Temping: A Study of Temporary Office Workers in Auckland

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Acknowledgements

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Preface

The Labour Market Dynamics Research Programme (LMDRP), funded by the New Zealand Foundation for Research, Science and Technology (FRST), is an interdisciplinary research project designed to explore and explain various dynamics of economic and labour market participation. The first phase of the programme sought to explain how individuals made decisions about access to, and participation in, the labour market, with particular emphasis on the life cycle of the household. This was initially focussed on three regions: Hawkes Bay, Waitakere and Tokoroa.[1]

The second phase of the LMDRP shifted to investigating aspects of non-standard work in New Zealand.[2] Non-standard work can be briefly defined as work that is no longer characterised by certain features that have been regarded as standard. These include full-time hours, a regular working week, access to non-wage benefits, having the status of an employee, and being located in particular places (see Burgess and Watts, 1999). Interest in non-standard work has been stimulated by its growing prominence in the last two decades of the Twentieth Century (VandenHeuvel et al., 2000; Burgess et al., 1999; McCartin et al., 1999; Mangan, 2000), and has occurred within the context of many major and well documented changes in the structure of labour markets in all industrialised societies (e.g. Henson, 1996; Crompton et al., 1996).

Since non-standard work has always existed, it is probably more accurate to note that what has changed in the last 20 years is the increase in the proportion and consistency of NSW (Zeytinoglu et al., 1999:1). By some estimates, about 25 percent of jobs are in non-traditional employment areas (**Management**, June 2000) and in a range of possible employment forms that defy traditional career assumptions (Arthur et al., 1996:6). In a New Zealand context, Carroll (1999) shows that although separate categories of NSW account for small proportions of the workforce compared to the 43 percent in standard work, collectively they total more than half of all workers. By acknowledging that he uses a narrow definition of standard work, Carroll (1999) leaves open the possibility that even larger numbers could be classified and counted as non-standard.

Such estimates show that instead of working full-time for a single employer with the assumption of ongoing employment, there is a growing trend towards self-employment, part-time work, irregular hours that vary, and less continuity of job tenure. Similarly, reliance on direct employment is decreasing and, instead, labour requirements are outsourced or employees provided by intermediaries. A complex web of relationships and arrangements emerge because of the numerous exchanges among individuals, teams and employers – "The interplay may seem downright chaotic" (Littleton et al., 2000:101).

By way of trying to make some sense of such chaos within a New Zealand context, the LMDRP is committed to a number of research projects. A recent report has qualitatively explored the experiences of a group of 40 knowledge workers in the greater Auckland area (Firkin et al., 2002). Further broad based studies are planned. One will complement the study of knowledge workers with a qualitative exploration of

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[1] A list of all previous LMDRP publications is provided at the end of this report.
[2] A discussion of, and review of the literature on, non-standard work is presented in Firkin et al. (2002).

the experiences of those in NSW in more traditional and/or contingent work. A second will contribute to developing a quantitative picture of NSW in this country based on an econometric model developed in Australia (see Borooah and Mangan, 2000).

In addition, three case studies of specific groups are being undertaken to explore the emergence of NSW in specific contexts. These have been prompted by the need to redress a tendency to situate much of the research on NSW at an aggregate level. For example, Fraser and Gold (2001) note that a great deal of research into self-employment has focused on the aggregate, micro-economic dimensions of self-employment, the role of self-employment more generally in the wider labour market, or efforts to define more precisely what is meant by self-employment. While such approaches are undoubtedly important, recognition that the self-employed are a heterogeneous group has seen growing interest in disaggregating this group so that the "term does not conceal more than it reveals as a labour market category" (Fraser and Gold, 2001:680). Similarly, Kunda et al. (2002) point out that the literature on contingent work largely overlooks occupation as a factor of analysis and the authors feel that such an oversight means that this important source of worker identity is consequently missed as a locus for sense-making and organising. The decision to separately investigate the experiences of female temporary office workers, accountants and midwives can be seen as a response to such concerns. This particular report focuses on the experiences of temporary female office workers in Auckland. The two other reports that have been separately published by the LMDRP are:

❑ **Midwifery as Non-Standard Work – Rebirth of a Profession**
   Patrick Firkin
❑ **Non-Standard Work in the Accounting Profession in New Zealand: Some Preliminary Evidence**
   Hector Perera

One familiar group of NSW workers are the so-called "office temps". These are the invariably female people with clerical, secretarial, and administrative experience who are hired by employers to 'take up the slack' of employers whose permanent workforce needs support because of temporary circumstances such as illness of permanent staff, delays in appointing permanent staff, or sudden 'peaks' of business. Office temps are familiar figures in many organisations, yet because they are not mainstream, not part of the 'regular' workforce, little is known about them, beyond perhaps a public stereotype that they are in some way 'marginal' people struggling to cope in a world where permanent employment is denied them. In this research the LMD group attempts to find out more about office temps – for example, the nature of their industry, the reasons they do it, the benefits and difficulties of temping for lifestyle and welfare, relationships with agencies and employers, and the implications for employment practices and legislative regulation. It is hoped that our work will help to illuminate the contributions and lifestyles of an important group, and foster a better appreciation of them in society.

1. Summary Report

1.1. Office Temps

This report presents the results of a study of female office temps – clerical workers employed by temporary employment agencies and contracted out to end-user organisations. Hiring temps enables end-user firms to utilise temporary staff as and when required without incurring the long-term commitment to, and costs of, permanent employees. The temp is legally employed by the agency, which invoices the client organisation for the hours she has worked, and pays her wages and other associated benefits as agreed. Hourly rate, conditions of work and length of assignment may all vary across assignments.

Recent reports suggest that, stimulated by a drive for organizational competitive advantage through greater flexibility and reduced long-term labour costs, the use of temporary workers, often in positions of considerable responsibility, has become an integral part of the human resource practice of many businesses. There has been a rapid expansion in the temporary recruitment industry to accommodate the increased demand for temporary staff.

However there have been concerns about the effects of the increased use of temporary staff - concerns relating to both the material conditions associated with this form of employment and the social and psychological implications of being 'a temp'. Most authors report that temping is typically an employment arrangement involuntarily entered into and that the majority of temps would prefer full-time, permanent employment. Concerns have been raised over the way temps are marginalised, isolated and exploited in their dealings with recruitment agencies and client organisations, and they are held to be economically disadvantaged in the labour market, underpaid in relation to their permanent counterparts, and subject to reduced legislative protection. In addition critics are concerned over the impact on an individual temp's sense of self worth when continually identified and interacted with as 'the temp'. Observers report that negative attitudes to temps are still apparent in contemporary organisations and that this contributes to a climate of suspicion and distrust between permanent staff and temps, and that temps are often socially isolated within client organisations. Finally, temps are held to be dependent on the agencies they list with, constantly monitored while on assignment, and disregarded in the placement process for permanent jobs.

1.2. New Zealand Research

There is not a lot of New Zealand research on temporary workers. A Massey University's Master's thesis by Derrylea Hardy (2000) covered temporary workers in Palmerston North, ranging from medical staff to cleaners. This study confirmed the largely negative stereotype of temps, showing that the majority of those surveyed would have preferred to be in a permanent job. In contrast a study by Inkson, Heising, and Rousseau (2001) of highly-qualified "leased executives" – managerial temps – showed contrasting results, with leased executives using temporary assignments voluntarily and proactively to broaden their range of saleable skills and develop their reputations and networks. A study by members of the Labour Market Dynamics Group (Firkin et al., 2002) showed that individuals may choose to engage in non-

standard and temporary type work in order to achieve a greater sense of autonomy and control over when and where they work as well as the ability to better manage work in life. These studies suggest that alternatives may exist to the classic "marginalised temp" stereotype.

In her own Masters' thesis, Petricia Alach (2001) conducted in-depth interviews with twelve women working as clerical temps. Key findings in this thesis also disputed the dominant discourse of temp-as-victim, and questioned the extent to which temping is necessarily experienced as isolated or marginalised. The study also posited emerging alternatives including a kind of 'entrepreneurial temp' who chooses temping as part of an overall career strategy and a 'lifestyle temp' who chooses temping as a way of securing income to fund, and time to enjoy, family, social and leisure interests. The current study sought to extend Alach's (2001) work by considering the orientations to work of a wider sample of female office temps.

1.3. Research Method

In this study, thirty-one temps, from a range of backgrounds were sourced through employing agencies and interviewed in depth. The sample ranged in age from 21 to 61 years and included temps who were married, single, divorced, self-supporting, and with or without children and/or other dependents. Average hourly rate ranged from around $13 to upwards of $20 and the length of time participants had temped from two months to over fifteen years. Participants had worked in a variety of temp assignments ranging from simple data entry to high-level executive PA roles and spanned a range of public and private sector organisations and industries. Interview questions put to temps covered their experiences of temping, perceived benefits of, and difficulties with, temping, relationships of temping to overall lifestyle, relationships with temping agencies, and advice to potential temps. In order to background the temping 'industry', one representative from each of nine employing agencies were also interviewed.

1.4. Summary of Results

1. *Most of those interviewed preferred not to have a permanent job*, if they could be sure of regular, on-going temping work. They were wary of committing to a permanent job, mainly due to fears of getting bored and/or stuck in a specific situation. Many made use of the on-off flexibility that temping afforded them and cited as a major benefit the opportunity to decide, sometimes on a day-to-day basis, whether they went to work

2. *Temps temp because they <u>want</u> to*. The majority had made a conscious decision to start temping, for a variety of reasons. Some who were looking, ultimately, for permanent 'career' jobs, found that temping enabled them to take time to make considered decisions about the type of role they would take. For others, the decision to temp had come out of a desire to re-balance their lives by devoting more time to family or leisure activities.

3. *Temps often see temporary work as less risky than permanent*. Temp work was perceived as relatively easy to get. Temps contrasted this with the length of time it can take to get a permanent role.

4. *Temping is a good means of self-development.* Temps reported that the ability to 'move around' had contributed to their personal and professional development and ability to learn new systems and ways of working.

5. *Temps want to continue temping even in difficult market conditions.* The researchers were able to compare the temps in Alach's (2001) thesis study, who were interviewed before Sept 11, 2001, with those in the present study, who were interviewed in 2002, following a dramatic decline in the temp market caused by the events of Sept 11, 2001. Despite this decline, which had caused some participants periods of weeks or even months without employment, very few participants were actively looking for permanent work. For many temps, it seems that the condition of contingent employment had become the anticipated and preferred backdrop to their lifestyle, regardless of external labour market forces.

6. *Temps do not feel socially isolated.* Few participants reported problems with the 'people side' of temping, but there was some reference to negative perceptions of temps that had been encountered in the workplace but no evidence to suggest that these participants had internalised any such stereotypes.

7. *However, temps do feel that due to employer prejudice too much temping may damage career prospects.* Despite what the temps themselves think about the desirability of temping, they are conscious of the societal and employer perception that temping is always involuntary and never a 'proper' job.

1.5. Conclusions

Overall, this study suggests alternative models to predominant accounts of contingent workers. While the availability of much temporary work is contingent on organisational whims and economic fluctuations, the extension of temporary forms of work to a wider range of people no doubt enables more self-confident and proactive individuals to frame temporary work to suit their needs rather than seeing it as 'employment of last resort'.

The report concludes with a discussion about underlying societal stereotypes about contingent work and the expectations of career commitment. It appears odd and patronising for society to attach second-class status to temping without checking the temps' own attitudes. It is paradoxical that these workers are expected on the one hand to display a new flexibility in work practices and on the other to conduct their lives and careers in the same old, traditional way. The attention of employers and policy makers should perhaps be directed to an under-utilised resource and a worthwhile model for more and more of tomorrow's workers. To consider the issues properly may necessitate a re-examination of many of the implicit assumptions which have guided academic, business and political discourses around the place of paid work in people's lives. For example, assumptions around what constitutes a 'good' job or a 'normal' career path may need to be re-examined. We could start with the question "'good' or 'normal' - according to whom?"

2. Background

2.1. Temping in Today's World

'Temping' is the commonly understood term for temporary work which is clerical in nature. Currently, it is undertaken almost entirely by women. 'Temps' (those who do the temping) can be procured in two ways; through direct hire[3] and via Temporary Recruitment Agencies.

This study focused on temps employed through temporary recruitment agencies. Utilising temps through these agencies enables end-user firms to utilise temporary staff as and when required without having to employ them directly, without having to take the time to advertise, interview and select a suitable individual, and without incurring the long-term commitment to, and costs of, permanent employees. The agency recruits potential 'candidates'[4] on an on-going basis, and screens, tests and sometimes trains them to ensure that they are suitably skilled and ready for immediate deployment to client organisations.

The temp is legally employed by the agency, which invoices the client organisation for the hours she has worked, and pays her wages and other associated benefits[5] as agreed. Hourly rate, conditions of work and length of assignment may all vary across assignments. Agencies are not required to give any guarantee of on-going work (RSCA Report, 2000). Because of this, many temps co-register with multiple agencies and may be technically employed by different agencies across a variety of assignments during time they are temping (RSCA Report, 2000).

Recent reports suggest that the use of temporary workers has become an integral part of the human resource practices of many businesses. Commentators have observed a structural shift in the way temporary labour is being utilised in contemporary firms (Carre, 1992; Nollen, 1996; Richards, 2001). Temporary workers are no longer used just as 'fill-in' labour or as a stop-gap measure related to changes in the business cycle. Instead, temporary staff nowadays fill positions of greater responsibility and are often placed in roles that are critical to business success (Brogan, 2001). In response to this, analysts observe a rapid expansion in the temporary recruitment industry to accommodate the increased demand for temporary staff (Richards, 2001; Peck and Theodore, 1998; Appelbaum, 1992). In the USA recruitment through temporary agencies accounted for one-fifth of all new jobs created since 1984 (Peck and Theodore, 1998) and the temporary recruitment industry expanded 10 times as fast as overall employment between 1982 and 1990 (Appelbaum 1992). On any given day, members of the New Zealand Recruitment Services and Consulting Association (RSCA) employ approximately 8,000 agency-affiliated temporary employees (RCSA, 2000). However, this figure does not cover many other temporary clerical employees in New Zealand, including independent contractors and those placed by agencies not affiliated to the RCSA. In addition many other sectors of the economy such as cleaning services, nursing, and supply teaching, are heavily dependent on temporary labour.

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[3] Directly hired in by firms as required without the use of a recruitment agency or other mediating organisation.

[4] Industry term for those employed by the agency as temps.

[5] Special leave, sick pay, holiday pay etc.

There has also been a shift in the type of work undertaken by temporary workers. Administrative/Clerical work continues to be the largest source of temporary employment, but in response to changing organisational demands the temping industry is diversifying into non-traditional markets such as industrial and medical temping (Carre, 1992), information technology, sales and marketing (Richards, 2001) and increasingly high level 'executive contracting', reported to be the biggest growth area in temporary employment (Richards, 2001; Shopland, 2001).

2.2. Critical Issues Concerning Temporary Work

In the past decade, a number of analysts have raised concerns over the outcomes of the increased use of temporary staff. These concerns relate both to the material conditions associated with this form of employment and the social and psychological implications of being 'a temp'. Most authors report that temping is typically an employment arrangement involuntarily entered into and that the majority of temps are seeking full-time, permanent employment (Gottfried, 1992; Smith, 1993; Rogers, 1995; Henson, 1996; Vosko, 2000; Hardy, 2000). Concerns have been raised over the way temps are marginalized, isolated and exploited in their dealing with recruitment agencies and client organisations.

Much commentary on temporary workers raises concern that temporary workers are economically disadvantaged and marginalised within the labour market. Because social and labour legislation continues to be premised on the assumption of 'the worker' as full-time, permanent and with a single employer, temps are often subject to reduced protection (Appelbaum, 1992; Carre, 1992). It is often reported that temporary workers are typically paid less than regular core employees and receive fewer benefits (Segal and Sullivan, 1997, Nollen, 1996). In the United States especially entitlement to benefits such as health insurance and pension plans is often tied to length of service eligibility requirements (Garsten, 1999; Henson, 1996; Nollen, 1996). Because turnover in the temping industry is very fast (Henson, 1996; Nollen, 1996; Peck and Theodore, 1998), temps often fail to qualify for benefits. Moreover, many temps are often unaware of their eligibility with regard to certain benefits and lack access to accurate, independent advice on their rights as temporary employees (Carre, 1992; Gottfried, 1992).

In addition to the concerns raised over the material conditions of temping, commentators have drawn attention to social and psychological costs attributed to temping. In particular, critics are concerned over the impact on an individual temp's sense of self worth when continually identified and interacted with as 'the temp'. Concerns are raised that pejorative notions of the temp as a form of sub-worker, may become internalised by those working as temps exacerbating experiences of alienation from self and others at work (Rogers, 1995). Observers report that negative attitudes to temps are still apparent in contemporary organisations and that this contributes to a climate of suspicion and distrust between permanent staff and temps (Smith, 1993; Rogers and Henson, 1997; Richards, 2001). Commentators argue that temps on assignment are often socially isolated and marginally positioned within client organisations. They note that temps are often spatially separated from permanent workers (Smith, 1998) or rendered "interactionally invisible" (Rogers, 1995, p. 151)

by permanent workers who "actively create barriers of silence, space or regulation" (McAllister, 1998, p. 227).

Concern is also raised over the way temps are required to function in a relationship of extreme dependency on their agency. Temps are constantly monitored by their agency, usually via regular phone calls from supervising consultant to client, and through end-of-assignment feedback reports. Temps are seldom privy to this feedback and a 'good' report is typically inferred by continued offers of work. Observers argue that temps are marginalized in the placement process because they are not consulted over how placement decisions are made and that their preferences are seldom taken into account (Rogers, 1995; Gottfried, 1992; Henson, 1996).

2.3. New Zealand Studies of Temping

Little research into temporary employment has been carried out in the New Zealand context (RCSA Report, 2000, Marshall, 2001). To date, no studies have been published exclusively on office temping.

In a Master's thesis, Hardy (2000) surveyed temporary employees in a range of industries and occupations in Palmerston North. She utilised a self-administered questionnaire with questions focused around the reasons people had started to temp and what they perceived to be the advantages and disadvantages of this way of working. Findings confirmed much of the published literature. The primary reasons for starting to temp were typically the need to earn money while looking for a permanent job, and the desirability of flexible work hours. The main perceived advantages were the flexibility of work and the variety of organisations and roles available to temps. The main disadvantages were the financial insecurity and uncertainty associated with temping. The majority of those surveyed would have preferred to be in a permanent job.

The findings of this study, though valuable as contribution to the growing literature on temporary employment in New Zealand, are limited in terms of exploring some of the experiential aspects of temping. Additionally, the study did not distinguish between different types of temporary employment – for example, different occupational groups - making it difficult to determine whether there are differences in the experiences of those temping in different fields, for example whether industrial temping is experienced differently to office and/or medical temping.

A study by Inkson, Heising, and Rousseau (2001), of highly qualified "leased executives" – managerial temps – showed contrasting results. These authors reported that leased executives used temporary assignments proactively to broaden their range of saleable skills and develop their reputations and networks. Other recent studies (Firkin, McLaren, Spoonley, de Bruin, Dupuis, Perera, Cremer, and Overton, 2002) signal a variety of reasons that individuals choose to engage in non-standard and temporary type work, including a greater sense of autonomy and control over when and where they work as well as the ability to better manage work in life. These studies suggest that alternatives may exist to the classic "marginalised temp" stereotype.

The current study builds on work begun in 2001, as part of a Masters' thesis looking at the experiences of women clerical temps (Alach, 2001). That thesis was based on in-

depth interviews with twelve temps and two industry representatives who provided background information on the temping industry in New Zealand. Key findings in this thesis also disputed the dominant discourse, found primarily in the North American and European literature, of temp-as-victim, and questioned the extent to which temping is necessarily experienced as isolated or marginalized. The study also posited emerging alternatives including a kind of 'entrepreneurial temp' who chooses temping as part of an overall career strategy and a 'lifestyle temp' who chooses temping as a way of securing income to fund, and time to enjoy, family, social and leisure interests, and voluntary or community service (see also Casey and Alach, 2002).

3. Method of Investigation

3.1. Research Objectives

The current study sought to extend Alach's (2001) work by considering the orientations to work of a wider sample of female office temps. The primary focus was on participants' experience of temping, including reasons for taking this option. Issues included the effects of gender on the temp experience, the respective roles of employer and agency in temp management, the effects of economic cycles on temping, and the relationship of contingent work to family life. In this paper we consider especially the orientations of temps to their work, their temporary employee status, and their careers, and in particular the question of whether Alach's tentative findings on alternative models of temp self-identity could be supported in a wider sample.

3.2. Recruitment of Participants

Acknowledging that the way in which participants were sought in the Alach (2001) study (word-of-mouth 'snowball' sample) may have led to idiosyncrasies in the results, the current study sought to gather interviews from a broader range of women working as clerical temps.

In order to access as wide a range of experiences as possible, the researchers approached about twenty recruitment consultancies in Auckland directly to ask for permission to send a letter to women temping in clerical and secretarial roles for their agency inviting them to participate in the study. Additionally the researchers secured support for the project from the Recruitment and Consulting Services Association (NZ) who placed an invitation to agencies to participate in the study in their quarterly newsletter. Eight agencies assisted the researchers to source participant temps. This sample includes several of the largest temporary recruitment agencies in Auckland as well as medium and small sized agencies. All temp participants were volunteers who responded to letters or advertisements from their agencies inviting participation. In-depth interviews, each lasting about an hour, were carried out with thirty-one temps and nine agency representatives.

The temp participants represented a broad range of temping experiences and life stories. They ranged in age from 21 to 61 years and included temps who were married, single, divorced, self-supporting, and with or without children and/or other dependents. Average hourly rate ranged from around $13 to upwards of $20 and the length of time participants had temped from two months to over fifteen years. Participants had worked in a variety of temp assignments ranging from simple data entry to high-level executive PA roles and spanned a range of public and private sector organisations and industries. Interview questions put to temps covered their experiences of temping, perceived benefits of, and difficulties with, temping, relationships of temping to overall lifestyle, relationships with temping agencies, and advice to potential temps.

In order to background the temping 'industry', one representative from each of nine employing agencies were also interviewed. These included representatives from the some of the largest recruitment agencies in Auckland, several medium sized agencies and a couple of smaller agencies. They had all worked in recruitment for several years, often in a variety of roles.

3.3. Interviews

The interviews carried out with the temps were semi-structured with questions designed to draw the participants into discussion about their experience of work. A schedule used as a checklist by the interviewer is attached as Appendix 1. The ordering of the questions varied over time to accommodate participant preferences and to allow participants to pursue the topics of most salient to them. Broadly speaking, the questions asked about the participants about their reasons for temping, relationship/s with temping agencies and the experience of being a temp. Additionally they were asked for background information, specifically age, marital status, family situation and living arrangements. The interviews were tape-recorded and summarised for later analysis.

The agency representatives were interviewed in order to gather background information and insights into current and future trends in the temping industry, potential opportunities and threats, and their perceptions about the motivations, attitudes and behaviour of the women who their agency employed as temps.

4. Context: The Temping Industry

This section of the report is based on the comments of the agency consultants who were interviewed as a means of backgrounding the industry.

4.1. Who Temps and Why?

The range of people who temp varies. Participants cited an extensive array of different reasons people choose to temp. For example:

- mothers looking for a few days' work a week or work that allows them to take time off in school holidays;
- tertiary students look for work during term-time and the holidays, and other people "temp for lifestyle";
- travellers in New Zealand;
- New Zealanders about to embark on their own travels, who are looking for full-time work that "doesn't tie them down";
- immigrants recently arrived and looking for New Zealand work experience;
- returning expatriates looking to reacquaint themselves with the New Zealand job market;
- people who have had a bad experience in a permanent job and are looking for some 'time-out' or a less stressful work alternative; "wanting work but no responsibility";
- people looking to move into particular industry or field using temping as a "way through the door";
- people who "are unsure about what they want to do" and use temping as a way of generating an income while they make that decision;
- a small, but growing group of 'career temps' who, for a variety of reasons, prefer temporary work over all other forms and have no intention of ever returning to conventional employment. Often the path to becoming a 'career temp' of this type is accidental. Consultants report that often people try temping following a redundancy or other event and then decide that they actually prefer it was a way of working.

All the consultants reported that the people who temp do so because they have made a conscious decision that temping is what they want to do. Many of the questions asked in the consultant's telephone screening and the in-person interview are geared towards finding out why people are looking to temp with consultants reporting that they are unwilling and unlikely to recruit a candidate who is only temping as a "last resort" or as a "stop-gap" (Agency 4) preferring to hire those who are looking to temping as a "lifestyle opportunity" (Agency 1). This is partly because of the high cost involved with recruiting a temporary candidate and also because the agency needs to be able to promise client organisations high levels of temp reliability and dependability, something which is not necessarily possible if an individual has floated into temping 'on a whim'.

4.2. Agencies' Criteria for 'Good Temps'

Temping as a way of 'getting into a company' was cited as an opportunity for both temps and agencies. For agencies, the payoff from providing a company with a 'good

temp' experience; was often that the company would in the future choose them to provide recruitment services (for both temporary and permanent staff). The key to developing business opportunities such as this was reported to be fostering good relationships based on the reliable delivery of quality services. The temp is therefore seen as an integral part of this relationship building, especially for a new client, as the performance of the temp largely determines the impression that the client forms of the agency and the likelihood that they will choose to enlist the services of that particular agency (or indeed any agency) again. To this end, agencies are vigilant in their attempts to recruit quality temps who possess, not only the right skills but also, and perhaps more importantly, the right attitude.

> 'a lot of it comes down to attitude…flexibility is really important…potential to learn, reliability, flexibility and attitude…people who've just got nouse and don't need to be constantly running to the boss to ask, 'what do I do next?' (Agency 6).

> 'It's 95% attitude…we want flexible, adaptable people who will be positive and go looking for work' (Agency 5).

> 'Flexibility, a willingness to chip in, a positive approach, good technical skills but mainly it's that 'can do, will do' attitude' (Agency 4).

4.3. Recruitment of Temps

The agencies in this study reported few problems recruiting office temps, though all noted that there was hardly ever a 'match' between the number of temps on their books and the number of assignments they had to fill. Temps often stopped temping to take up a permanent job or to go travelling or moved on (on a temporary or permanent basis) to assignments offered by other agencies. Because of changing client demands and the high level of temp turnover, agencies were continually recruiting to ensure that they always had a temp on their books who could fulfil the requirements of any given assignment.

Recruitment was typically done through advertising in local and national newspapers and through web-based recruitment sites such as NZ Jobs and Netcheck. A similar screening process was reported by all agencies. Firstly, potential candidates are asked to email or post in a CV. Those with the relevant work experience and skills are then further screened in a telephone conversation lasting up to 30 minutes. During this phone call potential candidates are questioned about their recent work history and reasons for wanting to temp. If a potential candidate is successful in the telephone screening she is asked to come into the agency to be tested using a variety of computer packages and to be interviewed in person. This visit to the agency usually took about 2 or 3 hours. Successful candidates are asked to fill in IRD forms, give their bank account details and sign a temp employment agreement. Candidates are advised about Health and Safety procedures during their visit to the agency and sign a form to confirm their understanding. Because agencies are aware that candidates often co-register with multiple agencies and tend to stick with whichever agency finds them work first, it is fairly common for a candidate to be offered her first assignment at the end of this process. Recruitment of temps is an expensive exercise and all agencies reported that they therefore had a vested interest in keeping those already on their

books in continual employment, thus reducing the likelihood of attrition to other agencies.

> 'temps will go elsewhere if we can't provide them with ongoing, enjoyable work and treat them well' (Agency 6).

> 'we choose to reward them with little incentives…if we want to retain a good temp we may give them a pay rise regardless of whether the client will pay more' (Agency 4).

> 'they stick with us because of how they're treated…how they're treated and the jobs we get them' (Agency 1).

Agencies expressed a preference for temps who are committed to continue to temp for some time. One agency reported that part of its strategic plan was to reduce the number of temps they recruited through retention and development of a smaller pool of highly skilled and committed 'career' temps.

> 'we don't employ people who are looking at temping as a stop-gap…part of our style is around retaining good temps and part of our strategic plan is to have fewer recruits and to maintain people on a longer term basis' (Agency 2).

The benefits of such a plan were reported to be lower costs for the agency, a 'guarantee' of ongoing work, 'once they're in, we generally try to recycle them' (Agency 3), and a sense of belonging to the agency for the temp. Additionally there is an increased possibility of repeat assignments, which are argued to be of benefit both to both the temp, who gets to go back into 'familiar territory', and to the client who is able to intermittently secure the services of a temp who is familiar with their in-house systems, both formal and informal. 'Clients always like someone who's been there before' (Agency 3).

4.4. Public/Private Liaisons

Agencies reported that alliances or arrangements with public sector agencies could become more common in the future, especially for agencies specialising in 'bulk recruitment' and in particular in the area of industrial temping. One of the agencies in the study reported that their organisation had recently entered into an arrangement with WINZ. Under this arrangement WINZ would screen and assess the (usually) recently unemployed for placement in positions being filled by the agency. This was reported to be beneficial to both parties, especially in the area of industrial temping, where the agency was experiencing difficulties in accessing and recruiting reliable candidates. Typically agencies reported that while they were currently able to meet all client needs without alliances, this could change in the future 'depending on how the demand for particular types of temps emerges' (Agency 2). At the end of the day though, recruitment consultants were careful to draw boundaries between the services that should be offered via public versus private sector establishments, particularly those recruitment companies who pitched themselves at 'the high end of the market'.

'we're not an employment agency, we're a recruitment company and there's a difference…we're here to give people a chance, but it's qualified people, people who have got skills' (Agency 1).

4.5. Immigrants and Temping

Several consultants reported that there had been a notable increase in the number of recently arrived immigrants applying for temporary work as a way of obtaining NZ work experience 'it's immigrants who apply for the jobs mostly' (Agency 4). This trend was reported to have both favourable (good work ethic, high reliability) and unfavourable outcomes (lack of knowledge about what temping is, English language problems).

'immigrants are often willing to do anything which can be good because you get really high commitment with really high reliability, but the downside is that they apply whether they are qualified or not…sometimes they'll just turn up to previous assignments on the off chance that there will be work for them' (Agency 6).

'some clients are resistant to having immigrants placed in their organisation and in the end it's not our decision to make' (Agency 1).

'most clients are happy to trust us and I've had little resistance to placing immigrants…strongly accented or poor English probably means that immigrants won't get work even though they are considered a desired source because they are perceived to have a strong work ethic' (Agency 5).

'it depends on the job and the client, how open they are…because at the end of the day there are clients out there who are just fine and there are clients out there who just want a good kiwi girl in the job and that's just the way it is' (Agency 4).

'There are sometimes clients who aren't willing to consider hiring immigrants, sometimes it's justified, sometimes it's not' (Agency 6).

It may be that there is cause for further investigation into the experiences of recent immigrants attempting to utilise temping as a way of entering the New Zealand labour market. Research may be needed to inform policy which recognises the potential for exploitation of recent immigrants who are willing, and sometimes desperate, for work but who have little or no knowledge of their rights or obligations as employees in New Zealand.

4.6. Changes in Temping Roles

Consultants reported that the types of temping roles being offered had changed over the past few years. Most notable were changes to the length of the average assignment and an increasing diversity in the types of roles offered. Reports from participants on the types of temp roles they had undertaken support assertions in the literature that temps are being employed in positions which are integral to the functioning of the business (Brogan, 2001). There is also some evidence of emergent polarisation within

temping, with reports of concurrent shifts to both shorter, less challenging and lower paid roles and a shift to higher-end, and more challenging project work. These trends were attributed to general shifts in 'the way organisations do business' and as examples of organisational responses to economic conditions following the events of September 11th 2001.

Consultants reported that prior to Sept 11, 2001 there had been a buoyant temp market, with good temps often finding themselves 'too much in demand'. Post-September 11th 2001 the temp market had essentially 'dried up' as businesses went into 'conservative mode'. This was experienced in terms of some temps having no assignments for weeks, in some cases months and in terms of a difference in the types of assignments being offered. Over the course of collecting data for this study, spanning February 2002 to October 2002, participants reported variable amounts of work with those interviewed later in the year reporting that levels of work were now 'back to normal' and that they were now back in 'full employment'. Interestingly, consultants reported that there were differences in sectoral responses, with public sector organisations seeming relatively unaffected by the changed economic conditions.

Consultants report that client organisations are becoming more tactical in the way they employ temps. This trend was noted before the events of September 11th with most reporting that those events had simply accelerated and intensified a process already underway. Client organisations were reported to be choosing to fill 'higher end' e.g. Executive PA, roles through internal promotion and employing a temp to take over some of the 'lower end' secretarial duties. The reason for doing so was reported as two-fold. Firstly, organisations are becoming more reluctant to employ a temp (who could leave at any time) in a core role. Secondly, as organisations become more experienced at using temporary labour they are becoming more savvy with their 'temp spend', thus choosing to fill lower level, and thus lower cost positions with temps.

> 'people aren't as free with ordering temps as they were a few years ago…now if someone's sick for the day, they'll usually just try and cope with it' (Agency 3).

> 'you don't have long, unmanaged temp assignments anymore…client's usage of temps is more efficient and they're interested in getting better value for money' (Agency 2).

> 'clients are getting a bit more conservative in their temp-spend so they put temps in a lesser paid role and move internally to cover higher level roles' (agency 1).

At the other end of the spectrum, one consultant reported a trend to organisations outsourcing entire projects to a team of temporary staff. In such scenarios a temp is employed as a project administrator or co-ordinator and works with a team of people all employed only for the duration of the project. This includes a leased executive, employed as project manager. These roles tend to be longer term and are often for a fixed length of time. Moreover such projects tend to draw on a temp's extensive experience and provide for quite concrete learning experiences.

Temps in this study were employed in a variety of roles, including many that could be considered integral to the functioning of the business. For example, one participant was employed as front-line bank teller serving customers in a variety of branches. This participant estimated that in many banks up to 30% of staff on any given day were temps and that it was not uncommon for all front-line tellers to be temps. Another temp was appointed as team leader for an entire department. A third had been brought into a role for the express purpose of transitioning an HR system from manual to computer based and, as part of that role was required to train the soon to be appointed permanent employee. Other responsibilities given to temps included undertaking extensive web-based research, developing a marketing plan for a large tertiary institution, and screening potential immigrants to New Zealand.

4.7. Pay Rates

Several consultants (and several long term temps) noted that pay rates for temps had not increased over time. Data entry and reception roles were typically paid at around $15 per hour (plus 6% holiday pay) with higher end PA and accounts roles being paid at between $18 - $22 per hour (plus 6% holiday pay). Consultants reported that New Zealand organisations operate as 'lean machines' (Agency 5) and continue to see hiring temps as a 'costly exercise' (Agency 4). One consultant reported that a factor depressing the rate that could be charged was a recent trend of smaller agencies entering the temp market. Smaller firms were reported to be especially conservative with their temp spend and careful to exactly match the presence of a temp with workflow demands. This trend was manifested in a variety of ways, including the shift to more part-time temporary work in which clients chose to employ a temp for only a morning OR an afternoon, and the emergence of more lower level roles such as data entry and mail sorting. These types of roles were reported to particularly suit two of the identifiable temp groups, namely students and recent immigrants, but there are questions around the implications of such a shift for more 'traditional' temps.

5. Current and Future Trends in Temping

5.1. Opportunities

5.1.1. Changing Relationships, Changing Roles

Reports from consultants suggest evidence of the beginnings of a type of polarisation in the temporary labour market. The majority of agencies in this study stated their intention to pursue a 'high-end' strategy of becoming relationship driven, quality providers of highly skilled and sought after temps. In contrast they referred to 'other agencies', named as 'bulk suppliers' who were more concerned with 'filling the order' for 'warm bodies' than taking the time to truly understand both client and candidate needs and seeking to put together the 'perfect match'. In this sense agencies were looking to come out from 'behind the scenes' and actively shape the future direction of the temporary labour market. Several consultants reported that they were beginning to promote themselves as providing a shift away from simple service delivery to a form of 'partnering' with client organisations. It was hoped that this would provide the opportunity for recruitment companies to develop better relationships with client organisations and thus have more influence over their recruitment decisions.

> 'not selling a temp so much, it's selling a solution' (Agency 2)

> 'I'm hoping we will see a move towards partnering with clients…getting the agencies involved in the decisions so you can actually work together to get better results' (Agency 3).

Consultants reported being asked to provide client organisations with a range of Human Resource advice. One respondent observed that this was becoming more common as New Zealand firms continued to restructure their operations, noting that it was often the HR department that 'got the flick' (Agency 1, p. 2) following restructuring. Thus it was becoming increasingly common for client organisations to turn to a recruitment company for information and advice. Services include: helping to re-place redundant employees as part of a 'change management' programme, including hiring back and paying (as temps or contractors) employees who had been made redundant from the company (Agency 1), interpretations of and consultation on matters of employment law, advising on staffing decisions (Agency 5 and 6), writing position descriptions, advising on remuneration (Agency 2) and educating client organisations on how to manage temps and contractors (Agency 3). For example an agency might advise on how tight a particular skills market may be and make recommendations on salary ranges for permanent positions (Agency 5). These services, sometimes offered without charge, e.g. helping to write a job ad for a long-term client (Agency 4), are in addition to the conventional recruitment services traditionally offered by these firms.

5.1.2. Re-branding 'the temp'

Part of this shift involved marketing temps (of all kinds) as 'more than just temps' and promoting temporary workers of all forms as workers with unique skills which can be of use to client organisations in ways other than the traditional 'fill-in'.

> 'encourage longer term roles to be able to convince clients that we have people who can fill specific needs and not just covering sick or maternity leave' (Agency 1).

There was some evidence that this was already happening. One agency reported that it was becoming more common for client organisations to hire an entire team of temporary workers to complete project work. In such cases the project manager, administrator and all other workers were made up of a range of temps and contractors who formed together into a temporary organisation for a particular length of time and then disbanded at project completion.

5.2. Threats

5.2.1. Legislation and regulation

Employment legislation (e.g. Employment Relations Act, Health and Safety) that continues to be premised on the assumption that no-one would ever choose to temp was cited as one of the biggest threats to the temporary recruitment industry (Agency 5). There was concern expressed that unduly restrictive laws could 'put people off temping' (Agency 6), particularly in the industrial sector. For many the biggest threats came from the risk of non-compliance to the various regulations governing employment in general as well as specific risks associated with temporary employment. For example, agencies could see compliance difficulties arising following the introduction of new Health and Safety regulations as the agency would be held liable for any accidents that happened to one of their temps working on a client's work-site. Additionally agencies reported the need to be constantly vigilant when doing reference checks for potential candidates and ensuring that those applying for the work are legally entitled to do so because, as one consultant succinctly put it 'with temps, if anything goes wrong, the buck stops with the agency' (Agency 6).

5.2.2. Changes in demand

A shift to client organisations covering temporary absences themselves was widely reported and sometimes seen as a potential threat to traditional temping. For larger companies, the shift to centralised shared services, often performed off-shore, was seen as 'taking from temp needs in Auckland' (Agency 4). Despite these trends there was no threat perceived to recruitment per se: rather, agencies expressed a belief that 'recruitment is always a headache for clients and they'd rather just have someone present them with a resume' (Agency 4). These practices were held to be in line with other trends which saw the type of temporary assignment typically offered changing and suggested a need for recruitment agencies to be aware of, and responsive to changing business needs around temporary recruitment, and to work to anticipate and meet those needs.

Similar sentiments were expressed around whether economic downturns should be viewed as threats or opportunities (or both) to recruitment agencies. One consultant expressed a belief that 'the biggest threat is to become complacent about what you're doing' (Agency 2) and there was a general sense that the nature of the market as 'a flexible moving workforce' (Agency 2) created both opportunities and threats. Several consultants pointed out that in some ways temporary recruiters are ideally positioned

in both buoyant and lean times as companies draw on temps for different reasons under both scenarios. Thus the responsibility of monitoring external factors and identifying possible opportunities was held to fall on the recruitment industry who must be more proactive 'in identifying needs and providing services to clients' (Agency 2). This may include acceptance that the traditional 'fill-in' role of the temp is in decline and thus may constitute a threat to the core business of traditional temping; but it could also be viewed as an opportunity for recruitment agencies to market temporary employees as having 'unique skills' (Agency 5 and 1) which could be utilised by client organisations in a variety of non-traditional ways.

5.2.3. The Temps Themselves

Interestingly, and perhaps surprisingly, one agency signalled that the temps themselves could be a potential threat to the temporary recruitment industry. Young temps, those born after 1976 were reported to 'pick and choose' when and whether to work to a much greater degree than their older counterparts. These consultants reported their surprise because they assumed that 'temps wouldn't want to be a day out of work' (Agency 4). This apparent unreliability was seen as a potential threat to recruitment companies, especially smaller ones, who need to be able to promise and deliver on all client requests for temps.

6. Why Organisations Use Temps: The Temps' View

Temps had clear views of the special value which they brought to the organisations in which they worked. However, in evaluating these it should be borne in mind that the method of research did not involve us in interviewing client organisations who might have provided an independent check on such views.

6.1. Skill, Flexibility, and Disposability

Most temps perceived benefits to client organisations as being clustered around the ideas that utilising temps provides organisations with a ready skilled, flexible and ultimately disposable workforce.

> 'People come in, do the job and go. They don't have them in the down time, they don't have them sitting around doing nothing and they have people who are specifically trained for the job' (31).

> 'really it's monetary, they only have us there when they need us' (30).

> 'they don't have to pay all the benefits and they can hire and fire as they like' (26).

> 'they can say goodbye without big pay outs…they've got the ease of people coming in and going out with no problem and they probably get quite a bit of skills with people coming and they don't have to spend time training people' (24).

> 'financially, they don't have to take responsibility…we'll just get a couple of temps in an then flip them off again…when it's good, it's good and when it's bad there's nobody to take responsibility in the way that a full-time employer would so what the client organisation get out of it is a fairly reliable workforce for very little involvement' (23).

> 'because they're cheaper they can undermine the award rates normally and if they don't like them they can get rid of them…often they go for temps because it's the other guy's responsibility' (22).

> 'when companies have great dips and troughs they can fill in when they need to and of course they can fill in for maternity leave and things likes that' (17).

> 'basically just filling a gap or it's a way for them to figure out what their needs are for a new position' (15).

> 'the financial benefit of not having permanent staff, they can get rid of you whenever they want. That flexibility and they get someone to do the job' (16).

> 'if they're really busy they can get people in to help out in the short-term and I think they would never really get temps who are useless' (14).

'they get a lot of the poop jobs done that no body else wants to do…they get to take on a temp for a short time and then say 'we don't need you anymore' and you just go' (11).

'to have someone come along and do the work and then remove them as needed is a very appealing idea' (9).

'nobody wants to do reception so it's the only way they can get it done…they don't want the problem of hiring and firing and they don't have to take responsibility for the person' (7).

6.2. Experience and Expertise

In addition to the basic skills and expertise a temp has, several temps reported that client organisations are also able to access a wealth of experience from temps who have been temping for a while. The ability to cope in new and often stressful situations coupled with the likelihood that the temp would have 'seen it all before' were cited as important benefits accrued to client organisations.

'if you've got a professional temp she's been working in so many different companies that if you have a problem arising you've never had before the chances are the temp will already have experience…you've already had that situation and you can confront all kinds of situations, all kinds of emergencies, it's OK you've been in stressful situations and you've had to cope with so many stressful situations in the past that you do get stressed but you are used to it…you have a broad knowledge and you can draw on your experience' (13).

'if someone has been temping for a while they get lots of experience on different systems, ways of doing things…you always take the knowledge that you accumulate to your next assignment so you are always adding value so clients get expertise and experience they wouldn't otherwise get' (8).

6.3. Novelty and Change

Furthermore, several participants reported that temps brought with them different perspectives and ways of doing things which provided change in an organisation and could 'shake up' and ultimately prompt a re-think of individual and/or organisational practices and processes.

'a more vibrant environment. A change to the system you know like everything's done in a certain routine and then there's a sudden change…it can cause a bit of a ripple but it's a good ripple. I think it's refreshing to have a temp come in once in a while…it's just like a breath of fresh air…' (29).

'I think people should miss you when you go so that people think having a temp is a really good experience' (25, p. 2)

'flexibility, different personalities, different opinions, different backgrounds and different skill levels' (18, p. 6)

'bringing in new blood or new ideas into the organisation where people may not have worked in that sector before or that industry, that could be advantageous' (17, p. 3)

6.4. Trialling New Positions

Additionally several participants reported a belief that temps were often used in a 'trial' capacity. In some cases the organisation was looking to hire a permanent person, often in a new role, and was using a temp to 'try out' the position and often to advise on selection decisions.

'sometimes when they're reshuffling and trying to work out 'can we handle this or will we need a new position' (9).

'it's quite a common practice for organisations to use experienced temps to analyse what the role actually entails and what kind of person they should be looking for' (2).

In other cases, the organisation was using temps as a way to get around restrictions on probationary practices enshrined in the Employment Relations Act 2000. In the second case, the temp (or a series of them) was often advised that the role was a potential temp-to-perm role, and thus the length of the assignment effectively constituted a 'trial period'.

'they get to try before they buy, if they want to buy' (17, p 3)

'if you hire someone as a temp and they turn out to be a dud and they can't do the job then you're not stuck with them so you don't need to worry that there will be a lawsuit if you kick them out or anything' (19, p. 5)

Several temp agencies confirmed this practice though some expressed their disquiet at organisational attempts to circumvent legislative restrictions in this manner: 'it's a bit naughty because you are not supposed to trial as such' (Agency 1). Most of the temps who reported this experience were quite happy with the practice, noting that it also provides the temp with the opportunity to put the company through a 'trial period' and thus make an informed decision about whether or not they would like to work there in a permanent capacity. In light of most temps' express reluctance to take on any of the assignments they are given in a permanent capacity, and the regularity with which they receive and turn down such offers, organisations that regularly employ such tactics as a means of reducing their own recruitment risks may want to tread carefully. Too long a trial period seems likely to result in it being the organisation and their job which are found wanting, leaving the organisation in the situation of having to start all over again with no guarantee that the next temp will be anymore inclined to commit permanently.

'it gives you an insight into different offices and you can work in a place and think 'there's no way I'd want to be permanent here' but it's Ok for a day or two' (12).

'because if you don't like a job temping you think 'oh, it's only for 2 days or 3 weeks or 6 months' and that's not too bad and you stick it out but you think 'gosh if this was permanent I wouldn't want to be stuck here' (11).

This possibility was also signalled by recruitment consultants who saw the opportunity for temps to 'try before they buy' as a major benefit of temping:

'it's a huge advantage, if you are looking to perm, you can see what the environment is like, what these people are like and choose whether you want to stay' (Agency 3).

7. Benefits of Temping

This section lists the main benefits of temping to the temps themselves, as they perceived them.

7.1. Flexibility, Time, and Other Interests

Flexibility, variety, and the ability to retain a sense of control over whether, when and where to work were cited as key benefits of temping as a way of working. The ability to take time off as and when required was hailed as a major advantage of temping over permanent work. In particular, the ability to take unlimited time off around the Christmas holiday period was cited by several participants as reason enough to keep temping. Additionally, participants had taken advantage of the on-off flexibility afforded by temping to take extended overseas holidays as well as days off 'here and there' to attend to other things such as family or other social events or to perform unpaid or paid work in another capacity. Participants reported few problems with taking time off. Most planned for longer breaks and advised their agency about impending holidays to try to ensure that they would have work up until their departure date and as soon as possible after arriving back in New Zealand. Occasional days off were generally obtained either by telling the agency they were unavailable for work on that particular day, if they were not currently on assignment, or, if they were, through direct negotiation with the client organisation.

> 'I like the flexibility so I can do my voluntary work…you can take days off here and there which is more difficult in full-employment' (1).

> 'convenience, because it suits me. I can work when I want and I don't have to work when I've got something else that I want to do' (12).

> 'you have lots of control over your day and whether you take something or not' (2).

> 'the travel and the freedom and all that sort of stuff' (26).

> 'broadening the number of people I meet and the flexibility so that if I need to do other things I can stop' (25).

> 'I can have time off when I want to have time off, especially around Christmas time…if I want to go early I just tell them and it's ok' (24).

> 'to have time off, I think that's a good one because if you have something planned you can just tell them ahead' (14).

> 'I can turn down assignments if I've got something I've committed to in the family or if I've got fun somewhere else but that's also balanced with the fact that if I want the money, I've got to work' (7).

Historically, temping flexibility has been primarily of the on-off variety, enabling individuals to take full days or week/s off at a time. This has been cited in the literature as a disadvantage to women who have taken up temping on the assumption

that they will be able to have within-week or within-day flexibility enabling them to attend to other (usually family) responsibilities. Critics have argued that the majority of temporary jobs are full-day and full-week assignments which offer little flexibility to women with childcare obligations (Martella, 1992). Additionally several authors report that many women who look for part-time temporary work or some other form of alternative work arrangement are disappointed by the lack of these sorts of assignments (Gottfried, 1992; Henson, 1996; McAllister, 1998). Findings from this study suggest a shift to more diversity in both the length and hours of temping assignments. Respondents reported working on (or at least being offered) temping assignments that were part-time and outside of 'normal' business hours. This was thought to result from a shift in the way many client organisations were utilising temporary labour. Both temps and consultants expressed their view that client organisations had become more savvy in their temp spend which had resulted in much more careful 'matching' of work demand to labour supply. Therefore it was becoming increasingly common for client organisations to request a temp for a morning OR an afternoon, or selected times during the week (to cover peak work flow) when previously they would have hired the temp for the entire 40 hour week.

For some, the availability of part-time or not-everyday-work was hailed as a benefit for a variety of reasons including, having more time to do other things such as community work, studying, family things or simply 'what I'd rather be doing'.

> 'I prefer part-time temping because I have things I need to do for myself and I make that my priority rather than going to work because I know I've got enough income to support whatever I need to do. My focus in on voluntary work rather than work that generates income (29, p. 1/2)

7.1.1. Suiting women with responsibilities for family

> 'I want to always have a finger in the pie and I think the only way to do that is temping because then you can turn them down and not get fired whereas if you have a permanent job with children if would be hard when the kids are growing up and you want to take time off or whatever but temping is just so flexible it would be good for a mother, especially part-time temping' (27).

> 'It suits me at the moment. It lets me be here for my son and basically keeps me in the workforce' (12).

> 'I bet there's mothers out there who wouldn't mind the opportunity to go temping for two or three days a week' (10).

7.1.2. Suiting students

> 'I had one assignment for a company that specifically targeted students and worked the hours of work required with tertiary students in mind…that was a very well though out arrangement' (9).

> 'I could see myself working at least two or three days a week while I do my study' (10).

7.1.3. When setting up one's own company

Temping while temps set up their own business was commonly reported. Temping not only provided participants with a reasonably steady income while in the start-up phase but in many cases also provided the participant with important contacts which could be drawn on in the future. Some participants had also sold their art or craftwork to contacts made on temping assignments and reported that temping thus enabled them to come into contact with a range of potential customers they might not otherwise meet. The experience of having been a temp and thus having an insight into the ways different organisations operated was also held to be advantageous when venturing out on their own.

> 'I requested part-time so that I could do work for my own company but I don't need that any longer as all the client relationships have been built and the other work can be done by email in the evenings' (4).

> 'I'm temping at the moment because it lets me do set-up stuff for my own company' (26).

7.1.4. Allowing time for hobbies and volunteer work

A large number of the temps reported that temping enabled them to become involved in other forms of volunteer, artistic or creative work. Several made jewellery or mosaic art and two were heavily involved in volunteer work at the national and community level.

> 'I was awarded a MNZM (Member of the New Zealand order of Merit) for services to the community. I thought you might be interested and possibly include this in your project, as working for a Temping Agency has certainly contributed to my receiving this award. With working temporary has allowed me the flexibility to attend meetings and conferences around NZ and the world, and being able to contribute on a number of committee's at a local and national level' (1).

When asked if they would prefer to find a way for this work to become their primary form of work activity or source of income all were resistant, citing the need for a multi-activity life to meet the needs of different aspects of themselves, and the desire to retain these types of activities as 'pleasure work' or a gift they gave to their communities.

> 'that's my gift, it's something I put out there' (29).

> 'that's a bit more of a pleasure to be able to do it for people, rather than good money' (25).

> 'I paint and make mosaics. I have sold my work but I mainly make it and give it as presents…I'm not really a business person and it's not really the thing for me to do' (16).

'I enjoy making art as a creative expression but I'm not interested in doing that as my sole type of work' (3).

For these women in particular the temping work they did was clearly identified as primarily a source of income needed to 'pay the rent'. For those who worked alone at home on their art, temping also provided an opportunity to 'meet people' in the work place and thus fulfil (in part) their need for social contact.

'I got tired of working for myself, by myself, making jewellery at home and not really having any sustained people contact so I thought 'well temping is good for that' so I thought I'll go and do that for a bit and just do the jewellery part-time' (25).

'temping allows me to have a varied life and allows for different expressions of self by providing some routine alongside my artistic and healing work and I enjoy being part of a team and getting to know new people' (6).

Moreover, several participants reported that they regularly engaged in a range of other work or leisure activities which served as a creative outlet or provided intellectual stimulation. These other activities were signalled as key in providing them with an important source of 'satisfaction' when this was not experienced in the jobs they were currently doing for pay.

'to me a job is something you should enjoy and preferably get some money for …but quite frankly I think that as long as you can sustain a certain amount of income and I'd like to have a job that's interesting, but if it's boring I just do creative stuff to balance it at home. So if I get to the point that I think 'god I just can't go in there tomorrow then I just do some art or pottery or something else and that balances it out' (25, p. 4)

'generally I have found that the temping work is quite boring so I usually try to make the most out of it by investigating people's lives. That's my stuff. I keep a notebook and write down characters and stuff' (23, p. 4)

'I only do it [temping] for the money. I wouldn't really want to work if it wasn't for the money side of it, I'd be happier doing voluntary work and travelling and other things…I enjoy the temping, it's not that I dislike the job but I don't feel that I have to work in paid employment to be fulfilled. I could do voluntary work…the paid stuff is mainly because I need the money' (20, p. 2)

'working as a nutritionist provides me with work that is satisfying but I still need a regular income and temping is an important way of keeping in touch with what's going on out there, with how people are living and what they are thinking' (6, p. 2)

7.1.5. Flexibility as a threat

For others the choice to temp was premised on the expectation that they would be in full-day/full-week employment, albeit for a variety of different client organisations,

over the course of a week/year. As such, the increased availability of part-time temping assignments, while perceived to be of benefit to other people (or even themselves in a different set of circumstances, e.g. after children) was reported as something to be wary of as it represented a threat to the temp being able to meet 'the minimal level of income she needed every week' (31).

7.2. Re-thinking Work-in-Life

Several respondents reported that temping enabled them to re-think and re-position the place and importance of paid work in their lives. For many the re-positioning had come about after a life event that had prompted them to really think about what was important to them in their lives. Several reported developing a belief that they had put too much time, effort and energy into conventional permanent paid employment and that temping enabled them to continue to earn income while retaining an emotional and psychological distance from the work and the workplace. This freed them up to concentrate on what they considered to be truly important in their lives.

> 'After my father got sick I re-evaluated what was important to me and realised that I didn't want to be in such a high pressure role…I wanted to spend more time with my parents and doing my art work' (3).

> 'it's just so less stressful and when I look at people who are in the office from 8 till 5 and they're complaining about this and complaining about that and I just think work should be there just to generate income and it shouldn't become like this major issue of your life, like you have to go to work to survive type of thing, you know?' (29).

> 'working full-time I would kill myself off and I have other interests like being the treasurer of a Scrabble Club and the manager of a Stamp Club and I do lots of voluntary work' (14).

> 'they wanted me to come in every weekend and work late every night and it got to the point where I wasn't having a life, I wasn't meeting new people, I was working too much and not going out and having fun…life's too short aye' (16).

7.3. Temping as a Learning Opportunity

The majority of participants reflected that temping had contributed to their personal and professional development by continually putting them into novel situations which constituted, one way or the other, a type of learning environment. Experiences of 'learning' encompassed the development of 'hard' skills such as learning a new computer package or how to use a piece of office equipment; 'soft' skills such as how to manage relationships with various and sometimes strange individuals and self-learning, where-in temps learned more about themselves and what they liked and disliked about particular forms of work.

> 'it teaches you quite a lot about what you do and don't enjoy doing, the people you do and don't enjoy working for and it's good for you to learn completely different styles of working especially if you are a little bit older because the

risk is that you are less attractive to employers if you haven't had some element of change' (2).

7.3.1. Gathering Insights, Gaining Experience

Participants who had recently immigrated or returned to New Zealand reported that temping provided quick, easy access to a range of New Zealand industries and organisations. This was reported as both a useful way of gaining New Zealand experience in general and as a way of gathering information about particular industries and/or organisations in order to inform decisions about future employment.

> 'Exposure to so many different areas and so many different places…it gives you a bit of an insight into areas and people and what you would and wouldn't go for' (27, p. 3)

> 'the freedom and the flexibility and having just come back from overseas with no idea of what the NZ job place is like, it's a good way to get around a lot of different companies and getting your nose in the door and seeing how people work and getting names thrown at you. It's a good way of getting around, finding out what really happens and meeting lots of different people' (26, p. 3)

> 'I've just come back to New Zealand after many years of living abroad and temping is a way to get out and get a feel of living and working in Auckland and business in Auckland because I haven't lived her before' (2, p. 3)

7.3.2. Professional Development

Much of the literature reports that temps are denied access to formal training provided to permanent staff by their employing organisations. Temps in our study reported that, in many cases, they were able to access training provided to permanent employees. For some, attendance at such sessions was compulsory, and in some cases completion of the training was necessary in order to undertake the assignment. Notably, participants who were placed in organisations that used a lot of temps reported that they were routinely included in staff training and health and safety courses. In addition, participants reported that simply being put in a variety of different assignments provided the opportunity to develop their professional skills. While extensive formal training might be fairly uncommon, most people they met on assignment were happy to help them to learn the new job, either by giving direct instructions or by answering any questions the temp might have.

> 'temping is a really good way to pick up extra skills and give you variety; different assignments, different work to do…a good way of getting experience and developing transferable skills quite quickly' (31).

> 'you always learn something' (20).

> 'if you go out there and make the most of it you'll learn heaps and I find there's more room for you to learn [temping] than working in one job' (10).

> 'variety, going out to different places, situations and meeting different people, increasing my skills base, learning to be adaptable and flexible so I can go into

any company and pick up how to use their system in basically one morning and learning not only the different applications but also learning the different parts of running a business' (9).

'systems are basically the same, you just have to learn them on the job' (17).

'you know if a woman wants to learn something different and they're prepared to give her a go, then she could pick up a few things so just really be prepared to do anything you're asked to do, don't think you're too good for that job or that it's too hard, just give it a go' (24, p. 3)

7.3.3. Gaining Confidence

Most participants reported that the stress of starting a new assignment had reduced over time as they developed techniques to learn new jobs quickly. Additionally, confidence developed from starting new jobs on a regular basis was cited as a benefit of the temping experience, in particular through contributing to a decline in 'firstdayitis.'

'you lose your fear of first days because you have so many first days' (2).

'I think it gives you lots of confidence because when I first started I was terrified cause as a temp you're starting a new job all the time so you can imagine what it's like you've got butterflies in your tummy and you start to think 'oh what if I can't do the job' but you get over that but now I just psych myself up and take a deep breath and don't worry about anything' (11).

'I used to be really nervous about meeting new people but now I can stroll into a new place, no worries about meeting new people or learning new processes at all…lay it on, I can totally handle it!' (4).

'You've always got that initial thing of getting your head around a new job and working out the system and who you need to speak with about what but once you get a job down it's sweet…if you've got it under control and you can cruise in there and do your job and go home, it's fine' (16).

'people will always gain confidence from temping because they'll either learn from trial and error or meeting a lot of people will give them confidence…I feel like its knowledge that probably nobody else will have but you as a temp have it' (10).

'you learn to be adaptable and skilled at handling people' (7).

7.3.4. Learning to Cope with Uncertainty

'The unknown' was reported equally as a benefit and a difficulty associated with temping. For some, not knowing what was around the corner was what made temping and interesting and exciting way to work.

'it depends on what life brings to me, life is so impermanent anyway, that's why temping is great. It's always a surprise' (13, p. 6)

'probably just not knowing where you're going to be next…the lack of routine is probably a bit of a disadvantage for some people whereas for me I like to embrace change quite a lot, I really enjoy having something different' (4, p. 4)

The ability to cope with uncertainty was cited as a requirement of being able to enjoy the temping experience. For the majority of participants living through uncertain periods in the past helped them to cope with the uncertainties of temping. Many had travelled and temped while abroad as a means to live and fund further travel. Several had been made redundant, some more than once, and several came from families where to be self-employed and/or living on some form of intermittent income was quite 'normal'.

'travelling and temping really helped me to develop confidence and I've learnt that I can always get by and I can cope with anything…being with strangers challenges and changes you and you learn that you can cope with anything and now just I don't have a lot of fear about the future or security' (16).

Working as a temp and having to deal with the inherent uncertainties around whether or not there will be ongoing work and accompanying income was seen as a great source of personal development for many participants. Longer-term temps, reflecting on changes in the way they viewed their temping experience, reported that over time they had become a lot more comfortable with the uncertainties of temping (and of life in general) and that this had contributed to their ability to retain perspective and cope better with the stresses associated with imposed change.

'it's OK you've been in stressful situations and you've had to cope with so many stressful situations in the past that you do get stressed but you are used to it…you have a broad knowledge and you can draw on your experience' (13).

'sometimes I get a bit overwhelmed at the learning curve I'm climbing and you have to remind yourself that you've done this all before and I know within a couple of days it will all start to sort itself out and I'll start getting it' (8).

'I'm much better at being confident about coping in a new situation and how to ask for help and you get better at it the more you do it' (6).

Interestingly, several participants reported that they 'felt sorry' for permanent staff they came across in their assignments who, in their view, had an unhealthy fear of change and few coping mechanisms to deal with the uncertainty inherent in (post) modern life.

'[temping] lets me step out of my comfort zone all the time and move around when I'm not happy which helps me to avoid the whinging and the bitterness…I think a lot of people are unable to do that which is sad, but it's their life' (13).

'I think temping has been quite good, it's helped me toughen up and it's given me good coping mechanisms and you go into a lot of companies where there are structural changes happening and a lot of people can't cope with the change, they want their comfort zone and I think 'crumbs I used to be like that' and now it just doesn't bother me (11).

7.3.5 Learning to Learn

Moreover, several participants reported that the requirement to be 'immediately effective' in an assignment had developed their ability to 'learn to learn' and that they were now able to pick up new jobs very quickly. This included both learning the specific tangible aspects of the job (such as circumnavigating an in-house system) and also an ability to 'read' a new organisational environment in order to understand and thus adapt themselves to 'the way things are done around there'.

'I enjoy it because you've got to be quick and it keeps you on your toes…it's always an emergency situation so everybody's stressed and here you go to sort it out. I quite enjoy that, I've got good skills to adapt myself and I enjoy it because I can go into all different kinds of companies and each time I learn a little bit more. It's enriching my life and my vocabulary and my experience' (13).

'your listening skills become very attuned…you have to pick things up quicker so you've got to learn to listen' (11).

'you become a good note-taker and learn what questions to ask' (15).

'I think temping is good. It gives you speed and it opens your eyes. The first week is really tiring because you've got to get everything and your detectors are out and you've got to work it out. When you are a temp you've got to deliver so you've got to pick up on what's around you, you've got to adapt to their way and it's interesting to develop your own psychology…it's good to be able to switch from one situation to another, you become more multi-lateral and more adaptable' (13).

'So as a temp you're always learning new things and not just about one thing but about different companies and different peoples, policies and everything so I see that temps are very open minded' (10).

'temping teaches you how to learn, how to get to know and about being flexible' (6).

7.4. Enjoyment of Temping

Several respondents reported that they had a lot of fun working as a temp and that they experienced a lot more enjoyment from their work as a temp than they had in previous permanent jobs. The temporary nature of the work, its variety that come with it were important motivational factors, which several participants believed contributed to higher levels of effort and performance from temp workers than permanent staff.

'temping is fun and exciting and you get to meet new people, different people, different types of people, not the same people you have to put up with everyday' (10).

'if they teach someone who is just there for a certain time they won't mind, they won't think it's too hard and that is the benefit of hiring a temp…most temps get out there and perform better than those that are there permanently' (10).

'I get to have a steady income, doing work I enjoy without having to get caught up in the pressures and politics of being a permanent employee and I can do my job better because I can just ignore the politics and get on and do my work' (3).

'I think it's fun. I like meeting new people all the time and I like different working environments. I can maintain my motivation towards going to work if I have constant change in my life…if I have to walk into the same office all day every day and see the same people it's not so much fun going to work' (15).

'The whole variety thing is what keeps me it enjoyable…like the jobs I was temping in I would never be able to handle doing permanently long term, it would just drive me nuts but because there was always variety and new people and places, that kept me going' (18).

'Because we live in a society where I find it very hard to think I'm gonna be at this job FOREVER and EVER and it's a lot easier to do something for a year or six months…I don't know about permanent, I can't imagine being with one company for ever…I don't think people do that anymore' (5).

'it's just lovely going in and I enjoy the people that I see and enjoy meeting people and talking to them' (30).

'it's good because it's such a good variety, you go to different places and that's fun, going to completely different areas of Auckland and meeting all these different people' (14).

This was especially so for those who enjoyed temping work as part of a diverse range of paid/unpaid, voluntary, artistic, family focused or otherwise social activities. Because one job no longer formed (or in some cases never had) the focus of the entire day, week or year, participants reported that they were more able to enjoy what they were doing and not worry to much about any niggles or annoyances they might experience while on assignment.

'I think time's are changing and people are moving into the temping thing and they're realising that a lot of their day goes into working…and I've met so many people that say 'ooh, I don't want to go into work today' and me, you know, I get up and think 'oh cool, another day of work you know, another couple of hours…' (29).

'I have a little moan when the agencies phone me up and say reception but I think about the fact that this is another trip somewhere…and if it's a day or a week or even two weeks I can put up with most things' (7).

'it's all right if you just want a job to pay the rent. I think if you want a job with more job satisfaction, I don't think you get that as a temp but the variety is quite good so if you're doing a boring job it's quite nice to know that you're only doing it for another four days and then you're out of there' (26).

'I enjoy the work but I'm not attached to it….temping enables you to retain a distance from the work which you can't do as a permanent worker like the tedium and the chaos that really get to permanent people don't get to me because I see myself as only being there in a temporary capacity and able to leave it at the office at the end of the day' (3).

'I think you view it differently because you're not really thinking that it's for a long time so you just take it as it comes and in a way it does suit' (5).

'I do enjoy being able to walk out the door at 5 o'clock and not lie awake at night worrying about the job' (2).

'you don't really have to put yourself in and you can just walk away at the end of the day and not be worried about whatever so in theory it should be less stressful because you have your experience as less stressful' (5).

7.5. Being Able to Escape

Ultimately, every assignment is temporary and can therefore usually be endured, and if not, then there is no compulsion for the temp to stay.

'I like the fact that I can ring up and say 'look this job's yukky, the people are horrible, I don't want to go back there and they can't make you!' (27, p. 3)

'you've got to be flexible and friendly and prepared to do the work that's there, knowing that if it doesn't suit you, you don't have to go back' (12, p. 3)

'it can be quite good because you can walk away from the problems' (22, p. 2)

'I like to tell myself I can come and go at any time' (19, p. 2)

'You always have the power to walk away if it's completely unacceptable to you' (2, p. 6)

'just the knowledge that at any time if you don't like a job you could move on, you're not stuck with somebody in the office that you can't stand and all the politics that go with that' (19, p. 4)

The knowledge that all assignments are finite also meant that temps were more likely to take on roles that they would never usually consider in the pursuit of serious, career type jobs. While acknowledging that 'too many' of these types of assignments could

be detrimental to future prospects, several respondents relished the opportunity to try out new things and to sometimes have 'the opportunity to do silly jobs' (31, p 2).

7.6. A Good Fall-Back Option

Several temps reported that temping would always remain a good fall-back option for them in the future. In particular several who were in the process of setting up their own businesses reported that they liked knowing that if the business was slow to get started, or didn't work out they could always come back to temping as a way of earning extra money.

> 'If I ever get stuck it's always there. It's something I can do if I get stuck or if I'm going through a slightly non-committal phase' (4).

> 'I think I'm ready for a permanent job so I think I'll look for one when we come back from holiday and if I find two months down the track that I still haven't got one then I'll just keep temping because it's a way of having an income but it also gives you freedom' (24).

> 'I really hope I don't have to do it again but I guess I always know it's there because in the foreseeable future people will always need someone to type and do manual tasks' (23).

> 'I can get temping work quickly and easily. I'm experienced in it. It's just the easy option really for me' (16).

> 'temping's definitely been critical in allowing me to be because if it hadn't existed I would have had to chose an alternative profession, or gone back to study or compromised a lot in what I wanted to do' (18).

> 'I would use it in the future if I needed to' (17).

> 'just decided I'd carry on temping until I figured out what I wanted to do and had decided on a course' (15).

> 'Well I think I don't want to be a temp any more but that doesn't mean I won't be…I think I would like a permanent career job but I change my mind every week' (5).

Additionally, several participants were in the process of looking for permanent work and reported that temping while doing so allowed them to take their time and be 'extremely choosy' about which offers they considered.

7.7. Better Security

As will be shown in the section on "Difficulties of temping", financial insecurity was a major problem for a number of temps. In contrast to this, however, several participants reported that they preferred temp work because they perceived it to be *less* risky than a permanent job. Temp work was perceived as relatively easy to get: most participants reported that they had been given their first assignment within days, if not hours, of

registering with an agency. Several participants contrasted this with the length of time it can take to get a permanent role and concluded that in this sense, temping, if work is plentiful, can often be a *more* reliable and secure source of income than many permanent jobs which under current employment conditions are always at risk of being made redundant.

> 'The main benefit is that it should be more sort of stable than permanent work because they should be employing you straight away whereas if you were a permanent person and you lost your job you'd have to spend a few weeks trying to find a new one whereas as a temp there might be a day' (5).

> 'I can get temping work quickly and easily. I'm experienced in it. It's just the easy option really for me' (16).

7.8. Developing a Preference for Temporary Type Work

The majority of temps who participated in this study expressed that they had developed a preference for temporary forms of work, regardless of whether this would continue to be in the form of office temping. Several participants were in the process of moving away from temping per se but expressed the desire to move into other forms of work which would continue to allow them to 'feel temporary in my head'.

> 'I figured out that I don't like permanent jobs because I get bored, I've got a very low boredom threshold so I wanted to continue doing project work' (15).

> 'I see myself staying as a temp and just keep going, find out what's out there whether I go back and do temping with the banks or anything' (10).

> 'I can choose when I want to work and I've still got this other life going on outside too. I'm not absolutely tied to a job' (30).

> 'I'll just do it forever. I like temping, it kind of suits me. It's got a sort of flakiness to it that I like. I don't want to get stuck in one office for twenty years doing the same job and it gives me the flexibility to go off on a long holiday. With a permanent job I'd probably have to resign and lose my job but with temping I can just give a few week's notice and I'm free to go' (19).

> 'If I can get projects then I will still be temporary in my head and able to work for myself' (13, currently setting up her own 'do anything' company).

> 'you can have time off when you want…I think it's more than that, you can vary your work life…because you're very structured if you're working full-time, you've got to go, you can't just say 'oh well, I'm not working this week…you've got to go to work and having just come to this country we want to see as much of it as we can, while we can' (28).

> 'it suits my lifestyle to the max…it suits me to go into a role, give it my best and then leave…I don't want to be tied down to anything. I enjoy having the time off that I want instead of being dictated to as you do in a permanent job' (27).

'I enjoy work of a temporary or project nature and plan to freelance as a graphic designer once I've qualified' (31).

'they can't understand why I would want to temp, partly for the financial insecurity and people do feel secure in a permanent job and that's what I like about temping is not being secure' (15).

7.9. Summary: Who is 'unfortunate'?

It is conventionally reported that temps are perceived as 'unfortunate' or 'unlucky' because of their inability to secure on-going, permanent employment. Results from this study suggests that temps may view permanent staff as 'unfortunate' (sometimes self-made) prisoners of circumstance or belief, stuck with the monotony and drudgery of on-going permanent work. Several respondents reported their belief that any suspicion, hostility or in many cases plain curiosity experienced from permanent staff had little to do with the fear that 'the temp' may steal their job, or that they were some sort of 'inferior' worker. Instead several reported that permanent staff often expressed jealousy or envy about the relative flexibility and freedom, from many of the constraints of conventional employment, that temps were observed to enjoy.

'sometimes permanent staff, who have to be in there five days a week may be a little jealous of a temp who can choose to come in when she wants and they give you little extra jobs to do but it doesn't matter…I think they probably think we're lucky because we can choose and we don't get taken into a room every two weeks and asked what we've done and how may products we've sold…we don't have the same pressure that they have and that can be uncomfortable at times' (30).

'they get jealous cause I get to sleep in…they want to know what I do with the rest of my time, they're quite curious about where does the rest of my day go, you know, what do I do. So I just tell them, I get to sleep in, I wake up, do my own thing and then come into work and they're like 'sigh' and the thing is they have the choice but because they've told themselves that they need to work this many hours for this many days to get this much income, they've sort of tied themselves to that' (29 – part-time temp).

'then you get people who say I'd much rather have a permanent job and I look at the job they're doing and think 'god how can you do that every day? Go to the same place day after day and do the same boring thing' (18).

'I feel sorry for the people I work with who do the job permanently. They get much more stressed than me and are badly affected by the office politics. I can distance myself but they can't' (3).

8. Difficulties with Temping

8.1. Financial Uncertainty

The problems reported to do with temping were often financial in nature. Temps reported that the uncertainty of on-going work meant that they couldn't rely on a specific level of income every week. By and large though, the women had found ways of minimising this financial uncertainty. Several reported that temps need to live within their means and to 'keep money aside for a rainy day when there is no work' (31). Alongside this was the need to plan for the 'peaks and flows' of temping work. In particular to be aware of the 'quiet times' around Christmas and the New Year and also to stay alert to changes in the economy which might affect the availability of temping work.

> 'there's the freedom factor but then there's also the not-knowing factor where you don't know if you are going to have work next week or if you go on holiday whether there's going to be work when you come back' (26).

> 'I think the only disadvantage would be if you had mortgage payments or rent because you can't guarantee the permanent income coming in' (14).

Two respondents reported that they had to get a permanent job in order to assure other people, namely 'the bank' that they were a viable risk. In both cases the women reported that they were only getting a permanent job in order to be able to secure a mortgage.

> 'a permanent job is a necessity, it's not a wish...I'll be stymied with a [permanent] job but I have to get it to get the mortgage' (28).

> 'I want to buy a house and the bank have laughed hysterically at me' (5).

8.2. Loneliness

It is widely reported in the literature that temps are often socially isolated and/or ignored while on assignment. Few temps in this study reported problems with the 'people side' of temping. Instead most reported that the people they had met on assignment were generally welcoming, friendly and helpful.

> 'the people side of it doesn't really bother me, I know I'm going to be meeting a whole lot of new people and some of them might be nice and some of them might not be and that doesn't really bother me...most people I've encountered have been very nice, very helpful, very friendly and I haven't had any problems with anyone really' (20, p. 2)

Exceptions to this were generally experienced in short-term, one-day reception roles, which were overwhelmingly reported as the 'least favourite' of temp assignments. Loneliness while on assignment was reported as a potential difficulty with temping and something that had been experienced by a number of the respondents.

'it can be quite soul destroying and you start to feel like you're a turtle carrying your house around' (31).

'the whole relationship thing, loyalty, credibility thing. You don't usually get to sustain anything so you're always starting relationships again and people are always asking you 'why are you temping?' 'what's your life story' (23).

'I've never minded it and it's never fazed me but it can be hellishly lonely going into new offices and meeting new people but it depends on the offices that you get into what treatment you get' (26).

'it's the stress sometimes of continually starting a new job. I am a bit of a security blanket person and so it would be nice to be part of a team and not to always feel the outsider' (7).

Additionally, several participants reported on having to deal with other people's 'bad moods' while on assignment. This was generally only reported as a problem if the assignment was short-term and the temp had not been able to develop a relationship with co-workers. Most of the stress in these situations came from the inability to figure out if the 'bad mood' was directed at the temp personally and the perceived need to stay polite and 'just shut up and stay quiet' (28) while in the early stages of an assignment. An experience of this sort could be mitigated or exacerbated depending on whether the temp experienced a lack of support from her agency.

'there are times that, just because you're a temp, people do take out their bad moods on you…and there's a lack of support from the agency. If you have a problem they're not really there for you' (31).

'sometimes it can be difficult dealing with a new boss, especially when they just fly off the handle because there isn't the opportunity to develop a relationship so you have to put up with more than you normally would and that can feel quite uncomfortable' (28).

'you have to be able to get on with people and learn to keep your mouth shut at certain times…I think you need to be not too out there and not too pushy, you've got to remember that you're a temp' (24).

'biting my tongue is definitely the most difficult thing, it's certainly not impossible and I am able to do it but that's the thing' (17).

'Sometimes people can be quite rude but you have to keep your cool and sometimes you do have to swallow your pride but I think it's character building' (13).

However, despite concerns raised in the literature over the effect of such treatment on the temp's psychological well-being, this treatment did not seem to be internalised by the temp's or attributed to some short-coming on their part. Rather, participants attributed receiving such treatment to different office cultures, which were more or less friendly, or referred to broadly held social beliefs wherein 'true' relational bonds are believed to only develop over the course of significant time.

'two weeks is basically the point where people start being friendly and that's the same in all jobs so maybe it's not just a temping thing, maybe it's just a human nature thing of how long it takes people to start to bond with you' (18).

'It's funny because sometimes people don't relate to you. It's like, oh well, you're someone from outside and you're not gonna be here long enough so we're not gonna form a bond with you, and I don't look at life that way…I can meet someone for 5 minutes and form a bond with them, that doesn't really worry me. That's not what I judge a relationship on, but a lot of people seem to and maybe they have a lot of people pass through or maybe they're just so busy that it's not something they want to spend energy on' (25).

Moreover the ability to cope with any and all types of reception was held to be a skill that good temps have thus enabling them to fit into whatever kind of environment they find themselves in.

'In some situations you can go in and the temp gets left with everything nobody wants to do and treated completely as the outsider and in some situations you're instantly accepted as part of the team and you've got to be able to cope with both environments' (9).

'good or bad assignments generally depends on the people, if the people are really good then it's a great assignment and if the people are really lousy then it's a lousy assignment but that's the same as working anywhere' (22).

'it can be good and it can be bad and it can be everything in between…A lot of it just depends on where you're working and who you're working with and what they're like and how they treat you' (16).

'it can be good but it can also be…a lot of people sort of look down on you. I don't think it's intentional but I think because you haven't got a permanent job…but it's just some people, but not all people, it's just the odd one…mostly it's pretty good because you're there for a reason and mostly they appreciate you being there and doing the work so basically it's pretty good' (24).

'you've got to be thick-skinned and not take it personally…as they get to know you it changes but if you come into a short-term assignment, you get a lot of that, you get ignored quite a bit' (19).

Several participants reported that it should be the responsibility of the temp to initiate friendly contact with permanent staff, who they perceived to be equally nervous about meeting a new person and even more unsure about how to proceed.

'you've got to introduce yourself to people and start up conversations because they won't because you're the new girl…you have got to say something because they probably feel a bit nervous because a new person's there so I think it's essential that you overcome your nervousness and speak to them first' (11).

'sometimes it takes a week until somebody talks to you…it's not that they are not nice people or whatever because sometimes I get a very good relationship with them but it's just that you're put there and they think 'oh she's only gonna be here for two weeks' and nobody thinks they can talk to you because you're there to do a job and then you're gone (13).

8.3. Balancing the Personal and the Professional

Some participants reported that a problem they had experienced with temping was not the inability to form meaningful relationships while temping, but rather the opposite, the difficulty of leaving friends they had made while on assignment. They therefore counselled temps to be wary of becoming too attached to co-workers and the importance of remembering that you will, at some point, move on.

'it's important, not to exclude yourself but to know that you're a temp and that you're there to do a job and carry on' (10).

'you have to find a really strong balance between getting on with the people you're working with to the extent you can do your job well but staying out of the politics and stuff' (8).

8.4. Expectations of Immediate Effectiveness

Some temps reported as an ongoing source of stress the expectation that temps are able to 'hit the ground running' and can immediately be effective in any assignment, often with little or no training. Temps and consultants reflected on the expectation that temps are expected to be the 'expert' in any given situation regardless of their actual experience with the systems in use. Temps reported that the fact that they are only in an organisation for a relatively short length of time means that their performance is observed much more closely, and that there is little room for 'bad hair days'. Knowledge that the agency regularly phones the client organisation for feedback on the temp's performance also added to the stress associated with the requirement of immediate effectiveness.

'generally you need to be that much better than a permanent person doing the job' (8).

'more is expected of you as a temp than from a permanent person' (Agency 1).

'you're the one with the most knowledge, not the least knowledge…they're looking for someone who can hit the ground running as opposed to learning the job' (Agency 2)

'you do need to be even more highly skilled to be a temporary person than you need to be in a permanent role, because you need to be able to go into roles at the jump and learn quickly and get on with people and just be able to think on your feet' (Agency 3).

'you have to learn something instantly so you have to be a really fast learner and you have to be effective in everything that you do' (4).

'it can be hard if colleagues that you work with expect you to be as good as, if not better than them and that can be hard if the person you're replacing has been there for twenty years and you've been there for twenty minutes' (27).

'I think you've got to be strong because sometimes people can make a comment about you not knowing which is quite normal because you have only been there an hour and sometimes I just tell them 'I've only been here an hour what do you expect from me. I don't know what you did last week' (13).

'the main disadvantages would be that you're unsettled and the uncertainty and sort of the expectation that you know everything when you walk in and you don't because everybody does things differently so you've got to be really quick' (22).

'I think some companies feel that they have to pay so much for a temp that a lot of them expect you to be superhuman' (11).

'having to deal with clients who think you're stupid because you make stupid mistakes at first' (6).

8.5. Not Taking Sick Days

A few participants reported that they were wary of taking sick days when on assignment for fear of losing the assignment. The requirement to be better and immediately effective meant that temps felt they couldn't be seen to be unreliable for any reason. This was especially so on short-term assignments or in the first few days of a long-term assignment.

'if you've just started a job, it's very risky calling in sick, you're likely to lose your job' (19).

'you can't really have a bad hair day when you're temping, like if you've got PMT or something and it just happens to be the first day of a new temping assignment you can't just be like that…when you're temping your performance is taken more on an hourly basis than a big overall plane' (26).

As indicated under 'benefits of temping', 'the unknown' was reported equally as a benefit and a difficulty associated with temping. For those with negative views the novelty of constant new situations and strange people was a source of stress which was often accompanied (or compounded) by uncertainty around income levels.

'probably going into an unknown entity. You walk in and you're not really sure what you're going to get, you're not sure about the people, the job, just the uncertainty and also a little bit probably the uncertainty of whether you're going to get work' (24).

'it can be a bit scary sometimes because you don't know where your next cheque is coming from…it suits me at the moment but I wouldn't want to do it all the time' (22).

8.6. Limited Progression

Several temps reported that temping as a way of working was unable to provide them with a sense of career progression. This was in part due to the way the temping industry is structured at present, with temps generally being offered, and accepting, a diverse range of assignments that may or may not build on previously mastered skills.

One notable exception was a long-term temp who had done many repeat assignments in the same organisation and had recently been engaged, on assignment, as a team leader in a department which she had previously temped in. Interestingly, this woman reported that, although repeat assignments in one organisation did lead to the likelihood of better roles in-house, there was a danger that too much time spent temping in one place could hinder her chances of getting good assignments in other organisations. Moreover, some participants reported their concerns that their decision to temp for an ongoing period of time could harm their 'career prospects' in the non-temp market. Participants reported their sense that the decision to temp, though increasingly coming to be seen as a legitimate 'lifestyle' choice, continues to be viewed as either a 'bad' or non-career choice. This was expressed, most poignantly, by those temps looking to move into permanent, 'career' type jobs. These women were wary of how extended period of temping may be interpreted by prospective employers.

> 'I'm having difficulty getting the job I want because I'm seen as slightly erratic, slightly unreliable and unfocused' (23).

> 'a long history of temping makes employers wary and if I tried to get a full-time job now employers would look at me sideways so I would have to leave bits out of my work history at least until I got to the interview' (26).

> 'all of my work history has been temping and I think that makes it difficult because I don't have a solid history in one place. I think that makes my permanent work search quite difficult' (9).

> 'I think [temping] is probably undervalued by some people and people in general should just learn not to judge by a person's career history and think 'oh you're a temp cause you can't get a real job' because that's not necessarily true' (18).

Consultants were divided as to whether long-term temping was a good 'career' choice. The notion of a career tended to be interpreted fairly conventionally as the ability to progress upwards within any given field or industry. The problems associated with long term temping were typically centred around the way a long-term temp may be perceived by potential employers, as a bit 'flaky', a bit 'unreliable' and as having 'commitment issues'.

> 'one of the problems could be in terms of what they look like on paper…they could appear as someone who maybe doesn't have the maturity or the stickability to stay in a permanent position for more than two weeks and some

employers many question whether that's the kind of person they want to have in their organisation' (Agency 6)

Consultants were quite reflective of the fact that they themselves would view someone with a long period of temping in their work history with suspicion despite their own experience in the field. They extrapolated that this was probably an even more likely set of perceptions in society at large.

'I reckon it can make it hard for them to secure a permanent job because if you look at a CV and you start to think to yourself, "why have they been doing this so long?" and we're in the business of temping, and you wonder about their commitment' (Agency 4).

Additionally, some felt it might be difficult for the temp herself to fit back into a 'boring' permanent work life.

'I think it may be more difficult to take on a permanent job because once you've been temping, when you do what you like, when you like, it may be difficult to go back into a structured permanent work environment where there can be no change' (Agency 3).

8.7. A Decline in 'Good' Temp Roles

Some participants also reported that they had had difficulties in getting the types of assignments they were looking for. Primarily these were women who were looking for higher level, executive PA type roles. Although, a couple of participants felt that this was mainly due to a lack of care or effort on the part of the agencies, all conceded that it was probably also a reflection on the changing ways in which organisations were using temps. Temps reported, and agency representatives confirmed, that organisations nowadays were becoming more tactical in their use of temps, preferring to cover more senior positions through an internal reshuffle and using temps for lower level and thus lower paid positions. For example, where previously a temp may have been requested to cover the maternity leave of a senior level PA, nowadays this role was more likely to be filled by a secretary already working in the organisation, with a temp being brought in to perform lower level word processing or secretarial work. For some, the experience of being offered fewer 'good' roles had promoted them to think about looking for permanent work in the hope that this might offer more 'challenge'.

'most agencies told me that there are very few senior PA roles around. That's because if a PA leaves or goes on holiday or whatever the company is more likely to promote internally and get a temp in to do the lower level stuff' (17).

'most of the time, especially on short assignments you end up doing really crappy jobs because nobody's going to give you any responsibility to follow up a project' (13).

8.8. No Pay Rises

Additionally, and typically cited as of more concern, several respondents reported dissatisfaction with the fact that rates of temp pay had not increased over the years

they had been temping. Several noted that while in times past, temps had been relatively better paid than their permanent counterparts; this was no longer the case.

> 'it used to be that temp rates were higher than the equivalent permanent wages for the same role but nowadays temps tend to get paid less' (17).

They contrasted their lack of hourly rate increase over time with permanent employees who, at the very least, could probably expect incremental salary increases in line with inflation.

> 'you miss out on your annual pay rises because the hourly rate has now dropped whereas if you'd been in a permanent job for seven years at least you'd get a 3% pay rise every year but the [temping] hourly rate hasn't gone up at all' (11).

Moreover those who had been temping for a number of years expressed disappointment that there was no financial recognition of this from their agencies, with one participant suggesting that some sort of long-service increment might serve as recognition, reward and incentive to long-term temps.

> 'it would be nice to think that there was some level of promotion and a nice gesture for a career temp, if they were willing to take slightly less of a cut of the cake themselves' (19).

9. Relationships with Temping Agencies

Participants often cited 'dealing with the agency' as one of the most difficult things about temping. In particular, complaints about consultants 'not listening', mis-matching temp preferences to assignment requirements and the inability to build relationships were cited as sources of concern.

Temps also reported that the high turnover of temp consultants in the industry was a contributing factor to the difficulties they experienced in their dealings with agencies. The majority of respondents reported that historically they had mainly been represented by one consultant with whom they had developed some sort of rapport. Participants noted that recently there had been an acceleration in the turnover of temp consultants, a trend confirmed by the consultants interviewed. Additionally, some participants, who were temping for an agency that had recently merged with another, reported that this larger agency, though able to secure access to a broader section of the market, had lost its 'personal touch'. Participants expressed frustration at having to continually attempt to build new relationships with a revolving stream of consultants and, in many cases having to 'start from scratch' explaining what skills they had, preferences for assignments and availability.

9.1. Mis-matching Preferences to Assignments

Participants generally reported their expectation that the temp consultant would (and should) take special care to ensure that the preferences of the temp were matched to the specifications of the assignment. There was general annoyance expressed at consultants who continually rang up to offer temps assignments which they regarded as 'unsuitable'. This included offering part-time to those who would prefer full-time, or short-term to those looking for long-term, or vice-versa. There was a general sense that temping individual preferences could be accommodated if temp consultants listened more carefully and consulted the information on their databases before placing the call.

> 'the temp and consultant should be a team because they need each other. Sometimes consultants don't respect temps' choices about length of assignment etc. and they should because the temp should be able to choose when and for how long they want an assignment and if they've made that clear to the agency then they should respect that and not phone up with unsuitable assignments and then get annoyed when the temps turn them down' (25).

> 'consultants can be really difficult to work with, they don't really listen to what you say. They just stick you on the tests and don't really ask you questions' (26).

> 'I think making direct requests to your consultant and having them ignored and their complete lack of interest in your progress…there's no dialogue there, there's no relationship…they don't really give a fuck' (23).

'Consultants generally don't have an understanding of your skills and it seems to be very much that if you ring on the day a job comes in you are the first one that gets offered it whether it matches your skills or not' (8).

'some agencies are not so good…if you don't fit into a pigeon hole then they're not that interested and they don't go out and look for you at all' (2).

'the agency is happy to keep me where I am because it suits them even though it doesn't suit me' (6).

'you're repeating yourself each time and then there's the situation when they ring you for work when you're already on assignment and you'd think they'd have those details on the computer' (5).

9.2. Not Keeping in Touch

Temps felt that agencies need to make more of an effort to keep in touch with their temps on assignment. Regular contact from a consultant was reported to help mitigate the feelings of isolation and loneliness sometimes experienced on assignment and to have a motivational effect on a temp's morale. While there was an acknowledgement that consultants are busy people and thus are unable to call every day there was some frustration expressed at the knowledge that consultants do regularly phone the client for progress reports but not the temp. Several participants reported that they believed that the temp, client and consultant formed a team that should work together to provide the best outcomes for all concerned. Agencies and consultants who regularly kept in touch were rated highly, and temps reported that they were more likely to make an extra effort and/or take on undesirable assignments for consultants who showed an on-going interest in the temp's welfare.

'there needs to be better communication between clients, agencies and temps so that there aren't any misunderstandings or surprises with the tasks you are required to do on assignment…I find they don't listen because its almost like she's our commodity and as long as she's in there we're getting money and sometimes I feel like it's not very personal with some of the consultants, it's more like a business transaction…there's no real relationship…no real support' (27).

'the agency should make more of an effort to touch base' (21).

'they should phone to check on you. I know they phone the client to see if they are happy so they should feedback that information to the temp' (8).

'the social events have stopped which is a shame because it was a great chance to talk to your consultant and meet other temps in your field' (19).

'you have that extra energy when they call you up just to see how you're doing' (10).

'sometimes you're excluded and it's not a nice feeling. It's close to rejection really and that feeling of being excluded and not acknowledged is on that

temps do experience regularly so it's important for agencies to keep in touch and take an interest in how the assignment is going and how the temp it' (10).

Some participants felt it was the responsibility of the temp to make the effort to touch base with consultants and feedback to them when they had had a particularly enjoyable or bad assignment. Interestingly, the participant who was most articulate about this had worked as a consultant herself so had a certain insight into the temp-consultant relationship from the other side of the desk. In addition to this being a 'nice thing to do', the practice of keeping regular contact with your consultant/s was argued to result in the temp being assured of better roles and ongoing assignments.

> 'you need to have a really good relationship with the person you are dealing with…I think it's important to get to know your consultant and a lot of people just don't bother…feedback when you really enjoy something and send them an email to say thanks…doing things like that really helps and as soon as they become familiar with you and you're in their face fairly frequently, then you generally get work out of them' (4, p. 3).

> 'it is important to touch base because you never know what might come across their desk' (2, p. 5)

Several consultants also echoed this sentiment, stressing the importance of temps keeping in regular contact and noting that it would be nice if some temp contact was positive, rather than solely focused around reporting problems.

> 'consultants also like to hear a thank you or that the temp enjoyed the assignment' (Agency 1, p. 4)

9.3. Just Not Caring

Furthermore there was a sense from some participants that (some) consultants simply did not want to know about any problems the temp might be experiencing on an assignment and that sometimes consultants punished temps who queried or complained about an assignment, by denying them future work or only offering them low paid, short-term assignments. This belief, whether true or not, had resulted in several temps keeping quiet about undesirable situations they had experienced and in the majority of cases leaving their agency to sign on with another.

> 'agencies don't really want to know about your problems, they're not really there for you…if you squawk or make a noise, you don't get the jobs again' (31).

> 'they treat you as though you are not human, you are merchandise, a product they are going to place' (13).

> 'I think there's a real lack of effort to get to know you' (8).

> 'it's really important that you have someone that you can come away and dump on and I think that should be the consultant but it tends to be your partner because the consultants just aren't there for you when they should be' (8).

'agencies will do these little pep talks and they'll act like they're your friend but really they're not interested and if you ever actually turn around and say 'look I need some help', they just don't want to know' (5).

9.4. Lack of Recognition and Feedback

This was reported as particularly annoying by participants who had been temping for a while. In particular several respondents reported that they would like to have some recognition when they had performed well. Generally it was reported that feedback in the form of praise only came from the client organisation, with agencies only getting involved if there was 'a problem'. One temp was particularly annoyed that she had been denied a request to view client feedback forms on her performance, and had been told by her agency that 'they would let me know if there was a problem' (23). This temp, and several others in the study, reported that they find this practice difficult to accept arguing that, although they work for the agency, it is ultimately their performance being judged and reputation which is at stake.

> 'people are going to know me for my name and if I see them on the street, I want them to associate things that I do with me and not necessarily with the agency' (23).

> 'I always try to be accountable for what I am doing and I do not work for the agency, the agency is working for me and if I do go and work for an employer, it's my reputation' (13).

However, consultation and recognition are two-way streets. Consultants stressed the need for temps to be proactive in their contact with the agency and highlighted the fact that 'temp consultants are really, really busy and don't have enough time to do the things they would like to for their temps' (Agency 6).

> 'consultants also like to hear a thank you or that the temp enjoyed the assignment' (Agency 1).

> 'be keen, be positive, ring in for work…be open, because the more you say yes to, the more you will get and the more trust a consultant will have in you and the more likely you are to be offered work' (Agency 4).

9.5. Lack of Training and Information

Several participants expressed disappointment that their agency did not provide training. Most however acknowledged that they were able to go into the agency and do some training on the computer packages provided. But there were several problems identified with the training currently available. The first was that this opportunity was currently only available during normal working hours and that temps would rather be out working and earning during those days. Secondly there was a preference expressed for some sort of course to be done with other people and a teacher. Thirdly participants reported that there was a need for training and/or information other than simple computer-based up-skilling. Suggestions included workshops on interviewing skills, information on the latest developments in software, information about changes

to legislation, industry trends and forecasting 'up and coming skill demand' so that temps could train themselves in these areas in order to secure on-going and/or better paying assignments. One participant reported that when she had temped in Australia this kind of information was provided by the unions and that she had felt much better informed while temping there. There was a sense that if agencies couldn't provide this information some sort of independent or union source would be useful for temps.

Several longer-term temps signalled their belief that agencies should do more towards resourcing those new to temping with practical tools and experience-based advice which is helpful to understanding the specific requirements of temping. Suggestions included a day long experiential course facilitated by experienced temps giving practical tips on such things as quick note taking and heuristics for learning names as well as providing insights into some of the experiences individuals had had on temping assignments and role-playing and/or discussing ways of handling certain situations such as: how to politely avoid being dragged into the middle of company politics. While agencies generally advise temps to call their consultant if there is a problem this is not always possible or practicable. Additionally, it was thought that in most cases a well-prepared temp would be better able to handle a difficult situation in a timely and professional manner and ultimately provide a better result for all parties.

> 'a crash course in how to temp would be good like learning what temps really go through, learning how to integrate into a new workplace and only staying there for a short period of time and managing your time and really representing the agency that you're working for…it would help you and help the agency you're representing…the training should come from the agency, they should say to you 'we want you to be the best temp you can so we'll pay you to do a course'…and make it interesting, that would help' (4).

> 'yes it wouldn't be a silly idea because you certainly have to experience it to learn how to do it' (7).

9.6. Breach of Promise?

Much of the dissatisfaction that long-term temps spoke of seemed to reflect their belief that the agency had in some way breached an implicit contract that existed between agency and temp. Long-term temps were disappointed that there was no overt recognition from their agency that they are *different* to the average short-term temp. These participants reported that they want some recognition for their history of dependability, loyalty and willingness to do undesirable assignments. There was a belief that the temp and agency should develop some sort of reciprocal arrangement and that in return for the temp being loyal, dependable and reliable to the agency, the agency would in turn do its best to keep the temp in work, to match temp preferences to assignments specifications and most importantly, to treat the temp with respect and to maintain regular contact. Wording to this effect appears in most temp contracts. Although the guarantee of ongoing work is explicitly *not* made, there are generally various statements outlining the type of treatment the temp can expect.

Several participants referred to their disappointment and in some cases disbelief at agency behaviour which they felt had breached the implicit promises made in the wording of the contract, in the interview process, and in the rhetoric of the various

publications generated by the agency. One question that generally brought about a wry smile from participants asked whether they belonged to a candidate care programme and if so what benefits were gained from this. Most participants responded that inclusion in a candidate care programme actually brought with it no obvious manifestations of care and that, member or not, consultants still failed to adequately listen, match preferences to assignments, or 'keep in touch'.

9.7. Benefits of Agencies

Despite the difficulties reported in the preceding section, most participants preferred to continue temping through agencies rather than setting up as an independently contracted direct-hire temp. The main reasons were, firstly, that agencies had access to a greater range of assignments which increased the likelihood of a varied work-life and decreased the likelihood of being without work. Secondly, agencies were able to access a wide pool of temps, which meant that those who could foresee the need to take time off at short notice, for family or other reasons, felt more able to do so, secure in the knowledge that the agency can always send someone else. Thirdly, many participants reiterated that their original reason for getting into temping was to reduce work-related stress and it therefore suited them much better to make less money than they might have been able to as a direct-hire temp and avoid the stress and paperwork associated with being self-employed.

> 'agencies give access to a broader range of organisations and industries which provide good experience and an insight into the NZ market place (29).

> 'agencies have a large pool of temps to draw from so temps feel freer to take time off when needed, knowing that the agencies can send someone else' (29).

> 'they just serve their purpose, they're like a matchmaker and they find me work which is good' (15).

> 'I wouldn't want the responsibility of being self-employed, that's always seemed to me like a lot of hard work and I don't really resent the fact that the agency charges me out at a lot more than I can earn' (7).

> 'I wouldn't be interested in setting up as an independent contractor because of the stress factors and that's the reason I went temping, to get away from that' (3).

> 'the good thing is that when I finish a job there is usually a job to go to' (5).

10. Temp Strategies

In order to make the most of the benefits which temping offers, and to minimise the difficulties, temps report a range of strategies designed to maximise the possibility of on-going and, in some cases higher paid, work. Specialising within temping, targeting particular agencies and working on developing a good relationship with one agency were all cited as ways of maximising the enjoyable aspects of temping while minimising the stressors.

10.1. Specialising

The difficulty associated with ensuring on-going work and associated income was different for different types of temps. For example several temps were 'specialised' in a particular area; for example medical, banking, or computer related. These temps reported few difficulties getting on-going work and, in the case of the medical and computer specialists, the hourly rate paid was higher than those involved in general temping. One respondent reported that she had trained specifically as a medical secretary in order to increase the possibility of on-going work, and several respondents reported that they would do likewise if the agencies (or some other body) would advise on which areas are experiencing a shortage of skilled temps.

> 'I'm interested in what sort of roles are higher paid and what sort of things go with those roles because I'm pretty capable' (25).

10.2. Targeting Particular Agencies

Several participants reported targeting particular agencies because they were known to have contracts with particular organisations, specialise in areas or industries that the temps wanted to work in, e.g. banking or the media, or because they were known to offer the type of assignment e.g. part-time, that they were interested in. Some respondents reported that they had chosen their current agencies specifically because they had heard that they had preferred supplier contracts with organisations who used a lot of temps and had signed with them with the objective of ensuring on-going work.

> 'I heard that Agency X had the contract for here and assumed there would be an ongoing need for a lot of temps so thought my chances of having a continued choice of work might be greater' (23).

Knowledge of which agencies did what typically came from word-of-mouth referrals or from advertisements in local and national newspapers. Such practices on the part of temps demonstrate attempts, largely successful, to maximise the utility of temping as a way of entering specific fields or otherwise meeting professional or lifestyle preferences.

10.3. Managing the Agency-Temp Relationship

Most participants were registered with only one agency. This was reportedly for a variety of reasons. Firstly, most participants found that they were able to get adequate work from one agency. Secondly, most felt that it was easier to build a relationship and

a reputation with one agency which would then 'keep you in mind' when decisions regarding assignment allocation were being made. Developing a relationship with key consultant/s and building up trust were seen the key mechanisms most likely to result in creating a favourable impression and therefore being kept in work. The importance of being extremely flexible at first was reported by both temps and consultants who took this demonstration of 'willingness to do anything' as an indication of the temp's reliability and level of dependability. Once this relationship of trust had been established, temps reported being able to 'have more say' over which assignments they accepted. This was confirmed by several consultants who reported that they were more willing to 'look for a really meaty assignment' for a temp who'd been flexible in the past, rather than for one who had been picky from the beginning.

'it's very definite, you've got to build up a rapport with them' (31).

'you've got to establish that relationship, get them to like you, get them to want you and then start exerting some of your own power, which is minimal but there…the longer you stay at an agency the more power you're gonna have over what you take and don't take…and you've always got to do a good job because no-one ever benefits from you doing a bad job, you don't benefit and the client doesn't benefit so just do it the best you can' (18).

11. Temps' Advice to Potential Temps

There was a general sense that temping could be a great experience and result in benefits for the individual both personally and professionally.

> 'do it, it's great experience. Life's for living and not for making money…money comes and money goes…you get a whole lot more experience temping than you do in a permanent job and that's the way the world is going' (29).

> 'go on and do it. It is an experience, it's handy, it's useful and if you don't need a permanent job it's a nice way of making money' (28).

However, the participants in this study overwhelmingly noted that temping may not be the ideal work option for everyone and gave fairly uniform advice about how to make the decision about whether or not to temp and how to make the most out of the experience.

11.1. Be flexible

Potential temps were encouraged to think about the reasons they wanted to temp and to go into it well prepared. Flexibility and an openness to change were seen as key attributes as was a willingness to take 'a little risk'

> 'You should be flexible and don't take things to heart cause you will get the odd person who is jealous or doesn't like changes and you're a change…also enjoy yourself, just enjoy it…it's just life and it's just for having fun and not for being unhappy and feeling persecuted and any of that stuff so just do what feels right' (25, p. 5).

11.2. Know yourself

There is a tacit recognition that the temping lifestyle, while preferred by the majority of these participants, is not for everyone. Participants stressed the need to know 'what suits you' in relation to the type of work option you choose and the 'situation' you are currently in. In particular, people were advised to steer well clear of temping if they don't like constant, change and variety and the financial uncertainty that can accompany this.

> 'it depends on why they want to temp…It doesn't suit me temperamentally because I like security but if it is someone who is easily bored and likes lots of variety then, yeah, it's great' (8).

> 'ultimately it depends on what suits the individual and you need to find a career that suits you because it is better for your health' (6).

> 'It's fantastic, I love it…but I don't think it's for everyone. I don't think there are too many people out there who can handle it, you've got to have quite a

strong personality, sometimes you have to take on really awful tasks and you have to be really, really patient and learn things really quickly' (4).

11.3. Ensure you are suited to temping

Temps cited a list of attributes that good temps need to have to enjoy the temping experience. These were generally endorsed by consultants. Friendliness, flexibility, and the ability to learn quickly and adapt to different settings and people were cited as most important in terms of doing a good job on assignment. The ability to cope with constant change and financial uncertainty were seen as key to coping with the temping lifestyle overall.

'they definitely need to be flexible and friendly because some environments that you're put into the staff are so stressed that you have to be quite understanding. You have to be able to pick things up quickly because you get minimum training and supervision and that's what clients love about temps, that they don't need to be holding their hands the whole time' (15).

'thick skin, flexible adaptable…you have to think on your feet. I actually find that quite fun. To realise that you're not going to get a job every day and you don't really know why sometimes there is work and sometimes there isn't so you just have to learn to go with the flow' (31).

'I think you've got to be able to talk to people, to be honest. You need to be flexible and to have confidence in yourself…you do find people difficult to deal with in some areas and they're from all backgrounds, all walks of life…you've just got to fit in' (30).

'You've got to be adaptable because you get put into lots if different types of environments and situations, willing to learn and willing to apply yourself to whatever situation you're put into…it's the energy you put out that you receive back' (29).

'thick skin, cheerful, well mannered and confidence in yourself that you can actually do it' (28).

'your personality has to be flexible, adaptable and if you're like that and you love to meet a whole range of weird and wonderful people then I say go for it but if you're closed off and not like that then I think you'd find it really, really hard going because it's so diverse' (27).

'I think you need to be a bit diverse and you need to have initiative to do a good job and some skills, but it's mainly someone with people skills…but for a temp to enjoy it you probably need to be a pretty flexible person and relatively easy going because if you were a person that got pretty strung up about things you wouldn't have too much fun and I think that even if you're at work you should still be having fun but I guess a lot of people think work should be work so they don't really care about that' (25).

'I think when you decide to go temping you've got to decide that you'll have a go at whatever they want you to do…you need to be able to nut things out for yourself…common sense is a lot of it…(24).

'You need to be able to get on with people and not be too shy. I think if you were a really, really shy person you'd have trouble but then once again, you don't want to be too pushy and out there so I think you just need to be able to deal with people and know how to listen' (24).

'low expectations, I think a good temp is probably happy-go-lucky to a degree and just happy to see what happens…an ability to let things slide off you, to not get involved in office politics or whatever' (23).

'you've got to be good and you've got to be adaptable, not afraid to step in somewhere with a lot of strangers who have got funny ways of doing stuff' (19).

'they need to be flexible and able to pick new things up very, very quickly and that's pretty much it' (17).

'helpfulness and an aptitude for working… I think as long as you're willing really and you just do anything they ask you' (14).

'you have to be extremely quick to see what's going on around you and you have to learn the politics and you have to stay neutral…you have to adapt to any computer system…you have to be quite open and you can't be too shy' (13).

'versatile, friendly and able to turn your hand to quite a lot of things' (12).

'patience, tolerance and they need to be open-minded. Attitude is everything' (10).

'adaptability, definitely a sense of humour. You need to be able to relate to people and you need to be confident' (9).

11.4. Be prepared

Being prepared included both overt actions and psychological preparation. In terms of action, would-be temps were advised to really think about why they were temping and what they wanted out of it, and then to take the time to find an agency and a consultant that suited them and that best fit with their needs, wants and personality.

'really, really sit down with the recruitment consultant and go round all the agencies and wait until you find someone who really works for you and really negotiate your rate and learn as many packages as you can' (26).

'I would tell them to save and to consider your options carefully. Consider why you're temping and what you want out of it and if you've got that solid in your brain then you'll know this is what I want to do and for how long' (22)

'get yourself a good agent…stand your ground with your agent because they are out for themselves and if you don't ask you don't get' (16).

'you have to totally re-evaluate your whole lifestyle because you can't rely on the same amount of money coming in every week so you have to arrange your budget accordingly…you need to realise that the market is quite different throughout the year so you need to plan for the holiday period…' (15).

Preparing psychologically essentially means going into temping with 'your eyes open' and was a sentiment echoed in advice given by temp consultants. There is an awareness and acceptance from those working in all capacities in the temping industry that the constant change and uncertainty can be hard to deal with and is especially stressful for those new to temping.

'be prepared to take bad with the good, the rough with the smooth and in general it would tend to be smooth sailing but because you're not part of the team as such you're more likely to get some of the rough' (17).

11.5. Set boundaries

Setting boundaries related to a variety of practices. Setting professional and personal boundaries on assignments was seen as the key to experiencing assignments as enjoyable.

'Have a thick skin and don't take it all on board…be able to go, OK, look I'm here to do this job and that's what I'm focusing on and please don't involve me in anything else, don't drag me into your bullshit' (31).

'don't get involved in the office politics…try not to do it too long because it is easy to get sucked in because it is easier…so I guess just keep your nose clean and take the money and run!' (23).

'be as adaptable as you can be without being a doormat and be as pleasant as you can, once again without being a doormat…you have to learn to be adaptable and skilled at handling people' (7).

'one of the main things about being a good temp is getting on with people and there's a really fine line between being too assertive, to the point of aggression, and being too mild' (7).

12. Agencies' Advice to Potential Temps

Like many of the temps in this study, consultants advised those thinking about temping that it is a great experience.

> 'it's variety, it's change, it's time-out from something that's stressful normally and it's just do you want to work or not and of you do want to work then it s a chance to do something new or different that you're probably never going to do again' (Agency 3, p. 3)

> 'I wouldn't recommend that someone do it on a whim, but if they are fully informed then it can be a great experience and a great choice' (Agency 1, p. 5)

Consultants similar advice to temps to those thinking about temping as a work option. Knowing yourself, being comfortable with risk and really understanding what temping is like, were cited as the three most important things to consider when making a decision about whether or not to temp.

Consultants echoed temp advice to 'know yourself' and to know that you are a person comfortable taking a little risk

> 'you have to be a person comfortable with taking a certain amount of risk and you need to be well informed about the nature of temping' (Agency 5).

The importance of 'doing your homework' and finding a 'good agency' was commonly encouraged. The need to 'go in with your eyes open' about the relative benefits and pitfalls of temping was frequently reported.

> 'temps need to be prepared to have times when they don't work and therefore don't earn' (Agency 5).

> 'they need to hear the negatives before they hear the positives' (Agency 2)

> 'it's important to know what you are getting into and they need to expect to have times without work and be able to survive financially through that' (Agency 1).

13. Conclusions

13.1. Temping as a Choice

As in the Inkson et al (2001) and Alach (2001) studies cited above, results so far go some way towards providing an alternative to the dominant discourses which position temps as victims. In this research, the assumption that temping is always involuntary is challenged.

In contrast to Hardy (2000) who found that over 90% of her sample of temporary workers would have preferred a permanent job, this study found that most of the office temps interviewed preferred *not* to have a permanent job, if they could be sure of regular, on-going temping work. Participants were wary of committing to a permanent job, mainly due to fears of getting bored and/or getting stuck in a specific situation. Several reported that if they had a permanent job they would miss the change and variety that working as a temp had afforded them. Additionally, many participants made use of the on-off flexibility that temping afforded them and cited as a major benefit the opportunity to decide, sometimes on a day-to-day basis, whether they want to work.

The majority of participants had made a conscious decision to start temping, albeit for a variety of reasons. Several participants, who were looking, ultimately, for permanent 'career' jobs, found that temping enabled them to make unhurried decisions about the types of role they considered.

For others, the decision to temp had come out of a desire to reposition the place of paid work in their lives. For several participants temping brought with it a sense of being 'freed-up' to devote more time to family or leisure activities. This was brought about both through the on-off flexibility offered by temping and a shift in the way the women felt about their work, in particular the ability to "retain a certain distance from the work which you can't do as a permanent worker" (3).

Interestingly, and perhaps surprisingly, several participants reported that they preferred temp work because they perceived it to be *less* risky than a permanent job. Temp work was perceived as relatively easy to get: most participants reported that they had been given their first assignment within days, if not hours, of registering with an agency. Several participants contrasted this with the length of time it can take to get a permanent role and concluded that in this sense, temping, if work is plentiful, can often be a *more* reliable and secure source of income than many permanent jobs which under current employment conditions are always at risk of being made redundant. This was particularly so for some participants who were attempting to make a career in some of the more volatile industries, such as television.

13.2. Temping for Professional and Personal Development

Permanent work is popularly believed to provide to provide permanent employees, committed to their organizations, with greater opportunities for development through the company's training and staff development systems. In contrast, temps are not seen as a responsibility in terms of development. However, several temps reported that the

ability to 'move around' had contributed to their personal and professional development in the form of overcoming shyness and, 'firstdayitis', and developing self-confidence in dealing with different people and novel situations.

Furthermore, exposure to a range of workplaces means that temps are constantly required to learn new systems and pick up different ways of working. While the requirement to 'hit the ground running' in a novel situation is acknowledged as a difficult and stressful aspect of temping participants in this study most commonly framed the expectation that they be 'immediately effective' as an opportunity for learning. Thus temping in a range of different assignments was seen to contribute to the development of both 'soft' and 'hard' skills and other knowledge which can be of benefit to the temp, both in securing future assignments and also if applying for a permanent job.

13.3. The Temp "Market"

The decision to continue temping was one that many participants had made despite experiencing economic hardship over recent months as a result of a downturn in the demand for temps. The results of this report draw attention to the importance of contextual factors when considering the ways in which temping as a way of working is experienced.

The 'marginalised temp' stereotype suggests that temporary work acts as a buffer for permanent workers against periodic market downturns. This leaves temps exposed. The timing of the current study in comparison to that undertaken by Alach (2001) provided for interesting comparisons between the experiences of those temping in a relatively buoyant (pre September 11th, 2001) or flat (post September 11th) market.

Pre September 11th, the temps interviewed by Alach (2001) reported little shortage of work, the ability to pick and choose assignments (within certain limits) and in many cases a problem of having 'too much work' and being unable to achieve the lifestyle improvements they had anticipated when becoming a temp. Such experiences of being in 'too much demand' were confirmed at that time by industry representatives who reported on a severe shortage of 'good temps' in the Auckland market.

In contrast respondents in the current study overwhelmingly reported that post September 11th the market for temps had dried up with many temps experiencing a severe lack of assignments, particularly in the fourth quarter of 2001 and the first quarter of 2002. This was experienced by the temps, both in terms of having no assignments for weeks, or in some cases months, and in terms of experiencing a difference in the types of assignments being offered - typically took shorter-term, lower-level and paid at a lower rate. Agency representatives confirmed this trend, reporting that client organisations had become much more conservative in their 'temp spend' and were seeking to provide temporary cover through internal 'reshuffling' rather than through using agency temps. Despite this, *very few participants were actively looking for permanent work*, and of those who were the majority cited a desire to offer their commitment to a more exciting and challenging role, rather than financial imperatives as their primary motivators. This suggests that for many temps, the condition of contingency employment has become the anticipated and preferred backdrop to their lifestyle, regardless of external labour market forces.

Future research needs to pay close attention to economic and environmental factors impacting the opportunities and difficulties associated with temporary work. Furthermore, reported diversification and potential polarisation in the types of temping work offered (see also Alach, 2001) signal that it is important for future research to pay careful attention to the type of temporary work being undertaken in order to distinguish between what temporary workers experience as desirable and/or undesirable aspects of this way of working.

13.4. Temping and Social Isolation

A further critique in the 'marginalised temps' literature is that temps are socially isolated. However, few participants reported problems with the 'people side' of temping: most reported that the people they had met on assignment had been really nice and helpful. Exceptions to this were generally experienced in short-term, one-day reception roles, which were overwhelmingly reported as the 'least favourite' of temp assignments. There was some reference to negative perceptions of temps that had been encountered in the workplace but no evidence to suggest that these participants had internalised any such stereotypes. The general response of participants to such encounters was extremely dismissive, with perpetrators being described as outdated and ignorant.

13.5. Temp-Agency Relationships

Problems to do with relationships centred more on the temp-agency relationship than problems encountered within client organisations. Temps, especially longer-term temps, expressed their belief that the temp-agency-client relationship should constitute a 'team' and a wish that the 'shift to partnering' be multi-directional to encompass both shift in the client-agency relationship and the relationship between temp and agency. Recognition of long-service was held to be particularly important and there was a belief that agencies, who wished to retain a pool of highly skilled, long-term, temp-only candidates, could do more to help overcome the experience of limited progression reported by long-term temps.

13.6. Temping and Career Prospects

Despite the subjectively experienced positive features of temping documented above, the perception that temping is always involuntary and never a 'proper' job appears to continue to prevail in society at large. Participants reported their sense that the decision to temp, though increasingly coming to be seen as a legitimate 'lifestyle' choice, continues to be viewed as either a 'bad' or non-career choice. This was particularly important to those looking to 'go perm' who, having made a conscious and deliberate decision to change their employment status, were continually frustrated by the experience of being judged on a work history which reflected past decisions rather than their intentions at the current time.

It is important for potential employers and the recruitment companies that represent them to be aware that, by and large, those temping have chosen to temp for a specific reason, are in demand and thus are able to secure ongoing temp work. It should be noted that the decision to 'go perm' is generally not made lightly, nor is it solely for

financial reasons. Overwhelmingly those who report making the decision to look for a permanent job cite the desire to have greater challenge at work and the ability to fully commit to a job and an organisation as driving factors.

However much temping may suit those who do it in their current circumstances, therefore, most consider that if they want eventually to move either to permanent work or to positions carrying higher responsibility, they need to be careful not to allow too many years to go by in temporary positions. However, this is attributed more to employer and societal prejudices against temping than to any inherent defect of the temping experience or of those who do it. The effect of this perceived bias is mitigated by the fact that many temps have no intention, even in the long-term, of taking up a permanent job or seeking traditional career 'advancement'. They prefer to maintain the non-central position of conventional employment in their lives.

14. Discussion

The findings of this study begin to provide alternative models to predominant accounts of contingent workers. The majority of reports focus on the ways in which the availability of temp work is contingent on organisational whims and economic fluctuations. While we acknowledge this to be true for many contingent workers, we seek to question the extent to which working as part of the contingent workforce, in this case as a clerical temp, is necessarily imposed on individuals by external forces rather than being a choice made by individuals who have available to them a wide range of work options. The extension of temporary forms of work to larger numbers of people and a wider range of occupations are doubtless important factors in enabling more self-confident and proactive individuals to frame temporary work to suit their needs rather than seeing it as 'employment of last resort'.

In this sense we introduce the notion that research into 'contingency' in relation to paid work should seek to understand both the ways in which the availability of work is contingent on economic and organisational imperatives and also the ways in which individual decisions about whether to take on such work is contingent on other life priorities. Such research is particularly important before we begin making sweeping assumptions about the extent to which being part of the contingent workforce is necessarily experienced as good, bad or otherwise and by whom.

Reports from participants suggest that, despite attempts by academics to broaden concepts of career to encompass aspects of life other than paid work, employers still think of 'career' in a narrow, permanent-employment focused way. Moreover, conventional industrial couplings, such as equating 'length of time served' to 'value of contribution', appear to prevail, much to the chagrin of those temping. The majority of agencies seem to agree, with many respondents, both temps and consultants, reporting their feeling that an extended period of temping 'doesn't look good on paper'.

This presents an interesting paradox as contemporary workers are increasingly called upon to display an ability to adapt and the desire to 'embrace change': however, these reports would suggest, not too much. It may also be that the historical nature of the temping, i.e. predominantly low status clerical work, mediates how those who choose to work as temps are perceived. Are leased executives or high-powered contract analyst/programmers, for example, perceived as having 'commitment issues', rather than a healthy desire for change and new challenge? Does an unconscious sexism inform different expectations of predominantly female office temps and predominantly male managerial and IT temps? It is important to note that these perceptions of how temps 'look on paper' to potential employers are forwarded by the temps themselves and their consultants. It would be interesting to research employer perceptions of individuals with so called 'chequered' work histories to determine the way in which this is interpreted and responded to.

Research such as this contributes to many contemporary academic conversations. Firstly, by providing first-hand, in-depth reports from those working as temps, this research provides some insight into the lived reality of temps, and highlights both the positive and negative aspects of this experience. This in turn can be useful in signalling to politicians and policy makers, areas of potential harm, which may be minimised through legislative and regulatory means.

Secondly, this research, and in particular the questions it raises around conventional understandings of contingent work, contributes to broader academic and popular debates which seek to understand the ways in which people's relationship to paid work is changing and the implications of this in terms of the continuing centrality of paid work in individual constructions of identity and the degree to which conventional industrial couplings are being challenged.

As more people in a diverse range of industries come to experience employment as contingent and impermanent, research which explores the ways in which paid work retains or reduces its centrality in individual lives is important. Research is needed which draws attention to commonalities in the experience of contingent workers and signals to policy makers and politicians areas of potential harm or opportunity. Equally important is work which pays attention to the differences experienced by contingent workers and which seeks to develop new understandings of why and how individuals have been forced into, or have chosen to take up this kind of work.

To do so properly may necessitate a re-examination or even discarding of many of the implicit assumptions which have guided conventional academic and public discourses around the place of paid work in people's lives. For example, assumptions around what constitutes a 'good' job or a 'normal' career path may need to be re-examined. We might start with the question 'according to whom?'

15. Suggestions for Future Research

The results from this study signal several areas of potential research for both academics and policy makers. Fundamentally, in order to fully explore the intricacies of the experience of temporary (and most likely other forms of non-standard) work there needs to be a 'putting aside' of the (often) unquestioned assumption that conventional, permanent employment is always and should always be *the* most preferred way of working. Subsequently, research attention can turn to exploring and distinguishing between the positive and negative aspects of temporary work and the different types of temporary workers. In order to provide relevant and useful policy for temporary workers, policy makers and those undertaking research which informs such policy decisions need to shelve the assumption that an individual's position in the temporary labour market is always a temporary aberration in an otherwise conventional pattern of employment and to accept that increasing numbers of workers are likely to *choose* to engage in non-conventional, temporary type work for extended periods of their paid working life.

Some of the findings reported here signal a line of, perhaps more esoteric, questioning to be considered by academic scholars researching in the areas of work and employment. Questions around the place of work-in-life and the ways in which conventional academic assumptions around identity and meaningful 'work' are being challenged through the lived practices of 'atypical' workers. Why, for example, should conventional paid employment remain 'the goal' if it is not experienced as enjoyable or satisfying and can't even be relied upon to provide some sort of 'security' of existence? See Casey and Alach (2002) for further discussion.

There are some clear avenues for future research needed to inform and ultimately shape policy responses to the growing incidence of temporary labour. Reports suggest that as the market matures there is evidence of the beginnings of a type of polarisation in the temporary labour market. The majority of agencies in this study stated their intention to pursue a 'high-end' strategy of becoming relationship driven, quality providers of highly skilled and sought after temps. In contrast they referred to 'other agencies', named as 'bulk suppliers' who were more concerned with 'filling the order' for 'warm bodies' than taking the time to truly understand both client and candidate needs and seeking to put together the 'perfect match'. Practices such as this suggest that the temping experience for individuals positioned in these different 'tiers' of the temporary labour market could be quite different and investigation into just what these differences are could return some important, policy informing, results.

Secondly, findings from this study suggest that there are concerns around Health and Safety issues for temporary workers. Further research may be needed to determine whether or not temporary workers are more likely to put their health at risk by being unwilling to take sick days or go on doctor's visits for fear of being perceived as 'unreliable' and thus denied access to future work. Policy makers may need to consider how to best serve the Health and Safety needs of temporary workers who may be employed by several recruitment agencies over the course of time and deployed, on assignment, to a range of different work-sites. Additionally, clarification may be needed over who is responsible for any ACC claims a temp may make while not currently engaged on a temp assignment.

Thirdly, research could be done into exploring the experiences of recent immigrants who are utilising temporary work as a way of gaining entry into the New Zealand workforce. Issues of discrimination and exploitation have been alluded to in this study but further research is required before any conclusions can be drawn or recommendations made.

Fourthly, reports such as these raise serious questions about the assumptions underpinning contemporary employment law. Taking seriously the very real possibility that increasing numbers of workers may prefer to engage in work in some way other than the conventional industrial standard, means that policy makers need to take into account a range of preferences and seek to provide protection that does not impede individual choice.

Fifthly, reports from this study signal the need for an independent source of information for temps and, most probably other forms of temporary workers. Advice on how to find out about their employment rights, entitlement to provisions such as special leave, holidays and maternity leave as well as guidance on changes in labour market demand and anticipated areas of skills shortages were named as some of the types of information temps would like to access. Perhaps some sort of joint venture between the Department of Labour and The Employment Relations Authority could be of use.

The study also raises questions and challenges for recruitment agencies, in particular with regard to how agencies plan to manage their relationships with the small but growing number of long-term temps who are increasingly looking to the agency as both technical and substantive employer. If recruitment companies are successful in their attempts to market temps as having unique skills, it is likely that highly skilled and experienced temps and/or project workers will find themselves increasingly in demand from a range of agencies who are seeking to foster a pool of 'temp-only' candidates, thus ensuring more control over the quality of the service delivered and enabling the agency to lower costs associated with continual recruitment. Agencies who plan to pursue this strategy need to think carefully about what it is that temps are asking for as recognition and enticement and how they might deliver this without increasing costs exponentially and/or adding to the workload of already stretched consultants.

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Appendix: Interview Schedule

Background Information
Name
Date of Birth
Living Situation
Brief outline of education, qualifications, work history

Temping Experience
Length of time temping
Average hourly rate range >$10 $10 -$15 $15-$20 $20-$25 $25+
What type of assignment/s do you usually get? Is that your preference?

Reasons for temping
How did you come to be temping? Planned? Unplanned?
Why are you temping now?

Agencies
What do you look for in an agency?
How do you decide which agencies to register with?
- Sources of information?
- RCSA membership as possible factors?

How many agencies are you registered with? Can you name them?
- Do you use them all? Why? Why not?

How do you find working with agencies?
- What do you like/not like?
- When are they useful/not useful?

Does your agency offer a Candidate Care programme?
- Are you a member? Why? Why not?
- What benefits do you experience from that programme?
- Was the programme one of the reasons you chose this agency? Stay with this agency?

Finding work
Have you had any difficulties finding temping work?
- Quantity?
- Type of assignment sought?

How do you decide which assignments to accept?
Do you ever turn down assignments? Why? Why not? How?

Being a temp
What is it like being a temp?
What do you like about temping?
- What do you see as the main benefits for you?

What do you not like? What is the most difficult thing about temping?
Tell me about your favourite assignment? Least favourite assignment?
Why do you think organisations hire temps?
What do you think organisations get from temps that they wouldn't get from hiring a permanent employee?
- What does your current client get from you that they wouldn't get from a permanent employee?

What qualities do you think good temps need to have?
What advice would you give to those thinking of temping?
Would you recommend temping to others? Why? Why not?

Where do you go if you want information/advice on your assignments? Work options? Career? What sort of information source would be useful to you?

Temping and 'Rest of Life'

How does temping fit into your future work/life plans?
- Who do you feel that you work for?

Do you have a 'place you'd like to be' and ideas on how to get there?

Do you see temping as a long-term work option? Why? Why not?
- What would need to change for you to see temping as a long-term option?

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Research Reports

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