vertical solidarity.

One of the major reasons for the unusual inter-strata vertical solidarity is that the boss/secretary relationship necessitates an interdependence particularly in terms of status acquisition. The secretary derives status by virtue of the standing of her boss, while he in turn is attributed status not only by the acquisition of a secretary but also according to

her measurability in relation to the mythological 'perfect secretary'. This interdependence enhances patterns of loyalty, which could be strained if the secretary made certain use of the knowledge to which she has access by virtue of her position, should she, for instance, be suspected of divulging managerial policy information to her peers. For a variety of reasons, therefore, both sides of the partnership encourage vertical solidarity. However, these lines of allegiance may be seen as contributing to the isolatory positioning of the secretary and the passivity of this sector of the workforce. The unique nature of the secretary's relationship with her boss, the secret and confidential aspect of part of her work, her loyalty to her boss and management in general - all serve to distance her from her working peers. It is little wonder that few secretaries seek unionisation even when problematic situations exist. The very conditions of her working location militate against the horizontal allegiances defined in trade union membership. When conditions become intolerable she usually takes the individualised action of seeking alternative, yet similar, employment with another boss, and attempts to create a more satisfactory vertical relationship within the same sphere of employment.

Clearly secretaries are not an integral part of any managerial structure since they possess neither the standing nor the powers inherent in managerial status. The secretary may supervise the work of a junior clerk, but would not have the ultimate authority to hire or fire any employee. She may be responsible for a petty cash fund, but is not granted the power of decision making on major monetary transactions. However, both social constructions of the function and the realities of the work demand and realise vertical solidarity in allegiance to and identification with management.

Peripheral status trappings are aspects of the work which aid the maintenance of vertical solidarity. The secretary often works in the pleasant surroundings of her private carpeted office, with personal telephone, located in the 'corridors of power'. She therefore possesses the outward signs of managerial status, yet her work is often routine in nature and her pay bears little comparison with that of management, being more closely aligned to levels of remuneration of manual and blue collar workers. The existence of gender differentiation contributes to the valuation of superficial status symbols above the intrinsic rewards of the job, which leads to the mystification of the crucial distinctions between employer and employee in terms of power, status and reward. Her condition of false consciousness is therefore enforced by gender factors which continue to assist the oppression of women in offices generally, and particularly those involved in secretarial work. The rewards offered for the work are those which stress feminine characteristics. Their categorisation as genuine rewards assists the perpetuation of women's traditional role and gender differentiation produces an example of the circular nature of the arguments which help to contain women within specific confined activities.

It is undeniable that the secretarial function exhibits features of control. The secretary is the communication filter between the boss and the world beyond his office door. She therefore performs the role of gatekeeper which permits control of both written and oral accessibility. This exemplifies another feature of the work which lends itself readily to alliances of vertical solidarity. The control elements of the function may not only be confused with executive power by the secretary, but may also provide the various facets of the function

which are categorised as the more rewarding and interesting elements of the job by many secretaries. It is suggested that the main reason for this is that it is in this area of the work that traditional female attributes of servitude are seen to be vital and the secretary's ability to manipulate particular modes of femininity are of paramount importance.

It is of particular importance to note the features of the work which provide satisfaction for the secretary and are categorised as important elements of the job in social constructs of the work. The main pivot of the argument contained by this observation is that conventional notions of skill cannot easily be applied to this aspect of the function. On the other hand, shorthand and typewriting abilities are the aspects of the work which can be objectively tested and rated in terms of skill application. Paradoxically, the skills of shorthand and typewriting, the acquisition of which require a considerable amount of time and which comprise the exclusive component of the secretary's function in relation to the abilities of the boss, are debased. One of the major reasons for this must be the 'women only' tag with which the skills have been labelled. However, the production of mailable typed transcripts demands a good command of English, an understanding of the nature and purpose of the documentation, an aesthetic appreciation, which are all constituents of the total transcription skill.

Since the skill of typewriting in particular is seen as predominantly manipulative then it may be estimated to be the manual element of the secretarial function, as against the mental labour involved in the controlling tasks performed by the secretary. There tends to be a mental/manual division of labour generally, with consequent degradation

of the manual labourer. Yet many jobs, including that of secretary, exhibit both manual and mental features, which suggests that particular spheres of employment are not easy to categorise as either mental or manual labour.

The general degradation of the skills element in the secretarial function promotes further incentives for enhancement of the personal service facets of the work, and must also interact with the notion that manual labour is not befitting of women. In addition, the public image of the secretary provides promotional advocacy for the importance of these rather superficial aspects of the secretarial function. However, the enhancement of these personal service areas of the work tends to deflect from the considerable real skills and abilities necessary in the job. The skills simply cannot be categorised a priori as 'naturally' female abilities. Furthermore, it may take considerable ability, intelligence and commonsense to apply the skills well within the administrative function. This area of knowledge and ability could, therefore, be taken as a feature of the secretarial function, which if exploited, could assist the improvement in status of the secretary in her own right. Yet the skills are almost universally negated by the general notion of their ease of acquisition and application, as well as by their connections with exclusively female occupations. Indeed many practitioners themselves, in addition to trainee secretaries, overlook the values which may be derived from promoting the essential skills as 'tools of the trade' which demark their working location from that of their boss. However, the identification of elements of the work which discriminate and differentiate the skills and abilities of the boss from those of his secretary automatically implies the consequent

allegiance of the secretary with other office workers. The fear of many employers must be that such horizontal solidarity would jeopardise the vertical solidarity and patriarchal relationship thereby maintained. Employers may be considered to have a vested interest in assisting the promotion of the socially constructed concept of their secretaries' function.

The influential nature of the exceptional working relationship created between the boss and his secretary should not be underestimated. Not only does it act as a vehicle for the maintenance of the secretary in her current position with little opportunity to demonstrate abilities and qualities which would provide evidence for eligibility for promotion, but it also affirms the validity of patriarchal control. Furthermore, the role of the woman in this particular working situation legitimises the traditional female role in the home of serving a male in the minutiae of domestic life. This exemplifies the circular reinforcement of gender differentiation, patriarchal control and vertical solidarity, both in working and domestic life and the secretary can be identified as a link in the reproduction of gender.

An almost impenetrable circular argument is established in which women's work, and the secretarial function in particular, reinforces women's devaluation. The aspects of the function which attract public recognition are the feminine qualities necessary in the job, rather than the abilities essential to administer a busy office. Public attention is therefore drawn to the aspects which are accorded inferior status and women are identified, and come to see themselves, as possessing only those qualities appropriate to women's work and which bear a strong resemblance to the

traditional role of women as homemakers. The strength of this argument lies in its very circularity. Apparently disparate sections of a woman's life are connected and reinforced by gender evaluative factors which thus produce a self-fulfilling coherent pattern with consequent apparent inevitability and logic in the positions achieved by women both at work and in the home.

It can be argued that all women's work is firmly rooted within patriarchal relations, and that where labour is primarily female, forms of control which are specifically patriarchal operate. It is certainly not the contention of this analysis that patriarchal relationships necessarily result in the notion of vertical solidarity. It is simply a matter of the two concepts interacting in mutual compatibility, within the secretarial function, to affirm the popular belief of the unique nature of each and every boss/secretary relationship.

The mythology surrounding the individualised and privatised relationships in secretarial work may well contribute to employers' resistance to incorporating secretaries into the organisational hierarchy by providing a career structure for them within the organisation. Indeed the same factors may also result in secretaries condoning, as appropriate, their inability to move into other areas of employment within a pattern of career development. The concept of patriarchy and its operation within the secretarial framework deters secretaries from organising effectively to ameliorate their position.

The effective patriarchal relationship within the secretarial function must also be related to patriarchy and its implications for women generally

in society. Rowbotham states:

"The wage system in capitalism has continued to be structured according to the assumption that women's labour is worth half that of men on the market. Behind this is the idea that women are somehow owned by men who should support them. Women are thus seen as economic attachments to men, not quite as free labourers. Their wage is still seen as supplementary .... It .... means that women make up a convenient reserve army which will work at half pay and can be reabsorbed back into the family if there is unemployment."(1)

Rowbotham goes on to argue that the inequality of women at work is built into the structure of capitalist production and the division of labour in industry. Certainly the inequality of women's pay and prospects appears to be built into the structure of women's office employment.

Promotion prospects for the secretary may well be assisted by a redefinition of her function. Rather than considering her primary function to be that of providing a personal service to her male boss, her function should be identified as providing a comprehensive and knowledgeable administrative service. Recognition needs to be given to the abilities necessary in the job. In other words the work content rather than the relationship between boss and secretary needs to be emphasised. The working role of the secretary should not be identified primarily as the creation of a relationship but rather as the skills and abilities necessary to carry out often complex and difficult administrative tasks. However, as has been discussed earlier, secretaries are not encouraged to develop relationships with, and do not come to identify themselves with, other office personnel of similar rank. It is in the very nature of the current definition of the secretarial function that a conflict

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(1) S Rowbotham, op cit, pp 120-121



in allegiance emerges between, for example, trade union membership and the working location of the secretary. It might be expected that secretaries, working in close physical and personal proximity to management and promoting the personal relationships with the boss as of intrinsic interest, importance and reward, would tend to identify with this sector of the organisation. In terms of the existing situation, however, this alignment does not appear to be in her long-term personal interests.

The lack of promotional prospects for secretaries may also be a 'hidden' factor in the general devaluation in recent years of the title 'secretary'. As the title has come, over the years, to be applied to any office worker who deals with correspondence, so the status which was once associated with it has declined. A host of job titles has evolved in an attempt to define more accurately the position of individual office workers. The resultant confusion and lack of clear differentiation in job classification is a major problem associated with the occupation. Moreover the various job titles suggest distinct promotional avenues, but conceal the fact that positions are often ascribed titles in relation to the status of the boss rather than the content of the work. This situation structurally limits promotional opportunities for secretaries because it is considered appropriate to measure advancement in terms of employer status and further promotes the short-term vested interest entailed for the secretary in maintaining an exclusively vertical axis of solidarity.

The devaluation of the secretarial function and the feminisation of the

occupation can be considered to act in many ways in concert. In practice both concepts function to maintain traditional patriarchal roles in the workplace as in the home. The roles adopted are depicted as wholly suitable for both the male and female members of the team and are, therefore, socially acceptable. It follows that the obvious and apparent promotion of the male is a 'natural' procedure in such an atmosphere of social acceptability of their relative positions. The female's advancement is seen as appropriately measured in terms of the status of the male. The glamorisation of the secretarial function, particularly within social constructs, may well assist the devaluation of the secretary in the exaltation of peripheral and inconsequential features of the role. These features are themselves open to glamorisation because of the feminisation of the occupation. However, the so-called glamorous aspects of the work may also serve as a secondary reward for the low status they help to create in that the secretary can so readily identify the fulfilment of gender norms within her working situation.

### Summary

Part I of this study has sought to provide general information about the work that many secretaries perform and the social constructs of secretaries and their work which contribute to prevalent popular ideas and beliefs about this area of work.

It has been shown that while each secretarial position may exhibit features which mark it as a unique situation, it is nevertheless possible to operate within a generalised concept of the function, since

in reality many secretarial positions are characterised by common features in both their role and function. Furthermore, the images of secretaries, inherent in social depictions of the function, appear to be sufficiently widespread to suggest that most people carry in their minds definite and, to them, lucid conceptual schema about the work.

The theoretical discussion of secretarial work, contained in the last section of Part I, relies on both an analysis of the tasks and duties involved in the function and features of the popularised images of secretaries which influence the status accorded to various secretarial tasks and in particular the working role demanded of women in many offices. This analysis is particularly noteworthy since it illuminates and illustrates a complicated cross-fertilisation of relations of gender with inter-positional and inter-personal relations. It is contended that the maintenance of the traditional boss/secretary relationship owes much to widely propounded social constructions of the work. However, another element in the mystique of the creation of the 'perfect secretary' is that of training programmes in operation in Technical Colleges throughout Great Britain.

In order to fully comprehend the content of secretarial curricula and the influence which they may have on students' systems of belief about their future occupation, it is essential to contextualise an analysis of curricula within a conceptual framework of the work itself. It is believed, therefore, that Part I of this study is a necessary prerequisite to the understanding of the investigation of the operational curricula within one particular college, contained in Part II of this study, and that it is against this background that these curricula

should be judged, examined and considered.

If, as has been argued in the current Chapter, the working location of many women entails the subordination of the secretary to a male boss, encapsulated in a situation of vertical solidarity, then it is necessary to enquire how the knowledge transmitted in secretarial courses contributes to the reproduction of the relative positioning of both parties, and makes the situation acceptable to many women. In addition, as the role of the secretary has been shown to be publicly available, then it is reasonable to suppose that trainee secretaries come to their studies with certain predispositions about their future work, which are to some extent influenced by popular images of both secretaries and women's roles generally. Investigations into relevant curricula therefore need to enquire into the extent to which the content, methods and organisation of the courses may confirm traditional views, contribute to adjustments in belief systems, or foster a critical awareness of the working role anticipated by students. The theoretical analysis of the secretarial function, which has been the main focus of this Chapter, constitutes the cornerstone of this study, since it depicts a necessarily traditional stance to be adopted by the actors of the roles. It is perhaps remarkable that, at a time of increasing debate about women's positions in society, such a traditional position remains acceptable to many women, of whom some have gained educational success which might have been supposed to encourage debate and enquiry into their various adult roles. This investigation is primarily concerned, therefore, with the question of how specific curricula may contribute to the acceptability by well qualified women of gender specific work and thereby assist the effectiveness of the reproduction of the secretarial function.

PART II

INVESTIGATION INTO TWO SECRETARIAL CURRICULA  
AT GREENFIELDS COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY

## CHAPTER IV

### THE HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY CONTEXTUALISATION

#### OF TWO SECRETARIAL CURRICULA

This Chapter is concerned with general background information relating to two specific secretarial curricula. An outline will be given of the development of secretarial work and training generally. The extensive provision for secretarial training will be exemplified by an analysis of secretarial courses in the Greater London area. Finally general background information will be given on the development of the Diploma for Personal Assistants' (PA Diploma) syllabuses and the College and Department within which the major part of the empirical data for this investigation was collected.

#### Historical Development of Office Work and Secretarial Courses

Contemporary secretarial curricula can be historically located both within the general development of clerical employment and in the various modifications of training provision over a number of years. Developments in both spheres are outlined briefly in order to contextualise the two secretarial curricula to be considered in depth in the following Chapter.

The historical development of clerical work is well documented<sup>(1)</sup>. In view of the fact that relatively detailed accounts of the rise of the present-day office and its personnel are available, it is considered unnecessary to make further detailed analyses in this investigation. The feature of the general development which is of paramount importance to this particular study is the feminisation of clerical work.

In the nineteenth century office work was an almost exclusively masculine preserve. For example, in 1851 0.8 per cent of the total labour force were clerks, but there were only 19 female commercial clerks, and women represented only 0.1 per cent of all clerks<sup>(2)</sup>. The next century was to witness not only a gradual proliferation of clerical jobs, until in 1951 10.5 per cent of the total labour force was categorised as clerical, but also a dramatic change in the gender representation within the work, so that in 1951 59.6 per cent of clerks were female<sup>(2)</sup>. These two factors are inter-related in that the increase in white-collar jobs in the late nineteenth century was a factor in the

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(1) For historical development of secretarial work see:

Jane Barker and Hazel Downing, 'Word Processing and the Transformation of Patriarchal Relations of Control in the Office' in Education and the State, Vol I, Schooling and the National Interest, ed. Roger Dale et al, The Falmer Press, Basingstoke, 1981, pp 230-235.

Mary K Benét, Secretary, Sidgwick and Jackson, London, 1972, Chapter II.

David Lockwood, The Blackcoated Worker, Allen and Unwin, London, 1958, Chapters I and II.

R Silverstone, op cit, Chapter I.

F McNally, op cit, Chapter II.

S Vinnicombe, op cit, Chapter I.

(2) David Lockwood, op cit, p 36.

move towards the employment of women into clerical work. At the same time technological advances were becoming evident with the introduction of typewriters in 1873<sup>(1)</sup> and telephones at around the same time. The operating of the new machinery was seen as eminently suitable work for women and provided a new element in the expanding sphere of clerical work. The introduction of new mechanical devices provided work which appeared not to threaten existing male employment, and contributed to the lack of resistance on the part of male office workers to the entry of women into offices.

The decline in the prestige of office work is particularly associated with the influx of women in the first decades of the twentieth century<sup>(2)</sup>. Women began to undertake office work which required neither physical strength nor prolonged training. It was perhaps inevitable, therefore, that their occupations would be conferred a lower status and remuneration than that of their male counterparts.

The devastation of the male population in the First World War created a greater need for female workers. The War itself also generated more white-collar jobs. Corresponding to the growth of routine clerical jobs was an increase in the number of lower and middle-management positions<sup>(3)</sup>, the latter becoming the domain of male employees. This then identifies, in bare outline at least, the origins of gender differentiation in accordance with level of occupation in the office hierarchy, which remains substantially the same today.

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(1) Mary K Benét, op cit, p 39.

(2) David Lockwood, op cit, p 125.

(3) F McNally, op cit, p 27.



In the mid nineteenth century the entry requirement to the office for the prospective male clerk was a general secondary education. Specialist knowledge such as book-keeping was acquired within the confines of the office. Clerks were, therefore, drawn mainly from the middle classes who could afford to provide their sons with an education. It was only after 1870 that the masses of working class children obtained the opportunity for literacy, with the first national provision for teaching reading and writing to all, and armed with this ability the potential for entry into clerical work. However, the inauguration of a national system of secondary education incorporating grammar and secondary modern schools, meant that the superior status of male office workers could be maintained, since male clerks were drawn particularly from the grammar schools, while the majority of female clerks came from secondary modern schools.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century commercial education was wide in its scope, rather than narrowly technical, although shorthand and typewriting were subjects which were in most demand. Most commercial education was carried out in evening classes. The main examining boards for commercial subjects at this time were the Society of Arts, Regional Examining Unions and the London Chamber of Commerce. It is interesting that these institutions remain the major examining boards today.

A gradual expansion of commercial education occurred after the 1902 Education Act, particularly with the introduction of some specialised Colleges of Commerce. However, even as late as 1937, some 96 per cent of the students enrolled at institutions of further education were still

completely dependent upon evening study<sup>(1)</sup>. One of the major points made in the Carr-Saunders Report on Commercial Education<sup>(2)</sup> in 1949 was that there was too much reliance on evening class study. It is supposed, therefore, that secretarial skills were learnt mainly by attendance at evening schools. However, very little investigation appears to have been carried out concerning the growth of secretarial curricula, and no textbook exists which gives documentary evidence concerning the teaching of any of the subjects relating to secretarial work<sup>(3)</sup>. The development of secretarial curricula and skills teaching is an area which requires investigation in its own right. The lack of systematic investigation and information in this area does not negate the current investigation as it does not constitute a primary area of concern of this work. However, it is to be noted that a void exists in the documentation concerning this particular sphere of education and therefore suppositions only can be made at this time.

After 1959 commercial education was refashioned as a result of the McMeeking Report<sup>(4)</sup>. The Report proclaimed a need to recruit and educate young people for commerce. It recommended a system of block

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(1) Michael Argles, South Kensington to Robbins, Longmans London, 1964, p 124.

(2) Ministry of Education, Report of a Special Committee on Education for Commerce, HMSO, 1949.

(3) It was confirmed by the curator of typewriters at the Science Museum, South Kensington, and by the British Library, that no official textbooks had been produced concerning the development of the transmission of secretarial skills or secretarial curricula in general.

(4) Ministry of Education, National Advisory Council on Education for Industry and Commerce, Report of the Advisory Committee on Further Education for Commerce, HMSO, 1959.

release and sandwich schemes and that specialised advanced courses should be established. By 1961 the official policy was to centre commercial courses in multi-purpose colleges, rather than in Colleges of Commerce.

The McMeeking Report was probably one of the factors which contributed to the introduction of specialised secretarial courses in colleges of further education. These courses began to be established in the 1960's and the following list of commencement dates, taken from booklets issued by the various examining boards, bears witness to the relatively recent introduction of specialist secretarial curricula:

<u>Board</u>	<u>Examination</u>	<u>Commencement Date</u>
AMS	Medical Secretaries Diploma	1966
RSA	Bi-lingual Secretarial Diploma	1968
C & G	National Certificate for Farm Secretaries	1970
RSA	Diploma for Personal Assistants	1972
LCC	Secretarial Language Examinations	1974

It is of course difficult to estimate the precise year in which each specialist course was first introduced, but the inauguration date of the relevant specialist examination gives a broad indication of such dates. It is equally difficult to state in all cases whether a particular course was established as a result of the relevant examination being offered, or whether the examining boards were simply responding to the requirements of existing courses.

#### Provision for Secretarial Training in the Greater London Area

To assess the extent to which secretarial courses are currently offered in the Greater London area, leaflets were requested from 35 colleges listed

in the London and Home Counties Regional Advisory Council for Technological Education booklet of Index of Courses (1978/79). Replies were received from 31 colleges. Only details of full-time courses were requested.

Information was also sought from five private colleges. These were selected from educational courses advertised in a Sunday newspaper. Four of these colleges offered secretarial courses which were similar in length and subjects studied to those offered by LEA colleges. One private college offered subjects not identified in any other prospectus, these subjects being French Cookery and Personal Grooming. Two of the private colleges also offered shorter, one-term courses, which were concerned purely with the skills of shorthand and typewriting.

An analysis of information contained in LEA college prospectuses and leaflets showed that the courses offered may be analysed in two categories, that is high level Post GCE 'A' Level and Postgraduate Courses and secondly low-level courses for Post CSE and Post GCE 'O' Level students.

Details are:

No. of Colleges offering high level Secretarial Courses .....	5
No. of Colleges offering low level Secretarial Courses .....	8
No. of Colleges offering both high and low level Secretarial Courses	18
TOTAL	<u>31</u>

In general the low level courses were of a general nature, although five colleges offered a specialist element to Post 'O' Level students, which included medical, legal and foreign languages. The general courses themselves can be said to be relatively broad based in that the subjects studied were not merely the skills of shorthand, typewriting and audio

typing. Each course included at least three further subjects from the following list:

English  
Communication  
Office Practice  
Secretarial Duties  
Commerce  
Book-keeping  
Background to Business  
Office Machinery  
Structure of Business  
Business Calculations  
Social Economics.

The principal areas of knowledge to be investigated in this enquiry are those contained in the Royal Society of Arts Diploma for Personal Assistants (PA Diploma). Of the colleges responding to the request for literature on full-time secretarial courses, seven prepared students for the RSA PA Diploma. Four of the colleges concentrated on the London Chamber of Commerce Private Secretaries Diploma or Certificate. Two colleges did not state specific examination aims. As the examinations under enquiry recommend Post GCE 'A' Level entry, only the colleges offering high level courses are included in the above data.

The LCC qualification is of similar standing to that of the RSA PA Diploma. In addition the knowledge incorporated in the examination syllabuses is very similar, since the compulsory subjects to be studied include Management Appreciation, Structure of Business, Communication, Private Secretarial Practice, as well as the skills.

It is concluded that most colleges in the London area offer full-time secretarial courses which incorporate knowledge transmission over and

above the basic secretarial skills. Furthermore, the majority of colleges providing Post 'A' Level and Postgraduate courses include subjects similar to those of the RSA PA Diploma.

Although the PA Diploma is a relatively recent innovation, it has been shown that a number of colleges in the London area have embarked on the teaching of this, or very similar, curricula. The number of colleges in Great Britain which entered candidates for the RSA PA Diploma examination in 1979 was 65. Furthermore the total number of students entering the examination in 1979 was 1,109<sup>(1)</sup>. It is, therefore, considered that although the major part of this investigation is of a small scale nature, within one particular college, the findings may throw some light on secretarial courses in general, since many similar courses are available in various further education colleges.

#### The Development of the RSA Diploma for Personal Assistants Syllabuses

The Diploma for Personal Assistants was first introduced in 1972, and the syllabuses were revised in 1978. The revisions resulted in some radical changes. For example, prior to 1978 students could opt to take either Law or Economics, whereas both subjects are now compulsory. The revisions to the Law syllabus produced a syllabus with a much broader base covering various aspects of law relating to the business world. Oral communication was changed from preparation for an interview before a board of examiners to a telephone test, with the aim of producing a more objective marking scheme for this section of the examination. One examination on Personnel and Functional Aspects of Administration replaced two previous examination papers known as Office Management and Office Administration. Changes in other syllabuses were less radical.

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(1) RSA Report on Examinations in 1978/9 Diploma for Personal Assistants  
Orpington, 1979.

Because of this recent innovation only current syllabuses and related examination papers will be considered when these areas are examined in detail in the next Chapter.

One of the reasons for the changes in this particular RSA syllabus was the demand from teachers of the various subjects in the colleges offering this course. Each year, after the publication of examination results, the RSA holds an open meeting to which representatives from colleges are invited. A major part of the proceedings is an oral report made by each of the examiners in the various subjects. The examiner is then subjected to questions and comments on the previous year's question paper. The assumption is, therefore, that the teachers can have some influence on the examiners and the syllabuses. Employers' representatives have a more indirect influence in that they are represented on the examinations committees. However, even on these committees the number of employers is outweighed by the number of teachers and RSA representatives. Most examiners are teachers of their respective subjects in colleges. It may be estimated therefore that the strongest influence comes from the teachers themselves.

One reason for the changes in the syllabuses was teachers and RSA's anxiety over the low pass rate in the Diploma examinations during the first five years of its existence. The pass rate had never risen above one third of the total number of candidates entering the examination in any one year. In 1976 the RSA established working parties to consider each syllabus and the revisions detailed above were made.

There does appear to be some divergence of opinion between the RSA and

colleges on the purpose of the Diploma. The RSA state:

"the course should be of equal value to young men and women interested in embarking on a career in office management by this route."<sup>(1)</sup>

However, very few male students have been enrolled by colleges to follow this course, the total number in Great Britain since 1972 being less than 10. This, of course, may not be because the colleges actually bar male applicants, but men may be influenced by the way in which colleges organise their courses. For instance, as will be shown in the next Chapter colleges still give the major part of the teaching time to the skills of shorthand and typewriting, indicating that the course is seen as secretarial in orientation rather than a preparation for a career in office management. This is the situation in spite of the fact that the Diploma can be achieved without learning shorthand at all. This point will be discussed more fully in the final Chapter. The statement to be made at this juncture is that, in spite of the orientation of the formally published syllabuses and the changes effected by the RSA, the operational curricula in the colleges, still mark the course as basically secretarial.

#### Greenfields College of Technology and its Provision for Secretarial Training

Greenfields College of Technology is located in a non-industrialised 'stockbroker' suburb of London, and was first opened in 1953. Since this time the building itself has been extended by the erection of new wings, the latest being completed in the early 1970's, and a further new wing is currently under construction. During this period the college has extended both the range of courses offered and the number of students

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(1) RSA, Diploma for Personal Assistants Booklet, Orpington, 1979, p 7.



enrolled. It is difficult to categorise the college in relation to the level of work, since this ranges from courses for students with two or three CSE qualifications, to degree courses in Biology and Nursing. Furthermore, as there is little local industry, which may require the services of a local technical college to train personnel, it cannot be categorised or labelled as a college with a dominant vocational theme, in the way in which some similar establishments have been informally known as engineering or construction colleges. The college stands in pleasant semi-rural surroundings of parklands and fields within the vicinity of high quality private housing.

There is a traditional departmental structure of organisation within the college. Therefore all teachers concerned with secretarial courses are located in the Business and General Studies Department. The one exception to this is with regard to Liberal Studies. All students take one full day per term of liberal studies, which is organised and conducted by a teacher from that department.

The specialist rooms allocated to secretarial studies are situated in the more modern part of the building. In comparison with many similar sections in other colleges, the section has modern, up-to-date equipment. For example, there are seven specialist rooms. Equipment includes 24 IBM golfball electric typewriters, eight of which are self-correcting, 26 Adler electric typewriters, and in addition a specialist room for word processing with 16 individual VDU's and keyboards. Eleven full-time members of staff are employed to teach secretarial skills, two of whom are Senior Lecturers, one Lecturer Grade II, and the remainder Lecturers

Grade I. Three part-time members of staff also service the section. Some secretarial lecturers in other colleges have noted the low status accorded to their sections in terms of lecturers' grades, equipment and accommodation. Many secretarial teachers voice the opinion in informal conversation that they are the 'cinderellas' of the technical colleges and that the general view of secretarial work as a low status occupation is reflected in the status attributed to those teaching trainee secretaries. However, this is not the case at Greenfields College, since the structure of the lecturers' grades, accommodation and general facilities, compare very favourably with other sections of the department and the college generally.

The 1980 intake of students who were studying on full-time secretarial courses totalled approximately 190 and all were female. On the whole students who attend full-time secretarial courses live in parental homes within the catchment area of the college. This has been increasingly the case since the mid-1970's when Local Education Authorities began to scrutinise more closely the applications of students wishing to attend out-county courses, since a recoupment fee is incurred by the local authority in such instances.

The Registrar General's Classification <sup>(1)</sup> of social classes, which is based on occupations, was used to give an indication of the background of the 1980 entrants. The occupations are divided in five categories, as follows:

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(1) General Register Office, Classification of Occupations, HMSO 1966 p x.

- I Professional (eg doctors)
- II Intermediate (eg managers)
- III Skilled - non-manual (eg clerical workers)
- III Skilled - manual (eg carpenters)
- IV Partly skilled - non-manual (eg telephone operators)
- IV Partly skilled - manual (eg coal miners)
- V Unskilled (eg labourers)

The jobs held by the fathers of students studying on the secretarial courses to be investigated in depth in the following Chapter were taken for this analysis. In the case of fathers who had retired, their last jobs were taken as the indicator.

Postgraduate Students

<u>No. of students</u>	<u>Social Class Category</u>
4	I
10	II
1	III

Post 'A' Level Students

<u>No. of students</u>	<u>Social Class Category</u>
2	I
16	II
1	III
1	V

The greatest proportion of these students were the daughters of men in social class II. This result was, perhaps, to be anticipated since it is accepted that there is a correlation between educational achievement and social class and, as will be shown later, relatively high qualifications are required to obtain entry to these particular courses. The particular physical location of the College, which has already been described, would also lead one to anticipate that students would have

such backgrounds. Silverstone found that about half her sample of London secretaries came from social class I and II backgrounds, with 37 per cent coming from social class III<sup>(1)</sup>. However, Silverstone's sample included secretaries with few formal educational qualifications, therefore it is apparent that the entry requirements for the courses in question and the location of the College, probably make this sample more selective.

A total of seven different full-time secretarial courses is offered at Greenfields. Entry to each course is dependent on previous educational qualifications obtained by prospective students and on specialist applications of the secretarial function selected. For example, specialist courses are offered for medical secretaries, legal secretaries and bi-lingual secretaries.

The courses to be investigated in depth are the Diploma for Personal Assistants and the Postgraduate Intensive Secretarial courses. The main reason for the selection of these particular courses is that they are of greatest relevance to the exemplification of various facets of the mythological nature of the popular image of secretaries, particularly that secretarial work is a promotional springboard to managerial level employment. The educational and personal background of the students leads to the observation that should such promotional opportunities be available then these students are the most likely candidates within this College to realise any promotional ambitions. Furthermore since both courses require a relatively high level of entry qualification it was assumed that, as alternative employment or training opportunities may

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(1) R Silverstone, op cit, p 82-83.

have been available, many of these students had made a positive decision to train for secretarial work, rather than pursuing the course simply because of a lack of alternative possibilities. Investigating the students' reasons for taking a secretarial course may, therefore, illuminate the extent to which the socially constituted image of the secretary impinges on personal perspectives of the work, as well as the identification of patterns of socialisation which lead to acceptance of gender differentiation in employment. It is also of interest to assess how the curricula attempt to inculcate norms and values appropriate to the popular image of the secretary, to a body of students with predominantly middle-class backgrounds and good educational qualifications. In addition the two courses in question are of a general nature and aim to equip students for employment in a wide range of organisations. This means that an investigation into the general secretarial function can be pursued, whereas a study of the secretarial function, say, within the medical field may need to take account of general bureaucratic elements within the medical profession which impinge upon the secretarial function within this specific structure. It is also estimated that, because of the relative maturity of the students and their educational achievements, they would not only respond positively in investigatory interviews, but also be capable of analysing and commenting on the knowledge transmitted during training, their motives for taking the course, future prospects, and the secretarial function in general.

The postgraduate course requires a degree or equivalent qualification for entry, and the Diploma for Personal Assistants a minimum of one GCE 'A' Level pass in an academic subject, together with at least four GCE 'O'

Levels, one of which must be English Language. Generally students have no previous formal knowledge of either the secretarial skills or the allied subjects taught on these courses. To give an indication of the previous educational attainments of the students, the 1979/80 entrants had achieved the following qualifications:

Postgraduate Intensive Secretarial Course

<u>No. of Students</u>	<u>Degree Subjects</u>	<u>Class of Degree</u>
1	Music	2.2
1	Latin and Linguistics	2.2
1	Law	3
3	English Language and Literature	2.2, 2.1, 2.1
1	Agriculture	2.2
1	Literae Humaniores	2
1	Home Economics	2.1
1	Archaeology and Geography	not known
1	Russian and French	2.1
1	Theology	2.1
1	Catering Management	not known
1	Latin	not known
1	Sociology	2.2
1	Modern Languages	not known

GCE 'A' Level Subject Combinations Taken by Students on Diploma for Personal Assistants Course

<u>No. of 'A' Levels</u>	<u>Subjects</u>
3	Geography, British Government, Economics
3	Art, English, History
3	English, Sociology, Home Economics
3	Law, History, Sociology
3	Maths, Chemistry, Biology
3	English, Sociology, Biology
3	Home Economics, English, History
2	English Literature, Biology
2	History, Economics
2	English, Biology
2	English, Domestic Science
2	English, French
2	English Literature, Sociology
2	Biology, History
2	English Government, History
1	Economics
1	Economics

The high level of entry qualification may suggest to prospective students that these are a necessary prerequisite for the employment they will ultimately take up and that their course of study will be fundamentally different from courses requiring, say, 4 GCE 'O' Level passes for entry. However, this is not the case as all students on full-time secretarial courses learn the Pitman system of shorthand and use the same typewriters and ancillary equipment. Much of the subject matter transmitted in the non-skill areas also bears close comparison. Although examination aims are not identical, many different levels of student do enter the same Royal Society of Arts shorthand and typewriting examinations. The essential difference lies in the shorter length of course for the more highly qualified student and, perhaps, the teaching methods adopted. The mere fact that secretarial courses are offered which demand, for example, a degree for entry may in part assist the perpetuation of the notion of very different levels of secretarial work, whereas many of the students who have taken a two-year full-time post 'O' Level secretarial course obtain secretarial jobs which are comparable to those obtained by postgraduates. Certainly the questionnaire responses from past students indicated no discernable difference in jobs obtained by Post 'A' Level and Postgraduate students.

The official title for those taking the Diploma for Personal Assistants is Advanced Secretarial Course. However, with the exception of official documentation such as grant forms to LEA's this title is never used within the College. The informal title given by all members of staff to the group is 'the PA's' and students come naturally to refer to themselves in the same manner. While the RSA may view the Diploma as preparation for a career in office management, it will be shown that the organisational

structure of the curriculum within this College marks the course as essentially secretarial. This situation does little to alleviate the confusion which surrounds secretarial titles. The staff use this title simply as a means of differentiating one secretarial group from another, yet the very use of a group label which does not include the word 'secretary' may suggest to students that they are in fact training for a different category of employment. This was exemplified in an informal conversation with post 'A' Level students taking a secretary-linguist course as they expressed the view that the PA group felt that they were of a higher status to the secretary-linguists, in spite of the fact that for 16 hours per week out of a total class contact time of 24 hours, they were studying identical subject matter and had several examination aims in common. The informal reference label for the graduate entrants is 'the Postgrads'. Since this refers to their previous education, rather than examination aims while on the secretarial course, it may have little influence on their categorisation of employment in the secretarial sphere.

Both the Diploma for Personal Assistants and the Postgraduate courses have RSA qualifications as their central aim. The Postgraduates take single subject examinations in shorthand and typewriting. The Post 'A' Level students take the Diploma for Personal Assistants and in addition RSA single subject examinations in shorthand, typewriting and secretarial duties. Although the examination aims are not identical, many students study the same subjects and similar syllabuses. For example, communication, secretarial duties, accounts, commerce, are studied by both groups,



although only the Post 'A' Level students are formally examined in these subjects. Law is a compulsory subject for the Post 'A' Level course, but only those postgraduates who have not graduated in a foreign language study this subject. Language graduates take a postgraduate commercial language in French, German, Spanish, Italian or Russian. However, over the past five years, the number of language graduates has not been greater than one third of the total number of students on the course.

All secretarial courses at Greenfields begin in September. The Post 'A' Level students complete one full academic year, while the Postgraduate course is of two terms' duration and finishes the following April. This is the main reason why the postgraduates take fewer examinations, in that the Diploma for Personal Assistants examinations are held only once a year, in June, and the postgraduates have left the College by that time.

Many of the Post 'A' Level students obtain local authority grants to assist with the financial costs involved in taking their secretarial course. However, since the mid-1970's the number of postgraduates who have obtained local authority grants has diminished considerably. In 1979/80 for example only two students had received such grants, while three had obtained financial assistance from the Government's Training Opportunities Scheme (with further Government restrictions, this source of financial assistance for this course has now been terminated). This was out of a total of 16 postgraduates. It is to be noted that in spite of the fact that financial assistance has been more difficult to obtain and the cost of tuition fees and other expenses incurred on the course

have risen, in recent years there has been no noticeable decline in the number of applicants for this course. Some students in fact have to take part-time evening and week-end employment to pay their way through the course.

It can be contended, therefore, that these postgraduates have a serious intention of entering employment in the business world and that they see secretarial training as contributing to the achievement of this aim. They are not merely demonstrating a desire to continue in the student role rather than enter the world of work, as the personal financial burden which the course represents to many would undoubtedly militate against this attitude.

## CHAPTER V

### THE STRUCTURE AND OPERATION OF THE DIPLOMA FOR PERSONAL ASSISTANTS AND POSTGRADUATE SECRETARIAL CURRICULA AT GREENFIELDS COLLEGE

In order to produce a meaningful account of the views of students and secretaries about office work, it is necessary to consider the effects of training programmes on conceptual schema. The social construction of images of the work, discussed in Chapter II, produces informal information about secretaries, while, in contrast, the curricula act as formally legitimised agents of distribution for the knowledge, skills and beliefs about what is required in this sphere of employment. The interaction and counterbalance between these two agents is discussed in the final Chapter. This Chapter describes the operational curricula at Greenfields College. Theoretical points raised in the final Chapter are dependent on a basic understanding of the schedule of training undertaken by the sample of students investigated. Therefore, while this section of the study is a purely descriptive account, it is nevertheless an essential element of the work.

Personal expertise did not extend to every subject area of the two courses. Therefore both informal discussions and more formalised interviews, using a schedule of questions (see Appendix V - Schedule of Interview Questions with Teachers), were conducted. The opinions of teachers about subject matter, secretarial work and the employment prospects of their students

are incorporated in this Chapter to illuminate as much as possible the learning situations encountered by students.

Each of the subject areas of the curricula in question was represented by an interview with a teacher of that subject. As there were in fact two groups of Post 'A' Level students, this meant that not every teacher on both courses was interviewed. In some cases, of course, an individual teacher taught two or more different subjects to the same group of students. The interviews with teachers were in a slightly different context from the normal interview in that the researcher was a personal colleague working within the same college. The advantages of this situation included the accessibility of teachers and a common understanding of the subject matter discussed. However, there were also some disadvantages in that on occasions teachers would prolong their responses in terms of college related propositions about the curricula, identifying the researcher in her teaching and administrative role rather than that of researcher. However, responses in this vein did not occur often, nor did they deflect from other information obtained. In addition it is appreciated that all teachers were aware prior to the interview that their colleague was undertaking some research. Most teachers were, however, not cognisant with the nature of the research. Only one of the teachers had discussed the research project at any length with the interviewer prior to the formal interview.

Teachers' responses were not analysed in the same way as information obtained by student interviews (to be discussed in the following Chapter), since the objective was to gain an overall perspective of the teachers'

views of the curricula. Further it was not considered appropriate that responses would be analysed in a comparative manner. The information gained was required to illustrate how each viewed his/her individual subject area in relation to the future work of the students, to illuminate both the content and method of teaching the individual's specialism, and to elicit practical information on, for instance, use of textbooks in teaching.

The syllabuses for the Diploma for Personal Assistants are distributed under the following two main headings:

1. Administration
2. Communication.

The RSA state that the aim of the Administration syllabus is to develop an understanding of;

"(1) the basis of organisation in the private and public sector and their relationship with one another, and the human relationships created within this context,

(ii) the principles, means and constraints involved in the administration of organisations, in particular the supervision of staff, and the interpretation and implementation of the demands of senior management."(1)

The general aim of the communication syllabus as stated by the RSA is:

"To enable the student to respond effectively to various assignments likely to face the Personal Assistant in employment, by applying commonsense, resourcefulness, tact, diplomacy and loyalty as well as showing an awareness of appropriate attitudes."(2)

The published aims of these two sections of the Diploma suggest that the syllabuses are geared to fit students for situations in close contact

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(1) RSA, Diploma for Personal Assistants 1980 Booklet, Orpington, p 11.

(2) RSA, ibid, p 26.

with senior management, having some responsibility themselves for supervising lower level employees. The personal qualities which have been traditionally associated with secretarial workers are a dominant feature of the stated aims of the communication syllabus. Therefore, while the course is supposedly producing office managers, it adheres to the inculcation of qualities which have long-standing associations with women and with traditional views of the secretarial function.

The Administration syllabus is divided into three sections, each of which is compulsory:

- A Economic and Financial Aspects;
- B Legal Aspects;
- C Personnel and Functional Aspects.

At Greenfields section A is covered in subject areas generally referred to as Economics and Accounts; section B in Law; and section C of the syllabus under the subject headings of Secretarial Duties, Office Administration and Commerce.

The Communication syllabus is also divided into three sections:

- A Written;
- B Office Skills Applied;
- C Oral.

These areas are dealt with at Greenfields as follows. Written communication in the subject Communication, Office Skills Applied in Shorthand, Typewriting, and Transcription, Oral in Oral Communication.

The distribution of class contact hours to the various subjects is as follows:

No. of Hours Per Week for Each Course

	<u>PA</u>	<u>PG</u>
Shorthand	8	8
Transcription	1	-
Typewriting	5	6
Law	2	3
Economics	2	-
Accounts	1	2
Commerce	1	1
Communication	2	1
Oral Communication	1	-
Secretarial Duties	1	1
Office Administration	1	-

It will be noted that the two courses are not identical in hours and subject headings. However, there is a great similarity in the knowledge transmitted in both courses in that, for example, while oral communication is not officially catered for on the timetable, postgraduates do nevertheless deal with such knowledge in the general communication teaching. Similarly some of the economics studied in the PA course is covered in the accounts and commerce taught to the postgraduates. However, given that the postgraduate course is shorter, not all areas are covered in as much depth as in the PA course. The fact that a public examination is taken by PA students in subjects such as Law and Economics frequently results in a different style of teaching and also appears to make this knowledge a more dominant feature of the course for these students. The postgraduates, on the other hand, generally regard such subjects as areas of general information only and give priority to the skills.

The teaching time allocated to the various subjects demonstrates the College's policy of seeking to obtain high standards in the skills of shorthand and typewriting. If such standards were not required to obtain employment, no doubt pressure would have been brought to bear from various sources to change this emphasis on the traditional secretarial

skills. This reinforces the fact that it is high speeds in the skills that employers require of prospective secretaries, which suggests that these activities are a dominant feature of the job.

The award of the Diploma for Personal Assistants requires a student to pass in all five compulsory examinations. It is possible to be referred in a maximum of one subject and to re-take this examination the following year. The results of students from Greenfields reflect the national average pass rate in that about one third of entrants pass the Diploma each year. The notable aspect of the results is that the Office Skills Applied examination receives a lower pass rate than any of the other examinations. This point must be related to the high number of teaching hours devoted to shorthand, typewriting and transcription, and to the fact that many non-practitioners of the skills consider them to be an easy option in terms of skill acquisition and application.

The PA curriculum is broad in terms of the number of subjects studied. The array of subjects must be viewed in relation to the fact that students usually have no previous knowledge of any of them when starting the course and that the teaching year extends only from mid-September to the end of May, since the month of June is devoted to examinations. Therefore, it is seen as a curriculum of breadth rather than depth. In subjects such as Law and Economics, basic concepts are dealt with and subject matter is descriptive rather than analytic. With a total of only 90 hours, including private study, devoted to each of these subjects, it would be difficult to envisage more than basic concept formation.

Each area of the syllabus will now be discussed in more detail.



## Administration; Economic and Financial Aspects

This syllabus follows a traditional economics syllabus, whereby a division is made between the micro and macro approach to economics. The micro considers firms and the way they market their commodities. The macro is concerned with the national economy. The syllabus obviously reflects the economic infra-structure of the country for which the syllabus is being taught. For example, it includes the role of the Bank of England, the Budget - forms of taxation and fiscal policy. The syllabus provides an introduction to the concepts of the British mixed economy.

The micro aspects of the syllabus follow traditional lines of examining the classical economic theory which suggests that industry produces to meet the needs of the consumer, which is referred to as the perfect competitive market. It is seen as an idealised concept and is approached in a theoretical manner. This is, however, developed by way of a more practical approach in that real life competitive situations are discussed such as monopolies and imperfect competition.

Basically the syllabus indicates a major concern for the profit making ability of firms and the way in which institutions and human beings fit into this pattern. There is no concern for the social implications. For example, there is no mention of the problem of unemployment. This syllabus therefore is a study of the firm and its problems with some reference to the role of Government.

The textbook recommended to students studying this subject does present material which is not covered by the RSA syllabus. For instance, there is a chapter on the location of economic activity which brings in

demographic problems. However, the teacher indicated that the textbook was used predominantly to make notes in 'very descriptive areas' of the syllabus. From the teacher's statement:

"I would hope that they (the students) would do wider reading, but I suspect they don't."

it appears that it is unlikely that any parts of even this one textbook which do not relate directly to the syllabus in question are studied by the students. The influence of such written material readily to hand may therefore be said to be negligible.

In the interview with the economics teacher, it was established that the subject matter was seen by her as broad background information on how business operates in Great Britain. It was stated that the textbook was only used as a back-up to lectures and that only those parts of the set text which related directly to the syllabus were recommended to students. The syllabus was considered to be an excellent one in that it was very practical rather than academic. This practical aspect was applauded because:

"I'm trying to make them (the students) sufficiently aware and to see all the different parts of the company and perhaps where they would fit in and also broader company decisions and of course stress the competition between companies all the time."

Because the teacher identifies the syllabus as practical, knowledge may well be imparted in a way to suggest that it will be of direct use in the day-to-day work of the potential secretary. However, the teacher's reply to the question on whether she thought she gave students any impression of what it was like to be at work may negate this conclusion:

"No. No, the essence doesn't lend itself to that and we are teaching broader principles."

Although the teacher had not worked as a secretary herself, it was stated that illustrative examples were used from her own work experience. An example was given. It may be coincidental, but the example seemed to have particular relevance to the traditional role of women and their 'natural' interest in domestic activities, such as washing clothes. Perhaps this was selected as a particularly apt example since the students were all female:

"I used to work for Proctor & Gamble and do market research for Proctor & Gamble and one celebrated occasion having interviewed all the housewives, some of the housewives came up repeatedly with the statement that product A made woollies whiter. Now, we knew there was Lux or some sort of flake in the packet. We didn't know exactly what was in the packet because of course we were never told, but when analysed these results went back to headquarters and they were astonished that a packet of flakes could make their woollies whiter, because of course you can't put bleach in flakes and you can't really make woollies whiter at least at the state of knowledge at that time. So Proctor & Gamble instructed all their salesmen to rush out and buy Lux flakes from shops and these were taken back to the laboratories and analysed, and they discovered that Unilever had put a fluorescer in Lux flakes which did make woollies whiter and of course that meant that Proctor & Gamble had to take steps to try to compete with Unilever."

Generally the impression was given that the syllabus was accepted by the teacher as wholly satisfactory and a good preparation for students' future working role. There was no indication that she found the syllabus restrictive or that she would in any way change her teaching if she did not have to comply with this examination syllabus.

The examination questions reflect the syllabus. They call for descriptive accounts of the structure of firms and industry on capital accumulation and pricing policy. For example:

1979 Question 8

- (a) (i) what forms may a firm in the private sector assume?  
(ii) in this context, what is a small firm?
- (b) Explain the terms vertical horizontal and lateral integration.

1979 Question 10

Explain carefully the distinction between a firm's maximum profit position and its optimum output position.

1980 Question 10

- (a) Explain the economic role of the Bank of England.
- (b) Illustrate, by examples, the differences between fixed costs and variable costs.

The economics teacher estimated the career prospects of students as follows:

"I like to think that they would have sufficient confidence to go into business on their own. Um, perhaps starting an employment agency. I would like to think that they could run a department may be, I would like to think that they could take over and make sensible minor decisions in the absence of the boss."

This estimation of potential employment is broadly in line with the socially constituted image of secretarial work in that the secretary will proceed to a position of managerial responsibility. No doubt this view is transmitted, even if only in a covert manner, to the students studying this subject.

Administration: Legal Aspects

This syllabus deals initially with a description of the composition and jurisdiction of the various civil and criminal courts in England. An outline is given of the way in which the law is made in this country, that is the sources of law, which would enable an individual to know how to go about finding out about the law on a particular matter. This is basically factual and descriptive knowledge. Students are only required to know the ways in which laws are made and not to comment on this in any way at all. Therefore there is no analysis of why laws are made or how they may affect individuals.

The most heavily weighted section of the syllabus concerns contract and commercial law. Most of this information is gained through case law and a knowledge of leading cases is required, which again is descriptive knowledge. The law relating to the passing of ownership is also dealt with only in outline as it was stated by the teacher that this was a very technical and specialised area of knowledge. The importance of this aspect of the syllabus was to appreciate when the risk passes from the seller to the buyer.

The law of tort has a 15 per cent weighting on the syllabus. This branch of law deals with liability for civil wrongs as distinct from wrongs which are crimes. The teacher concerned felt that potential secretaries needed to be aware of how a business may be sued for negligence or defamation and this knowledge was gained by an acquaintance with the law of tort.

From the interview conducted with the law teacher, it became apparent that the subject was used to indicate how the secretary might protect her boss:

"In the law of tort for instance an important aspect of liability is the law of defamation and I do impress on them (the students) that it's very important that if one is saying anything or writing anything that adversely affects the person's reputation then one must be very careful to mark it 'confidential'",

and

"I look at it from the point of view of the fact that if she (the secretary) knows something about law and procedures of law and some matter crops up in her work at least the bell will ring and perhaps put her on her guard against saying something or doing something which might have some bearing on legal liability."

The final major area of law covered in the syllabus is that of legal aspects relating to employment. It was stated that this was dealt with from the point of view of an employer of labour rather than the rights of an employee, or indeed the student as a prospective employee.

The textbook recommended to students gives a general background to law and is intended for anyone who is considering taking up a career in business and is not specifically geared to secretaries. The teacher stated that he recommended students to read only those parts of the book which covered the syllabus. Indeed there appeared to be little emphasis on textbook knowledge as he said:

"There is a general unwillingness I think on the part of some students to read the textbook. They tend to rely on notes."

The textbook is however occasionally used in class:

"If the material is straightforward and time is very short I do ask them to make notes, but I don't do that to any great extent. If some of the material in the textbook is outside their syllabus I do particularly stipulate the pages they should not read."

Examination questions illustrate the descriptive nature of this area of knowledge:

1980 Question 11

Explain the differences between a Partnership and a Limited Company with regard to:

- (a) their creation
- (b) their legal personality
- (c) the liability of their members towards third persons becoming involved with them.

1980 Question 12

Explain the points of civil law involved in the following situations and on whom liability may rest:

(i) Mr Y is the managing director of a small company. He discovers that there is a faulty tread on the main staircase in his premises. He immediately contacts his employee, Mr Z who is responsible for maintenance of premises. Two days later, and before Mr Z has looked at the fault, Miss W trips on the stair tread and is injured.

(ii) Instead of contacting Mr Z, Mr Y immediately asks X and Partners, a small firm of local builders, to come in and make good the stair. This they do straight away but not adequately as Miss W falls and is injured.

### 1979 Question 13

H, a manufacturer, receives an order for £10,000 of goods from J. Since J's financial standing is unknown to him, H telephones K, a fellow manufacturer whom he knows had dealings with J. H asks K if J is financially sound.

Discuss the legal position of:

H: if K replies "J is all right" when, in fact, J owes over £6,000. On the faith of this remark H makes the goods but fails to gain payment from J.

J: If K replies "He's a bad payer, he owes me £6,000", when in fact, J does not owe K any money, nor has he ever done so.

These questions indicate that a knowledge of the law involved is required of students, rather than an analysis of the situations involved. The examination questions call for no indication of how the secretarial function may necessitate an acquaintance with legal procedure, although the teacher did indicate that he attempted to make such connections for the students.

The teacher believed that there was a career structure for people entering the business world as secretaries and said:

"I think that if a girl is proficient in the skill subjects, has a good grasp of the more academic subjects such as Law and is prepared to work hard and has a certain measure of ingrained ability, then there is no reason why, if the girl is career minded, she should not progress from the secretarial to the executive and managerial type of job."

A further example is thereby given of the possible perpetuation of the myth that an avenue for promotion to managerial status is available to secretaries.

### Administration: Personnel and Functional Aspects

The RSA state that the learning objectives for this syllabus are:

- "(i) understand the role and activities of management;
- (ii) have a knowledge and understanding of supervisory and administrative skills and their practical application in the office;

(iii) have a working knowledge of office methods, procedures and services and assess the possible consequence of change;

(iv) be aware of the sources of information and the area in which practical and professional services may be necessary."<sup>(1)</sup>

A weighting of 30 per cent is given to the personnel aspects of the syllabus. This area considers the obligations and rights of an employer of labour rather than those of an employee. A third of the syllabus is devoted to organisation and functions of the firm and its staff. This includes the functions of management in the planning, control, organisation and co-ordination of the firm. The duties of an office supervisor are examined and the place of this employee within the management structure is considered. Students learn how the office supervisor can control expenditure in the office and improve the economical use of resources as a means of reducing expenditure. Therefore, the office supervisor, perhaps the post to which it is considered that students wish to be promoted, is identified as an integral part of a management team and emphasis is placed on her part in improving the profitability of the firm.

The remainder of the syllabus is devoted to office services and methods, and personal responsibilities. The activities dealt with include the organisation of conferences and meetings, arrangements for business visits, petty cash and sources of information. This is the area of the syllabus which has been the traditional domain of the secretary and is the knowledge which students may expect to use in their initial jobs.

As was stated earlier, this syllabus is divided into three subject areas

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(1) RSA, Diploma for Personal Assistants Booklet, op cit, p 20.



at Greenfields. Some concern was expressed by the teacher of Secretarial Duties that students were having to learn aspects of a job which they would never use, because her teaching was dominated by the examination requirements:

"If you look at the area of committee work .... they (the students) could really run meetings, organise meetings, discuss them, say what's right and what's not in order, and from what we've heard after they leave, not very many of them do get the opportunity to even minute meetings and I do worry that sometimes that we do have to go to such depths and that they'll then get to work and think I can do that .... and why don't they ask me to do this, and they don't get the opportunity."

Some disparity was identified by this teacher between the knowledge transmitted and the reality of the working situation of secretaries. However, she also stated that she felt that generally students did not have a realistic picture of their future work when they started the course, as most of them viewed it primarily in terms of the skills. However, she estimated that the examples she could draw on from personal experience did assist in widening their personal horizons. The examples of what she told her students were:

"I once told them about a conference that my boss had gone off to meet somebody and they'd agreed to meet on the M1 to meet and talk about this job, at Scratchwood Services, and they had their coffee and walked over to the conference centre, just for a chat for about a quarter of an hour, and a man came over and asked them for £19 for the conference fee. Because they had sat down and used it for a conference they had to pay £19 which was the basic fee for holding a conference. Now I didn't know that and I might have been able to tell them about it in advance, perhaps that would have been saved.

And another duty I had .... was that my boss was an American and his 18 year old daughter cabled that she was going to get married in the States and so he booked a telephone call in the middle of the night to her and he was going to sit in the office until the call came through. When I got to work the next morning it was obvious that something had gone wrong and I'd done everything except switch the extension through. So he sat there all night with the call coming in to the switchboard and not coming into the office."

This teacher paints the enigmatic picture of being compelled by virtue of

a predetermined syllabus to transmit knowledge that will not be used in the working situation, and on the other hand indicating to the students that the secretarial function may be wider and more fulfilling than they originally anticipated.

The textbook recommended to students was on Secretarial Duties. It is concerned primarily with procedural knowledge such as how to use reprographic machinery, obtain visas for visiting certain foreign countries, arrange meetings. It also deals with the personal qualities necessary in a secretary. The teacher stated that the textbook was only used as a back-up to her teaching and that she felt that students could pass the examination on attending lessons even if they did not refer to the book.

It is particularly in this area of the syllabus that the personal qualities necessary in office workers appears. However, very little class time is devoted to this element of the syllabus, as only one hour of the total Diploma for Personal Assistants course is given to the discussion of human relations in the office, and the postgraduates do not deal in any way in a formal sense with this aspect. Examination questions rarely refer to this aspect of the syllabus, no doubt because of the subjective interpretation necessary in the discussion of personal qualities. All teachers, therefore, concentrate for the major part of the time of the procedural knowledge.

The future work of the students was identified by the secretarial duties teacher as:

"the majority who are successful on the PA course will start as secretaries, but not as junior secretaries, and then a lot depends on luck, opportunity, what comes along and their initiative at taking what's available and what they want. They don't all want to be assistants or junior executives. Some of them don't see any further than marriage and having a job to reinforce a joint income."

Thus at least the initial job was identified as secretarial, indicating again some teachers' assessment of the course as secretarial rather than managerial. A further statement by the teacher also reinforced this view:

"My main worry about the PA's is that they can be over qualified .... When I read the syllabus for the PA Diploma .... I think 'Oh my goodness there's an awful lot of knowledge here for people with no experience to draw on' .... I think the skills are fine. If they're going to be a secretary, they're going to use their skills without a doubt, it's that extra parcel of knowledge that they need for the PA Diploma that I do wonder, that if when they get out to work, they're going to be a bit disillusioned."

The commerce sphere of the syllabus was considered by the teacher concerned to be useful background information for anyone entering the business world. This same teacher also teaches oral communication and in one statement identified the view that these students were destined to become secretaries:

"with the communication it is going to be a matter of them operating more effectively as secretaries. With the commerce .... it is just general information, so they'll be more knowledgeable individuals, so consequently be more use to have around the office."

No one particular textbook was recommended by the teacher for this area, although he did refer to different texts and recommended books as the course progressed. However, he did believe that the teaching was more important than the textbooks.

Much of the knowledge examined is of a descriptive nature:

1979 Question 1

State five possible duties of an office supervisor.

1980 Question 1

Specify four items of equipment that could assist in the addressing and/or despatch of a bulk circular.

Other questions illustrate that the syllabus tends to suggest that students will be part of the management of the firm and their priority is to work towards the greater effectiveness of the management of the organisation:

1979 Question 12

State, together with reasons and examples, the means by which the management of an organisation might achieve greater co-ordination and harmony of effort between the different parts of the organisation.

1979 Question 10

A company operates a centralised typing pool (comprising thirty typists) based on a multi-bank system. The multi-bank is directly controlled by the pool supervisor who assigns work to each typist according to immediate availability to carry out the work.

Suggest the means that might be adopted to raise the level of output, accuracy and reliability of the work carried out by the pool. State any assumptions that you consider have to made.

It is to be noted that personal identification with management has been shown to be a recurrent theme in many of the PA syllabuses.

Communication: Written

The RSA state the following learning objectives for this syllabus:

- "(1) convey meaning in clear, concise and accurate writing;
- (ii) compose in suitable language a variety of communications required of the Personal Assistant, with a proper regard to appropriate conventions of style and presentation;
- (iii) select, and comment on, facts from source material and convey these concisely and logically in a work situation;

(iv) service committees, working parties and other meetings."<sup>(1)</sup>

A 25 per cent weighting is given to composition of articles and statements for publication and press releases. Approximately one third of the syllabus concerns abbreviated forms of communication such as summaries from a variety of texts, notes for speeches and demonstrating office equipment, job descriptions, and telex and telegram messages. The preparation of documentation for, and reports of, meetings and conferences is allocated 23 per cent of the syllabus. The remainder of the subject matter is concerned with letters, memoranda and formal invitations.

In an informal discussion about this syllabus with the teacher concerned, it was stated that some aspects of the knowledge were of more immediate use to the students than others. For example, undoubtedly all students would be dealing with letters and memoranda in any job taken in an office. However, she felt that hardly any of the students would be expected to produce articles for publication. Examiners, at an open meeting, had wished to maintain this aspect because it was the only area where candidates could demonstrate good use of English and imagination. Thus knowledge is transmitted, perhaps for educational reasons, but since it is an integral part of a vocational course it does influence the way in which students view the secretarial function.

The communications teacher felt that while some of the items taught may not be of immediate use, nevertheless students may be promoted to posts where such knowledge would be useful. In any one job an employee would not be required to compose all the items of communication covered in the syllabus, but she felt that future employment was of such a diverse nature

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(1) RSA, Diploma for Personal Assistants Booklet, op cit, p 26.

that most will be called upon to use some of the knowledge in their employment. A textbook is not used in teaching this subject.

The examination requires students to compose items of communication from the various areas of the syllabus. Questions again are slanted towards acceptance of management decisions and resultant identification with this section of the organisation:

#### 1980 Question 4.1

As personal assistant to the Training Manager of Safeguard Insurance Limited, you are closely involved in the company's staff training and development programmes. As part of a plan to improve the induction of new employees into the firm, you have been asked to liaise with the Personnel Manager and to write an article for the next edition of the company's house magazine.

This article is aimed at junior school-leavers joining Safeguard in July/August period and is to be entitled:

"Making A Good Start - How to Handle Colleagues, Callers and Customers Successfully!"

#### 1980 Question 4.2

Your company, Addrite Limited, which makes a range of office accounting equipment has decided in principle to introduce a secretarial servicing system to replace its existing provision. In the new scheme, a secretarial servicing unit will be set up in each of the company's head office departments. It will comprise a supervisor, 3-5 senior secretarial staff and 8-12 typewriting/transcription staff. The units will replace the current 'one-to-one' manager/private secretary relationship and the existing departmental typing pools, which are both felt to be costly and to inhibit staff development.

The decision has not been welcomed in all quarters, however, and criticisms have been voiced about the consequent loss of prestige, job satisfaction and personal contact. In order to pave the way for the introduction of the secretarial servicing units, you have been asked by your principal, Mr John Bucknell, Managing Director, to write an article for the next edition of the company's house journal to emphasise the advantages which would derive from introducing the new system, bearing in mind that some staff view the prospect with scepticism.

### Communication: Office Skills Applied

This examination requires the student to produce from taped office-style dictation, typewritten documents. The tape may either be taken down in shorthand or used in an audio-typing fashion. All typewritten material produced by the students must be mailable. This is the aspect of the curriculum which students and staff identify as of most immediate use in the students' future working role. In discussion with the teacher responsible for preparing students for this examination, she said that she believed the examination required students to carry out the practical tasks of a secretary in a situation which resembled, to a greater degree than any other examination attempted by these students, the reality they would experience in their first jobs.

Students are told at the beginning of the recorded tape that they are acting as PA to a Mr X. The candidate has to make decisions as to whether, for example, carbon copies are needed, where corrections in grammar and syntax are needed and to compose written communications from brief notes. On the whole the decision making and initiative to be shown by students is in minor areas. They are not called upon to, say, alert the person dictating the material to any points of law which may relate to the dictated material. Yet this is the kind of situation in which the teacher of Law felt that the knowledge he was transmitting would be useful to the students.

No textbook is used for this aspect of the syllabus.

## Communication: Oral

The aim of this section of the syllabus is to understand:

- "(1) the basic principles of giving and receiving oral information;
- (ii) the importance of selecting the correct vocabulary, tone and sequence for the person addressed, and choosing the appropriate time for the communication."<sup>(1)</sup>

The candidate is examined by means of a series of telephone calls which last for approximately 20 minutes and the student is required to act out the role of a secretary. No textbook is recommended by the teacher for this subject:

"The oral communication angle .... the lectures themselves are far more vital there because it would be difficult to get a textbook to put over the kind of thing I'm putting over in my lectures."

This teacher saw the knowledge involved as being of general use to anyone about to start work. When asked whether he saw the subject as relevant to the students when they go to work, he said:

"Well, oral communication for obvious reasons - everyone ought to be able to communicate satisfactorily."

and later he added:

"In as much as a secretary is going to be working in an office situation, I suppose the information could be more immediately useful than to other students, but I think it's information that any intelligent person should have."

## RSA Single Subject Examinations

All students take RSA single subjects in shorthand and typewriting. For the postgraduates these are their only formal examinations. The main reason why the PA students take these examinations is the very low

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(1) RSA, Diploma for Personal Assistants Booklet, op cit, p 34.



national and College pass rate for the Diploma. Most students do pass single subject examinations and therefore possess formal qualifications to present to prospective employers.

The syllabuses for these subjects merely give an indication of the nature of the examination, as indicated in the following example.

Shorthand 80-160 wpm

"Two or three passages (which may include a report or memorandum) will be dictated with short interval after each; at least one passage will be of general commercial interest .... At speeds above 80 words per minute the passages will vary in length, the longest not exceeding five minutes, but the total dictation time will remain constant, i.e. eight minutes at each speed".<sup>(1)</sup>

It is to be noted that only one of the passages has to be directly related to commercial interests. Much of the RSA material used for teaching shorthand has no relevance to the business world. This point was brought up in an interview with a shorthand teacher, when she was asked about the relevance to students' future work of the knowledge she taught:

"Well, for practice for examinations, some of the material I read for that, especially RSA is not at all relevant. For instance, I have to read perhaps about grandmother's teaset and similar sort of material, which is not at all relevant. Sometimes I don't like reading it, but on the other hand if they (the students) have never met that sort of vocabulary they would come unstuck if I kept purely to business material. So I have to explain this to them, and they understand."

Some of the RSA examination passages are concerned with values and norms involved in the secretarial role. In this area of the curriculum, therefore, it can be contended that knowledge is being transmitted in a covert fashion, as overtly one is simply testing a student's ability to

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(1) RSA, Single Subject Examinations Booklet, Orpington, 1979, p 38.

take down dictated material and transcribe from their notes a replica of what has been said. However, information is also being transmitted. For instance, one RSA passage reads:

"A good secretary must at all times remain calm and patient. This is especially necessary when dealing with people outside the office. Some people can be very annoying but we must remember that we are representing the firm for which we work. There is much truth in the old saying that a soft answer turns away anger.

There is a great deal of skill in knowing how to dress properly for the office. The old jeans and jumper we wear around the house on a Sunday morning are not suitable for the office the next day. There are clothes for all occasions and the thoughtful well-groomed secretary will be careful in her choice of dress for the office."(1)

Another passage included the following depiction of the secretarial role:

"... a secretary is not appointed as a manager's deputy but as his aide. She is never considered his business rival. On the contrary, other members of the organisation treat her as the one person who really understands how her chief thinks, acts, writes and decides. This is probably the key to the reasons for the demand for able secretaries and, conversely, why so many women, young and old, derive such satisfaction from the work. People recognise their very great importance. Secretarial work seems to meet the particular psychological needs of women to a greater extent than many other forms of employment."(2)

The shorthand teacher interviewed referred to passages of this genre and said:

"They (the students) don't like them. No, they hate them. They groan and say 'Oh, this demoralising stuff'. Then we have a little laugh about that .... They might accept the ones about dress perhaps, we have a few about what you should wear and you should look smart and tidy - those sort of things, yes, but a few of them (the passages) seem to go too far in some ways - talking down to this particular age group."

Unlike the practical correspondence examination, there is no work simulation element to this examination. It is simply a matter of students taking down

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(1) Royal Society of Arts Examinations Board, Shorthand 100 wpm, 15 March 1977.

(2) Royal Society of Arts Examinations Board, Shorthand 100 wpm, 2 July 1973.

in shorthand material dictated at a steady, even rate which is then transcribed in handwritten form, precisely as dictated. No decision making is called for on the part of candidates. However, the students value this qualification because employers invariably request specific speeds for potential secretaries. For instance, no job advertisement has been found to date requesting applicants to have attained the Diploma for Personal Assistants, yet many advertisements state that applicants should have a speed of, say, 100 wpm. Employers are not fully cognisant of the qualifications which are being requested, as few bosses dictate at a constant rate of 100 wpm for a period of up to five minutes.

An important comment on the dominance of examination syllabuses in teaching strategies was made by the shorthand teacher:

"It's such a short course I do feel very strongly that we have to spend a lot of time on examination material for the exam because they're very very specific shorthand examinations and therefore they do have to have the right material I feel. The right vocabulary. The only thing I think I would like to do would be to develop in another way the transcription side of it all a little different. It's a question really of time, a great deal of it, because you can't start too much involved transcription too early because they can't cope with it anyway. And by the time they can cope, we're then faced with exams and therefore again the two are not really related, they are quite separate things. I think it depends really whether they're being trained for an office or trained to pass the exam. Really it should be for an office but if they're going to take exams, and most of them want to, they do need their speeds then they've also got to have practice at that."

Both groups of students learn Pitman 2000 shorthand and use the set textbook which takes them through the many points of theory. Sentences are given to illustrate the theoretical points, but these are for developing skill rather than imparting knowledge. When the theory has been covered

students purchase a monthly magazine entitled 2000. This is used particularly for the shorthand passages contained in it. The shorthand teacher made the following comments about this magazine:

"They (the students) usually hate the cover for a start and all groan when they look at it, because they think it's some sort of, what shall I say, well just some sort of smiling female again. I think they would rather have something a little more business like on the front sometimes. But they do find it useful, for the shorthand, we do a great deal from it - that plus our examination passages."

The cover of this magazine does seek to present a visual image which complies with the social image of the secretary - a smartly dressed female with an ever present smile.

With regard to the career potential of these students, the teacher said:

"If they've got good secretarial skills, not just a smattering .... then I think they can go somewhere. Possibly not in their first job but it's going to come in their second, because often they find that the job they're really after they've got to have some experience."

Again the skills come to the fore as the primary requirement in the students' future work.

The teacher indicated that she talked to students about their future work, not simply from the point of view of the usefulness of shorthand, but more generally. The examples she gave indicated that it was primarily the role of the secretary which was discussed. For instance she said that she drew on her own work experience:

"The kind of questions that you might be asked from the point of view of perhaps suddenly being asked to ring up and make an appointment for the boss's mother to have her teeth seen to and perhaps the boss wants only a Swiss doctor. That's the sort of thing I was asked to do."

#### RSA Single Subjects: Typewriting

All students take Stage II (Intermediate) and the majority also take

Stage III (Advanced) Typewriting. The syllabus consists of a list of items which the student must be capable of producing in typewritten form. This includes letters, forms, agendas and minutes, tabular statements. The examination requires students to follow instructions rather than use their own initiative. It may be estimated that this work relates more to that of a copy typist in an office rather than an administrator or even much of what a secretary may be called upon to do.

A textbook is purchased by all students and used extensively in class teaching. It consists of theoretical points such as display of various documents and gives exercises on these items of theory. It is interesting that, particularly in straightforward copying exercises some of the material is concerned with normative values. For instance, one passage reads:

"It is a well-known fact that a good personality is an asset to the office worker. She must be a person who is liked by her employer or supervisor, by her fellow-workers, by the salesmen who call at the office, and by the public who are the customers or clients of the business of which the office is a part. You should know yourself, not as you think you are, but as other people think you are. If you find that your personality is less pleasing to others in some respects than you had thought, you should remedy the defects.

It is not assumed that the following characteristics are the only ones that make for the best personality, but they are important:

**Punctuality:** You must always be on time, and begin work at once.

**Cleanliness:** Clean hair; clean, well-kept hands and finger-nails; clean well-brushed clothes suitable for an office- clean teeth.

**Courtesy:** Say 'please' when asking a favour; 'Thank you' when one has been granted. Do not interrupt the work or conversation of others.

**Cheerfulness:** Respond to questions and requests with a smile, and cultivate a bright and happy disposition."<sup>(1)</sup>

Again, therefore, in an oblique manner, knowledge is transmitted which

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(1) A M Drummond and I E Scattergood, Gregg Applied Typing, McGraw-Hill, Maidenhead, 1965, p 101.

does coincide with the public image of the secretary. Just as with similar passages used for shorthand teaching, many students voice their dislike of this kind of material, yet as will be shown in the next Chapter, they do not totally reject the values which are incorporated in such statements, as when interviewed they made similar statements about the personal qualities necessary in a secretary.

#### RSA Single Subjects: Secretarial Duties

Only the PA group take this examination. The syllabus is covered during the teaching of Personnel Functions for the Diploma for Personal Assistants. As this has been discussed earlier in this Chapter, no further analysis of the subject matter is considered necessary.

#### Summary and Discussion

The various subjects studied on the secretarial courses investigated can be categorised firstly into those which have long-standing association with secretarial curricula, such as the skills and secretarial duties, and secondly those which have their main links with a traditional academic education, such as law and economics. The knowledge transmitted within subjects in the first category provides students with the ability to carry out practical tasks involved in office work, while the second category of subjects is concerned with information about business and commerce and the operation, organisation and duties of management. It can be seen that the skills provide students with abilities which might result in a personal horizontal alignment of solidarity with their working peers who also require these abilities in their work. However, the major

contribution of traditional academic subjects is to provide a background of understanding which facilitates and fosters the vertical axis of solidarity, discussed fully in Chapter III.

Although the basic secretarial skills dominate the curricula in terms of hours of study devoted to them, the strength and influence of subjects such as economics lies in their association with high status academic knowledge. The latter subjects do not only provide material which implies the necessary alignment of the secretary with management, but also influence the overall tenor of the courses. The mere inclusion of these subjects denotes curricula of higher status than courses which concentrate exclusively on the skills, and thereby probably provides attractive and acceptable courses for students who have attained high level scholastic success. Undertaking this kind of course will again suggest that the student is destined for a working situation of higher standing than those students who only learn conventional secretarial skills. Once more this implicit classification of future working occupations relies predominantly on the notion of vertical solidarity incorporated in the boss/secretary relationship since it is argued in this study that this is the distinguishing feature of those who work within a personal relationship with a boss. It is, therefore, contended that the influential nature of curricula incorporating knowledge transmission geared to the unquestioned alignment with, and acceptance of, management organisation, goes far beyond the number of hours allotted to these subjects on the timetable.

On the whole it is considered that most teachers operated within strong boundaries to their subjects, and little consideration or discussion took

place on the contribution of each area of knowledge to the actual jobs anticipated by students. This situation suggests that opportunities are rarely afforded students to analyse their possible future work and results, perhaps, in an uncritical acceptance of the implicit orientation of the course towards producing students who will welcome the vertical and inter-positional alignments traditionally associated with secretarial work.

This study now proceeds to enquire into the views of current and past students on their training courses and the work they have undertaken since leaving college. However, a more detailed discussion of the implications of the curricula described in the current Chapter, can be found in Chapter VIII.



## CHAPTER VI

### CURRENT STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE SECRETARIAL FUNCTION AND SECRETARIAL TRAINING

This Chapter concerns the images and beliefs that trainee secretaries hold both about their future work and the training they are undertaking. The views of present students will be considered in relation to the work experience of past students, which is discussed in detail in Chapter VII. Post 'A' Level and Postgraduate secretarial students were interviewed and questioned about why they chose to undertake their current course of study, their views on the secretarial function, personal job aspirations, and various aspects of the courses on which they were currently engaged. The first part of this Chapter is devoted to an account of the methodology used in the interviews with current students. This is followed by an analysis of the information obtained from the interviews.

Interviews were held with students currently studying on Post 'A' Level and Postgraduate secretarial courses. The data collected in this way is used to identify the students' conception of the secretarial role, their interpretation of the knowledge transmitted with reference to the skills, attitudes and qualities necessary as a secretary, as well as the extent to which participation in a secretarial course had influenced students' views of the secretarial function.

Various methods of conducting interviews were considered, ranging from the formal situation where the interviewer asks set questions in a specific order, to the informal situation which may be more akin to a conversation or discussion. In five pilot interviews an informal method of questioning was attempted. Certain themes were discussed with the student, but the questions were not preselected. This resulted in different areas of concern being discussed in greater depth and at greater length with different students. These interviews were relatively difficult to guide in that it was necessary to think out questions more or less spontaneously, which would not indicate a certain bias in the replies anticipated. It was estimated that responses would be difficult to summarise or to quantify in any meaningful way. Therefore it was considered advantageous, at a later stage, to operate a more formal style of interview with scheduled questions to be asked in a specific order (see Appendix I - Schedule of Interview Questions). This was considered preferable for the purpose of asking all respondents exactly the same questions in the same order, so that all answers related to the same topic and therefore replies could be compared. It is, however, recognised that by using only preselected questions, the interviewees' patterns of thoughts and stated opinions are channelled within prescribed areas. However, this disadvantage was outweighed by the usefulness of information gained in this way. It was found that information gleaned from the pilot interviews was not totally dissimilar to that gained by means of scheduled questioning, and some information from the pilot interviews is used within this study, where this is considered appropriate.

The student population interviewed was relatively homogeneous in that they were all in the same age group, British, of very similar educational

background and holding similar educational qualifications. For this reason, it is estimated that standardised questions were generally interpreted in more or less the same way. It was also considered that most of the questions drew upon knowledge or opinions to which respondents did have access, as questions related to the course on which students were currently engaged and their future working location with which, of course, the course was directly concerned.

For the main part the interviews were conducted with students who actually knew the researcher as a lecturer teaching on the secretarial courses within Greenfields College. This may have resulted in certain difficulties. First, in the interview situation both lecturer and student were taking on different roles from those usually encountered between them. It was felt that students did try to give a free and open response, but did look for some feedback to their replies as to their performance, perhaps as they would do in the classroom. In such circumstances the single word 'right' or 'fine' was used to reassure the students so that they would feel confident in going on to the next question. In order to test the effect of one of the students' teachers asking the questions, similar interviews, using the same schedule of questions, were conducted with students at another college, the students being completely unknown prior to the interview. Furthermore, a lecturer at Greenfields College who had experience in conducting educational research, but had no contact at all with secretarial students, conducted similar interviews again using the same schedule of questions, with four secretarial students studying at Greenfields. Responses made by students in the latter circumstances did not differ in any apparent way from those made with the researcher who was known as the interviewees' teacher.

In the later interviews, which used the schedule of questions, where a respondent did not give a very full reply, then a pause was allowed in order to indicate that perhaps more could be said on the topic, or simply, if necessary, supplementary questions were asked, such as 'what do you mean by that?' or 'can you explain why you say that?'

An attempt was made to obtain identical conditions for each interview, as far as this was reasonably possible. All interviews were held in the same room of the building, which was a small informal tutorial room. The same equipment was used, namely a taperecorder. One difficulty in this area was that the interviews necessarily had to span several months so that the length of study on the course differed for each student. The first of the interviews using the scheduled questioning method was held two months after the students had begun their course in order to have allowed the elapse of sufficient time for students to have settled on to their course and to have received sufficient formal teaching to be able to assess the content. The interviews went on until March of the same academic year. It was considered desirable not to proceed beyond this date as students would become involved in their formal examinations in the summer term and would not wish to be distracted by attending such interviews. It is however recognised that the length of time which had elapsed since each interviewee had commenced her course may have affected responses to questions relating, for example, to the textbooks used, as in the later stages the students had obviously read them in greater detail.

The questions were not precoded as it was felt that more information would be gained by giving respondents freedom of response, although

again this does make comparability more difficult. Respondents were, therefore, free to decide on the aspect, form, detail and length of their replies.

Thirty students were interviewed for this research, 26 of whom were studying at Greenfields College. Eighteen of the sample were Post 'A' Level students and 12 Postgraduates. The total number of Greenfields students on the two courses in question was 35. Attempts were made to select a random sample of students, by asking alternatively named students on the alphabetic register. However, it was found that on very many occasions specific students could not attend an interview session when the interviewer was free to conduct the interview, for instance, because of prior commitments to other activities in the College. The result was that subjects were not in fact selected by any systematic means. Access was such that any form of random sampling was out of the question. The subjects, in common with subjects in many other small-scale researches were included because they met, in the words of Professor Fred Waisanen:

"the usual criteria of convenience, co-operation and captivity!"(1)

The schedule of questions was devised to enable the interview to be completed in about 45 minutes. This was necessary in order to accommodate the sessions within the private study periods allocated to students. It was not considered reasonable to ask students to miss official classes for this purpose.

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(1) M H Kuhn 'Self-attitudes by Age, Sex and Professional Training', in Sociology Quarterly, January 1960, No 9, pp 39-55.

Before every interview each student was advised that her replies would not be seen by any other member of staff, that information given would in no way jeopardise their progress on the course and that interviews were being conducted simply to help in a personal study being undertaken by the teacher. Each interview used only Christian names to maintain some degree of anonymity. Interviewees were assured that no names would be attributed to any responses quoted in written form within the study and that a fictitious name would be attributed to the College within which students were studying. It is felt that these students were sufficiently mature and had a rapport with staff which meant their acceptance of reassurances and their trust in the situation created by their teacher.

As has already been stated, the interview questions posed to students were not precoded. However, personal involvement in discussions while teaching similar students over the past 16 years, meant that the researcher had some notion that responses would fall into definable categories. The information obtained from interviews was in fact relatively easy to categorise for analytical purposes. For example, the responses to the question relating to whether students believed secretarial work to be particularly suitable work for women, fell into two well defined categories, which were an instrumental and a gender category. Each set of responses to a specific question was therefore allocated a variable number of categories according to the information obtained.

In general terms it can be stated that there were both advantages and disadvantages in having a formal role within the institution in which

research was carried out. The advantages included accessibility of information and an understanding of College organisation. Both interviewer and interviewee shared a common understanding of the curricula being discussed. The disadvantages included the possibility that students would not acknowledge the researcher's role as different from the role in her teaching position. Also it is appreciated that in these circumstances the researcher can be lodged in thought processes relating solely to the institution within which her day-to-day work is carried out. However, on balance, it is felt that, while noting these possible disadvantages, it was beneficial to carry out the research within the employing establishment. It is felt that in the circumstances of undertaking research while in full-time employment where time for research is limited, then the benefits of accessibility outweighed the disadvantages.

All interviews were recorded and then transcribed to provide easily accessible material for analytical purposes. This material formed the basis for the following discussion of students' views, ideas and beliefs about secretarial work and training.

It was considered that questioning students on their reasons for taking a secretarial course may throw some light on their views of the secretarial function, although it is difficult to distinguish factors such as those who found no alternative employment now making the best of the situation and maintaining that it will be interesting and rewarding work. Indeed asking people about their reasons for choosing a specific course of action is a notoriously difficult area of investigation. People's reasons are often complex and they may themselves be

insufficiently aware of their reasons to describe them when questioned. Nonetheless, the following points emerged.

It was established that postgraduates' reasons for taking a secretarial course fell within two well defined categories. Either they find they are unable to find suitable work using their degree qualification, or they believe that secretarial work will give them an introduction to an area of work where they can gain promotion. Examples of responses given by the five postgraduates who fell within the first category are:

"Because the degree I possessed (Classica) was of no practical direct use in a job." (PG)

"My degree subject was music and I didn't really know what I could do, because the areas where I could use music like teaching and performing, I decided against." (PG)

Some postgraduates, of course, hope to combine the knowledge gained in their degree course with secretarial skills as with the student quoted above who has a music degree and wished to obtain a post in Arts Administration and in fact obtained a post as secretary to a large London orchestra.

The seven postgraduates who wished to use secretarial work as a stepping stone, made statements in the following vein:

"I don't really want to stay as a secretary or personal assistant or anything else. I would like to get into public relations of some kind and so starting off as a secretary, but working up the company." (PG)

It can be concluded, therefore, that at least half the postgraduates identified secretarial work as an element in a career structure.

With regard to the Post 'A' Level entrants, two students stated that they had wanted to go to University but did not gain sufficiently high grades in their 'A' level passes, so that a secretarial course was a



second choice in these instances. Two students saw the advantage of the course being that it was relatively short and made definite statements about not wishing to go to University because the course would be too long. For example:

"I thought about doing a degree in business studies but I didn't want to go to University as it would be for four years and I thought, well, a year would be just enough for me." (PA)

"I did this course mainly because I didn't want to go to University." (PA)

Only one of the Post 'A' Level students made a positive statement about having always wanted to be a personal assistant. All other students saw secretarial training both as a stepping stone into a specific area of work and also as an insurance policy for the future in that they believed that they would always be able to obtain employment for the hours they required and in any area of the country, if not the world, in which they lived:

"I'm going to get married and it is an insurance policy that no matter where I might travel in the world or nationally, I'll always be able to get a job of some kind, if not a full career." (PA)

"Secretarial work also has a great many advantages in that you can do it part-time, you can do it almost anywhere and therefore for someone who is married as I am, this is quite an advantage." (PA)

"It's always good background even if you never do the job. You've always got something there to offer." (PA)

"I wasn't really quite sure what I was going to do and I thought I might as well get another skill behind me before I actually made the big decision." (PA)

"Basically I thought it would be something to fall back on." (PA)

The overriding factor emerged that current students did not view the job of a secretary or PA to be their ultimate goal but rather either as a

means or avenue to other employment, or skills to be used if other employment was not available. Even the one student who did say that she had always wanted to be a PA went on later to state that in five years' time she hoped to be 'higher than a PA'. Some confusion is to be noted in that although students believed, as will be shown later in this Chapter, that they would be able to obtain interesting jobs where initiative was called for, yet they did not wish to remain in such jobs.

It is interesting to note the extent to which many students accepted the traditional female role of their careers being of secondary importance to that of male partners in that those who were married needed a skill which was marketable in many geographical areas where their partner may need to travel in pursuance of his career. Furthermore many accepted the notion that in the future they would need part-time employment to fit in with domestic responsibilities, thus accepting that the female had prime responsibility for home and children. This was particularly evident when asked whether there were any aspects of the job of secretary which made it particularly suitable work for women. Fourteen interviewees gave instrumental reasons associated with women's general role within the family. For instance:

"I suppose it's suitable for a woman because you can often work part-time as a secretary, which is obviously very useful for a woman if you're a mother." (PA)

"If you want to leave and have children it is an area which you can get back into quite quickly." (PG)

"You are nearly always in an office or nearly always based in one place and you can dash out at lunchtime and go and get the shopping and bits and pieces." (PA)

"She can go temping if she wants for a couple of weeks, she can drop it for a year if she gets married." (PA)

It is notable that, in spite of the fact that no direct questions were posed regarding students' views on women's role generally in society, sixteen students alluded to their beliefs in responses to various questions. These systems of belief appeared to depict very traditionally orientated roles for women within the family, certainly where the male partner's career and job were of primary concern. This confirms one teacher's statement that her secretarial students generally adhered to traditional ideas about their future lives and view them in the 'cosy magazine image'. Certainly it can be argued that these general beliefs about the nature of women's role may be positively transferred to the work place and facilitate the acceptance of the secondary role of servitude to a male boss, called for in many office jobs.

Sixteen interviewees interpreted the question on aspects of the job of secretary which made it particularly suitable for women as relating more directly to the actual tasks and role of a secretary rather than peripheral 'benefits' such as hours of work. Here again replies did shed some light on the students' ideas of femininity as well as the role of a secretary:

"I think women often have more perseverance in routine and tedious jobs and obviously this must be involved in secretarial work. They are probably better able to knuckle under, if you know what I mean, to people who are not particularly co-operative." (PG)

"I think women are really better at organisation than men .... I think they've been brought up to it probably. I mean it passes down from your mother. She teaches you how to organise in the house initially and you tend to think and plan ahead far more than men do." (PG)

"A lot of men I think like to have a woman around and do things that a man wouldn't be willing to do. May be sometimes they're a bit more diplomatic .... I suppose a secretary sort of looks after her boss, makes sure he gets to appointments on time and this and that. Whereas a man might not be willing to look out for another man's business." (PA)

"I think that a male secretary working for a male boss, then I think they'd start treading on each other's toes because they'd both be breadwinners for a family and I suppose feel they should be making the decisions. I don't think men ever like being the underdog." (PA)

All students differentiated clearly in their own minds between the work of a shorthand-typist and that of a secretary, in spite of the fact that, as indicated in Chapter I, there is some confusion over these titles and what work is entailed under each different title. Indeed many students indicated that they saw clear conceptual differences between a secretary and a personal assistant, as shown by the first of the responses cited below:

"As a PA I should think you would have to do a bit of typing and a bit of shorthand, but not an awful lot as compared to just an ordinary secretary - more organising your boss's daily routine, helping him out, taking his place when he is away." (PG)

"If you see a job advertised in the paper and it just says shorthand typist then that is what you expect that you'll be doing. But if it says secretary - some don't even mention shorthand or speeds - then I suppose that's what I'll be looking for, where there's a chance to use your own brain and a chance of promotion." (PA)

"She (the secretary) has much more responsibility and knows about the boss's work more. She can take steps on her own initiative. I would value her job much more highly." (PA)

"I should think you'd have more responsibility (as a secretary) and if anything if you were in a very high position then you wouldn't be doing much typing yourself perhaps you'd have an assistant yourself .... and she'd do the typing." (PA)

"To me the words shorthand-typist conjure up the image of somebody who does nothing but sit there typing, being fed stuff and not needing to think for herself .... A real secretary will at times presumably have to take their own decisions, work things out, make arrangements, and think ahead - with more responsibility." (PG)

All students believed then that different job titles did indicate different levels of work. Twenty-four interviewees also spoke confidently of the

concept of a career structure whereby they would probably start work as a secretary, gaining promotion in the first instance to personal assistant and then further promotion, although they were unable to name the position which would count as promotion from personal assistant. The personal images and beliefs held by current students about their career aspirations must be contrasted with details supplied by past students. As will be shown in the following Chapter, when a comparison was made between the first job obtained after leaving College with the last post in employment, it was found that the vast majority had obtained no progression from the secretarial level.

It is to the posts of secretary and PA that students aspire initially. They see their first posts after leaving College involving a minimal amount of time being spent on the skills of shorthand and typing, and envisage obtaining jobs where they will be able to take decisions and use their own initiative. The area of work which is least attractive to them is in the realms of routine tasks and shorthand and typing. This point must be related to the fact that, as indicated in Chapter V, the major proportion of class contact time is devoted to the basic skills. No student questioned the fact that she spent so much time learning skills which she hoped not to use when she obtained a job. In fact students saw these subjects as the core knowledge of the curricula. Most students anticipated that they would probably have to participate to some extent in routine work, but they expressed the desire that this would not expand into a major factor of their jobs. There was no questioning as to whether jobs as secretaries or PA's existed where a considerable portion of the work time is spent initiating work rather than following through activities initiated by others. Empirical data, discussed in Chapters I and VII, suggests however that many secretarial

jobs do involve a considerable amount of routine work, including shorthand and typewriting.

Students have a strange mixture of concepts regarding office work. On the one hand it is stated by them that there are routine and tedious jobs to be done, that bosses need secretaries to do the routine work for which they are too busy, such as correspondence, filing and answering the telephone, but, on the other hand, they believe that they will obtain jobs where the greater part of their time will be spent initiating work. As has been stated earlier, students categorise such jobs as direct avenues for promotion into even more responsible jobs, either as PA or above. This point was particularly highlighted in responses to a question relating to students' ambitions and the position they hoped to achieve in about five years' time:

"Not just a shorthand typist, but where I had my own, perhaps department that I'm looking after or running and taking decisions." (PG)

"Hopefully fairly high in the secretarial level, towards a PA, or out of secretarial altogether, into public relations." (PG)

"I hope I will be in some sort of management position or working my way up to being in a management team." (PA)

"I am ambitious so if I can work my way up through being from a PA to .... I would not be Managing Director .... but hopefully I would be a little higher than a PA." (PA)

"Perhaps if I started off as a secretary then in 5 years' time hopefully be an accomplished PA." (PA)

"One of the reasons I thought a secretarial course was a good idea was that it was an introduction into a company - it is the first rung on the ladder - a stepping stone." (PG)

This then was how most students envisaged their job prospects, although it is to be noted that two students stated that they could not in any way predict what they anticipated doing in five years' time, while another

hoped to go to University after completing the secretarial course. Responses do show that students view secretarial work in terms of the image of promotional opportunity depicted in the public image, rather than in terms of the reality of lack of promotion experienced by many women in office employment, which is exemplified in the following Chapter by the work situation of ex-Greenfields' students. The proviso must be made, however, that interviewees were asked an open question which might have invited unrealistic responses about future aspirations, and it is appreciated that the status of the information obtained is characterised by the nature of the question. Nevertheless all responses were concerned with work situations rather than totally unrealistic predictions.

Not surprisingly, the knowledge transmitted in the secretarial curricula and the manner of its transmission does influence the views of some students and approximately one-third (11) of the interviewees stated that their ideas about secretarial work had changed since they started their studies. Typical replies indicate that it is both the subjects which are included in the curricula and the teachers themselves who generate the notion of interesting and demanding secretarial jobs:

"I did have the fixed idea that it was a boring job. Not the shorthand and typing side (has caused me to change my ideas) .... but the other lessons. The staff here in what they say .... for example in secretarial duties and background to business .... they have explained because they've got inside knowledge of what the job's like." (PG)

"I didn't really have much idea of what a secretary does apart from shorthand and typing and making 'phone calls .... but there is a lot more to know - we do Economics, Law and Accounts .... you seem to have to know a lot more than you actually think." (PA)

"The staff here are so pleasant and really try to help you and show you how interesting it can be." (PG)

"I realise now that the secretary has to do a lot more work than I first realised. All the responsibilities that are placed upon her which I thought were mainly a manager's job - organising the office, organising the staff, really, and giving suggestions on different plans." (PA)

"I think I had the opinion when I first came here that the secretary wasn't up to much really, but now I find doing it, there is a lot of intelligent girls in my group and I see the possibilities of what you can do with a PA Diploma." (PA)

For some students, therefore, the curricula operate as processes of recreation of the socially constituted image of jobs entailing interesting, high-powered activities. Certain student responses imply that before starting their course of study they had viewed secretarial work as rather narrow, repetitive and boring work, but their views had now changed and appeared to be in accord with the public image of the function. This point illustrates that while there is undoubtedly a public image of the secretary, as indicated in Chapter II, this generalised social concept does not totally impinge on the belief systems of each individual in precisely the same way. Indeed some may reject such depictions of the secretarial function. To maintain that an image exists is not to describe images which all people have in their minds and it is extremely difficult to recreate precisely the images and beliefs that individuals do carry in their minds. Nevertheless the socially constructed notion of secretaries did appear to have varying degrees of influence on all the students interviewed.

While the students quoted above asserted that the inclusion of subjects such as Law and Economics on the curricula had led them to believe that the job would be much broader and more interesting than originally perceived, none was able to state how such subject matter would directly assist them in their anticipated work. This may indicate some conceptual confusion about their future function. Of importance, however, is the effect of including certain subjects on the course. It is not simply a matter of the knowledge that is transmitted in the classroom. The mere



fact of including subjects on the official timetable suggested to these students that these topics would be a necessary and integral part of their future working life. Students suggested generally that the subject matter itself was background information only and no student was able to make any specific comments about how this knowledge would be useful in the office. For example:

"I think it is all sort of basic knowledge that'll help you in the future." (PA)

"It's like all the general knowledge, but slightly more inclined towards the business world." (PA)

"I don't think I'll use it in any specific way but I think it's given me confidence .... to go out and get a job in industry .... because at University .... you're totally cut off from industry and you're in a little world of your own." (PG)

"I can't see myself using them directly in a job, unless I'm involved with somebody who is an economist or something. But if I meet people who are working in those subjects I'll know a bit about what they're talking about. It will give me more confidence that I do know something apart from just shorthand and typing." (PA)

"Well, for Law and Economics you learn how a business runs, you learn the different types of business organisation so you'll know the behind the scenes set up of whom you're working for. And in Law they've got certain legal requirements and you have to know these, you have to know if you're up to scratch so to speak." (PA)

It will in fact be shown in the following Chapter that past students had found the subject matter of Law and Economics to be amongst the least useful to them in their office work. Of note is the fact that not one student made any comment at all implying that they would have preferred a course where such subjects were not included.

While all students confidently believed that office jobs were available where initiative was an important component of the work, nine of the interviewees did state that they expected to find that it was necessary to have some practical experience before obtaining such posts. When

asked if they thought there would be much opportunity to use their own initiative when they became a secretary, replies included:

"Oh, I hope so. I think in fact if you see a distinction between a PA and a secretary. I hope I'm not going to be a secretary. Perhaps obviously I might start off as, you know, a secretary, but I hope to get on to be a PA, which I think is a cut above a secretary." (PA)

"Hopefully I will get a job, probably not straight away, but some time where I can use my own initiative and take decisions on my own." (PA)

"I hope so .... I don't expect to walk straight into a responsible, high paid job, but after, you know, a couple of years' experience I'd like to find a job like that." (PA)

"From what I've been told you will be able to use your initiative to quite an extent as a PA, but I think this will take time - obviously you can't go into a job and expect to go into it like you've known everyone for six months, and after a while I think you should be allowed to - you've been trained to do it." (PA)

"As I progress up the career scale hopefully yes. Initially not an awful lot, no. And that, that there will be, will be very minor. But I couldn't stay in a job which didn't demand it of me anyway." (PG)

Others indicated that they would look specifically for an office job where initiative was required:

"I would go for a job where that would be one of the criteria." (PA)

"I hope so because .... I like taking my own initiative and most jobs you see advertised will say 'initiative needed'." (PA)

"Well if you go for a PA job, the advertisements, and from what we've been told, they want somebody who can stand on their own feet. I think if you go for a reasonable job which you've been trained for, I think you will be left to your own devices." (PA)

"Well, I hope so, yes. I intend to look for a job where I will use my own initiative." (PG)

"Well, I hope so. I should think this applies again to some jobs and not to others and you have to make sure you get the right one." (PG)

Generally therefore students felt that if they gained experience or chose their jobs carefully, they would be given responsibility to use their own initiative. Their replies indicated that they believed that the course itself was intended to fit them for such posts. For some students the curriculum does act, at the very least, as a vehicle for the perpetuation of the notion of responsible and therefore varied and interesting secretarial jobs. Others indicated that job advertisements had also influenced their notions of secretarial work, which reinforces the importance of the advertising of secretarial vacancies referred to in Chapter II.

It is of paramount interest that, while the courses investigated contained very little overt knowledge transmission concerning the personal qualities and attitudes necessary in a secretary, nevertheless all responses to a question relating to the qualities needed to be a secretary coincided with the stereotyped public image of the secretary. Although some students had shown considerable dislike of shorthand and typing passages relating to these personal qualities, it cannot be assumed that this is necessarily because they reject the values. It may simply be that they feel they do not need to be told about appropriate behaviour, qualities and attitudes. An indication of responses obtained to the question concerning the personal qualities of a secretary is:

"Tolerance probably with the people you work with, having to be nice to them all the time, not losing your temper and telling them what you think. Having to be subservient and pleasant." (PG)

"She should have tolerance, patience, I think if you're going to work for a boss you've got to be the calming influence, I should imagine, you know, in business . . . I think you've got to be charming as well, you've got to be able to smile even under pressure." (PG)

"Fairly friendly because you are likely to be in contact with a good many people and therefore you must present the right kind of friendly image that will encourage people to co-operate with you." (PG)

"To be prompt, well dressed and to get on with all sorts of people. Not to be easily roused." (PA)

"I think you've got to be on the ball the whole time, you know, you can't sort of slacken off, whereas your boss can disappear off and say 'I'm disappearing for a couple of hours.' You can't do that, you've always got to be there." (PA)

"Patient, polite, conscientious about work .... it makes you an easier person to get on with." (PA)

"Be really nice." (PA)

The secretarial experience gained by past students led the majority of questionnaire responses about the personal qualities necessary as a secretary to emphasise similar qualities to those identified by trainees and this is discussed more fully in the next Chapter.

It is evident from replies to the question on the personal qualities of a secretary that current students accept the notion that their own thoughts, beliefs, personality, have to be subordinated and that they have to become an extension of another individual - their boss. Students demonstrated an implied acceptance that the responsibility for establishing a good working relationship is almost exclusively dependent on the secretary's personal adjustment to the requirements of her boss - an idea which coalesces with the public image of the function.

On the whole students interviewed felt that in the initial stages of their working lives they would be working with management rather than be part of a management team, but many added that they hoped to be an integral part of a management team after they had gained work experience in an office:

"I don't know if a secretary is classed as management team or not. I can envisage myself working with management .... you do work with a management team but I wouldn't consider myself management." (PG)

"I've certainly come across secretaries who are (part of a management team). Oh yes." (PG)

"Yes I should think if you're in a fairly responsible position then you would (be part of a management team)." (PG)

"May be not straight away but I would hope to, yes." (PA)

"Well perhaps not at first if you're quite low down. You wouldn't feel very involved but once you get to know everyone in the firm and you understood what was going on. Yes, I would feel part of them." (PA)

"Yes, I think I would, may be I'm also kidding myself there, but I would like to think that I was part of the management side." (PA)

All responses indicated at least an identification with management, even if doubts were expressed as to their initial acceptance as part of a management team. Students may have some doubts as to whether they would be an integral part of management as they expressed doubts in replies to another question as to their powers regarding monetary decisions and supervision of other employees. All students believed that they may be given licence to purchase, for example, a new typewriter or to supervise the work of a typist, but none felt that their monetary and supervisory influence would go much further than this.

An alliance with management was also expressed indirectly in that over three-quarters (25) did not believe that it was appropriate for them to join a trade union, although other factors may have influenced their replies to this question, such as whether their parents were trade union members and whether in fact they understood trade union organisation to

any great extent. One student expressed great surprise that there might be a trade union which would cater in any way at all for secretaries.

Typical replies to whether they would consider joining a trade union were:

"Not unless I had to, but in some cases you have to - no - I wouldn't." (PA)

"No, I'd never join a trade union." (PA)

"I might consider it, it would depend which one it was. I don't like the idea of striking much, but if it was compulsory for my job, then I would, but I tend not to worry about things like that too much." (PA)

"No, I don't think I would." (PG)

Only three students said that they would probably join a trade union.

However, no student indicated that she would actively seek union membership.

Textbooks issued on the course may influence the students' views of the secretarial role. Students were therefore questioned generally about the books and specifically about the Pitman 2000 magazine which each student has to buy monthly. Four students felt that the magazine was aimed at a lower level ability group than themselves and so felt able to dismiss the secretarial concept which was portrayed. Others did appear to be influenced by the knowledge put over in some books, while five interviewees did doubt that a secretarial position necessarily led to the serene contentment depicted by the girls on the front covers of their magazines:

"What I've seen in the textbooks is what I had in mind what a secretary will do." (PA)

"Business Administration .... is the best because it tells you about redundancies and recruiting staff and application forms and income tax which is what you might have to deal with." (PA)

"I find the 2000 magazine .... rather disconcerting because their articles on office life or how to deal with a stapling machine do seem to be aimed at the lowest common denominator .... and the pictures throughout, sort of unfailing cheerfulness, and it's so false." (PG)

"They show a secretary as super efficient, almost like a machine." (PA)

"Something like Secretarial Duties - it makes it seem a bit boring." (PA)

The students' responses to the questions on textbooks were a little more hesitant compared to replies regarding the lectures they attended, and it did appear that they paid less attention to textbook knowledge than knowledge transmitted by teaching staff in class contact time. Many students admitted that they had looked at the textbooks rather than read them. There was almost an uninterested attitude towards the textbooks, perhaps, as has been stated, because they felt that they were not geared towards the higher level work which they believed was available to them. However, this does further confirm that students do not anticipate spending too much of their working life on the less intellectually demanding aspects of any secretarial job.

The following statement concerning one student's dislike of the 'cover-girl' pictures on the Pitman 2000 magazine implicitly encapsulates the promotional prospects and level of work anticipated by the vast majority of students:

"They always look as though .... they have come up from the age of 16 and have worked up slowly through the office, rather than done a degree and all the rest of it .... they'll be there not likely to move (the girls depicted on the front cover of Pitman 2000 magazine)." (PG)

### Summary and Discussion

Analyses of interviews held with current students revealed that generally trainee secretaries conceptualise their future patterns of work in terms

of the public image of the secretary. It is perhaps remarkable that all students interviewed did appear to adhere, to a greater or lesser degree, to various facets of this mythological and stereotyped vision, in spite of the fact that the relevant curricula do not necessarily overtly recreate every aspect of the socially generated image. The aspects of the popular notion of the function which gained overriding compliance were the ideas that good promotional prospects pertained both within the secretarial sphere and into managerial level work, together with the belief that special personal attributes were particularly necessary in a successful secretary.

The job aspirations outlined by interviewees are particularly interesting. Although, as was stated above, ambitions complied with the public image, these future aspirations were muted and did not in general go beyond the administrative area of office work. If personal ambitions are related to responses to questions on the particular appeal to women of office work and reasons for undertaking secretarial work, it can be contended that a contributory factor to the muted nature of career aspirations is the general societal depiction of women's role. Many students implicitly indicated that their careers would take second place to that of their male partners and that their primary role would at some future stage be rooted in domestic activities. Although students generally believed that they would ultimately obtain demanding posts where responsibility and initiative were required, perhaps they are able to suppress any underlying and unspoken fears that they would continue in a subordinate position requiring only routine work, by the notion that their working location would be subordinate to their primary gender related activities within the home. Furthermore, although all students propounded positive



views regarding their ambitions, and some indicated an allegiance to the glamorous images of working within a management team, such aspirations were unspecifiable in terms of the nature of the work and the point at which such aspirations could be generally anticipated to come to fruition.

From this evidence, it is possible to suggest that students with good educational qualifications feel that it is appropriate to have positive career aspirations, but that this notion may bring conflicts with their traditional beliefs about the role of women. Secretarial work may, therefore, provide a compromise in any such personal conflict, with the secretary's gender respectability, promotional rather than career structure, and the extent to which the hours of work and location permit women to give prime consideration to other areas of their lives.

At a time of high unemployment, when perhaps other jobs were simply unobtainable, it was envisaged that some students at least may have viewed secretarial training as a last resort and one of the few avenues currently available for obtaining paid employment. However, this was not the case as all students interviewed had clear ideas both about the secretarial function itself and the prospects which would ensue from pursuing this kind of employment. In no way did any student perceive secretarial work in a negative manner. It could, of course, be argued that, having chosen or been forced by general employment trends to embark on secretarial training, their views were tempered by a state of cognitive dissonance and they were simply attempting to make the best of their situation. However, the question of identifying and analysing

an individual's reasons for specific selections is complicated and is discussed more fully in various other parts of this study. It is also pointed out that in a way the interviews formalised information which the researcher had gained in informal discussions with similar students over a number of years. The remarkable feature of information from current students is that neither the current unemployment trends, nor the increasing debate concerning women in society in general, appeared to have influenced the present students to any great extent, and they did appear to be expressing views in every way similar to those of students as many as 16 years ago.

Some of the students interviewed had, in the classroom, voiced objections to shorthand and typewriting practice passages which conveyed normative values about the behaviour of secretaries. Yet in interviews the same students quite readily expressed very similar value judgements in their own words. All students had very precise notions about the secretarial function and there was little hesitation in conveying their ideas in spite of the fact that very few of them had ever worked in an office. The overall tenor of student responses reinforces the proposition that the secretarial function is publicly available and that the images thereby created are extremely influential in concept formation.

The study now goes on to examine the practical experiences of secretarial work gained by students with very similar backgrounds to those interviewed and cited in this Chapter.

## CHAPTER VII

### SURVEY OF PAST STUDENTS OF GREENFIELDS COLLEGE

Practical circumstances did not permit a longitudinal survey of the thirty current students interviewed in connection with this study. Nevertheless it was considered essential to attempt to relate the ideas and beliefs expressed by the sample of Greenfields' current secretarial students to the realities of office work experienced by a comparable group of past students. Therefore questionnaires were sent to a sample of ex-students who had completed a Post 'A' Level or Postgraduate Secretarial Course at Greenfields College between 1971 and 1979. This Chapter begins with a discussion of the methodological approaches adopted for the compilation and analysis of the questionnaire. The latter part of the Chapter is devoted to an analysis of responses.

The population for the postal questionnaire was drawn from students who had studied at Greenfields between 1971 and 1979 as this meant that they had all undertaken a course similar in nature to that described in Chapter V. Approximately 230 students had completed either the Diploma for Personal Assistants or Postgraduate Secretarial course during these years. The relevant personal details for each student were obtained from centralised index record cards. However, since these files are

freely accessible to all staff at the College it was inevitable that each past student was not in fact represented by a card, since some were missing, and it was with some difficulty that 200 cards were finally located. There is no reason to suppose that the missing record cards in any way represented untypical students and therefore it is believed that the students contacted were a reasonable representation of the total population. Forty per cent of the sample were ex-Postgraduates, while 60 per cent had taken the Post 'A' Level secretarial course. This corresponded approximately to the proportions of each category of student who had undertaken the two secretarial courses in question.

A mixture of pre-coded and open questions was used, depending on the nature of the information required (see Appendix II - Questionnaire to Past Students). Open ended questions were needed, for example, to obtain details on the aspects of working as a secretary which respondents liked or disliked. Open questions permit a relatively free response without precoded suggestions as to, for instance, aspects of the work which might not appeal to the individual. Therefore the nature of the information required determined the extent to which precoded questions were used. In the instances where a Likert Scale was used, four options were given for responses in order to alleviate the error of central tendency, reported by Oppenheim<sup>(1)</sup>. As the questionnaire did not request information of a very personal nature, respondents were asked to put their name to the document so that follow-up letters could be

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(1) A N Oppenheim, Questionnaire Design and Attitude Measurement, Heinemann, London, 1966, pp 133-142.

sent to non-respondents. It was also considered that named forms would facilitate checking with College records where necessary regarding such factors as educational qualifications. The latter information was not requested on the questionnaire itself in view of the need to keep the document to a reasonable length and the availability of this information on record cards.

The questionnaire was compiled so that respondents would be able to complete it in about one hour. One ex-student still known personally by the researcher was asked to complete the questionnaire and time herself to test the approximate timing of completion. It was felt that if it were too long then the response rate would deteriorate. As people in this age range are very likely to have moved from their home address while attending College, it was considered important to give as much encouragement as possible to those who did actually receive a questionnaire to complete it. For this reason a stamped addressed envelope was included for its return.

The main purposes of the questionnaire were to relate the working experiences of past students to the projections of office life expressed by current students, to obtain up-to-date information on the work undertaken by secretaries and to acquire some information on how secretarial courses were viewed in retrospect and in the light of work experience. It was found that the general information concerning secretarial work coincided to a great extent with the observations of other researchers about the work of secretaries, as discussed in Chapter I. Since respondents had at one stage studied on secretarial courses which were very similar to the courses now being undertaken by the sample of current students,

it was considered reasonable to relate their working experiences to the anticipated careers perceived by current students. Time did not permit a follow-up of the current students, since it would be necessary to allow the elapse of a number of years after leaving College, to assess whether, for example, ambitions had been realised.

A pilot questionnaire was sent to 50 ex-students on 21 November 1979. A letter was enclosed with each questionnaire, giving reasons for contacting them and stating the usefulness to the College of any information given on completed questionnaires (see Appendix III - letter accompanying questionnaire). A total of 21 pilot questionnaires was returned and after consideration of these responses, minor adjustments were made to the composition of the questions and a further 150 were despatched on 23 January 1980. A reminder letter was sent out on 27 February 1980 to all those who had failed to return questionnaires (see Appendix IV - reminder letter to past students). The reminder was necessary as it has been reported as positively affecting response rate<sup>(1)</sup>. A total of 87 completed pilot and final questionnaires, together with 13 uncompleted questionnaires was eventually received, which represents a response rate of 43.5 per cent. Given that many addresses may have been out-of-date, the response rate coincides with the predicted outcome. For example, Oppenheim states:

"For respondents who have no special interest in the subject matter of the questionnaire, figures of 40 per cent to 60 per cent are typical; even in studies of interested groups, 80 per cent is seldom exceeded." (2)

Others report that response rates in postal surveys are notoriously

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(1) Christopher Scott 'Research on Mail Surveys' in Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, Vol 124 Series A, 1961, pp 143-191.

(2) A N Oppenheim, op cit, p 34.

low. For instance, according to Ilersic:

"on the average, a 20 per cent response is considered good."(1)

The response rate of this sample is relatively high, taking into account that personal student records are not up-dated after students leave the College and therefore some questionnaires must inevitably have failed to reach addressees. However, it can be contended that as the researcher was known personally to the ex-students, this would probably encourage participation in the project, in comparison to requests to respond to questions from an anonymous individual. Evidence for this statement stems from the fact that many respondents enclosed personal letters with their questionnaire, outlining their activities since leaving College and expressing pleasure at hearing from the College.

Examination of the College record cards of non-returners revealed no common patterns in these ex-students' qualifications or progress on their secretarial course. The only supposition which could be considered was the possibility that, as the questionnaire related to secretarial work, non-responders may not have been employed in that capacity since leaving College. However, there was no practical means of testing this supposition. This does in fact seem unlikely as most students acquire an offer of their first job before leaving College, informing the College of details of the job, and invariably this first post is secretarial in nature.

The completed questionnaires were analysed by allocating each category of response a numerical category, inserting this information on a card

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(1) A R Ilersic, Statistics, HFL (Publishers), 1967, pp 298-299.

index which was then fed into a programmed computer. A 'no response' numerical categorisation was added to each set of responses. The responses to open questions were coded in accordance with information obtained. In all cases these responses fell within clearly definable areas of information and within a maximum of five main categorisations. The responses to open questions were therefore relatively simple to codify. The statistical details obtained in this way form an integral part of the remainder of this Chapter.

The data concerning the numbers of each category of ex-student involved in the postal survey and questionnaires returned is as follows:

Population Sample of Postal Questionnaire

	No. Sent	No. Returned Completed	No. Returned Not Completed
Ex Postgraduate Secretarial	80	36	7
Ex 1 Yr Advanced Secretarial	120	51	6
	—	—	—
TOTAL	200	87	13
	==	==	==

A further four completed questionnaires were returned after this analysis had been completed.

As was indicated in the previous Chapter, many of the current students who were interviewed identified a career structure whereby they anticipated progression from positions as secretaries to personal assistants and beyond. However, from an analysis of the various jobs undertaken by past students since leaving College, there is little evidence of such a career structure in operation in office work. The first job obtained on leaving College was categorised as 'secretary' by 88.5 per cent of the respondents. Only 6.9 per cent had obtained first posts which they



categorised as personal assistant, while 2.3 per cent had obtained jobs which had no connection with secretarial work. Of the total number responding, 24.1 per cent were still in their first job, while 37.9 per cent had obtained at least one further job since leaving College which they still categorised as 'secretary'.

This evidence means that 62 per cent of respondents leaving College between 1971 and 1979 had obtained no progression in status from that of secretary. This data was obtained by comparing past students' first jobs with their last post in employment. Only 8 per cent categorised their last job as personal assistant, 8 per cent stated that they held an administrative post and 14.9 per cent had jobs which had no connection with secretarial work. Many of the respondents had gained some years of office experience since leaving College, which might have counted as a factor to gain promotion, yet promotion had only been realised in relatively few instances. The following table gives the number of respondents and their year of leaving College, which indicates the number of years of practical experience possibly obtained, although it is to be noted that 9 respondents were no longer in employment:

Length of Possible Work Experience of Questionnaire Respondents

<u>Year Left College</u>	<u>Number of Respondents</u>
1971	1
1972	4
1973	8
1974	11
1975	10
1976	11
1977	15
1978	13
1979	14
	—
TOTAL	87
	==

There was no discernible connection between number of years of work

experience and the acquisition of a personal assistant or administrative post. It is also to be noted that no respondent had obtained a job which she categorised as managerial or executive. Past students had not therefore generally realised the ambitions expressed as desirable by current students.

Another indicator of job status is that of salary. For this reason Question 5 requesting current salary to be inserted was added to the questionnaire after the pilot 50 had been sent out. The proviso was made after the question that respondents need only give this information if they were willing to do so as it was recognised that for some people this is a sensitive and private area. Without this written proviso an unwillingness to divulge salary information might have jeopardised completion of the remainder of the questionnaire. 46 per cent of respondents did not reply to this question, some of whom were not currently employed. Of the remaining 54 per cent who did supply the relevant information, only one respondent, an ex-Postgraduate, was earning between £2,000 and £2,999, the other responses were:

1979 Annual Salaries of Respondents

<u>Annual Salary</u>	<u>% Respondents currently earning Salary in this bracket</u>
£3,000-£3,999	9.2
£4,000-£4,999	27.6
£5,000-£5,999	11.5
over £6,000	4.6

(Respondents who were not currently employed, but gave their last salary in employment, are excluded from the above table.)

The following table relates salary to years of experience:

Table of Current Annual Earnings Related to Years of Experience

Year Left College	No. of Respondents in each Current Salary Bracket				
	£ 2,000-2,999	£ 3,000-3,999	£ 4,000-4,999	£ 5,000-5,999	£ Over 6,000
1971	0	0	0	1	0
1972	0	0	1	0	2
1973	0	1	1	2	0
1974	0	1	3	1	0
1975	1	2	1	0	1
1976	0	0	3	2	1
1977	0	0	4	2	0
1978	0	3	2	2	0
1979	0	1	9	0	0
	—	—	—	—	—
TOTAL	1	8	24	10	4
	=	=	=	=	=

The tables above indicate that most students were earning between £4,000 and £4,999 per annum. Although it is appreciated that this is a very small sample, the table above suggests that there was no apparent relationship between years of experience and higher salary. It can be contended that while salary may well have increased since leaving College for individual ex-students, such salary advances had, in the main, only kept pace with inflation rather than having been achieved as a reward for experience or for promotion to a higher status occupation. This again suggests that the majority of past secretarial students had not been promoted. In addition, there was no distinguishable relationship between formal qualifications and salaries. The postgraduates had not in general obtained higher salaries than the Post 'A' Level students, nor had those students who had achieved the RSA Diploma for Personal Assistants achieved higher status or higher pay. This data reinforces Silverstone's statement

reported in Chapter I that employers do not necessarily seek secretaries with a high level of educational qualifications. It can be argued further that in general employers are not cognisant of particular secretarial qualifications such as the Diploma for Personal Assistants.

Some students mentioned their inability to gain promotion by way of secretarial jobs in their general comments at the end of the questionnaire. For example:

"It is not true that 'you can go in as a secretary and get promoted'. It does happen, but it is not really that probable." (PG)

"I can only advise women who don't think they'll like it not to become secretaries, but to try and find training for a career in their own right. Lower paid at first perhaps, but with better long-term prospects." (PG)

"Course was very thorough, interesting and great fun - it is only jobs which do not come up to the same standard - no prospects." (PA)

"Once branded a secretary, it is very difficult to get out of." (PA)

From this evidence it is to be concluded that promotional prospects for secretaries are certainly not as easily obtainable as suggested by the public image of the job. In addition the promotional aspirations expressed by current students are unlikely to be fulfilled in the majority of cases.

The evidence gained from interviews with current students indicated that they would seek posts where initiative was called for and where a minimal amount of routine work was required. Responses to several questions to past students gave some indication of the extent to which they were called upon to use initiative in their secretarial jobs.

Question 11 asked to what extent they had been allowed to use their initiative. Responses were:

Estimated Use of Initiative in Secretarial Work

A great deal	27.6%
Quite a lot	33.3%
Some	19.5%
Hardly any	13.8%
No response	5.7%

From the table above it is clear that more than 60 per cent of past students believed that they had been able to use their initiative in their work. However, when giving examples of activities involving initiative, these tasks appeared generally to be in the realm of minor activities rather than initiating work in their own right. Examples given by those who said that they did use their initiative, fell mainly in the following area;

"Obtaining stationery and office equipment." (PA)

"Within the areas my work covers, I can do any job in the way I want." (PA)

"Arranging transport." (PA)

"Dealing with telephone enquiries, reorganising filing system." (PA)

"Routine correspondence, devising a filing system." (PA)

"Booking restaurants and hotels." (PG)

"Day to day correspondence, my own work routine." (PG)

"Organising meetings, often given the essential info. on a letter but compose it myself." (PG)

"The ability to make decisions confidently in your boss's absence, production of agendas/minutes without any prompting." (PG)

The total number of responses which indicated that initiative was only required in areas such as devising filing systems, writing routine

letters, dealing with telephone enquiries, or organising meetings or travel arrangements was 65.5 per cent. Only 11.5 per cent replied that they used initiative to act on behalf of their boss in his absence, while 5.7 per cent gave examples where they would actually be involved in primary decision making areas such as deciding which students should be rejected for a specific course in a school for foreign students and having responsibility for employing certain categories of staff. 17.2 per cent of respondents gave no examples.

Even if examples cited above indicate that the majority of secretaries are only allowed to use initiative in secondary, back-up tasks, nevertheless this was the area of work which appealed most to many of the ex-students. In fact 49.4 per cent stated that the aspect of the job they enjoyed most was making their own decisions and being left to organise the office themselves. 21.8 per cent enjoyed meeting different people, 10.3 per cent liked being made to feel useful and having an appreciative boss. While a descriptive account of secretarial work, as given in Chapter I, may suggest very routine work with perhaps little opportunity for personal satisfaction, nevertheless it is clear that many aspects of the work do in fact afford some reward in terms of personal fulfilment. However, the areas identified by ex-students where personal gratification may be satisfied do substantiate the conclusions reached in Part I of this work. That is that the overwhelmingly predominant areas of self fulfilment fall within the realms of traditionally female orientated activities of organising the routine running of the home-base, that is the office, of the boss and receiving some signs of gratification from the boss for so doing. It follows therefore that the fundamental satisfaction stems from the accomplishment of norms perpetuated in

traditional female patterns of socialisation.

Information from other research used in Chapter I indicated that routine tasks played a substantial part in many secretarial jobs. These observations were largely substantiated by information gained from questionnaire responses in connection with this research. Routine work was what 40.2 per cent of respondents stated was the least enjoyable aspect of being a secretary. The routine tasks identified included typing, filing and photocopying. It is interesting to note however that the least rewarding aspect of the job for 28.7 per cent of respondents was the fact that they felt that they lacked status, were treated as a servant and that their intelligence and ability were not appreciated. Four respondents actually used the words 'being a dog's body'. The use of such unprompted emotive terminology seems to indicate rather deep feelings of frustration. However, it is important to consider these findings in relation to the students following the course. Some, at least, of these well qualified people must, through their various educational successes, have come to identify themselves as intelligent and able. It would therefore have been surprising if some of the sample had not felt that their abilities were not being utilised to the full. The following table shows the number of responses in each category of aspects of secretarial work disliked;

Aspects of Secretarial Work Disliked

<u>No. of Responses</u>	<u>Work Disliked</u>
35	Routine tasks (eg typing, filing, photocopying)
25	Being dog's body (eg treated as a servant, being at boss's beck and call)
6	Personal services (eg making tea, buying birthday cards for boss's wife)
12	Other various tasks which were not categorisable

It is difficult to assess from questionnaire responses how much time is spent on activities which were generally disliked. In retrospect it might have been possible and desirable to insert a question which attempted to quantify this aspect of the work, although obtaining reliable information in this respect may have been difficult. However, it is to be noted that in spite of the fact that some aspects of secretarial work were disliked, the majority of respondents were either 'very happy' or 'quite happy' in their work, as indicated below:

General Job Satisfaction

	<u>No. of Responses</u>
Very Happy	32
Quite Happy	29
Not Very Happy	12
Not Happy At All	5
No Response	9

An attempt was made, by combining the information from the two tables above, to ascertain whether there was any relationship between job satisfaction and aspects of the work disliked:

Relationship Between Job Satisfaction and  
Aspects of Secretarial Work Disliked

General Job Satisfaction	Work Disliked			
	Routine Tasks	Being Dog's Body	Making tea and personal services	Other
Very Happy	19	6	2	5
Quite Happy	14	10	2	3
Not Very Happy	1	6	2	3
Not Happy At All	1	3	0	1

From the table above it is difficult to identify a pattern of relationships between job satisfaction on the one hand and aspects of the work which are



disliked. This shows both the limitations of individual questions posed in the postal survey and the inability of the researcher to delve more closely into responses, as is possible in personal interviews. For example, the category of 'quite happy' as an indicator of job satisfaction could have been taken by respondents to be positively happy to a reasonable extent or negatively as being merely not absolutely unhappy with her work. If a personal interview could have been arranged it would have been possible to enquire, for instance, of some respondents why they felt that they were very happy as a secretary while at the same time they felt that they were a 'dog's body' in their jobs. It is, therefore, regretted that the practicalities of this research did not permit such follow-up interviews to the postal survey.

From the data analysed above, it can be estimated that the opportunities for using initiative in a secretarial post are limited, that routine tasks are an unappealing aspect of the job, that just under a third of respondents do feel that they lack status and that they are capable of taking greater responsibility than is called for in a secretarial job. This evidence appears to substantiate the propositions made in Chapter I analysing secretarial work, that the secretary's role is essentially supportive. It also illustrates the discrepancies between the public image of the secretary, current students' ideas about their future work, and the realities experienced by past students.

Replies to Question 6 on the questionnaire, requesting an indication of the usefulness to secretaries in their jobs of the knowledge and subject matter learnt in their secretarial course, also gives an indication of the kind of work that these past students have been called upon to

undertake in their jobs, If the secretaries had been required to take executive decisions, then one would estimate that the knowledge transmitted in subjects such as Management would have been most useful to them. However, the knowledge which had proved of greatest benefit was overwhelmingly that of typewriting and shorthand. The relevant figures for each subject are:

Usefulness of Course Subjects to Secretary's Work <sup>(1)</sup>

Subject	Very Useful	Quite Useful	Not Very Useful	Not Useful	Not Studied	No Response
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Typing	77.0	1.1	0	0	0	21.8 <sup>*</sup>
Shorthand	71.3	16.1	4.6	2.3	2.3	3.4
Secretarial Duties	46.0	33.3	12.6	3.4	2.3	2.3
Communications	35.6	23.0	3.4	5.7	25.3	6.9
Office Admin.	32.2	23.0	9.2	4.6	25.3	5.7
Commerce	13.8	23.0	23.0	16.1	19.5	4.6
Audio Typing	11.5	11.5	16.1	24.1	31.0	5.7
Personnel and Functional Aspects	10.3	11.5	5.7	0	63.2	9.2
Management	8.0	12.6	14.9	14.9	42.5	6.9
Economics	5.7	11.5	9.2	14.9	50.6	8.0
Law	3.4	11.5	20.7	19.5	39.1	5.7
Accounts	2.3	6.9	9.2	10.3	63.2	8.0

<sup>\*</sup> The high rate of 'no response' to 'typing' was caused by the inadvertent omission of this subject from the pilot questionnaire.

The table above is somewhat complicated by the fact that subject titles have changed over the years of the existence of the course. As was indicated in Chapter IV the constituent components of the course have also

(1) It will be noted that some subjects listed in Question 6 on the questionnaire (see Appendix II) have been omitted from this table. This is because the questionnaire was also used for College purposes and sent to past students who were not related to this research. Information which is not directly related to this study has therefore been omitted.

altered since its inception. This accounts for the high level of 'not studied' responses in some instances. These factors complicate detailed and precise statistical analysis. Nevertheless broad conclusions can be reached from this evidence. For example, it can be argued that this information coincides with the conclusions about the work actually done by secretaries which was elicited from the replies to questions on the use of initiative and what these ex-students enjoyed most and least about secretarial work. If such a vast majority of respondents found shorthand and typing very useful knowledge in their work, then they must have been called upon to use such knowledge to a reasonable extent. A number of respondents who had studied Secretarial Duties and Office Administration and Personnel Functions found these subjects either very useful or quite useful, which are the subject areas where they would have obtained information for example about various filing systems. This again is the area in which many stated that they had been allowed to use their initiative. A high percentage also found Communications either very useful or quite useful. This knowledge would, for instance, have given them the ability to compose letters from notes which is also an area which was selected as one in which initiative was required. All other subjects were selected by less than 50 per cent of respondents who had studied the subjects as being very useful or quite useful. This information serves to emphasise the deduction that secretarial work involves essentially a supportive role where tasks are carried out from instruction rather than the initiation of tasks and responsibility for their processing.

The importance of these conclusions is twofold. First that current students do not anticipate that the nature of secretarial work will

involve such a secondary role and that in general the knowledge transmitted in secretarial courses does not purport to show the work in this light. On the whole current students interviewed believed that subjects such as Law and Economics would be useful in their work, but were unable to specify the ways in which they would be used. Apparently the work situation has not illuminated this situation as the majority had not found the subject matter useful to them.

In spite of the fact that secretarial work may be rather different from what students envisage during their course, this does not necessarily mean that secretaries find their working situation totally unacceptable. As shown earlier in this Chapter, the responses to the question relating to how happy current secretaries were in their jobs indicates that most are either quite happy or very happy. As suggested in Chapter I, one aspect which may lead to the majority of respondents being at least quite happy in their secretarial posts is the aspect of working in close proximity with management. Respondents were approximately equally divided on whether they believed that they were part of management. Nearly half (43.7 per cent) of respondents stated that they did believe themselves to be an integral part of a management team. 48.3 per cent (42 respondents) felt that they were not a member of a management team. Examples of reasons given for not feeling part of management are:

"I do help and liaise very closely with management and would give some decisions on behalf of my boss (ie use his authority) but I am not usually consulted on management decisions." (PG)

"Although involved in discussions, decision is the ultimate responsibility of the management." (PG)

"I was rarely involved in policy making decisions for the company, more given a brief within which I had freedom of action." (PG)

"Definite feeling of a 'them' and 'us' situation." (PG)

"Some people think of secretaries as 'just someone to do the typing' still." (PA)

"I am not part of the 'management team' though it would be equally impossible without me to back up on the more mundane aspects." (PA)

"When my boss is involved in making decisions which could cost several millions of pounds a year the most helpful thing I can do is make coffee; supportive but hardly constructive." (PA)

"I was always considered as inferior in so far as I was there to type and answer the phone and serve coffee." (PA)

"However much the old line is used 'working as a team' I believe as a secretary/PA you always work 'for' and never 'with'." (PA)

"Very little of the 'meat' of the work is channelled to secretary. Secretary is separate support person, not an integral part of the main team." (PA)

Interesting statements were made, however, by those who believed that they were part of a management team. This is notable mainly because, in spite of the fact that they identified themselves with management, they indicated in the two previous questions that they did not in fact take management and executive decisions particularly in the areas previously established as managerial functions, namely that of power over men and money. Only two respondents had any executive powers such as deciding whether to employ applicants for a specific job. In the area of monetary responsibility, although 48.3 per cent of respondents stated that they did have some responsibility for spending money on behalf of the organisation, only 11.5 per cent of respondents had any responsibilities beyond petty cash or purchasing stationery or office equipment, which may be argued as not counting as management functions. Very few indeed were therefore actually involved in managerial level decision making. Some of the reasons given, why, in spite of this, they did feel part of management were:

"Being treated with respect and as a colleague by other managers with whom you are in daily contact." (PA)

"I feel that most managers would be lost without their secretaries, and in that respect a secretary is part of a management team." (PG)

"Any management team requires a good back up from administration and close working relationship ensues." (PG)

"As secretary to four administrators I was dealing with much of the routine correspondence and those I worked for were willing to explain any queries I had regarding the business." (PG)

"Being secretary for one department I work closely with all grades of employees and consequently have to liaise with and among them and help co-ordinate their various projects with one another." (PA)

"The secretary is there to complete the chain, typing reports, letters, etc., conveying messages between the members of the team." (PA)

"My views were always considered and acted upon." (PA)

It may be contended that while nearly half of the respondents do believe themselves to be part of management they do not give instances of managerial functions for which they have responsibility, nor do their reasons for this belief support their notion, if it is accepted that the prime responsibility of management is the employment and deployment of labour and monetary decision making. This aspect may well exemplify the mystification of the position of secretaries in the labour market. These responses also supply specific exemplification of the reasons for the establishment and maintenance of vertical solidarity between boss and secretary which was discussed in the theoretical debate contained in the conclusions to Part I of this work.

Only 14 of the respondents belonged to a trade union and only one of these belonged to a clerical workers union. This evidence coincides with Silverstone's findings on trade union membership reported in

Chapter I. It also supports the claim that personal identification with management may suggest that membership of a trade union is not in accord with the appropriate standing of a secretary. However, other inter-related factors contribute to the non-unionisation of secretaries, for instance the isolationary nature of the work and the lack of canvassing of such workers to join unions. The main point is that respondents again certainly indicated in their responses support for the theoretical discussion on vertical and horizontal solidarity referred to above.

With regard to the subject areas which secretaries felt they would have benefited from learning during their secretarial courses at Greenfields, 47.1 per cent did not respond to the question, and 42.5 per cent named only simple procedural tasks such as how to operate a telex or switchboard. On the whole, therefore, ex-students did not appear to feel that a lack of knowledge was maintaining them in an essentially supportive role. What they identify as areas of weakness and lack of knowledge are in fact more routine tasks which would only help to maintain their current situation. This information supports the notion which has already been discussed in Chapter III that it is fundamental societal factors which locate women mainly in supportive roles, which is the major element in the secretary's restrictive situation, rather than a lack of objective knowledge.

61.9 per cent of respondents reported that they had found it necessary to have personal qualities as a secretary which again emphasised the supportive nature of the work. The qualities were in the area of patience, tact, tolerance, getting on with people. The important factor is that only four respondents mentioned any qualities such as drive,

initiative, self-confidence, dynamism, problem solving ability, which might enhance their chances of promotion to managerial level and also indicate levels of work activity beyond routine and supervised tasks.

The final major area which was investigated by information gained from questionnaire responses was the relevance of the knowledge transmitted during the secretarial course to past students' current working situation.

The data is as follows:

Similarity of Secretarial Course to Work Experience

Job Very Similar	17.2%
Job Quite Similar	52.9%
Job Not Very Similar	21.8%
Job Not At All Similar	1.1%
No Response	6.9%

An analysis of the reasons given for specific replies in the above table reveals that 26.4 per cent believed that the course had been realistic. However, approximately one-third of respondents felt that the knowledge they had received during training had caused them to anticipate an unreal secretarial role. A breakdown of these latter responses gives an indication of the reasons given:

Job is more routine than course suggested	)	
Course glamorised the job	)	11.5%
Course did not suggest inferior status in the job	)	
Promotion prospects are not as course suggested	)	11.5%
Did not get as high a position as course suggested	)	
Some of the knowledge is not used at all at work	)	10.0%
Tasks and duties carried out differently at work	)	

For a considerable proportion of ex-students then it appears that the course had contributed to an unrealistic picture of secretarial work. Indeed it was suggested in the Chapter describing the curricula and in the analysis of interviews with current students that many aspects of



the course may contribute to an illusionary vision of future employment.

Question 19 regarding documents composed and despatched by secretaries was badly worded. The question had been inserted to elicit information regarding which documents a secretary was responsible for compiling and sending out under her own signature. However, 75 per cent of respondents had in fact ticked the 'send out' column for some documents and left blank the 'compose' column for the same document. This shows that they interpreted 'send out' as putting in envelopes and posting. For example 11.5 per cent said they composed letters, while 78.2 per cent said they sent out letters. The figure for sending out documents has therefore been ignored. However, responsibility for composition of documents is as follows;

Responsibility for Composition of Documents

Letters	11.5%
Memos	10.3%
Agendas	9.2%
Minutes	10.3%
Accounts	4.6%
Legal Documents	2.3%
Others	4.6%

This evidence supports the statement that in very many secretarial posts there is little opportunity for secretaries to use their initiative by way of assuming responsibility for some at least of the production of paper work, which is the prime activity of office work.

Only just over half of the past students (56.3 per cent) indicated that they were still employed as a secretary. 10.3 per cent of those who returned questionnaires were not working at all. 22.9 per cent had moved to a job which had no connection with secretarial work, while only

5.7 per cent had gained promotion to an administrative post. Of those who were still working as a secretary, 26.4 per cent stated that they did not wish to remain in that area of work. Some respondents specified an area of work they wished to enter other than secretarial. 10.3 per cent hoped to gain promotion to an administrative post, 2.3 per cent wished to enter personnel work, and 21.8 per cent hoped to obtain employment which had no connection with secretarial work.

From this it does appear that a number of past students are disillusioned with secretarial work. However, it is to be noted that it is not always primarily because of discontent with the work that such secretaries wish to leave this area of employment. For example, two secretaries stated that as they had originally trained to be teachers they did hope at some point to obtain jobs as teachers, but indicated elsewhere in the questionnaire that they were quite happy as secretaries.

It is interesting that on the whole there was very little variation between replies received from Post 'A' Level ex-students and those replies made by Postgraduates. The one exception to this was in replies to the question regarding similarity of the work of secretary to the secretarial course undertaken. While 17.6 per cent of Post 'A' Level respondents stated that the course had suggested that secretarial work was an avenue for promotion and that a relatively high level position would be obtained, only 2.8 per cent of Postgraduates made any such assertions. A further 17.6 per cent of Post 'A' Level respondents made statements that some of the knowledge gained on the course was not used in their job, whereas no Postgraduate made any statement in this vein. One reason for this may well be that, as indicated in Chapter IV,

the Diploma for Personal Assistants course does have a different emphasis in the curriculum in that Economics, Law, Accounts, are compulsory examinable subjects, and as such have a much more dominant position. In the postgraduate course only the basic skills are examinable, Law is an option, and less time is devoted to subjects such as Commerce. In spite of the fact that the content of the two courses is very similar, the nature of the final examinations does contribute to another facet of the hidden curriculum. It is suggested that the formal certification of subject matter by an examining board increases the degree of importance attributed to the knowledge in the students' minds. This factor must be pertinent to the assessment of the relationship of the secretarial course to the experiential conclusions about the work by past students.

#### Summary and Discussion

The information supplied by past Greenfields' students supported the findings of other researchers regarding the tasks which many secretaries are called upon to perform. For the most part, these tasks are of a routine nature and the role of the secretary is essentially supportive.

In spite of the fact that for many ex-students there were areas of secretarial work which they disliked, that the work was not precisely what had been envisaged when they were training for their jobs, and that they had not obtained the promotion which, if related to current students' views, they had no doubt anticipated, nevertheless the majority were at least quite happy in secretarial work. The areas of the work which were stated to give satisfaction were organising the office for the boss, meeting people and being appreciated. If these areas of

gratification are taken together with the personal qualities which past students deemed necessary, such as tact and loyalty, then it can be argued that evidence has been given to sustain the theoretical analysis contained in Chapter III. That is that secretaries are encouraged and welcome the position of vertical solidarity between themselves and their boss and that this inter-personal and inter-positional relationship overrides their consequent subordination in a patriarchal situation, of which they are not apparently conscious.

It was suggested in the summary to Chapter V that the subjects of the secretarial curricula investigated fell into two categories: those which reproduced the tasks of the secretary and others which assisted the reproduction of vertical solidarity. Although ex-students had found subjects in the latter category of little practical use in their jobs, these respondents did appear to welcome a vertical allegiance with their boss. This evidence, therefore, can be said to support the propositions concerning the covert function of the transmission of specific areas of knowledge, in that it is possible that these academic subjects contribute to the maintenance of vertical solidarity and the influential nature of the inter-positional relationship explored in Chapter III.

It is appreciated that the theoretical exploration of the secretarial function, contained in Chapter III, and the evidence cited in Part II of this study, could lead to the suggestion that secretarial curricula function in an overtly conspiratorial manner in the reproduction of the secretarial role. This is not, however, the conclusion reached from this research. It is acknowledged, for instance, that the RSA has

attempted to produce a qualification of higher status for many women, that they are currently negotiating exemptions in other professional examinations for Diploma holders, and that a concerted effort has been made by the RSA to publicise this qualification. Yet few employers recognise the qualification or show interest in any knowledge and abilities, other than the basic skills, in prospective employees. This fact, together with all pervasive public images of the secretary and women's role in general, contribute to secretarial curricula functioning differently from the intentions of the examining board. It is contended that rather than improving the employment, status and prospects of women in office work, the curricula operate, perhaps unintentionally, as an element in an ideological collusion, which assists the retention of existing working conditions for many secretaries.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT OF EMPIRICAL DATA

#### RELATING TO SECRETARIAL CURRICULA

A number of complex and inter-related theoretical issues may be derived from the accounts of secretarial courses and students' perceptions contained in the preceding Chapters and the following discussion concerns theoretical issues relating to the empirical data presented in this study. The three major areas of concern in Part II of this study are the published curriculum; the interpretation of the official curriculum within Greenfields College and the transmission of knowledge in the classroom; and past and present students' perceptions of their secretarial courses. The possible relationships between each of these areas of concern is complicated and causal connections, at this stage of enquiry, must be in terms of provisional probabilities rather than precise specifications of necessary and sufficient causal relationships. Undoubtedly further investigation is required into various aspects of the theoretical areas which are to be explored in this Chapter. It is believed appropriate, however, to provide some theoretical propositions, derived from the empirical data, since this may not only consolidate and expand theoretical points implicit in the empirical data referred to in previous Chapters, but also supply a stimulus for further research.

It is perhaps not at all surprising that the curricula outlined in

Chapter V exist in their present form in the capitalist society within which they operate. The notable feature of this research is the mainly uncritical and unquestioning attitudes adopted by well educated women, both in relation to the knowledge transmitted in their courses and the subsequent situation encountered in their secretarial work. The major concern of this study is the consideration of how various aspects of the secretarial role are transmitted generally in society and particularly within the formal training procedures in colleges, to effectively and largely uncritically recreate and perpetuate the generalised notion of the secretary. All points discussed in this Chapter and throughout this study seek to contribute to an understanding of the acceptance of traditional images of the secretary by many well qualified women.

The main points of discussion in this Chapter suggest that various elements of secretarial curricula contribute to a certain extent explicitly and to a very significant extent implicitly to the transmission of the socially constituted secretarial function. The areas to be discussed as important features in the reproduction of the secretarial role include the coherence of curricula knowledge with the prevalent image of the secretary as an integral part of management; the strong boundaries created around each subject of the curricula<sup>(1)</sup> which may assist the student to carry out the work of a secretary, but result in little opportunity for discussion of the secretarial function itself; and the unquestioning attitudes to be nurtured as a facet of skill acquisition in shorthand and typewriting.

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(1) See also; Basil Bernstein, 'On the Classification and Framing of Educational Knowledge' in Class, Codes and Control, Vol I (ed Basil Bernstein), Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1971.

It will also be indicated in this Chapter that some researchers into secretarial work have drawn rather simplistic conclusions about the way in which secretarial curricula operate to inculcate appropriate knowledge and attitudes to prospective secretaries. The investigations at Greenfields College suggest that many aspects of the curricula act subtly in concert to implicitly assume the authenticity of the popularised depiction of the secretary, rather than overtly demanding compliant beliefs about secretarial work. The latter part of this Chapter deals with the location of secretarial curricula within society where so-called 'natural' female attributes are often fostered during the socialisation of the female child. The congruity of the personal qualities nurtured in women generally, with those depicted in popular images of the secretary and implicitly reproduced in secretarial training, produces mutual reinforcement to each area of socialisation and, it will be argued, assists the almost automatic acceptance of the secretarial role by many women.

This Chapter will conclude with a final summary and discussion of the research project as a whole, with particular reference to the relationship between the theoretical discussions contained in Chapter III and theoretical aspects discussed in the current Chapter.

Having outlined the main points of consideration, this Chapter will now proceed to a more detailed discussion which incorporates these important areas of concern in the reproduction of the secretarial role.

The curricula of both secretarial courses at Greenfields College are



derived directly from the RSA Diploma for Personal Assistants syllabuses. The explicit intention of the RSA is to provide courses, for both men and women, which will qualify them for posts as office supervisors, office managers and personal assistants. However, the interpretation of the published syllabuses within the College implicitly orientates students towards a different sphere of employment, namely secretarial work. It may well have been the laudable desire to improve the job prospects of women in particular, that contributed to the RSA's decision to establish the Diploma for Personal Assistants qualification, as the RSA's stated aim is to qualify students for supervisory positions. However, the organisation and operation of the curricula in the College retain the hallmarks of a secretarial course, particularly in the dominant positioning of the skills of shorthand and typewriting.

The reasons for the College's maintenance of a traditional secretarial stance are manifold. In the first place even if it is to administrative posts that students aspire, teachers believe that they are unlikely to obtain such jobs on leaving College without practical experience, but they are able to obtain direct entry to secretarial positions, if they possess the skills of shorthand and typewriting. Secondly, the fact that the skills dominate the curriculum may militate against males applying to follow the course, as these skills are still seen as traditionally female tasks and secretarial jobs as exclusively female work. If more male students were to enrol for the course, the College might think it necessary to reconsider the orientation of the course. Furthermore, while the RSA may envisage a distinct category of employee known as Personal Assistant, many teachers and employers seem to equate the title of Personal Assistant with that of secretary and therefore deem that the

skills are a necessary prerequisite to obtaining such employment. While the creation of this course may, therefore, have compounded the confusion in secretarial titles, the very title of Personal Assistant may lead students to believe that they are training for employment of higher status than that of secretary.

It is indeed difficult to contend that teachers are wrong to provide students with skills which are readily marketable. All students completing the course to date have, when desired, obtained employment. It is undoubtedly true that, in the London area at least, secretarial posts are still available and widely advertised. However, no advertisement has been found during the course of this investigation, requesting applications for posts of office manager or supervisor. A dichotomy exists between the realities of the job market and the visionary aims of the RSA. This examining board may have provided the basis for courses which appeal to the muted career aspirations of certain women, but it must be concluded that the position of women in office employment cannot be ameliorated simply by providing certification for posts which in reality are non-existent.

Investigation of the secretarial courses at Greenfields College has provided illustrative examples of the divergence, which may exist on many courses, between the published syllabuses and intentions of examining boards and their implementation within our colleges. Evidence has been supplied which suggests that it may be necessary at all times to enquire beyond public syllabus statements to obtain a realistic insight into the actual knowledge content and orientation of courses.

Many of the courses offered within Technical Colleges have direct links

with the world of work<sup>(1)</sup>. Secretarial courses exemplify this situation as they aim to provide the necessary skills and knowledge required for office employment. The fundamental orientation of the courses, described fully in Chapter V, is overtly vocational and is viewed as such by students. Consequently all subject areas of the curricula are identified by current students as a necessary preparation for the attainment of a secretarial post. This interpretation of the reasons for transmitting certain areas of knowledge within the classroom must influence students' perceptions of future employment. If, for example, it is necessary to have a knowledge of Law, Economics, Personnel Functions, composition of articles and press releases, then it is inevitable that any position requiring such wide-ranging knowledge must be varied and consist of at least some high level activities. If it is necessary to fully comprehend the functions of management and to have a personal commitment to their policies and the execution of their duties, then it is reasonable to suppose that, with experience, one may be in a position to undertake these activities in one's own right. Therefore, it is not unreasonable for students to predict that the skills will provide the opportunity for gaining practical experience, which together with the knowledge acquired on the course, will provide the opportunity for promotion to managerial status. Such predictions of future job prospects do, of course, also coalesce with popular images of secretarial work, as described in Chapter II.

The inclusion of subjects such as Economics within these vocational courses contributes to the recreation of the secretarial myths of variety, responsibility, and promotional prospects. Generally the curricula

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(1) See also: Denis Gleeson and George Mardle, Further Education or Training?, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1980.

provide the backcloth which supports the perpetuation of popular images of secretarial work, although overt statements about students' prospective work and potential careers do not appear to be made in the classroom, nor as an integral part of any of the syllabuses. Each subject may, therefore, function in a covert fashion, by its mere presence within a vocational curriculum, to suggest the importance of the knowledge to the prospective area of work for which the course as a whole provides preparation.

The number of teaching hours devoted to subjects such as Law and Economics is comparatively low. The provision of what must be only a rather superficial knowledge of a wide range of activities in the business world, may enable students to give some serious consideration to the specific area of business in which they wish to work. However, because the notion of secretarial work as an entrée to other areas of employment is so widespread, the transmission of knowledge within various subjects suggests that, with experience, management positions of various kinds are reasonable aspirations. Yet in reality to become, for example, a personnel officer or a company secretary, further training and qualifications are undoubtedly necessary in the vast majority of cases. There can be no doubt that the work experience of past students substantiates this observation.

Much of the knowledge content of the public syllabuses, outlined in Chapter V, provide information which may be considered to be useful to any person about to take up employment, such as the legal obligations of the employer in regard to the employment of labour. However, the notable feature of the interpretation of these aspects of the syllabuses in the curricula in question, is that all such information is dealt with

from the point of view of the employer, in the form of the management of the organisation. Comments by teachers and examination questions in particular, clearly illustrate that little consideration is given to the imminent location of the student as, in fact, an employee. It may be therefore a natural consequence that students are encouraged to view the world of work exclusively from the viewpoint adopted by an employer. Since no consideration is given to the student's prospective status as an employee, it can be suggested that the curricula imply that the necessary alignment of the secretary is characterised by compliance with employers' decisions and that she operates as an integral part of management. Yet again, it is suggested that the acceptability by students of this implicit function of the curricula is enhanced by its coherence with prevalent popular images of the secretarial function.

It is important to note that the curricula of the two courses investigated consist of subjects which have traditionally constituted a vocational secretarial curriculum such as shorthand, typewriting and secretarial duties, with the addition of areas of knowledge which have their roots in the academic sphere of education, such as Law and Economics. At an explicit level, the latter subjects are seen to propound essential knowledge for the prospective secretary, but it could be suggested that a covert reason for the inclusion of these subjects is to produce a more intellectually demanding element for students whose previous education has led them to expect and respect this kind of knowledge. The result may be students who are more content and intellectually stretched during their period of training than those who only learn the practical skills. One of the underlying factors which has some bearing on this particular point of discussion is the status accorded to different areas of knowledge.

In society at large the skills of shorthand and typewriting are attributed a low status in comparison with academic and abstract subjects such as Economics. Among the reasons for the low rating of the skills are the manipulative manual abilities required in the acquisition of this knowledge, and the almost exclusive association of the skills with women's work. Colleges may be very ready, therefore, to incorporate traditionally high status subjects within secretarial curricula in order to raise the overall status of the course. As discussed earlier, the direct influence of these curricula on the students' images of their future work may be more far-reaching than course organisers' desires to produce high status curricula.

Further observations can be made about the implicit function of the secretarial curricula. It could be contended, for instance, that one of the implicit functions of the curricula is to produce secretaries who will be content with the subordinate positions which they inevitably obtain. For example, the teaching hours for Law and Economics are only sufficient for the student to become aware that these subjects involve difficult areas of understanding, and insufficient time is devoted to the subjects for students to come to terms with the concepts involved and to develop analytical abilities. In later employment the reality of lack of promotional prospects may be assimilated and accepted because certain areas of concern, of high status in the academic and business world, such as Economics, have been shown to be inaccessible to them during their course of training at College. It may well be a covert function of the curricula to demonstrate to students their incapacity to receive and understand this subject matter<sup>(1)</sup>. Indeed it may be

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(1) See also: Hilary Dickinson and Michael Erben, Intrinsic Pedagogy: a consideration of the work of Claude Grignon in relation to some processes of anticipatory socialisation in the practices of French vocational education, Standing Conference on Sociology of Further Education 1980.

with some relief that students find that they are not called upon to use this knowledge in their work.

The arguments concerning the possible implicit function of certain subjects on the courses investigated are complex and undoubtedly require further concentrated enquiry. However, it is noteworthy at this stage of enquiry that, while it was reported by teachers that Law and Economics cause students the greatest concern in terms of knowledge acquisition and examination performance, nonetheless official examination results defy the rationality of both the concern expressed by students and the conclusions drawn in the discussion above. It is usual for the pass rate, both nationally and at Greenfields College, for Law and Economics, to be in the region of 60 per cent, while passes in the Office Skills Applied examination are around 30 per cent. The Office Skills Applied examination requires students to act out a simulated office situation in which they are expected, for example, to make hotel bookings, travel arrangements, and produce the relevant documentation. The main areas of weakness which contribute to the high failure rate are that some cannot produce all the documents within the specified time allowance, while about one-third of the students make errors in technical matters such as the actual dates for which accommodation should be booked. In spite of the difficulties students have with this examination, they are usually self assured and confident in their application of the skills, testing of skill ability at job interviews, and anticipated competence in carrying out tasks involving these skills in the work place.

Examination results would lead one to suspect that students would be seriously concerned about their ability to carry out the routine

secretarial tasks, but as has been stated this is not the case for the students in question. This point reveals the necessity to look beyond official examination statistics and syllabuses for evidence of the consequential impact of curricula on students' views and ideas both about their own capabilities and, particularly in vocational courses, about their working role. These features of the secretarial curricula constitute an element of the hidden curriculum and are deserving of enquiry because of their effects on students' perceptions of the world of work and their personal location within it. Indeed it is possible that the general low status attributed to the skills may influence students' confidence in their own abilities to utilise this knowledge in the working situation, together with the fact that students do obtain certificates for the skills in the single subject examinations.

Chapter V clearly illustrated that the majority of subject areas of the secretarial curricula provided, both overtly and covertly, general background information to the business world which suggested an inevitable structure of commercial organisation and managerial responsibility therein. A backcloth of ideas is presented which implies that individuals are required to modify their own behaviour to conform to structural norms and management decisions. These basic concepts may therefore assist the prospective secretary to accept responsibility for creating a viable boss/secretary relationship, in that the image is created of monolithic structures served by individuals who have learned to adapt in compliance with the structure's requirements. In other words the curricula ideally produce office personnel capable only, in Mannheim's<sup>(1)</sup> terms, of intrinsic interpretation of their situation and unable to reflect

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(1) Coser Lewis A, Masters of Sociological Thought, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1971, p 430.



extrinsically on their socio-historical location. Thus it may be an inevitable consequence that the secretary believes that she must adapt unquestioningly to her work situation and the socially constituted function, as depicted particularly in job advertisements requiring secretaries who will adapt to 'moody film tycoons', for example, is seen as a taken-for-granted situation by students.

From the evidence contained in this investigation, it is possible to contend that enquiry and analysis of an existing system of societal organisation are not fostered in any area of the curricula. The student is encouraged to relate to management and the problems of employers rather than examine her future status as an employee. Such a personal alignment with management must not only militate against the secretary's willingness to relate to other office personnel, but also assist the mystification of her own position as an employee. It is argued that the effect of these curricula is that they perpetuate the mystification of the secretarial function as the knowledge transmitted, both implicitly and explicitly, suggests that the secretary will possess power, status and reward, which are attributable only to the employer and not the employee, the latter, of course, being the status of the secretary.

Some areas of knowledge of the curricula are considered by the Greenfields lecturers themselves to be irrelevant to the students' future work. For example, the teacher of communications believed it to be highly unlikely that any secretary would be required to compose articles for publication. From the evidence supplied by past students and data from other research, it appears that few secretaries are responsible for such tasks. Indeed

most of the documents composed by secretaries are, in any case, attributed to their boss and the secretary is rarely credited with the work involved in producing the document. This situation, together with the fact that ex-students have been made to grapple with a good deal of knowledge which is not actually used in their work, could be assumed to be a prime condition for the alienation of labour. In the working circumstances described not only does the secretary not own the product of her labour, but she is not even credited with responsibility for its production. However, if alienation is taken in its simplest form to mean an overall conscious personal discontent with the working situation, most past students could not be categorised as alienated. Although certain features of their secretarial work were mentioned as the cause of some resentment, on the whole secretaries appear to obtain reasonable satisfaction from their jobs. It has been argued that job satisfaction stems particularly from the personal relationship the secretary may have with her boss. This one-to-one relationship with her employer may be sufficiently potent to override the hand-maiden aspects which could be a condition of a conscious sense of alienation. This point must be related to the discussion of vertical solidarity in the boss/secretary relationship discussed in Chapter III.

A noteworthy facet of the curricula which are the main focus of attention of this study, is that each subject appeared to be taught in an isolationary vacuum. Little attention was paid to the actual working positions which students could anticipate in terms of the manner in which each subject area would contribute to students' future office jobs. No explanation is given to students as to how the various areas of knowledge might

relate to each other to provide a cohesive pattern of work within the office. Many teachers were concerned primarily with procedural knowledge with little discussion of the extent to which such procedures would constitute an integral part of the secretary's work. On the whole, therefore, students are left to deduce and compose their own individual systems of belief about office work from implicit rather than explicit portrayals of working situations in offices. The lack of general discussion of the secretary's work and role may facilitate the acceptance of socially constituted images of the work, since little opportunity is given within the transmission of knowledge generally, to debate the authenticity of such images or individual students' perceptions of their chosen occupation.

Another interesting facet of secretarial curricula, which may well affect the submissive stance of both students and secretaries, is the attitudes required in learning and applying the skills of shorthand and typewriting. From personal experience of teaching these subjects and observations made by other teachers in general discussions, it is undeniable that an integral part of skill acquisition is the mental stance taken by the operator. Should, for example, a student stop to analyse what is being dictated, then undoubtedly her shorthand skill will deteriorate. Even a skilled typist, concentrating too deeply on the meaning of the material to be typed, is likely to make more typographical errors. This is not to say that the skills involved are completely automatic and unthinking operations, but rather that a specific detached mental attitude has to be developed to maximise the skills of the operator. This particular mental attitude is not only encouraged in relation to the material, but also with regard to the skill itself. If, for instance, a student

becomes intrinsically motivated in shorthand, she may wish to analyse the theoretical underpinnings of outlines to be produced, which in fact inhibits the automatic response to the spoken word, which is the cornerstone of the skill. Further evidence for this observation stems from the fact that many skilled shorthand-typists can produce good copy without having any idea of the meaning of the material which they have produced. Learning problems, in relation to the mental stance of the students, are often recognised in postgraduate students in particular, who, perhaps because of their previous education, wish to question and analyse in detail each shorthand outline. Ultimately the teacher has to explain that this attitude is not appropriate in the learning situation in question. A particular illustrative example of attempts to make students concentrate on the skill rather than the meaning of the text is an exercise frequently used to enhance the students' concentration on the skill of typewriting. This involves providing material in an unusual foreign language, such as Norwegian, to be typed - most students, of course, not being able to understand the material, can only attend to the skill rather than the material itself<sup>(1)</sup>.

It is not being argued that this particular mental stance, necessary in the acquisition of secretarial skills, necessarily results in a generalised attitude of non-reflection, but rather that it is an important aspect of the curricula when considered in conjunction with other areas of knowledge. It is the experience of many shorthand and typewriting teachers that a curious relationship is established between the knowledge and the disposition

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(1) A M Drummond and I E Scattergood, Gregg Applied Typing, McGraw-Hill Publishing Co, London, 1965, p 54 (example of typing concentration exercise.)

of the learner or operator which precludes reflection on the meaning of the material. Intellectual and reflective qualities are suspended. It can be argued that this detached attitude to the meaning to be given to material is a dominant aspect of the curricula since over 50 per cent of class contact time is devoted to skills requiring the development of a detached mental stance. This particular mental attitude may be generalised so that all knowledge concerned with the secretarial function is accepted rather than analysed and considered. The particular mental stance required of secretarial trainees in much of their work may also develop a mental set which lays the ground for accepting the tasks and behaviour which are demanded in the social depiction and reality of the secretary's job. Furthermore the detachment of the individual from text may facilitate control over her with regard to secrecy, confidentiality and loyalty, which were discussed in Chapter III as a feature of patriarchy as it impinges on the boss/secretary relationship.

The discussion so far in this Chapter has attempted to illustrate that various aspects of secretarial curricula operate, often in a very subtle manner, to reproduce the secretarial role. It is necessary to stress that where research is limited to textbook knowledge and published syllabuses, it could be supposed that secretarial training is characterised predominantly by the overt inculcation of norms and values. Yet the curricula in question, to which such textbooks and syllabuses relate, function as a complex network of often implicit assumptions rather than as a process of near indoctrination. In fact it is possible to propose that a situation, akin to indoctrination of value laden objectives concerning the reproduction of the popular view of the 'perfect secretary' might result in a more critical appraisal by students of these values. The effectiveness of the curricula, particularly with the level of student

investigated, may very well stem from the subtlety of the implicit approach to the reproduction of the secretarial role.

Although the socially constituted secretarial function contains many features relating to the behaviour required of the 'perfect secretary', evidence has been cited in Chapter V to indicate that very little knowledge is transmitted overtly in the curricula investigated about the norms and values traditionally associated with secretarial work. While many textbooks contain major sections on these areas, it was demonstrated that textbooks do not feature as important sources of knowledge on the courses in question. However, other researchers have taken these published purveyors of norms and values as analogous to knowledge transmitted overtly in the classroom. For example, McNally argues that:

"Their (secretaries') loyalty and submissiveness, where it exists, may be attributed in part to the emphasis on these qualities encountered during training."<sup>(1)</sup>

McNally goes on to quote examples which are to be found in the training manuals to support this thesis. However, it has been shown that, at least in this particular College, these attitudes are not overtly propounded to any great extent. Although there is a chapter concerning appropriate personal qualities for secretaries in the textbook issued to the PA students, the teacher indicated that the textbook was not used extensively. The postgraduates have no textbook at all for this area of work. Yet it was equally evident from statements made by students that they do believe that certain traditional qualities will be necessary in their future secretarial role. From this evidence, it is concluded that it is the

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(1) F McNally, op cit, p 56.

dominance of the public statements, which comprise the socially constituted secretarial function, which are at the foundation of the belief systems incorporating the views of the qualities necessary to maintain the relationships which constitute a major element of the secretarial function. It is not denied that convergent beliefs are expressed in the classroom to some extent in a covert manner. However, McNally draws certain conclusions from textbooks, concerning the knowledge transmitted in secretarial courses, which cannot be sustained when curricula and the transmission of knowledge are investigated in greater depth. McNally may, therefore, be overlooking the contagious strength of the public image of this function.

Textbook knowledge has also been taken by other researchers as a specific indicator to illuminate training procedures adopted by colleges. Silverstone also mentions the training of secretaries and quotes a magazine article outlining a secretarial course which has:

"shed the dull (and seldom used) subjects such as company law, advanced book-keeping and the history of mercantile banking. In their place shorthand and typing are interspersed with exciting and practical sessions on hair, make-up, deportment, dress sense, manicure, hygiene and diet ...."(1)

Silverstone generalises from this information to conclude that many teachers, amongst others, must feel that it is appropriate to dwell on aspects of the secretarial function such as deportment and make-up. It has, however, been demonstrated in the description of two specific secretarial curricula that such subject matter is certainly not dwelt upon. It can be contended further that as similar courses are offered in other technical colleges, these curricula are not atypical, but rather that extreme examples have been quoted by other researchers to produce a generalised and rather

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(1) 'What Makes a Top Secretary?' in Memo, Pitman, 6 November 1970, quoted in R Silverstone, The Office Secretary, op cit, p 418.

simplistic image of the training of secretaries, which does not necessarily concur with many of the training programmes within local authority colleges.

It is also of interest that it is not only those, who may have little personal contact with secretarial teachers and curricula, who believe that training courses are used as vehicles for the inculcation of traditional concepts of femininity. In the course of this investigation, one liberal studies teacher accounted for the uninterested attitude of secretarial students to liberal studies in terms of the narrow curricula laden with values to which the students were subjected while training to be secretaries. While a discussion of the many factors of causation which generate a negative attitude towards liberal studies is inappropriate in the context of this investigation, it is worthy of note that even a teacher working in liaison with the curricula in question accepted a generalised notion of the curricula which appeared to be derived from the socially constituted secretarial function. If it were the case that behavioural norms and values were an all pervasive theme of these curricula, then it could be said that these curricula do operate as a process of explicit recreation, but this is not the case. It is necessary to emphasise that in spite of this, students do generally adhere to the conventional image of the secretary, when for instance they mention their need to buy smart clothes before they start work in an office, or their need to cultivate certain personal qualities.

Although the curricula in question do little to dispute traditional and popular ideas of the 'natural' qualities of women and desirable attitudes of secretaries, they do not actively recreate the idea as



a dominant theme throughout the knowledge transmitted. Teachers are concerned primarily with imparting knowledge about how to carry out a variety of tasks, rather than the manner in which these activities should be performed. It is apparent from the empirical data that these curricula cannot be assessed except in relation to the general cultural norms perpetuated by society and discussed fully in Chapter II. It is societal influences which play a major part in the perpetuation of the generalised concept of the secretarial role, with the courses in question subtly implying, rather than overtly demanding, compliant attitudes and behaviour.

It is perhaps not surprising that the College in question identified little need for the overt inculcation of behavioural norms appropriate to the secretarial function. The premise to be sustained is that the very personal qualities which characterise the 'perfect secretary' are qualities which are learnt generally in an apprenticeship for womanhood and the socialisation of the female child. Moreover, as Barker and Downing state:

"The type of women who make director level secretary .... require the kinds of qualities which come from a solid middle class upbringing and/or education."(1)

As was indicated in Chapter IV this is the predominant family and educational background of the secretarial trainees engaged on the courses at Greenfields College. By virtue of their background, students possess the pleasant telephone manner, deference to authority and politeness anticipated by prospective employers. The College needs only to provide

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(1) Jane Barker and Hazel Downing 'Word Processing and the Transformation of Patriarchal Relations of Control in the Office' in Education and the State Vol I, Schooling and the National Interest, (ed Roger Dale et al), The Falmer Press, Basingstoke, 1981, p 240.

the element of secretarial skills to produce successful secretaries.

While it could be argued then that the College in question could operate adequately within relatively narrow secretarial curricula, Greenfields nevertheless produces a more intricate structure to its secretarial curricula (see Chapter V). An analysis of the curricula serves to illustrate the complex inter-relationship between the public image of the stereotyped vision, the reality experienced by secretaries, and the curricula as intermediary operants.

With regard to current students' perceptions of secretarial work, it was notable that the dominant views of the secretarial function were the practical convenience of the work and the transferability and utilisable nature of the basic skills. Students spoke not so much in terms of careers but rather of general promotional prospects. This point was discussed in Chapter VI, and it was suggested that the majority of secretarial students held traditional views concerning women's role generally, where a respectable job rather than a positive career was sought, in order to alleviate any confusion and contradictions between prospective family and working roles. Secretarial work therefore appears attractive as it fulfils the function of permitting a woman to concentrate her energies on familial areas of life. Although the majority of students embarked on their training with the general conceptual view of interesting, rewarding secretarial posts, no students emphasised the glamorous aspects portrayed in the public image. Students' analyses of the function were a distilled version of the socially constituted image.

It is indeed extremely difficult to attempt to measure the effects which

the public image of the secretary may have on the conceptual schema of individuals. Any operational features of social constructs are problematic fields of investigation, particularly in relation to their accountability for and impact on belief and knowledge creation. It can, however, be contended that for many students the curricula operated, particularly in relation to the breadth of subjects offered, to sustain their personal set of constructs of their projected future work. Yet for those who had undergone a more complete rejection of the mythology surrounding secretaries the curricula operated as conceptual revisionary agents to produce acceptance of certain aspects of the public image.

The facility with which some students were able to change their ideas about secretarial work may well demonstrate the potency of widely propounded mythological images, since even where the authenticity of generalised public notions has been dismissed, a residue of doubt remains which may be measured against, for example, the official authority of the curriculum. The general acceptance of various aspects of popularised images of the secretary may have been assisted by the fact that no alternative role models were posited by way of the curricula, as alternatives to traditional images of secretaries. The main point, however, is that it is possible that the combination of residual yet doubted elements of the image in the minds of some students, together with officially proclaimed knowledge implicitly aligned to the traditional view of secretaries, appears to serve as a force for attitude and conceptual adjustments. This points not only to the difficulty of critical examination of images that individuals carry in their minds, but also to the intangible and immeasurable (in terms of statistical reducibility) effects of knowledge transmission on conceptual schema both with regard to the official public

curriculum and the tacit teaching of norms, expectations and dispositions within the hidden curriculum. Processes of attitude and concept formation and adjustment are complex and not readily accessible to the researcher. Nevertheless the evidence from the sample of students interviewed suggests that the working of processes such as those outlined above may be important in the development, adjustment and re-adjustment of ideas about the secretarial function.

It has been acknowledged that many of the covert aspects of the curricula do coalesce with the socially constituted secretarial function and must influence, to some extent, students' ideas and beliefs. These covert factors may not only be found in the realms of material used in skills teaching, and anecdotes about working experiences related by teachers, but also in the very behaviour and norms exhibited by the teachers themselves.

It is a generally accepted notion, and perhaps a source of some amusement, that in technical colleges one may identify the subject area of a specific teacher by the clothes he wears. This applies to male teachers as much as to females in that the business studies teacher usually wears a suit with collar and tie, while those concerned with liberal studies are often dressed in jeans and jumpers. The secretarial teachers, therefore, may often be identified by their office style apparel. Tipton suggests that teachers in technical colleges bring to their teaching posts the norms perpetuated in the socialisation of their original work environment<sup>(1)</sup>. Thus, the teacher of secretarial students may be signalling to the students the norms and values appropriate to her original working situation and to the future employment of the students. In a variety of ways, then,

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(1) B Tipton, Conflict and Change in a Technical College, Hutchinson, London, 1973, Chapter V passim.

the hidden curriculum may be recreating the social image of the secretary. It is also recognised that the informal anecdotal knowledge transmitted by secretarial teachers may be extremely influential since it stems from significant others in the students' lives, that is their teachers. Perhaps for this reason, and the manner in which the information is transmitted, students accept anecdotal information on secretarial norms and values much more readily than similar textbook information.

### Summary and Discussion

This study has demonstrated that public images of secretarial work are widely available in society at large and that in a variety of ways the curricula investigated do provide a background of knowledge, skills and attitudes which generally assist the perpetuation of the social image of the secretary. In an overt fashion these curricula recreate the activities and tasks involved in the secretarial function. In addition students are given information about the organisation and administration of commerce, industry and government in Great Britain, with particular emphasis on the responsibilities and role of management. Many of the documents produced in the skills, communications and personnel functions, teaching coalesces with the knowledge transmitted about the function of management in that it suggests that the duty of the secretary is to assist and improve the efficiency of management. However, the curricula do not overtly recreate that part of the secretarial function which is concerned with the role of the secretary, in terms of behavioural norms. This is done to some extent in a covert manner, and perhaps in some ways unconsciously by teachers, but not to the extent to which general notions of secretarial training would suggest. Since many past and present students did profess attitudes and beliefs which appeared to be in accord with the public notion of the role of the secretary, then it is contended that the dominant feature of this

system of belief must be the fact that their cultural background has led them to accept a specific role for women generally, which is closely related to that expected of the secretary.

The discussion contained in Chapter III illustrated the convergence of traditional views of women's role in the home and patterns of behaviour expected of secretaries. It has been argued that among the reasons for the maintenance of women within these traditional roles is the self-fulfilling circular argument relating to the reproduction of gender both at home and in the workplace. While secretarial courses appear to do little to counter such traditional beliefs about the appropriate location of women, it is contended that they are not the instigators of these conceptual frameworks. The secretarial courses simply provide a fertile climate for the perpetuation of the culturally generated norms and values associated with women in general and the secretarial function in particular. In fact the very subtlety with which the curricula lay the ground for the acceptance of conservative ideas regarding women's position in society, may enhance the effectiveness of the inculcation of appropriate values. An obvious and continual insistence on certain attitudes and norms would be more likely to result in a positive rejection by students of the values involved.

The vertical solidarity described in Chapter III as a major feature of the patriarchal relationship between the secretary and her boss can be related to the public image of the secretary which emphasises the particularly feminine qualities necessary in the work. It is argued that the manner in which such personal qualities are highlighted as important aspects of the work assists the perpetuation of patriarchy in many areas of office work, since this emphasis on personal qualities and personal relationships detracts from the real abilities necessary in the administrative duties

of many secretaries and thus contributes to the general low status accorded to the occupation. The lack of recognition and status for the occupation is partly attributed to the fact that secretarial work is an almost exclusively female occupation and that there is general ignorance of the skills and knowledge necessary to carry out the work.

It has been noted that both current and past Greenfields students cited traditional female qualities as necessary components of secretarial work. It is concluded that the acceptance of conservative views of appropriate female qualities in secretarial work relates partly to the prevalent popular images of the work and also to the fact that this notion coheres with the general socialisation of women. Furthermore the curricula do not reject this image, nor do they provide an alternative role model for the prospective secretary. The curricula do, however, provide another element in the mystique of the reproduction of the secretarial role, since they include components which indicate a complementary image of the secretary as a serious individual who needs to study and consider important matters such as Law and Economics. This image of the secretary is probably particularly attractive to the students investigated in this study, who had already achieved educational success and no doubt see themselves as serious minded individuals. However, it has also been noted that curricula which include subjects such as Economics function to provide uncritical approval of management organisation and decisions and an apparent necessity on the part of the secretary to align herself with management decisions and policies. The personalised and privatised relationship between the boss and his secretary, depicted so often in social constructions of the function, suggests that the secretary's location is contingent upon unquestioned alignment with management; various subject areas of the courses provide information and knowledge which coheres with this popular view of the work, although such commitments to management are not overtly discussed; thus elements of

an ideological collusion can be identified which, it is once more argued, provide a seemingly logical and inevitable pattern to women's status and position in the office.

As was discussed earlier in this Chapter, the conditions of training, particularly in the area of the skills of shorthand and typewriting, require the detachment of the individual from text. This feature of the training programmes is notable particularly when it is related to both the other facets of the curricula discussed above, and also to the popular image of the secretary.

It is suggested that each contributory area of the reproduction of the secretarial role appears of, perhaps, minor significance when considered in isolation, but that the very strength, potency and undoubted success in reproducing an acceptable and traditional secretarial role lies in the combination of the various elements which assist the creation of systems of belief. For example, in shorthand and typewriting students are deliberately encouraged not to analyse the material to be produced. In subjects such as Economics and Law they are given descriptive accounts of various commercial procedures, where little analysis of situations takes place, and students are not required to consider how such functional aspects may impinge on their future status as an employee. In addition, social depictions of the secretary stress the glamour of working in close proximity to high status managers. Although each of these elements may provide images of different aspects of secretarial work, the various images are credible because they are complementary, convergent and coherent. An important aspect of this study is the argument that all official and unofficial agents for the transmission of knowledge, skills



and attitudes involved in secretarial work must be considered as acting in concert. There is an interaction between the different sources of information which contributes to individual belief systems about secretarial work, and these variables provide total images which are greater than the sum of the individual factors involved.

It is also contended that secretarial work remains a reasonably popular area of work for many practitioners, particularly because it does offer secondary, and perhaps substitute, conditions of satisfaction. Although individual personal autonomy, which is generally considered as a desirable feature in a job, is almost totally excluded by the very nature of secretarial work, the secretary is given second-hand autonomy in that she can make decisions within the parameters determined by her boss. The physical conditions of her work are usually of high standard by virtue of the fact that she is working in close proximity to a high status individual within the organisation, and the vertical axis of solidarity means that she may be privy to policy decision matters of importance within the organisation. Compared with, say, an assembly line worker, the secretary may be considered to enjoy many benefits from her working location. However, the importance of the elements of the work which afford job satisfaction is that they serve to disguise many of the real features of her status as a subordinate employee whose work is almost totally guided by the desires of her boss. It has been maintained in this study that generally the prospective secretary is encouraged to categorise such secondary features of her future work as of primary importance and that this leads to the mystification of the secretary's position.

While various images created for the prospective secretary act in concert and help to make the future work acceptable to many women, it is also noted that secretarial work is particularly illustrative of the transference of traditionally female homebased tasks to the working location. These tasks are exalted to prime ranking positions of importance and serve to assist the perpetuation and recreation of gender and patriarchal control, as debated in Chapter III.

It must be concluded that secretarial curricula contribute little to the attainment of a 'sociological consciousness' in trainees which might promote at least a discussion of the function and thereby provide ammunition for the amelioration of their position and prospects when they enter the job market.

APPENDIX I

SCHEDULE OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WITH STUDENTS

SCHEDULE OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WITH STUDENTS

- 1 What made you decide to take a secretarial course?  
  
Supplementary question if necessary:  
Did you consider any other kinds of training or jobs before you settled on a secretarial course?
- 2 What sort of things do you think you will have to do as a secretary?
- 3 Do you think there is much difference between the work of a shorthand-typist and that of a secretary?
- 4 What do you think are the qualities a secretary needs?
- 5 Why do you think people need to have a secretary?
- 6 What do you think you'll look for as important aspects of the job when you go for interviews?
- 7 Do you think there are any aspects of being a secretary that you might not like very much?
- 8 Are there any aspects of the job that you're particularly looking forward to?
- 9 Do you think you have changed your ideas about what it's like to be a secretary since you have been on the course?
- 10 Do you think the subjects you are studying are important to the job of a secretary?
- 11 How do you think you will use the information you are getting from subjects such as Law, Economics, Personnel Functions?
- 12 Do you think that these subjects are interesting?
- 13 Do you think there will be much opportunity for you to use your own initiative when you are a secretary?
- 14 If you are in a position to take some decisions in your job, do you think you'll have to think first how your 'boss' would have thought about such matters?
- 15 Do you think you will have to supervise the work of any other people?
- 16 Do you think you'll be able to make decisions on how and when to spend money?
- 17 Do you think that you'll be part of a management team?
- 18 Why do you think that all the students on your course are female?
- 19 Do you think there is anything about a secretary's job that makes it particularly suitable for women?

- 20 What sort of job do you hope you'll have in, say, five years time?
- 21 Have you looked at any of the textbooks or magazines you've bought while you've been on the course?
- 22 What sort of picture of a secretary do they convey to you?
- 23 What do you think, for example, of the pictures on the front of Pitman 2000?
- 24 If you were offered two jobs, one as secretary to a managing director, the other as secretary to an assistant company secretary, which would you choose and why?
- 25 What would you do if your working conditions were unsatisfactory and making you unhappy in your job?
- 26 Would you join a trade union?
- 27 How important will the actual office you work in be to you, for example, the building itself, the sort of furniture in your office?
- 28 Would you like to make any comments on your secretarial course or the job you hope to get when you leave college?

APPENDIX II

QUESTIONNAIRE TO PAST STUDENTS

QUESTIONNAIRE TO PAST SECRETARIAL STUDENTS

1. Name ..... Address .....
2. Title of Secretarial Course taken .....
3. Dates of your Course                      From ..... To .....
4. Please list below jobs you have had since leaving College:

Type of Organisation	Your Position	Approximate Dates	Your Main Tasks in the Job	Main Reasons for Leaving

5. Current salary (If you are prepared to disclose it) .....

6. How useful to you in your job(s) did you find the following subjects which you studied at College (please tick appropriate box):

	Very Useful	Quite Useful	Not Very Useful	Not Useful	Not Studied
Law					
Typing					
Secretarial Duties					
Audio Typing					
Economics					
Shorthand					
Office Administration					
Management					
Accounts					
Communications					
Foreign Languages					
Personnel and Functional Aspects					
Commerce					
Others (please state name of subject)					

7. Were you/are you happy in your job(s) as secretary/PA? (Please tick appropriate box):

Very Happy	Quite Happy	Not Very Happy	Not Happy At All







19. Do you compose and/or send out any of the following documents in your own name? (Please tick appropriate column)

	<u>Compose</u>	<u>Send Out</u>
Letters	.....	.....
Memos	.....	.....
Agendas	.....	.....
Minutes	.....	.....
Accounts	.....	.....
Legal Documents	.....	.....
Others (please state)	.....	.....

20. Are you still working as a secretary/PA? (Please circle) YES/NO

If yes, do you hope to remain a secretary/PA? .....

If you hope to obtain another kind of job, please state job and reasons .....

.....  
If no longer secretary/PA please give reasons .....

21. Please give any comments you would like to make on your secretarial course or your secretarial/PA job(s) .....

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APPENDIX III

LETTER ACCOMPANYING QUESTIONNAIRE TO PAST STUDENTS

Dear Ex-Student

We are looking at our present secretarial courses and trying to make them as relevant as possible to the future work of our students. As you are now, or have been, working after completing a secretarial course, you could give us up-to-date information about office life.

We also feel that it would be very helpful to our students to learn how you got on after leaving College, which can indicate to them what they can expect in the world of work.

It would, therefore, be extremely useful to us if you would complete the enclosed questionnaire and return it to us. If you can just think back to your student days here perhaps you can fill it in with the information you would have liked to receive at that time.

Of course, all your tutors will also be pleased to hear a little about you too and I thank you for any help you can give us. I enclose a stamped addressed envelope for the return of the completed questionnaire.

Best wishes for the future and I look forward to receiving your completed questionnaire.

Yours sincerely

Valerie Gibb  
Head of Secretarial Section

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APPENDIX IV

REMINDER LETTER TO PAST STUDENTS

Dear Ex-Student

You may remember that in January last I sent you a questionnaire about your working life since you were a student at this College.

It would be most helpful if you could complete this and return it to me so that we can obtain as wide a perspective as possible on the various jobs available to people who have studied secretarial subjects. I am enclosing a further copy of the questionnaire should you have mislaid the original, or it could have been lost in the post.

Any information you can give us regarding your career would be most helpful and we thank you for your help.

Best wishes,

Valerie Gibb  
Head of Secretarial Section

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APPENDIX V

SCHEDULE OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WITH TEACHERS



QUESTIONS TO STAFF TEACHING POSTGRADUATE AND PERSONAL ASSISTANT  
SECRETARIAL STUDENTS

- 1 Now you teach ..... to the PG/PA secretarial group?
- 2 How is this subject going to be relevant to students when they are out at work?
- 3 Do you think you give them an impression of what it's going to be like at work?
- 4 Can you give examples?
- 5 Do you call on any work experience you have had to give examples to students?
- 6 Can you give any examples of tasks that you teach which you anticipate they'll have to do at work?
- 7 Do you think students need any particular qualities or abilities to work as a secretary?
- 8 Is it possible to foster these in your teaching?
- 9 Do you find that students are interested in finding out what they're going to need to do and be like at work?
- 10 Do you feel that students have a realistic idea of what it is going to be like to be a secretary or PA?
- 11 How do you think that they arrive at this picture?
- 12 In what ways do you think you can contribute to their notion of what it's like to be a secretary?
- 13 Do you feel you need to do anything to counteract any unrealistic ideas of a secretary's job?
- 14 Do you think the general design of the RSA syllabuses you are following is appropriate for developing the skills and qualities students will need when they're at work?
- 15 Do you recommend any particular textbooks to them?
- 16 How do you use these textbooks?
- 17 Do you have any difficulty in getting students to use the textbooks?
- 18 Do you think these textbooks contribute in any way to their ideas about the qualities and skills necessary to be a secretary?
- 19 Would you like to make any comments about the secretarial students or how you feel the course is preparing them for their future jobs?

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