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Job Insecurity and Social Networks:

A Study Of Part-time Temporary Public
Sector Workers.

ROB HARVEY

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of
the requirements of The Nottingham Trent
University for the degree of Master of
Philosophy.

June 2003

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Abstract

Job insecurity has been associated with precarious work, organisational change work intensification, decline of trade union power, the introduction of new forms of technology into the workplace and other work related factors. Amidst this the worker and their social context are becoming increasingly divorced from the focus of research. This study explores the way in which the individual's social network affects and is affected by the experience of precarious work.

Fifteen individuals in part-time temporary work within the public sector were interviewed three times over a period of two years about their work and their social network. Literature and preliminary stages of the research suggested four social network types: Amplified – where the social network amplifies the pressure from work; Shielded – where the social network shields against the pressure from work; Mediated – where the social network amplifies and shields the pressure from work and Unmediated – where there is no important social network.

The research demonstrates that the meaning which people attach to work determines whether they consider themselves as being insecure. The meaning of work is largely determined by the individual's social network. For example the study found that a number of individuals on similarly precarious contracts were evenly split between those that described themselves as being insecure and those that described themselves as being secure. The obvious difference between these groups was their social networks. Workers who were being strongly supported by their partners and the rest of the social network all described themselves as being secure despite their precarious contract. Workers whose social network seemed to be amplifying the pressures from their work largely described themselves as being insecure.

The study concludes that considering the individual's social context as well as the well explored work related features gives a better understanding of the phenomenon of job insecurity.

List of Acronyms/Abbreviations Used

CAQDAS	Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
FTC	Fixed Term Contract
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
INSNA	International Network for Social Network Analysis
IPD	Institute of Personnel and Development (The former name for the CIPD)
JIWIS	Job Insecurity and Work Intensification Survey
LEA	Local Education Authority
LFS	Labour Force Survey
NHS	National Health Service
NUD*IST	Non-numerical Unstructured Data by techniques of Indexing Searching and Theorizing
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PCT	Primary Care Trust
PT	Part-time
SCELI	Social Change and Economic Life Initiative
Temp	Temporary Contract
VTIME	Voluntary Reduced Working Time
WERS	Workplace Employee Relations Survey
WIRS	Workplace Industrial Relations Survey

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Acknowledgement

This thesis is based around the accounts of fifteen individuals who gave up their time to share their experiences with me. Without their help this research study would not have been possible. I would like to thank Colin Bryson, my Director of Studies, for securing the funding that has enabled this project to be carried out. Thanks also to my partner Gemma, whose confidence and support over the last couple of years has been a great help.

Finally, 'thanks' doesn't really seem to do justice to the support my family have given me; they made this possible with years of support.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and confirm that it has not been submitted for a degree at any other University.

Chapter 1: - Introduction

This thesis creates a new understanding of the phenomenon of job insecurity by building on the considerable literature that already exists concerning the individual's experiences at work, such as the legal protection that comes with their work status, and adding a distinctive sociological aspect, which deals with the role of social context in the individual's life.

The main hypothesis of this thesis is that the individual's social situation has a crucial and overlooked role in determining whether the individual defines themselves as insecure in their working lives.

The thesis begins by establishing a definition of job insecurity and critiquing established literature in this field. The alleged relationship between job insecurity and precarious work is then discussed. The chapter then develops into a discussion of aspects of precarious work, and in particular the constituent sub-category of part-time temporary work. Chapter 2 sees the introduction of the conceptual framework. This framework consists of three interlinked concepts; sensemaking, orientations to work and social networks. Chapter 3 describes the methods and manner in which the research for this thesis was conducted. Chapter 4 presents the research analysis of this study, the chapter is broken down into an introduction and then four distinct sections based on the identified social network types. Finally, Chapter 5 summarises the analysis of the thesis, evaluates the approach taken by the thesis and suggests directions for future research.

Job Insecurity

In order to engage with any debate about job insecurity, a clear and concise definition must first be defined and then used consistently throughout. Job insecurity is a phenomenon that is felt and experienced by the individual. At a broad level job insecurity could be described as an employee's 'fear of involuntary severance from their employer and their paid work'.

Whilst this thesis has adopted an orthodox definition of job insecurity, it has also recognised the literature concerning the background issues to defining job insecurity. These issues typically were linked by a loss of control and stability. The loss of control over the pace of work; the loss of the ability to complete the entire job from start to finish; a loss of regular pay rises or promotion opportunities, and the loss of independent representation were all factors which have been linked with job insecurity (Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt 1984; Burchell, Ladipo et al. 2002). Whether these issues constitute a part of the phenomenon of job insecurity or a wider issue, such as employee relations or the psychological contract, is open to debate.

The importance of the phenomenon of job insecurity has been brought into sharp relief by recent surveys conducted by the OECD and an international consultancy firm. Both of these surveys have suggested that over one third of the British workforce describe themselves as insecure in their job (OECD 1997; Curphey 2003). The prevalence of job insecurity, actual or exaggerated, has resulted in much interest in the subject from different quarters. Topically, the British Government has commissioned a large number of projects into both job insecurity and the broader subject of 'work-life balance' (Hogarth, Hasluck et al. 2000; Hogarth, Hasluck et al. 2001). Workers and the organisations which represent them have taken great interest and in some cases conducted research into this area. Organisations, which in part represent the interest of employers,

such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) have also conducted their own research (Guest 1999).

Job insecurity has been an area in which academics from a number of disparate disciplines have been involved; disciplines such as Industrial Relations (Cully, Woodland et al. 1999; Heery and Abbot 2000; Millward, Bryson et al. 2000), Sociology (Jarvis 1999; Berthoud, Gershuny et al. 2000; Nolan, Wichert et al. 2000; Fredriksen-Goldsen and Scharlach 2001; Crompton 2002), Management Studies (Guest 1999; Purcell, Hogarth et al. 1999; Guest 2000), Labour Economics (Gregg, Knight et al. 2000; Robinson 2000).

An important argument made by this thesis states that job insecurity cannot be predicted by an examination of purely job related proxies such as job tenure or labour market turnover, traditionally associated with a labour market approach to job insecurity. While this approach has been well developed (Gregg and Wadsworth 1995; Gregg, Knight et al. 2000; Robinson 2000), it is very different to the one that was adopted by this thesis. Instead, the emphasis was placed on the subjective experience of the individual. Job insecurity is not something which can easily be predicted by any means other than by actually asking the individual in question how they are feeling about their job. As such even surveys such as the recent Job Insecurity and Work Intensification Survey (JIWIS) that attempt to 'measure' insecurity through scales are also less than ideal. Job insecurity is a subject which requires an approach which appreciates the complexity of the phenomenon and the individual who might be subject to it.

The Extent of Job Insecurity

The status of job insecurity in the United Kingdom, in terms of both its current prevalence and historical change, largely depend on the definition of job insecurity being applied.

Labour market proxies such as job tenure have been and still are used by some academics to measure job insecurity. Job tenure is the length of time that an individual stays in the same job. Assuming that a reduction in job tenure is synonymous with job insecurity then levels of job insecurity have been generally increasing but some sectors of the labour market have not been affected by this general trend and in these cases levels of job insecurity have been decreasing (Gregg, Knight et al. 2000).

Job tenure has been criticised as an indicator for job insecurity (Robinson 2000; Burchell, Ladipo et al. 2002) and as Burchell (2002) noted, job tenure may be a poor indicator of security.

With growing unemployment and a decline in job opportunities, individuals may reasonably cling to what they have, rather than risk the growing uncertainty of the external labour market. Others, who may well be able to progress to better positions in other organisations, stick with their downsizing organisations to collect their severance payments. So, perversely, prolonged tenure may actually indicate increased job *in*security if employees adopt defensive labour market strategies.

(Burchell 2002 : 62)

In studies that have focused on the subjective experience of job insecurity, where the individual is asked whether they feel secure in their job, there was often not enough of a similarity between the questions that were asked to enable rigorous longitudinal comparison. In order to facilitate comparison, other features must also be kept the same such as the type of individuals used in the research. For example a study of public sector workers could not be directly compared like for like with a study of workers from the workforce as a whole. These problems of compatibility compound to make longitudinal analysis problematic, and this in turn makes it difficult to assess whether the subjective phenomenon of job insecurity is increasing.

Burchell (2002) suggests that the 1986 Social Change and Economic Life Initiative (SCELI) and the 1997 Skills survey are similar enough to facilitate a comparison of results. Both studies ask the individual "Do you think that there is any chance of you losing your job and being unemployed over the next twelve months?" If the individual answers yes, a follow up question designed to 'measure' the strength of this insecurity is asked: "How would you rate the likelihood of this happening?" on a five point scale ranging from "very likely" to "very unlikely". SCELI reported that in 1986, 20% of respondents were concerned about losing their job. The 1997 Skills Survey reported a slight increase, with 23% of respondents reporting that they were worried about losing their job (Burchell 2002). These results taken at face value seem to give credence to the claims that the whole issue of rising job insecurity has been 'whipped up' by the country's media (OECD 1997; Smith 1997; Guest 1999; IPD 2000; Robinson 2000).

However if the general level of job insecurity is disaggregated, dramatic change becomes visible:

Between the mid 1980s and the mid 1990s there was little aggregate change, but a very significant redistribution of insecurity between more and less advantaged workers. The most marked changes were that the professionals and workers in the financial services, previously the most secure occupations and sectors, were now the least secure.

(Burchell 2002 : 68)

The evidence for a wide spread rise in job insecurity seems to be patchy, though this seems symptomatic of a field of research which is characterised by differing concepts and interpretations. There is evidence which points to a change in fortune for individuals whose work was previously characterised by high levels of security (Robinson 2000; Burchell 2002).

Precarious work as the cause of job insecurity?

Job insecurity has been linked with work which has been labelled atypical or non-standard. Standard employment can be defined as full time permanent employment (Fevre 1991), features of which include mutuality, security and often other fringe benefits (Leighton and Syrett 1989). The antithesis of standard work as stated by Fevre is:

‘Atypical’ paid work is understood as the opposite of this type of work, which is either part time, temporary, or (as in self employment) does not involve a conventional contract of employment.

(Fevre 1991: 56)

This definition hides the wealth of ambiguity and complexity that constitutes atypical work. The difference between standard and non-standard employment may have been well explored in academic circles (Crompton, Gallie et al. 1996; Casey, Metcalf et al. 1997; Allan and Daniels 1999; Gallagher 1999; Purcell, Hogarth et al. 1999), but in terms of definitions derived from employment law, a recent study (Burchell, Deakin et al. 1999) suggested that of those currently in work in the United Kingdom, 30% have an employment status which is not clear. One sub-strand of ‘non-standard work’, temporary work, was identified by Casey (1988), as having no less than 11 overlapping categories.

The growth of non-standard/atypical work has been attributed to the diverse range of factors. Perhaps the best known was proposed in the theory known as the “The Flexible Firm” by Atkinson & Meager (1996). This suggested that employers would seek to compete with organisations not over the price of products or the provision of services but over the cost of the labour which they used. The flexible firm theory suggested that the most effective organisation would have a core of workers vital to the organisation who enjoy employment security. This organisation would also have a peripheral workforce who would be employed in a manner which would allow the organisation to vary the number of

workers; this was described as numerical flexibility. Numerical flexibility was supposedly achieved by the organisation through the use of temporary contracts, unstructured part-time contracts and redundancy. At the time, 'The Flexible Firm' received vociferous criticism from various quarters (Casey 1988; Pollert 1988; Blyton and Morris 1991; Pollert 1991). Most of the criticism focused on the lack of evidence which could be reliably attributed to organisations emulating this model. Indeed there was lack of evidence suggesting organisations had any intention to strategically emulate this model. Despite this criticism of the flexible firm model much of the ideology still prevails in discussions of flexible working (Bryson 1999).

Beck's (1992) Risk Society¹, an influential work on Western societies' supposed move towards reflexive modernity, suggested that this move towards flexible employment represented a transfer of risk from the employer to the employee. Employers with an inflexible labour force risk being unable to adapt to market demands. Having a flexible labour force enables an employer to better match the demands of their business with their labour, thus preventing over-staffing. This transition means that some workers who may have been accustomed to having a permanent contract now have to face the possibility that due to market conditions their contract might not be renewed. The risk derived from the market, which to an extent was previously absorbed by the employer, now has been transferred onto the employee (Beck 1992 : 147-149).

A relationship has been drawn between flexible forms of work and job insecurity (Purcell, Hogarth et al. 1999). Purcell et al state that [for some workers]

Flexibility means insecurity and unpredictability rather than an opportunity to achieve a greater balance in their lives. Far from being family-friendly, low skilled, part-time and temporary work and shift-working more often involve incursions into 'family time', particularly where the flexibility is unstructured.

(Purcell, Hogarth et al. 1999 : 67)

¹ Originally published in Germany in 1986, titled Risikogesellschaft.

Purcell, Hogarth et al (1999) do employ a number of caveats, and it would be unfair to report them as claiming that all flexible work is insecure. These caveats include reporting that, for some workers at the peak of their chosen career, flexible work can bring benefits. However, most workers are not in this position. Purcell (2000) goes on to state 'that temporary work is unequivocally insecure'.

This probably represents the strongest allegation of a link between flexible work and job insecurity within academic circles. The arguments for a link between precarious work and job insecurity are convincing. Both phenomena have risen in the same areas of the labour market. This does not constitute a causal relationship; it does, however, suggest that job insecurity is more likely to be found amongst precarious workers.

The continuing use of the terms 'non-standard' or 'atypical' in conjunction with work and workers needs to be carefully considered. As the number of people in these forms of work, particularly part-time, continue to grow, the definition of non-standard, or atypical work becomes more problematic (Gallagher 1999). A better definition, particularly for the purposes of this project, would be 'precarious work'. The concept of 'precarious work' has been used before by Allen and Henry (1996), but was made more specific than is being used here. Precarious work is used in this thesis to describe work which has limited duration or has been designed in a way that means that the worker has little control over when they work. The definition reflects the notion of risk and uncertainty being passed onto the worker.

The following section outlines the differing degrees of precariousness found within two of the major constituents of 'flexible work'. By highlighting these differences the study will demonstrate the variety found within precarious work, and illustrate how and why some forms of work entail the worker accepting more risk than others.

Precariousness of Temporary Contracts

Work that has a finite span is inherently precarious. The shorter this span the more precarious the work. In terms of employment contract, the duration can differ significantly and so result in different degrees of precariousness. The following section outlines each type and discusses the precariousness that the type may engender.

Fig 1 Precariousness of Temporary Contracts

- Long Fixed Term Temporary Contract e.g. ≥ 3 years.
- Medium Fixed Term Temporary Contract e.g. ≥ 1 years.
- Short Fixed Term Temporary Contract e.g. < 1 year.
- Short Seasonal/Casual Fixed Term Contract
- Zero Hours Contract

Least Precarious

Most Precarious

Fixed-Term Contract

There are a number of groups which are considered to be part of fixed-term contract work. The most common is a contract with an end/renewal date. The length of these contracts can conceivably vary from a matter of days up to six years. Workers may also be hired for specific seasonal periods or to cover shortfalls in other parts of the business's labour force – e.g. maternity cover. Fixed-term contracts may also be determined by the length of a specific work project -e.g. a research program or an engineering project. In terms of precariousness, the longer the contract, the more time the individual has to make sure they have work to go to on completion of the current contract(Reilly 2001).

Zero Hours

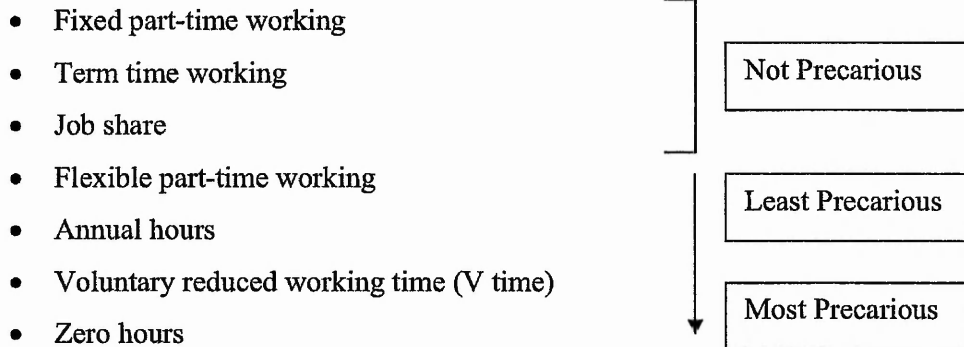
Zero hours is the most precarious form of work. Sometimes also known as 'bank' contracts. In some cases workers are contracted to make themselves available between specific times, but in other cases there is no formal contract whatsoever. Either way the worker has no guarantee of work. Apart from the fact that zero hours workers cannot rely upon a minimum income, they are often excluded from certain rights and benefits, entitlement to which is subject to a minimum number of hours worked, calculated on a weekly, monthly or other basis (ILO 1997). Very little information about the numbers of zero hours workers actually exists (Burchell, Deakin et al. 1999). However, there are still industrial sectors who employ workers under these conditions. They include the retail, finance and public sectors (Cave 1997; Allan and Daniels 1999). The actual extent of this form of work has been challenged (Robinson, Buchan et al. 1999).

Precariousness of Part-time contracts

Unlike temporary work, part-time work is not intrinsically precarious. Part-time precariousness is largely a matter of control, where the hours of work are set by an employment contract there can be no precariousness, precariousness becomes an issue in the forms of part-time work where the employer has control over when and how much work is done by the worker.

In terms of employment contract, part-time work is not one single standardised form of work, different forms of part-time differ significantly and so have different degrees of precariousness. The following section outlines each type and discusses the precariousness that the type may engender.

Fig 2 Precariousness of Part-time Work



Fixed Part-time Working, Term Time Working and Job Share

Fixed part-time work is when a worker works a set number of hours a week in a fixed shift pattern. Term time work was brought in to 'help' parents with school-age children. A worker only works during term-time and usually only school hours so that they can drop off and collect the child from school. This form of work is often used to attract and retain senior female employees who have had children.(Allan and Daniels 1999). Job share is where typically two people share one job. In most cases the week is split into two 2.5 day sections; however this is open to variation depending on the requirements of the individuals and the employer. These types of part-time work involve individuals working hours stipulated in their employment contract. The employment contract stipulates that they will provide x hours of work a week and in return the employer will pay them y. There is no precariousness inherent in these forms of work as there is no scope for the employer to change the work.

Flexible Part-time Working

Under this scheme of work, a worker will have a contract with an employer that stipulates how many hours a week they will work for. It does not specify when,

therefore the employer is able to decide when to use the worker. The worker may also be required to work extra hours to accommodate peaks in activity or to cover for other workers. These extra hours, typically get paid at the same rate unless the worker works enough to be comparable with full time workers at the same place of employment (Allan and Daniels 1999). This form of work could be considered slightly precarious, the worker has no control over their working hours but they can at least expect a predictable source of income.

Annual Hours

A worker can be contracted to work a specific number of hours per year as opposed to the more usual weekly arrangements. They then work depending on the peaks and troughs of the employer's business; and as such they may work much more in some periods than in others. This is usually mediated by a stipulation in the employment contract which specifies when the majority of the hours will be worked (Allan and Daniels 1999). This form of part-time work engenders precariousness; the employer may not give much warning as to when the peaks and troughs of work may be, conceivably leaving the worker without an income for months.

Voluntary Reduced Working Time (V-time)

A V-time scheme allows a worker to offset his or her wage for time off during a given period of time. The reduction in working time usually takes the form of a shorter working day, week, or a block of time taken off during the year. Good examples of this can be seen in traditional manufacturing industries where demand for work may be subject to dramatic change. Whether this form of part-time work is precarious depends on just how 'voluntary' the working arrangements are. If the worker has had control over changes in their working arrangements then this form of work is not necessarily precarious. If working changes are imposed though, this form of work could be very precarious. (Allan and Daniels 1999).

Zero Hours

Zero hours work can often entail less than full-time hours of work and as a result can be considered a form of part-time work as well as being temporary work.

Significantly precarious work has spread into sectors and occupations which were previously characterised by stability and long job tenure in single organisations, both in higher paid professional occupations (Felstead et al 1998) and the public sector (Morgan et al 2000; Bryson 1999).

These are the same areas that were highlighted as being parts of the labour force which have been subject to rising levels of job insecurity.

Why Part-time Temporary Public Sector Workers?

This section justifies the selection of part-time temporary public sector workers in this research project. Part-time temporary workers, as a group are perhaps the furthest removed from 'standard/typical' workers. They differ on two counts: that their work has a specific end point (though a contract may be renewed) and that some have less control over when they do work. This category of workers includes some of the most precarious forms of work found in the labour market. Part-time temporary work was chosen as the form of work to be studied, as precariousness was to be an important part of this thesis. Without the pressures a worker might perceive from their precarious work it would be difficult to discover whether their social circumstances were playing a part in how the worker was making sense of their situation. Both elements were needed.

In UK labour legislation a part-time temporary worker is considered to be a part-time worker and a temporary worker (there is no specific legislation that pertains to part-time temporary workers) and so is covered by both strands of labour law.

A part-time worker is defined as:

Anyone who works fewer hours than a comparable full-time worker at the same establishment.

(DTI 2000)

This definition was adopted on 1st July 2000 into legislation in the UK as part of 'The Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations'. Until this time the UK Government applied a definition passed in the '50's. The definition was that part-time work was anything under 30 hours of work a week (Allan and Daniels 1999). Even given the changes, the definition remains vague. Part-time workers are being defined in relation to another group of workers. As a result there is no universally accepted standard for part-time workers; one part-time worker might be expected to work much fewer hours than another. While there are people who work more hours, sizeable sections of the workforce, can theoretically be classed as part-time workers.

In terms of employment protection offered by labour law, part-time workers have received similar rights to full-time workers with the recent adoption of 'The Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations' 2000 that:

The regulations give part-time workers the right not to be treated less favourably in their terms and conditions than comparable full-time workers.

(DTI 2000)

In practical terms this means that part-time workers should receive the same hourly pay as comparable full-time workers. They should receive the same sick pay, holidays, and redundancy packages (worked out proportionally). They should have the same access to training as full-time workers; the same rights to

maternity and parental leave as full-time workers and they should not be made redundant simply on the basis that they are part-time. Though this raft of directions given to employers are termed as regulations, interestingly there is vague clause that allows employers to treat part-time workers less favourably if it is 'necessary and appropriate to achieve a real business aim'(DTI 2000). What would constitute a 'real business aim' is something which is likely to be tested in employment tribunals and the courts in the near future.

Unlike part-time work, the rights afforded by temporary work are very dependent on the type of contract. Fixed-term employees are the biggest sub-sector of temporary workers. This group of workers gained new rights as of 1st October 2002 due to the 'Fixed-term Employees (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations.

Similar to the part-time regulations previously discussed, these regulations theoretically ensure that fixed-term employees are not discriminated against in favour of comparable permanent employees. These regulations also state that successive fixed-term contracts should be limited to four years. After this four year period these contracts should be considered permanent. Significantly, like the similarly titled new part-time regulations, the employer is permitted to ignore these regulations, in order to achieve a 'genuine business objective'. In addition the four year limit on successive fixed term contracts is only a guideline and the regulations allow for this to be decreased or increased as a result of collective or workforce bargaining.

Precarious workers may not receive the same protection from trade unions as more 'standard' workers (Croucher and Brewster 1998; Heery and Abbot 2000). This is a result of a complex number of factors but most importantly they are less likely to be members of trade-unions. Research has also shown that even when they are members, they can struggle to get their issues on the trade-union agenda (Harvey 2000; Heery and Abbot 2000). This could mean that in workplaces

where the voice of the employees holds little sway in terms of bargaining, these regulations could become quickly eroded².

The legislation theoretically represents a much greater level of protection provided by the law for the workers concerned. For example, workers on temporary contracts could be employed on successive rolling contracts indefinitely. The project auspiciously coincided with this legislation coming into force. It would be an interesting time to capture for the project, would the legislation would have any effect upon part-time temporary workers lives?

² A temporary part-time worker's position can also be significantly improved by the presence of a trade union willing to take on their issues (Harvey 2000).

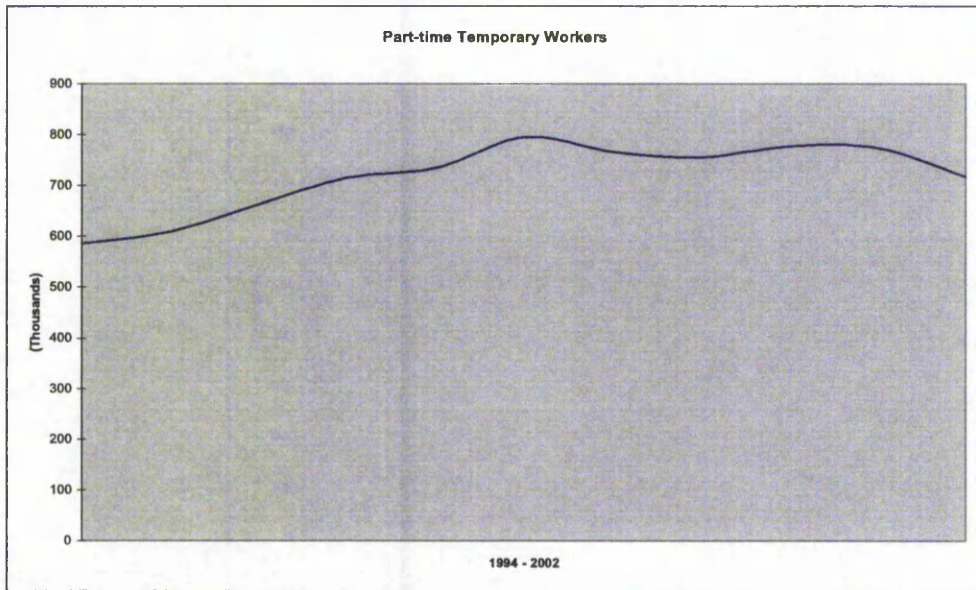
The Extent of Part-time Temporary Work

The main sources for labour market statistics do not compile many statistical sets which allow for the isolation of the levels of part-time temporary workers. Generally, data are provided regarding part-time workers and temporary workers as though these groups were mutually exclusive. This would make it difficult to assess the extent of this part of the labour force, as workers are counted twice. However, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) by way of the Labour Force Survey (LFS) provided a set of statistics on part-time temporary workers. This set is limited in comparison to the scope provided for other forms of work. For example, there is no data provided regarding the private/public sector division of part-time temporary work. Neither is there an available breakdown by occupational criteria. The following section is based on LFS figures for part-time temporary workers³ (where available) for the period of 1992 – 2002. Where figures for part-time temporary workers were unavailable, figures for part-time workers and temporary workers were used. This is not ideal but is likely to be reliable enough to suggest trends within part-time temporary work.

The last eight years (from 1994-2002) have seen a steady rise in the number of part-time temporary workers. The level, which peaked in 1997 at 807,000 workers, then fell to 755,000 workers, where it remained fairly static until 2000 when levels once again peaked up to 825,000 workers. The numbers of part-time temporary workers then started to decline slightly. These trends are visible in Figure 3.

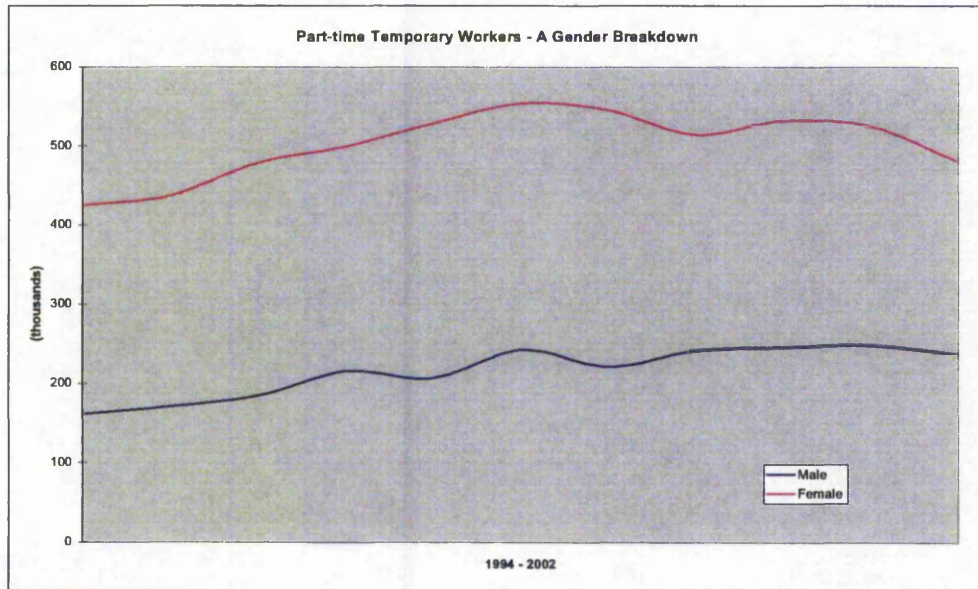
³ Temporary employees in the LFS are those who say that their main job is non-permanent in one of the following ways: Fixed period contract; Agency Temping; Casual Work; Seasonal Work od "Other".

Fig 3. Graph Depicting Levels of Part-Time Temporary Workers from 1994 - 2002.



In terms of gender, in the first quarter of 2002 there were over twice as many women (480,000 workers) as there were men in part-time temporary work (237,000 workers). Both male and female levels peak at around 1997, but where the female level starts to decline from this point onwards, the male level remains fairly static. These trends are visible in Figure 4.

Fig 4. Graph Depicting Levels of Male and Female Part-time Temporary Workers from 1994 -2002



The levels of part-time temporary workers now seems to be slightly decreasing, but within this generalised picture there seems to be much more dynamic change going on. As has been noted the LFS statistics for part-time temporary workers were limited. To gain an idea of the trends both within occupation classification and within occupational sectors it is necessary to consider statistics for both part-time and temporary work. Temporary work shows some interesting trends when occupational criteria are considered.

Fig 5 Graph Showing Occupational Breakdown Of Temporary Work

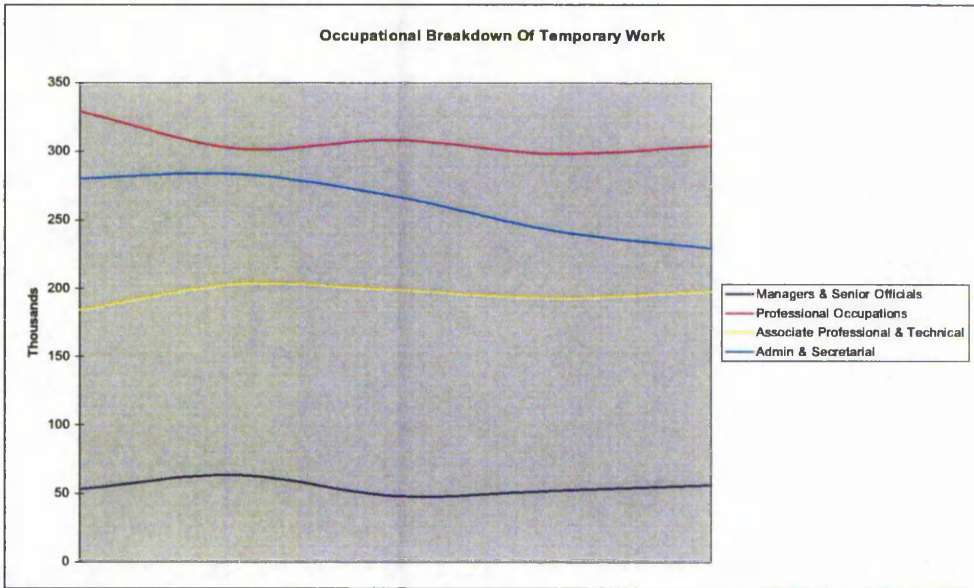
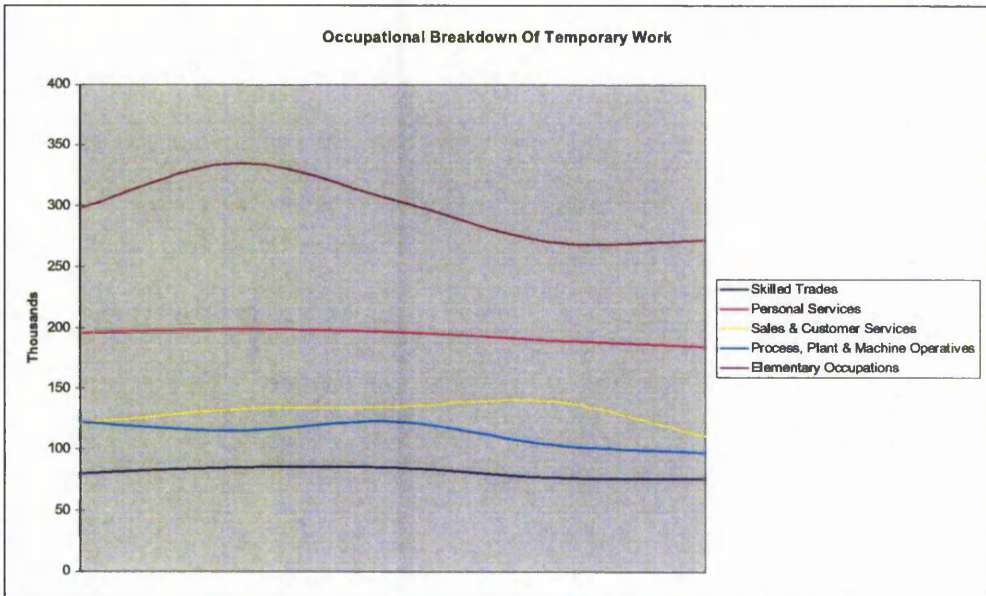


Fig 6 Graph Showing Occupational Breakdown Of Temporary Work



Figures 5 + 6 give an occupational breakdown of temporary work. The occupational groups are derived from Standard Occupational Classification

(SOC) 2000⁴. However within this decline there are occupational groups where the levels of temporary work increased against this trend: - Managers & Senior Officials and Associate Professional & Technical. Another group worthy of note was the Professional Occupations; the group which consistently had the highest levels temporary employment throughout the last three years surveyed (1999 - 2002) and whilst this group initially declined, it rose again towards the end of the sampling period.

The public/private sector criteria highlighted an even more stark trend as the following section demonstrates

The Public Sector

The reason that the public sector was focused on was because labour market indicators suggested that this area was subject to rising levels of precarious work.

The public sector accounts for around 27% of the labour force. 53% cent of these public sector workers are on fixed-term contracts (Hegewisch 1999). Breaking the public sector down into its main constituent parts, (Health, Higher Education, Local Government and Central Government,) not only are the levels of temporary work much higher but the rate of growth of temporary contracts is much greater too. The high levels of temporary work in the public sector seem to be driven by sectors such as Higher Education(CRANET survey as quoted by Hegewisch 1999 : 117) which has relatively high levels and growth of fixed term temporary contracts. Disaggregating further, within HE there are institutions where all the academic staff are employed on Fixed Term Contracts. HESA⁵ data

⁴ For further information on LFS classifications or definitions see: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_labour/LMS_FR_HS/LMS_FR_HS_Concepts_Definitions.pdf

⁵ HESA data sets are not without their problems, staff on less than a 25% contract are not included; academic related staff are not included; there is likely to be some double counting of staff in the data.

indicates that the level for the whole sector is closer to around 45% of all academic staff on FTCs (AUT 2003).

These levels were not only rising at a relatively high rate but precarious work was also relatively new to many sections of the public sector. As mentioned earlier, it has been suggested that job insecurity is a phenomenon which is particularly prevalent among workers who had previous experience of stable work. After all, the public sector used to be home to the 'job for life' stereotype, if not the actual job. (Morgan, Allington et al. 2000).

The public sector differs from the private sector in a number of important ways: the absence of profit, strong trade unions and collective bargaining and its relation to politics (Corby & White 1999). According to the CRANET survey (Hegewisch 1999) ⁶this sector has been subject to growth in non-standard employment above and beyond the rate of growth in the UK workforce as a whole. Fixed term employment is increasing at twice the national rate, and both temporary employment and part-time work have increased at 20% over the national rate of growth. Job share growth is twice the national rate, annualised hours have risen in some areas of the public sector at four times the national rate of growth and home working has increased at twice the national rate of growth (Hegewisch 1999). Feelings of insecurity are likely to be amplified for staff that have served in the public sector for a long duration due to the 'job for life' ideology that pervaded the public sector for so long.

In summary, job insecurity has been linked to forms of work which entail a high degree of risk and uncertainty for the worker. The lack of research which deals with the way the individual and their social context affects and is affected by this uncertainty and risk has also been highlighted. This is the focus of this study and the following Chapter illustrates the conceptual framework that was adopted in pursuit of this goal.

⁶ CRANET survey of International Strategic Human Resource Management. The survey started in 1990 and is now carried out at three to four year intervals.

Chapter 2:- Conceptual Framework

The study has sought to give an insight into the social world so often ignored by other studies of job insecurity. To that end a conceptual framework, which gives an explanation of how the individual makes sense of his or her home and social life, was conceived. The concept of 'sensemaking' describes how the individual makes sense of their work and social spheres, the outcome of this process is the individual's orientation to work, and 'social network' as a concept simplifies the individual's social context.

Sensemaking

'Sensemaking' is the first of the three key concepts used in this thesis. Of the three concepts, this is the most fundamental and also the most complex. The following is a functional explanation of the concept and how it has been used in this thesis. For a more complete and rounded explanation of sensemaking please see Chapter 1 and 2 of Karl Weick's (1995) *Sensemaking in Organisations*.

Sensemaking can be defined as 'how people construct what they construct, why and with what effects...' (Weick 1995 : 4). Describing and using the concept of sensemaking makes explicit the view of the world that this thesis has taken. Involved in the adoption of this sensemaking approach is the implicit belief that human beings interpret their contextual situation; the events and phenomena which surround them. However sensemaking goes beyond interpretation. Weick describes sensemaking as a process possessing a number of key features. These include: being driven by plausibility rather than accuracy; enactive of sensible environments; social; focused on and by extracted cues; and grounded in identity construction (Weick 1995 : 17).

At the heart of the sensemaking concept is a causal relationship between the individual and the environment. The process of sensemaking is an ongoing one, so in effect there is no start or conclusion. The individual's environment is made up of cues. These cues could be anything from a simple object to complex socially negotiated events such as the approaching end of an employment contract. The individual gives these cues meaning through the sensemaking process. The meaning that the cues currently in the individual's world are given, are derived from past experience. This process creates an identity which in turn changes the way individuals process these environmental cues in the future and so the cycle continues.

the direction of causality flows just as often from the situation to a definition of self as it does the other way. And this is why the establishment and maintenance of identity is a core preoccupation in sensemaking

(Weick 1995 : 20)

The past holds considerable sway over an individual's sensemaking process, it offers a bank of past experiences and past sensemaking processes on which the individual can draw on. Weick suggests that there are organized action sequences which become more entrenched the more they are acted out. From a job insecurity perspective this could be practically demonstrated by an individual being employed on a temporary contract finding other work before the present contract expires. When these well practiced procedures break down it presents a problem for the identity or orientation that has been constructed by past sensemaking processes, and as a result a new orientation or identity is adopted; an individual may feel very comfortable working on temporary contracts because they have never had problems getting work but the moment that this ceases and the well practiced procedure breaks down, the individual may stop maintaining an identity which relishes the variety of temporary contracts.

From the outset notions of reality or accuracy become irrelevant. The individual's world is the subject of a vast and complicated sensemaking process. Any consideration of another person's sensemaking process adds another layer of

sensemaking, as the researcher is trying to make sense of the individual in question's sensemaking process. There is a recognised discrepancy between labour market proxies used as indicators of job insecurity such as labour turnover, and the number of people who are insecure about their job (Guest 1999; Robinson 2000). It is conceivable that part of this discrepancy is due to a lack of consideration of the individuality of peoples' sensemaking. A worker is approaching the date of contract renewal, their contract has been renewed without question ten times in the past, they have been given no sign that it won't be renewed this time. Outwardly to somebody else's sensemaking process it might be expected that the worker would be reasonably comfortable and confident. The worker himself is far from comfortable; perhaps his relationship with his superiors has deteriorated, his sensemaking process has left him with feelings of job insecurity. This again, underlines the importance of research which has direct contact with the individual when such complex phenomena are concerned.

Orientations to Work

The consequence of the sensemaking process is the construction of identity, and of particular interest within this identity is the individual's orientation to work. The literature concerning people in precarious work has provided two tentative 'orientations to work'. These will be used in the results section of this thesis to help differentiate between the different meanings that individuals attach to their work.

The concept of 'Orientation to work' was introduced in a study of car workers in a Vauxhall plant in Luton by Goldthorpe et al (Goldthorpe et al 1980). Orientation to work can be defined as 'the meaning attached by individuals to their work which predisposes them to both think and act in particular ways with regard to that work' (Watson 1995). In part derived from the work of Weber, this actor-centred approach (as opposed to a systems based approach) focuses on the

work-community-nexus and examines how work related behaviour is dependant upon socially generated aims, attitudes and values (Rose 1988).

Early 'orientations to work' literature suggested that features, which could be understood as being part of the individual's social network, had an important role in how the individual attaches meaning to his work. For example Goldthorpe et al's study highlighted the importance of factors outside work such as immediate and extended family in addition to the geographical community in which the worker lives, as being of critical importance in the construction of worker orientation. The 'orientations to work' literature such as Goldthorpe et al (1980), Beynon and Blackburn (1972), Wedderburn and Crompton (1972) and Daniel (1973) were all based on research conducted into manufacturing industries such as car, food and chemical plants during the '60s' and '70s'. The choice of industry reflected the labour market at the time; these were the sectors which employed a large proportion of the workforce. The make up of the labour market has changed dramatically over the past 30-40 years most notably with a decline in manufacturing and an increase in service industries.

The concept of orientations to work, in the main, hasn't made the transition and been used in recent academic literature, although there have been notable exceptions such as Catherine Hakim's recent work into women's orientations to work (Hakim 1993; Hakim 2000).

Two main characterisations of the individual in precarious employment have dominance within the literature. The first is derived from literature which associates negative factors with precarious employment, for want of a better term, this characterisation is labelled as the 'insecure' worker. It is not derived from any one literary source, instead it is a composite made up from a number of academic pieces; notable examples include (Beck 1992; Purcell, Hogarth et al. 1999; Schabracq and Cooper 2000).

The individual is in employment, which in their own judgement is deemed to be insecure. They have not chosen to be in this position, other factors such as family

commitments or simply a lack of any viable alternative employment has forced them into this status. They constantly feel they have to prove their worth to stay in their job, never mind advancing their career. Their position does not provide financial security. On a more personal level they may also find it hard to form any long lasting relationships due to their relatively high potential for relocation. They may also be suffering from stress related illnesses.

The other characterisation, the portfolio/boundaryless worker, is the binary opposite to the 'insecure' worker and presents the worker in 'precarious' work in a very different light. The term 'portfolio worker' has its origins in Charles Handy's (1990) *The Age Of Unreason*. Handy depicted a changing world of work where a lifelong career with one organisation which defined us as a person as no longer being relevant. People needed to have different aspects to their working lives. These different aspects could be different jobs mixed with retraining/continuing education. Lifelong learning is a particularly important theme:

Education becomes an essential investment, whether as a passport to a core job or as a route to acquiring a saleable skill on the outside, then to ration it is absurd. It is equally absurd to try to shove it all at the beginning of life, or to think that it can all happen in classrooms, or to ration it later on to those who were cleverest at 18 years of age, or to think that brain skill are the only skills that matter, just because a precious minority need them. A new world of work requires upside-down thinking in education.

(Handy 1990 : 137)

Note the use of the phrase 'core job'; part of the legacy of the 'Flexible Firm' model.

The boundaryless worker is a not dissimilar concept. Gunz et al state that:

To flourish in this new environment one must be self-reliant, losing one's dependence on the organization as the prime provider of structure to a career. 'Boundaryless' in careers means developing new competencies and a new architecture to careers.

(Gunz, Evans et al. 2000 : 24)

As workers, they thrive on the unpredictability of life, knowing that just as the challenges that will face them will change, they too must adapt. Their careers, if indeed that is still a relevant term, are likely to be characterised by periodic changes in employer. They may well also have changed occupations completely, perhaps having to undergo retraining in order to do so. They embrace their own employment situation and they would be unlikely to consider themselves as insecure. They too may not have financial insecurity, but here, as a priority, financial security comes low on the individual's personal agenda; far more important is a stimulating challenging work experience.

These two 'orientations to work' are widely exaggerated caricatures of the meaning that individuals might attach to their work but the accuracy or the academic basis for these 'orientations' are not important. They are tools with which the research materials have been sifted through.

These two tentative 'orientations to work' will be used in the results section of this thesis to help differentiate between the different meanings that individuals are attaching to their work. The orientations being used are ideal types and it is unlikely that any individual will be labelled as being either an 'insecure worker' or a 'portfolio/boundaryless worker', it is more likely that individuals show, to some degree, attributes associated with either of these orientations through their language use.

Social Networks

Sensemaking has been portrayed as an interaction between the individual and their home/social and work spheres. Aspects of the work sphere, such as the precariousness of the contract or the impact of organisational change have been well documented. The concept of the social network is a tool which can help to simplify some of the complexity and variety of the individual's social/home sphere.

Social networks are a well used concept (Scott 1991, Wasserman & Faust 1994, Lienhardt 1977), yet they have not been widely accepted into main stream studies concerning the individual and work. The versatility, and arguably the ambiguity, of the social network as a concept has resulted in its utilisation in many fields. Despite this, there are three main fields which use this concept. The first is sociology/social anthropology, where the concept has been used to study the complex roles and relationship in families and other social groupings (Bott 1971). The second and not altogether unrelated field is that of Social Policy (Willmott 1986). The final field which uses social networks also examines relationships and roles of actors, this examination is carried out with complex computer models and mathematical calculations in order to place a numerical value on these social phenomena (Freeman 2000; McCarty 2001). This field is largely confined to the United States which is home to the International Network for Social Network Analysis (INSNA), a multidisciplinary scholarly organization, which publishes a refereed journal, '*Social Networks*', and an informal journal, '*Connections*'.

A social network is broadly defined as 'a specific set of linkages among a defined set of persons' (Mitchell 1969). For the purposes of the project this definition is distilled further; a social network can be defined as the people who have an impact on your life. For most people they would be family (paternal and immediate) and close friends. Social networks are hard to define due to their variety. One individual's social network may be made up of very different

elements than another person's. For example, if a child is brought up by relations other than their biological parents, such as an aunt and uncle, they will naturally play a more major role in that person's social network than an aunt and uncle in the social network of a person with a more 'typical' family. The use of the social network concept can help to 'illuminate actual or potential patterns of linkage and the flows of power, emotional support and practical resources associated with them (Wasserman and Faust 1994).

Social Networks as a concept, is not widely applied in any way to the individual's experience of work, there have been notable exceptions concerning the way in which an individual's social network affect home and work. Notable examples which use concepts which are related to social networks include Jarvis's work on the informal strategies of households to attempt to balance the demands of home and work (Jarvis 1999). Jarvis' study focused on dual income households and how these households negotiated strategies. These strategies included deciding to move to a new area to facilitate a change of job for one person and how that affected their partner and the decision for the non-working partner to return to work. At the heart of the study is the concept of the social network which "exposes the interdependency of decisions associated with home, work and family life" (Jarvis 1999 : 242).

Nolan's (2002) 'Intensification of Everyday Life' explored how job related tensions spilled over into family life. Nolan's work was largely based around the JIWIS (Job Insecurity and Work Intensification Survey). This survey provided a wide range of information about various issues relating to job insecurity and work intensification. The way work related stress was affecting families was tackled with questions such as 'Does job related stress cause tension within your home/household?' Respondents answered on a five point scale ranging from 'very much' to 'not at all'. Nolan highlights that workers with families find it hard to balance the demands of their work and families (Nolan 2002).

For the majority of JIWIS participants, as much as they strive to protect the security and stability of that 'esteemed resource' [the family and the support that institution provides] contemporary employment practices serve to undermine it.

(Nolan 2002 : 131)

Similarly Crompton's work on flexible working and the family(Crompton 2002) also explored the ways in which families and most specifically women try to balance the demands of their caring responsibilities and work.

How does this project use the concept of Social Networks?

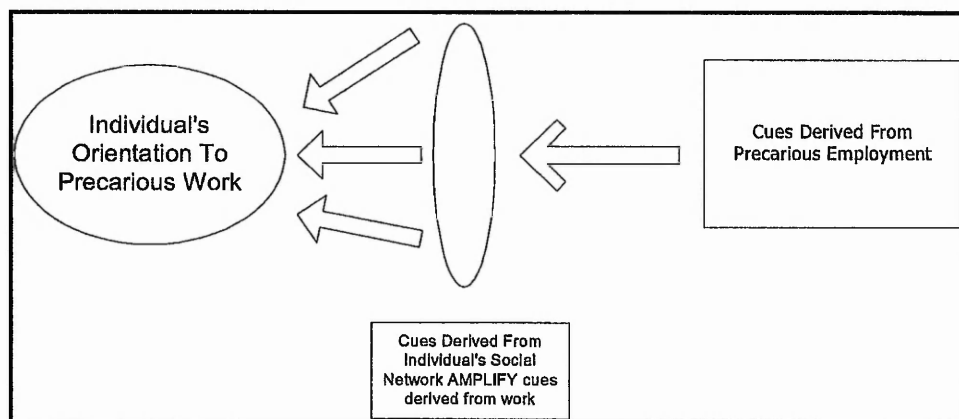
While this project chooses primarily to focus upon the social network at the micro level as this is the level that directly impacts upon the individual, the project is mindful of the macro level too. Policy makers such as the Government and the employers are responsible for constructing the framework in which these individual's interpersonal relationships can occur. The Government creates the legislation to which employers should adhere to, so in this case, legislation on part-time temporary workers would be relevant.

The use of the concept is focused on the role of the network as opposed to the layout of the social network. This is not to say that the extent and dynamics of the social network are unimportant, in some cases, such as when there wasn't much of a social network at all, this becomes more of an issue. Early examinations of both social network literature and preliminary research findings suggested that there were grounds for four distinct 'types'. These types are labelled as Shielded, Amplified, Mediated and Unmediated. It is unlikely that any of the respondents correspond exactly, these types are conceptual tools to be used for analysis purposes. The following section outlines each of the social network types through a description and diagram. The diagrams are all completely original work.

Amplified

According to this social network type, the impact of the cues derived from precarious work is amplified by the impact of the cues derived from the individual's social network. The following is a graphical representation of this.

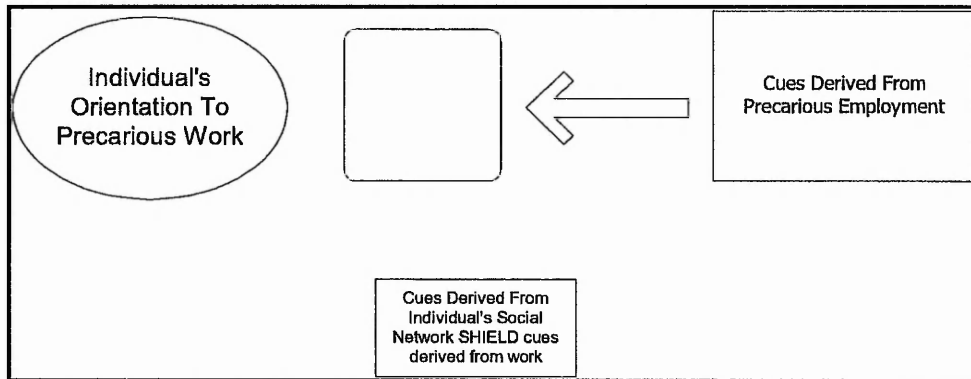
Fig 7 – Diagrammatic representation of the sensemaking process when an individual has an amplifying social network type



Shielded

This type is the antithesis of the *Amplified* type. This type states that the cues derived from precarious work which otherwise might cause the individual distress are shielded by the cues derived from their social network. The following is a graphical representation of this type.

Fig 8 – Diagrammatic representation of the sensemaking process when an individual has a shielding social network type

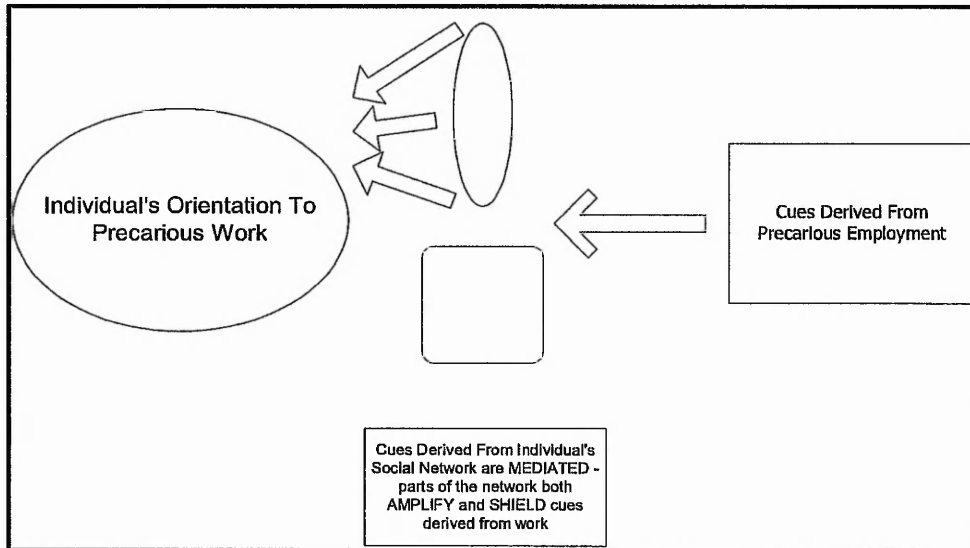


Individuals who fall into this category place greater emphasis on the positive cues derived from their social network than they are on the negative cues taken from their work. This type has profound implications for attempting to account for the reason why people in similar precarious employment situations can define themselves very differently (Insecure & Portfolio). As with the previous type, there is enough latitude in the type to encompass a diverse range of real life situations.

Mediated

The mediated type represents a hybrid of some of both the shielded and amplified types attributes. The individual has both the supportive features of a shielding social network and the detrimental features associated with the amplifying social network. The following is a diagrammatic representation of this type.

Fig 9 – Diagrammatic representation of the sensemaking process when an individual has a mediating social network type

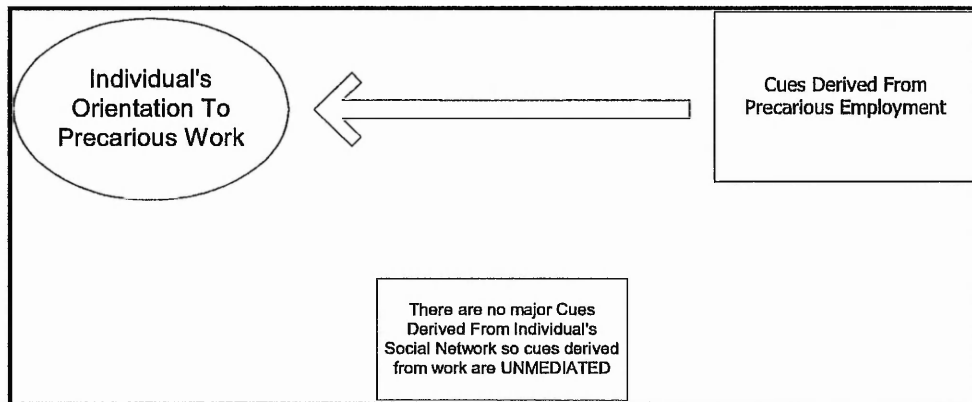


The shielding and amplifying cues may be derived from different parts of the social network. Alternatively, one member of the social network may have a complex role involving both shielding and amplifying features. The inclusion of this type reflects the need for a more complex and versatile type than the other three types in some cases. In most of the cases the individual's social network contained elements of shielding and amplification but there was usually a heavy bias towards one or the other; individuals who have mediated social networks like other individuals have both shielding and amplifying elements in their social network but they do not have a heavy bias to one or the other.

Unmediated

This type recognises that for some individuals there may be little importance placed on cues derived from their social network. The following is a diagrammatic representation of this type.

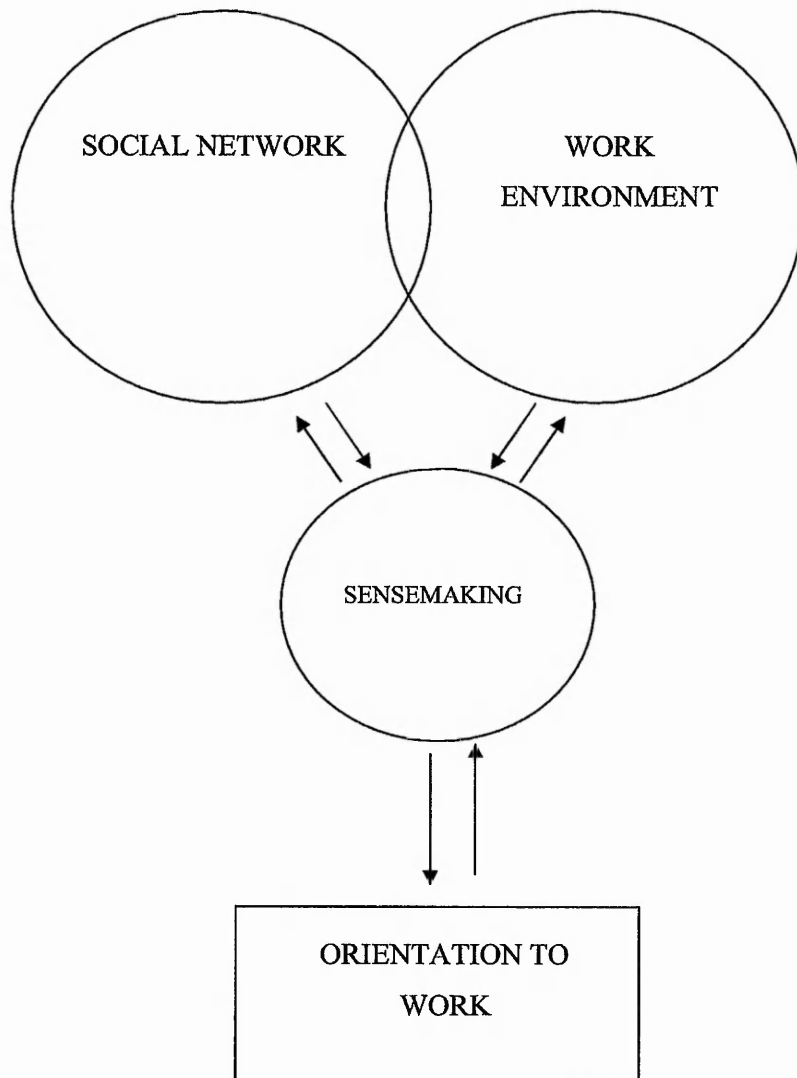
Fig 10 – Diagrammatic representation of the sensemaking process when an individual has an un-mediating social network type



The primary cause of this social network type is when the individual has little or no social contact with their family, they also have no meaningful contact with friends. The type does not attempt to suggest that there are individuals who have no social contact whatsoever; instead the type asserts that some individuals' social contact may be relatively limited. In terms of the sensemaking process for the individual, having an unmediated social network entails prioritising cues derived from the social network as being less important than other cues.

The following figure outlines the way the three concepts interact with each other in this thesis. The individual makes sense of the cues from their social network and their work environment. This process defines the individual's orientation to work. The process is ongoing and the constructed orientation then affects the way cues from the social network and work environment are made sense of in the future.

Fig 11 Conceptual Framework



Chapter 3: - Research Methods

Just as the conceptual framework was suggested by the aims of the study, the methods employed by the study were determined by the evidence sought.

This project studies 15 individuals over a period of 24 months. Each individual is treated as a distinct and separate case study.

Case Studies

Case studies, by their nature are hard to define. Case studies as a method for looking at a particular aspect of the world are very common and with each use of the term 'case study' our shared understanding of the term shifts, most of the time this shift is imperceptible but it is important that this shift in language is understood. 'Case study' is described as having a number of main roots of origin; these include the medical, legal and social work professions. Yin devised a description of the term which is defined by the function that the 'case study' performs. Yin describes a case study as:

an empirical enquiry that:

- investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when
- the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident

(Yin 1994)

Case studies are a method of getting very close to the source of information; it yields a richness of depth that is unobtainable in most other forms of intellectual inquiry. This depth comes at the price of scope. Research employing case studies usually limits itself to a relatively small number of 'cases'. These cases can often

be very complex as demonstrated by organizational case studies or case studies involving an in depth view of people (psychologically or sociologically).

The following five distinctive features define Case Studies:

- Investigation of a relatively small number of cases
- Information gathered and analysed about a large number of features of each case.
- Study of naturally occurring cases
- Quantification of data is *not* a priority. Indeed, qualitative data may be treated as superior.
- The main concern may be with understanding the case studied in itself, with no interest in theoretical inference or empirical generalization. However there may be attempts at one or other, or both, of these. Alternatively, the wider relevance of the findings may be conceptualized in terms of the provision of vicarious experience as a basis for 'naturalistic generalization' or 'transferability'.

(Gomm, Hammersley et al. 2000).

The process of sorting the information can crucially affect any trends or conclusions made, and as such care must be taken in order to minimise the impact of bias. This process also goes some way to prevent the project from stalling between the tasks of collection and analysis. A variety of techniques can be employed in order to achieve this distillation.

- Putting information into different arrays.
- Making a matrix of categories and placing evidence within such categories.
- Creating data displays – flowcharts and other devices – for examining the data.
- Tabulating the frequency of different events.
- Examining the complexity of such tabulations and their relationship by calculating second-order numbers such as means and variances.

- Putting information in chronological order or using some other temporal scheme.

(Miles and Huberman 1984).

To an extent this process and the resulting structure applied to the case studies was determined by the use of the Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software(CAQDAS) program NUD*IST. The use of this program is described and discussed at length later in this chapter.

The emphasis on contextual factors is key to the case study method. It is also key to the thinking behind the project. The idea that part-time temporary workers are insecure due to their part-time temporary nature is the key debate in this project. The project argues that while the type of contract (and associated employment features) a person employed on is important in the construction of their orientation to work, it is by no means the whole story. Other important contextual features of peoples' lives can also have large roles to play in the process of constructing an orientation to work.

Quantitative studies have an important role to play in this field. Their scope is often huge, and as such provides information about the labour force as a whole. They are usually conducted over regular intervals and thus are able to capture some of the dynamic attributes of the labour force. Ultimately their value, and the way in which quantitative research distinguishes itself from most qualitative work, is its ability to highlight, and to an extent predict, large general trends. However such an approach is not without its drawbacks. Quantitative research homogenises and aggregates information - therein lies the problem. If the research is required to explore very personal features, such as the individual's relationship with their partner, quantitative methods simply will not provide enough detail.

This project's aims were to discover the ways in which people in precarious employment made sense of their lives. Interviews were the most practical tool for collecting the information required by the study. An interviewing approach

would also be sufficiently flexible to enable a more adaptive approach; if one line of questioning was made redundant by virtue of the individual's context, the interviewer was able to move the interview onto more relevant areas.

The interviews themselves were both long and semi-structured.

[The long interview] can take us into the mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world. It can also take us in the life world of the individual, to see the content and pattern of daily experiences. The long interview gives us the opportunity to step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves.

(McCracken 1988)

A semi-structured approach was adopted towards all three rounds of interviews, the Aide Memoirs for which can be found as Appendix 1, 2 and 3 respectively. The first interview gathered a range of different types of information:

Biographical Information

This section collected information about the careers of close family members and any partners of the subject. The theory that people's expectations of work are shaped to a large extent by their parent's experiences of the labour market has been well documented (Peiperl, Arthur et al. 2000) This section also covers topics such as dependents in the household and the subject's educational qualifications.

Work History

The next section collected in depth information about the subjects' work history, including information relating to the type of contract, salary, age of the subject at the time of the job and whether or not there were any dependents at the time. This question would allow the study to approach a number of theories on job

insecurity. For example, many academics believe that job insecurity is predominantly caused by someone moving from a previously stable form of employment to a more precarious situation (Peiperl, Arthur et al. 2000; Robinson 2000).

Other main topics which the interview dealt with included attitudes towards current employment, present financial situation, attitudes towards flexibility & security and hopes and aspirations for the future. The second and third interviews played a different role to the first. The first interview was the longest in length because in essence the project was trying to retrospectively capture the person's background as well as a snapshot of their lives at the time of the interview. The second and third interviews also captured this snapshot of the person's life at the time of the interview. As time passes between the three interviews, the project enveloped the following three factors.

Time Element

The duration of the fieldwork and the intervals used allowed the research to capture a sense of how people's lives on temporary contracts can change dramatically.

Subject Feedback

The subject was provided with a copy of the transcript of the previous interview. This enabled them to comment on the way the last interview went. This removes misunderstandings or potential misrepresentations; it also allowed the individual the chance to reflect on how they responded to questions put to them, perhaps allowing them to see how they've changed in their attitudes since the last interview that little bit better.

Thread Development

During an interview sometimes it was impossible to thoroughly listen to the information being provided by the subject and to also think about the question which was about to be asked, as a consequence sometimes it was possible to overlook a thread of an important theme being mentioned. If this research study was based purely on just one round of interviews, the potential information gained by following that thread would be lost to the study. Adopting a multi interview strategy allowed the researcher to reflect on what was said in their own time and then to make a special point of revisiting the thread during the next interview. This means the information collection was much more thorough.

NUD*IST

NUD*IST is an advanced form of Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS). The use of NUD*IST is a research method in itself and serves to add to the rigour with which the qualitative materials were processed. NUD*IST has its origins in research at La Trobe University, where the software was created in 1980 by Tom Richards to support social research by Lyn Richards. Designed for handling Non-numerical Unstructured Data by techniques of Indexing Searching and Theorizing (NUD*IST) (QSR International 2002). The value of the use of NUD*IST has been widely documented by the academic community (Delamont, Parry et al. 1994; Coffey, Holbrook et al. 1996; Lee and Fielding 1996).

The following section outlines specifically how NUD*IST 5 was used in terms of this research project. NUD*IST 5 uses a complex hierarchical coding system; such codes can be used to represent anything the researcher desires. They can represent objective aspects such as gender, age and occupational sector; these codes can also be made to represent conceptual themes such as insecurity, stress and job satisfaction. NUD*IST 5 allows the researcher to set these codes up before importing any of the interview files. Initially these crude labels were set

up in order to allow preliminary material to be sorted. NUD*IST 5 allows these codes to be manipulated at all steps within the analysis process, as such codes which prove to be redundant can be removed and codes which prove to be too ambiguous can be tightened or split into multiple codes. Every time that the code system was altered, informed the research narrative. Indeed, the setting up of the code system is a description of prejudices. If a code was then removed on the basis of the materials this tells the researcher that that particular prejudice in this instance was unfounded. If a code attracts so much material that it needs to be split, this tells the researcher that he may have discovered a potentially crucial theme within the research project.

The materials themselves were sifted and coded in a number of ways.

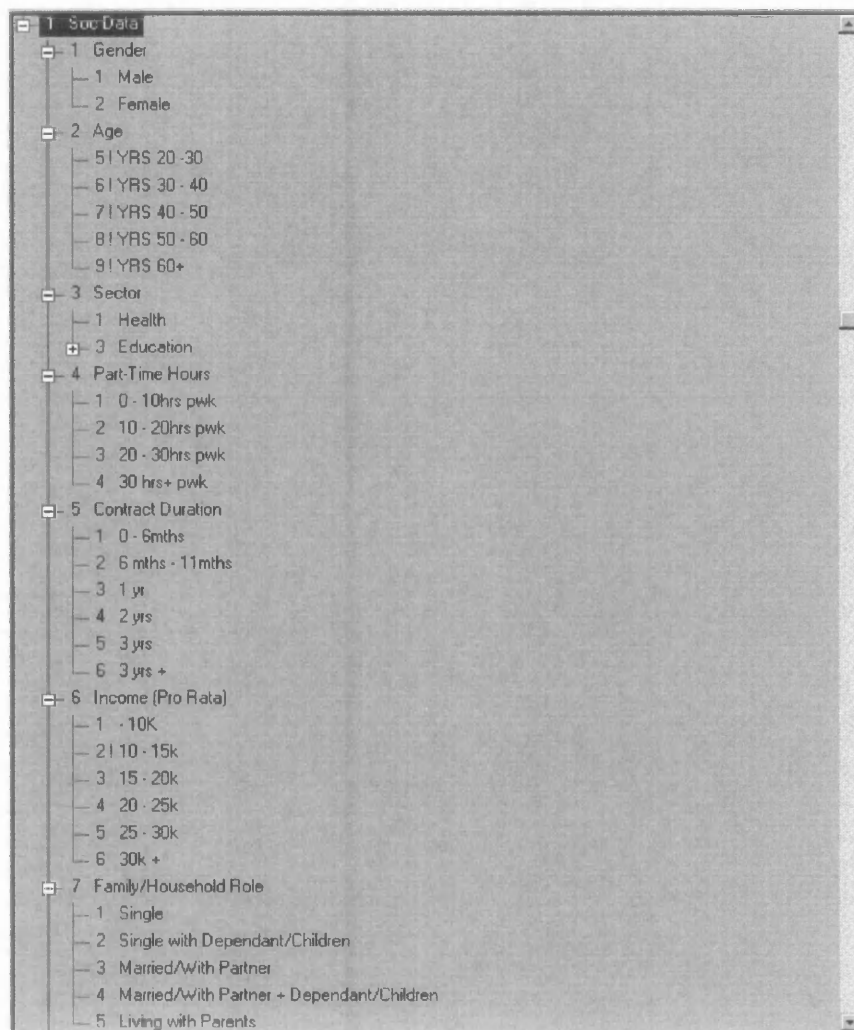
Text Search

This is perhaps the most obvious manner in which to look for trends and can be described as broad brush coding. NUD*IST 5 allows relatively complex text searches to be carried out on the interview transcripts. Instead of just being able to look for one word, as is the case with most word processors, the text search facility within NUD*IST allows the researcher to search for a string of words. So for example if the theme of family was important you could ask NUD*IST to search for father, mother, brother, sister, mum, dad, grand-mother and grand-father simultaneously. NUD*IST 5 also allows for searches to be carried out where a word or string is searched for on the basis of an exception. For example, the researcher might be interested in examples where the respondent has talked about Subject A, but only when it hasn't been closely associated with Subject B. Text searches are a fairly crude way in which to sift through information. However as a method of broad brush analysis, it helps to get the analysis process moving. In practice respondents can talk about issues without using obvious key words and as such a more precise approach must also be taken.

Complex Retrieval

Once the text searches had been conducted and a feeling for the types of themes that are present within the literature had been gained, a more systematic approach was taken. This involved the careful reading of all the transcripts and the creation of a hierarchical themed coding system. The project's objective coding structure looks like this in NUD*IST.

Figure 12 - Contextual coding in NUD*IST 5

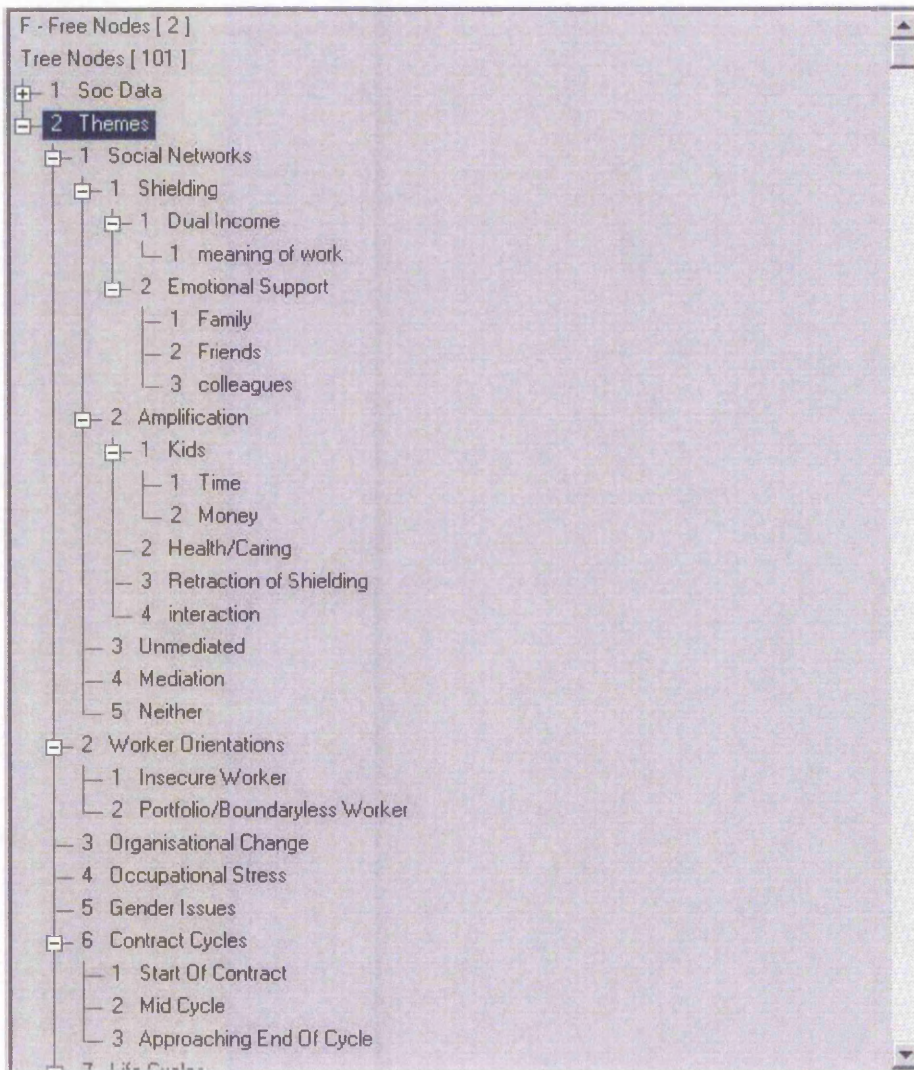


(Copyright QSR International⁷)

⁷ All screenshots taken from NUD*IST remain the copyright of QSR International.

As mentioned previously the code hierarchy was constituted of a mixture of objective and thematic codes. In this project's case the objective codes were the gender, age, occupational sector, number of part-time hours worked a week, contract duration, income, family/household status and respondent. So in the gender coding, all material given by women was put into the female code, and all material given by men was put into the male code. All information given by workers in the educational sector was placed into the education code and so on. All information provided by one respondent over the course of the three interviews was coded to that respondent. Thematic codes are simpler, anything that was said by a respondent was coded into themes. Thematic coding by its very nature is subjective and is done within the researcher's understandings of the subject (and theme). As such this process could be seen to be prone to misunderstandings – a respondent might have meant one thing but the researcher may interpret this passage of speech in a completely different way. This is not a problem specific to using CAQDAS. Any thematic sorting of materials, whether it be with the most complicated of CAQDAS or just paper, scissors and highlighters would encounter such a methodological problem. The thematic coding can be seen in the following figure.

Fig 13 – Thematic coding in NUD*IST 5



(Copyright QSR International⁸)

Once all the information has been coded into these themes, then NUD*IST 5 really comes into its own. The materials can then be sifted for trends in a very precise way. For example if you were interested in the perceptions of insecurity of young female part-time temporary mothers you would ask NUD*IST to display all the text coded in the thematic node of insecurity, the objective node of

⁸ All screenshots taken from NUD*IST remain the copyright of QSR International.

20 – 30 yrs old, the objective node of female and the objective node of mother. NUD*IST 5 would display all the text which is contained within all four nodes. As such the construction of the node tree allows for an adept sifting of the material which in turn helps the researcher come to more rigorous conclusions.

NUD*IST 5, like any other computer program, does as it is instructed, if the coding isn't done carefully then the benefit of using such a program is restricted. If the wrong questions are asked of the materials, then the program obviously won't be able to provide meaningful results. This is why it is wrong to look at CAQDAS as some sort of magical research tool which guarantees the quality of the project, it does no such thing. Like any tool it can be used badly, but given the right materials and a good understanding of the way in which the program works, CAQDAS can be used to analyse materials in ways which would take a single researcher adopting a traditional highlighters and scissors approach, a considerable amount of time.

The Subjects

The fifteen individuals were drawn from two different occupational areas found within the public sector. These areas were Education and the Health sector. These sectors account for 25% and 40% of all public sector workers respectively(Corby and White 1999).

Education

Eight individuals were drawn from higher education; they worked at universities in a variety of different jobs varying from administration and other support staff to staff that were involved with teaching and research. Higher Education(HE), in relation to the rest of the workforce, has dramatically high levels of part-time temporary workers. This is due, in part, to the way in which much of this sector is funded. The numbers of part-time temporary workers in HE is very difficult to

quantify with any sort of accuracy. There are a number of reasons for that. First and foremost, Universities do not keep particularly good records as to who is working for them. Inaccuracies creep into any figures that are given by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) because:

- Some of these workers often hold more than one job with the same employer and thus are counted more than once.
- Some workers are so temporary that may not be employed at the time of the sampling process despite the fact that they regularly work for the employer.
- A worker that does only one hour of work a year, for example a visiting scholar giving a seminar, could feasibly be included as a part-time temporary worker.

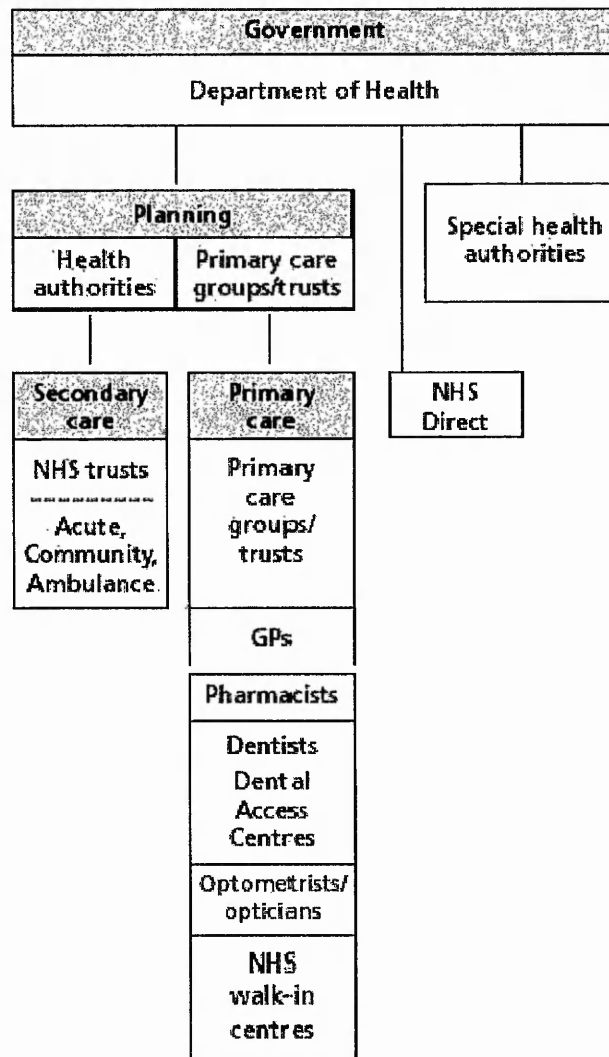
These factors combine to make the reliability of figures of workers employed in the part-time temporary workforce questionable at best (Bryson and Barnes 2000). The majority of the problem is caused by the fact that universities don't prepare these figures in order to facilitate research; they seem to be a by-product of the personnel function of the University.

In addition to this eight, one of this project's case studies was employed as a part-time temporary supply primary school teacher.

Health Sector

The health sector contains many different areas. The following figure shows all the elements that make up the National Health Service.

Fig 13 – Organisational hierarchy of the NHS



(<http://www.nhs.uk/thenhsexplained/default.asp>)

The distinction between the public and the private health sector has become increasingly blurred⁹; more and more services are being tendered out to private companies. This appears to be a trend set to continue.

Five case studies were drawn from the health sector. Three of these case studies were made up of individuals who were employed by NHS trusts. Trusts are found in most large towns and cities, and usually offer a general range of services. Some trusts also act as regional or national centres of expertise for more specialised care, while some are attached to universities and help to train health professionals. Together, NHS trusts employ the majority of the NHS workforce including nurses, doctors, dentists, pharmacists, midwives, health visitors and staff from the professions allied to medicine, such as physiotherapists, radiographers, podiatrists, speech and language therapists, counsellors, occupational therapists and psychologists. Other staff includes receptionists, porters, cleaners, IT specialists, managers, engineers, caterers, and domestic and security staff.

One case study individual was a public sector worker who worked on such temporary contracts as to make it very difficult to categorise her. Her contracts usually lasted only a few days. At the time she was contacted to arrange her participation in this project she was working for the probation services, however by the time she was first interviewed she was working for the NHS. In addition, she also regularly worked in higher education. It was felt that this individual and the supply primary school teacher should be included, because although there may well be different experiences of employment within different areas of the public sector, the project's focus upon the individual's features such as their gender or family role means that the accounts of these two individuals are just as valuable to the project as any of the other subjects' accounts.

⁹ The distinction between the public and private sectors is discussed within the introduction

Each of the fifteen individuals were interviewed three times, thus the study's materials are drawn from 45 in-depth interviews. The interviews were conducted over a period of 24 months. They were not conducted with uniform intervals for two reasons. Firstly and primarily it has been highlighted that people's attitudes to the temporary nature of their contract changes, depending on where they are within the contract cycle (Bryson and Barnes 2000). The contract cycles within the public sector, in particular Higher Education can be very uniform. Therefore by varying the interval, the less likely the study was to catch large sections of the interviewees at the same stage of the contract cycle. The length of the intervals were sufficiently long enough to catch a large number of the interviewees moving through a contract renewal and in some cases more dramatic changes such as job changes, leaving the occupational sector altogether, pregnancy, childbirth and separation/divorce. Secondly, it would have been very difficult to arrange access and physically conduct all of the interviews at the same time. As such, the process was more organic whereby each interview informed the project, and consequently the following interviews, as to the issues and themes likely to be important or indeed irrelevant.

Chapter 4:- Evidence & Interpretation

The following table provides an overview of the 15 case studies. Each individual has been given a pseudonym to protect their identity. The table also provides details of the individual's working environment and their social network.

Table 1 – Overview of Case Studies

	Job Title (At First Interview)	Employer	Contract Types	Social Network 'Type(s)'
Alison	Senior Course Administrator	University	1 yr FTC then 3 month FTC then Permanent and finally 1yr FTC	Shielded
Brian	Research Fellow	University	PT(0.5) 3 yr FTC throughout	Shielded
Chris	Research Fellow, Research Student & Volunteer Board Member	University & Non-profit regeneration organisation	PT 2 yr FTC then made FT & Permanent on PhD completion	Unmediated + Shielded
David	Lecturer & Research Student	University	PT (0.2) 1 yr FTC then quit to become a teacher.	Unmediated + Shielded
Francine	Managing Editor	Two separate Universities	1.) PT (0.4) 1yr FTC and 2.) PT (0.5) 3yr FTC then 1.) PT (0.4) permanent 2.) PT (0.5) 1yr FTC.	Amplified + Mediated
Gwyneth	Lecturer, Research Student, Health Authority Board Member	University & Health Authority	PT(0.2) 3yr FTC then made PT(0.2)Permanent.	Amplified
Helen	Senior Lecturer	University	PT(0.2) 3yr FTC then	Amplified

			PT(0.9) Permanent	
Ingrid	Research Nurse	Research company sub-contracting for the NHS working in a City Hospital.	PT(0.2) 3yr FTC then PT (0.2) 1yr FTC.	Shielded
John	Mental Health Nurse/Counsellor & Lecturer	NHS(A City Hospital) and a University	PT(0.5) 3yr FTC and PT (0.4) 2 yr FTC throughout	Unmediated
Leon	Clinical Psychologist	NHS(Primary Care Trust)	PT(0.8) 3yr FTC throughout	Amplified
Monica	Partnership Co-ordinator	NHS(City Health Authority)	PT (0.8) 2yr FTC then seconded on same contract terms	Amplified & Mediated
Nicola	Marketing Officer & Residential Social Support Worker	1.)NHS (City Health Authority) & 2.)Homeless Shelter	1.)PT (0.6) 3yr FTC 2.) Zero Hours – moved to new dept in Health Authority on new PT(0.6) 3yr FTC & Quit Shelter work	Shielded
Polly	Social Exclusion Leader	NHS (City Health Authority)	PT (0.8) 1yr FTC was extended by 3 months. Was moved to new position as a result of organisational change and onto a new PT (0.8) 1yr FTC	Shielded
Sarah	PA to a senior Council worker	City County Council	Remained Zero Hours throughout	Amplified
Rosalind	Supply Primary School Teacher	County Council	Zero Hours then 1 yr FTC	Shielded

Amplified

Importantly, it will be demonstrated that when an individual in precarious employment seems to be defining themselves as insecure, the source of the insecurity may not be directly connected to job related factors, such as length of contract or number of hours worked. The job related cues are not made sense of in isolation, in the following cases detrimental cues derived from the individuals social network play an important role in the construction of an insecure identity.

Features of the Amplified Cases

Whilst this study makes no pretence of being a representative sample, there are a few interesting features of the collection of people who have at some stage of the interviewing process fitted the *Amplified* type. By bringing in these features some of the important themes within this type are introduced.

The first obvious feature is the gender divide. There are a number of reasons why this type is populated with relatively high levels of women, this is not to say that men did not conform to this type but that overall it seemed as though the type was primarily a female one. The second interesting feature is that there seems to be an age envelope to this type. This range of ages is connected to the individual having a family of their own, in the cases within this research project this envelope was mid-thirties onwards, though this probably says more about the range of ages in the cases used; it would not be unreasonable to expect that younger individuals with families could also fit into this group. The reason why having a family seems to be a prerequisite in this type will become apparent shortly. The third feature is not really a feature at all, it is an omission of one, the *amplified* type was not specifically restricted to either of the industrial sectors that the project's cases are drawn from; individuals from both the health and education sectors could be connected to some degree with this type.

The following section outlines some of the causes of amplification within a social network.

Features of Amplifying Social Networks

Though the term 'social network' has been used because of the versatility that this lends to the project, this does not in anyway underplay the importance of the 'family'. The family played an important role in many individuals' sensemaking processes, from both a supportive and unsupportive perspective. Children in particular bring a number of decisions for the household to contend with, these decisions can be both on a day to day basis as well as the more strategic type of decisions. For some of the respondents precarious work makes these decisions more problematic and for some their family situation makes them more keenly aware of the negative aspects of the sensemaking cues derived from precarious work.

The choice between childcare and one of the parents staying at home (assuming they are living as a couple) was one decision which had profound ramifications for some workers. On one hand childcare is often expensive and beyond the reach of some individuals, but on the other hand if one of the parents is to provide this care this might mean the family having to rely on one income instead of two. This is not purely a financial decision, but a part of the way in which individuals with children make sense of their own beliefs about their roles as parents.

Alison is 42, at the time of the first interview she worked as a Senior Course Administrator for a University. Alison has a husband who works as an Operations Manager for a power company. They have two children who are both of school age. Alison worked from 11 am till 3pm Monday to Friday; this enabled her to spend time with the children before and after their school day. At the time of the first interview she had been in the same job for five years on consecutive one year fixed term contracts and at the time of the first interview she had just two and half months left and had yet to hear whether the University would be renewing it or not. At the point of the second interview it was apparent that the contract had been renewed but she had been put on a three month contract. She said that this was huge insult having 'slogged her guts out' for five years on year long temporary contracts and as a result by the time of the third interview she had changed job for a permanent contract elsewhere within the same University.

Here Alison discusses the way the household fits around the needs of the children.

HOW DOES YOUR HOUSEHOLD DECIDE WHO DOES WHAT WORK?

Very traditionally I'm afraid.

RIGHT.

In that when we had, well when we had the first child I gave up work and my role has therefore gravitated towards things to do with the family and the home and because I've been there my husband's been able to take a masters degree and do other things, other courses and give more time to his work which has enabled him to develop a good career and gain a senior position and therefore because of that there's

been no reason to change the way things are structured domestically.

Alison feels that because of the way she made sense of the role of being a mother to her children she has been forced into work she doesn't enjoy or find fulfilling. She seems to feel undervalued within the organisation that she works for. She wasn't alone in having to find work that fits with her child caring responsibilities, five other respondents were in a similar situation.

At each step of a child's development there are different 'problems' for the household. Once children get to school age households may deem that they need less attention, but even fitting this amount of time around a job can be very difficult.

It is a real soapbox issue with me that as a graduate and I'm good at what I do I can't get a better job because I want to work part-time. I work term time only at the moment which is perfect with the children but it's a temporary contract and it really annoys me and frustrates me that I can't find better work with more responsibility, for the job to be more interesting, with better pay and still fit in with my family.

Ultimately Alison seemed quite pragmatic about the life choices she had made. She seemed to be suggesting that she could either have had a better career or she could have been a good mother, the two are mutually exclusive and she was happy at the choices she had made. This is her retrospectively making sense of what has happened in her life.

DO YOU REGRET HAVING SO MANY JUMPS IN YOUR CAREER?

Yes I do really although it was the result of having the family and being there and I'm happy that I did what I did and I think that I have better children for it.

It doesn't suit everyone but it suited us and I'm glad I did that so there's that side of it so you can't have – well I don't think you can have everything and I'm not dissatisfied with my choice although it would have been nice, perhaps under different circumstances, to have had a more scintillating career than I have.

This represents an important finding. Alison feels as though she has been forced into work, which seems to have all the characteristics of a secondary labour market(Doeringer, Piore et al. 1985; Purcell, Hogarth et al. 1999), because of the flexibility she feels she needs in order to accommodate her role as a mother.

Alison described herself as being insecure and also very aggrieved at the way in which she had been treated. She said that each time her contract was coming up for renewal she was given unofficial 'signs' that her contract was going to be made permanent. The pursuit of permanence as an escape from the yearly round of increasing insecurity has ruled the last five years of her working life. Her contract was renewed but the length of the contract was reduced to three months something which made Alison determined to leave her position.

Parents may also feel that their children put pressure on the household financially. The two points in children's development which seemed to be a cause of amplification were childcare before they were old enough to go to school and in many cases when they were much older and are going to University. As a University education becomes more and more expensive the more pressure this cue places on a household, if this household is depending upon precarious employment in order to pay (in part or in full) for a child's education then the pressure is amplified.

Monica is 48. Monica worked as a Partnership Co-ordinator at a city Health Authority. She and her husband, who works as a Secondary School Teacher, roughly earned about the same wage so neither has the 'major wage earner role', instead both incomes are as important to the running of the household. They have two children who are 18 and 21. Parts of the health authority were disbanded between the first and second interview. By the time of the second interview Monica had been moved to a primary care trust within the city however she was immediately seconded to a research group in another city. The transfer was immediate and Monica never actually started work for the PCT. Monica's working time was split between tele-working and working at the new offices. The secondment was for a year; ironically the research project was about organisational change. By the third interview Monica was facing moving back to the PCT, she did not know what position they would find for her on her return.

Here Monica talks about the household and the financial pressure the children bring.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY WERE THE MAJOR DRAINS ON THE HOUSEHOLD FINANCES?

The children, education, in that my son has just finished University and obviously we earn too much to you know have any sort of you know grant. They don't get grants any more but we had to pay the full fees. My son was actually in that first cohort of students that had to pay fees and then we've given him his living expenses every month. So that's been quite a huge drain on the finances. And now just as he finishes Sarah will be starting in the autumn. So that's sort of over a period of six years, that's going to be really tough for us in terms of money.

Monica was very concerned for her own job the first time I interviewed her. Fundamental changes were taking place as to the way that the health sector was

being run with control in many city Health Authorities being devolved out to Primary Care Trusts. This organisational change meant that she wasn't sure whether there would be room for her highly specialised role in the hierarchy. Organisational change has been documented as a source of job insecurity (Burchell, Ladipo et al. 2002).

Monica felt most worried because she felt that if she found herself without work it would mean the household would not be able to support the children at University in the way they would want to, her precarious work was not making her feel insecure it was the potential ramifications of this precarious work that was causing the insecurity. Monica was not the only one who was worried about supporting children through University. Three other respondents were in similar positions

The theme of interdependence is central to the 'amplified' social network type. Children, as has been noted, are often very dependent on the social network. Other people besides children can also seem as though they are placing a strain on the social network. Illness is a major theme within this type. When a member of the individual's social network has a serious illness it has been evident that this has a profound effect upon the other members of the network. The importance of this is dependant on different factors such as how close to the person who is ill is the individual in question, how ill they are, and whether the illness means that the person in question has to make substantive changes to their own lives.

The scenario in which illness had the biggest effect was when the interviewee's husband was the person who was ill.

Again Monica was the individual concerned.

He's got a degenerative eye condition so I guess there's the distinct possibility that might get so bad that he wouldn't be able to work because of that.

IF THAT DID HAPPEN HOW WOULD THE
HOUSEHOLD COPE? HOW WOULD YOU ADAPT
DO YOU THINK?

Well it's quite difficult to leave teaching on health grounds now but if it got that bad that he couldn't do his job then he would leave. I mean I don't know I think he'd get some sort of enhanced pension.

In this case the ill person is also an important wage earner. Monica was unclear as to how the onset of the disease would affect the family. As has been mentioned, the household is supporting two children, one who is at University and one who has finished University but is unemployed and living at home. The reason she seems unsure of the implications is probably because they had only recently found out about the condition. There is another possibility though; Monica's sensemaking process may have been unable to process this information through to some sort of conclusion so instead she has decided to deal with it when it happens instead of worrying about it now. Such a decision would be consistent with an individual whose sensemaking process is already struggling under the pressure of other cues. This was the only example of this scenario. More common was when the ill member of the social network is a close family member. Monica was more of an 'insecure worker' than a portfolio/boundaryless worker. She strongly demonstrated attributes associated with this orientation particularly before contract renewals or periods of organisational change. This effect of the orientation becoming clearer towards periods of change was widespread through the cases.

Gwyneth is 42. Gwyneth has many different jobs. Firstly she is a part-time senior lecturer at a University; initially she was on a three year fixed contract replacing somebody who worked full-time in the department who is on Secondment. At the time of the first interview she was into the second year of the three year contract. She supplements this wage with sessional hourly paid work at the same University. She is a city Health Trust board member. She works as a consultant employed by a large organisation for the health authority working on health action zone in community development. Finally, she is also a part-time postgraduate student. Her partner is an accountant for non-profit organisations in the public sector. As a qualified social worker, she used to work in various management positions within non-profit public sector organisations. She then gained a postgraduate qualification in Human Resources which is her current area of expertise and is the field in which she lectures. During the research process her contract was made permanent.

Illness has come to play an important part in Gwyneth's life. Here she talks about the illness in her social network and how it has affected her.

I think I said that my brother hadn't been well. He's now recovering from a major operation.

RIGHT.

But he's doing okay.

GOOD.

So it's kind of – I suppose that kind of family dynamics are changing as well and my Mum is becoming more and more disabled so things are changing in that kind of family sphere. It's just a general aging process I guess.

I MEAN HOW DOES THAT AFFECT YOU?

Less at the moment because we've – this coming, how long is it now? It's about a year. It might be coming up to two years.

RIGHT.

It will be two years I think in December that my Mum and Dad moved into an apartment with extra care facilities, particularly my Mum because Dad's fine but – so that's less if you like of – Because what I was doing was – I mean that was another reason that I went into part time work; partly to do research but also partly so that I could – because they live the other side of Manchester so you know, it's a good two and a half hour drive, and it would mean I could go over fairly regularly to sort of help with that caring situation really. So that's less in a way.

RIGHT.

Because of what's happened. But you know, I still do sort of visit fairly regularly so that has an effect in terms of how I divvy up my time really I suppose. It terms of – with my brother it's just – I mean he's now adjusting to early retirement which he's thoroughly enjoying! Which is nice. So there's no sort of real difference there. What else?

HOW DO YOU THINK HEALTH ISSUES HAVE CHANGED THE WAY YOU LOOK AT WORK? DO YOU THINK THEY'VE HAD AN EFFECT ON LIKE THE WAY YOU LOOK AT WORK, YOUR BROTHER AND YOUR MOTHER?

Yes, I think so, I think so, and I certainly – for my partner John, I think it's changed his approach in a way. I mean I have this little sort of folk tale you know, I guess it is, about men; it's very, very difficult when you come to about age fifty and if you really care, because that's not – most of the men that I know who've been in managerial jobs, between fifty and fifty four if they haven't had their heart attack or their whatever, then you know, the chances are you might die between fifty and fifty four. If you survive that you're all right.

RIGHT.

After fifty to fifty four your all right. So you've got that to look forward to! But it's just that I just know so many people or even know other people whose, you know, husbands or brothers or friends or whatever, have had some kind of major health risk between the ages of fifty and – I mean John's brother in law has started with a brain tumour aged fifty two.

RIGHT.

And he thought he just had stress headaches, so you know. So it got to the point where he was then inoperable.

OH DEAR.

Yes, it was horrible. And he did a lot of care support around that, and I think that probably changed his outlook on life in terms of wanting to look at other options, maybe part time work or other ways of doing things.

Her brother's illness has meant that he has stopped working altogether. Her mother is becoming frailer with age. A social network may not just include your own family, it could also include the family of your partner, and in this case illness has also affected this part of the social network. In all the interviews that were conducted with Gwyneth, she said that these health issues were the reason why she hadn't tried to find a full time job. Firstly she wanted the flexibility that part-time work would offer her to enable her to provide care for her ill family members and secondly the illnesses had made her aware of her own health. She wanted to try to stop herself from taking on too much work and her strategy for doing this seemed to be to limit the number of hours she was contracted to work. The strategy, however, did not prove effective and she seems to have taken other work to fill in the gaps created by the part-time work.

But I think one part of me has always had that, that work life balance kind of approach to life and the other side of me is a workaholic. So it's – although I appreciate it theoretically I find it very, very hard to put it into practice. So although I've opted to – and I still think I'm a part timer if I actually look at what I do, but in terms of paid contract work, free lance work and free work that I do, in terms of volunteering work or managerial work on committees and stuff then it's actually more than a full time job so I'm not very good at – Yes, I do. And I lie to myself a lot, and I think well, you know, I've got all this time. But I do feel tired, you know. It's only when I come to look at it I can see why. But certainly in terms of, I mean suppose partly as well because my career hasn't been within one organisation, it's not been hierarchical, then I've not had a time scale in a sense that you know, by you know, two years or whatever I'll be a senior manager; by three years after that I'll move to something else. I've not had that. It's more about flitting I guess. Now that's probably being unfair,

but it is about personal development; it's more about personal development and things that I want to do.

Gwyneth uses the language associated with a 'portfolio/boundaryless' orientation. She was one of two people who had taken the ideology of the portfolio/boundaryless worker to heart. She has taken deliberate and conscious steps to emulate this orientation as a strategy.

DO YOU THINK ITS LUCK THAT DETERMINES THESE THINGS OR DO YOU THINK IT'S YOUR OWN SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE?

Yes I mean it is. It's the fact that I've done a lot of stuff. You know I don't bother with half the stuff I've done on my CV because it would just be too long, I suppose the thing is I've been into a lot of different places. I've worked across different sectors. So I have built up people, contacts and stuff and I've worked hands on and I've worked strategically. So I suppose if you look at it like that then I've got....

A PORTFOLIO?

Yes, a portfolio, yes. But yes I mean I have and you know the freelance stuff I've done and got the voluntary management and you know the director of a couple of organisations. So it all counts. So yes I guess people think you know I'm worthy of being employed by somebody.

OK

But if they don't want to employ me then I can always do something else.

Yes I suppose so. I suppose, I was talking to somebody who wanted to develop themselves as a portfolio worker and he was put in contact with me. So I guess other people see me as that. But yes he was moving out of a big company, I don't know I think it might have been an oil company but he was doing some freelance work for Rail Track and stuff and you know he wanted to sort of develop that. So he was quite interested to talk to people who were sort of doing that kind of thing.

As well as periodic retraining and new qualifications she has maximised the number of different working options so that if her lecturing contract was not renewed she would have had the hourly paid and consultancy work to fall back on.

Cues from illness can have affects on the individual's sense making process which are difficult to quantify.

Leon is a 43 year old Clinical Psychologist. His wife is self employed working as a technical writer. They have two school age children. Leon originally worked in Information Technology after graduating with a Psychology degree, he gave this up because it wasn't 'fulfilling'. He then took a three year Masters course in Clinical Psychology which allowed him to work for the NHS as a Psychologist. He became qualified in 1995 and has since been working in a Primary Care Trust. Though Leon is on a part-time temporary contract it is clear that this is of his own making and that if he wanted to change the terms of his contract, the weight that he carries as a clinical psychologist would enable him to do so.

Here Leon is talking about the deaths of his parents.

OK HOW DO YOU THINK YOU AS A PERSON
HAVE CHANGED IN THE LAST EIGHT MONTHS?

Not hugely although and I suppose as I said to you at the beginning I mean I think the biggest change personally is in terms of my father dying and my mother died quite a few years ago, fifteen years ago. So it's sort of no longer having either parent around is a big change and it just makes you think differently about things. You suddenly realise you know you are the oldest of that line.

YES

Well I have brothers and sisters but ...

IT MUST MAKE YOU LOOK AT YOUR CHILDREN
DIFFERENTLY AS WELL I GUESS.

Yes. Someone said to me, oh you're an orphan now and I thought oh dear.

The passing of Leon's parents didn't affect Leon's life in a practical sense and yet such an important event in his social network cannot fail to have affected him. The whole basis of this project is that individuals are complicated social entities trying to make sense of their environs and for us to make sense of them enough to talk about their orientations to precarious work requires going beyond labour market indicators. Returning to Leon, his orientation to precarious work was closer to the portfolio/boundaryless type; at no point over the two years did he express any worries about his contract not being renewed. He was certain of his employability and did not worry about his ability to get another job should the need arise.

The most pronounced proponents of the amplified social network were individuals who for one reason or another had previously been members of a

more shielding social network. In some cases the change can be quite violent. The following two cases illustrate how the collapse of a longstanding relationship can have, for the individual, profound implications for their construction of identity including their orientation to precarious work.

At the time that Francine was first interviewed she worked as managing editor/editorial assistant on two journals. The two journals were entirely separate, one was employment based and the other was medical, they were also based at different universities within the same city. She was employed on two fixed term contracts, one a year long and the other three years in duration. Francine is 50. She has four daughters, the eldest is a teacher and is self supporting, the next is a student at University, and the next two daughters are both at college. All four of the daughters are musicians and the youngest daughter is aiming to become a professional musician which all places great financial demands on the household. Her husband works as a medical research scientist and is on a longstanding permanent contract. Over the research interval Francine went through a period of turmoil. She was going through a protracted divorce, and at the time of the first interview was still living with her estranged husband. The employment research based journal was then moved to a different University when the current editor retired.

When Francine was first interviewed, she was nearing the end of her contract for one of the journals. The journal in question was being moved to another academic institution and she wasn't sure whether she would be able to remain editor. She thought that the new institution would want to appoint their own editor and even if she was given another contract she was unsure how she would manage the commuting as the new institution was not close to either where she lives or where she works on the other editing contract. These were the cues that were being derived from her working situation. On their own these cues may have caused an individual to feel insecure. Francine was also dealing with cues from her home life.

Yes about, the beginning of the summer last year because of, I mean this is quite a private thing, a change in family circumstances in which it became clear that financial independence was suddenly something I had to acquire for myself and independence in much more significant ways. I live with my husband but we're not living as married, a married couple, so I live in my own right in that house. Now that was a bolt from the blue having just decided on a part-time fixed term contract which would allow me to build up a freelance business. To suddenly find I had to be financially completely independent. Which is why I had to pull my socks up and get another job. So the cold wind of change and the idea of part-time fixed term suddenly lost its glamour but my sense of humour has returned.

That Francine cites her relationship breakdown as being the reason she sought her second job underlines the importance of this event in her life. Francine was one of only a few of the interviewees who professed to actually being insecure about her work. Individuals are not constrained to one social network type, as their social world changes they may come to fit a different type better. This was the case with Francine; she will be encountered again in the following *mediated* social network section.

The retraction of a shielding network is an issue on which gender has implications. For example, in a number of the cases the female partner gives up work to give birth to a child, they then spend time off work to care for that child while their male partner continues to go to work. Presumably the male partner is developing his skills and progressing along in his chosen career, he may also be building up a pension. The female partner is thus more and more dependant on the male partner. If the relationship does breakdown it leaves the women in a more precarious position financially and employment wise.

As was mentioned in the earlier section about research methods, an important benefit of this form of research is that as well as the period actually being covered by the interview, the past can also be brought into the frame.

Sarah worked primarily for the county council. Her work was extremely temporary; often only a couple of days at a time. She is a zero hours worker registered with a council agency, supposedly when there is work available she may be contacted by the agency to see whether she wants to work. In practice she gets most of her work by word of mouth but then has to ring the agency to inform them that she has filled a vacancy. She is 58 and has two children but they are both adults and do not reside with her. She is separated from her husband who currently lives in Estonia.

Sarah sees the breakdown of her marriage as being something of a watershed in her own life. When Sarah's husband's business went under it had a big effect on their relationship. Sarah recounts her memories of the way that business's decline caused the relationship to rapidly deteriorate:

It's lovely, it affected him, not me because he didn't tell me. That was the problem. He just got terribly moody and drank a lot and got nasty and abusive. I didn't know why. I mean I should have put two and two together really. But he would never talk about it. Yes looking back it was very obvious that was why he changed, because he did change very dramatically. But you know really stupid because if we'd sat down and talked it out we could have got over that because actually I was earning quite good money at the contract works. And with my private income as well, it was enough for us to live on because the children had left home by that time. But he'd borrowed money you see that he hadn't told me about and he had all these debts. And that was why he was drowning I suppose,

and just didn't want to tell me, like a lot of these macho men.

They just don't believe in partnership.

His working life spilled over into their relationship resulting in violence towards her and ultimately the breakdown of the relationship. Aside from the end of the relationship there were other long lasting ramifications. He had borrowed money against their house to try to keep the business afloat which meant that when the business went bankrupt she also lost both her home and all the money she had tied up in it. This event cascaded into her working life too.

My husband went bust, his company went through liquidation, he hit the bottle and there was all kinds of stuff going on around that. So I moved out and then on the rebound I had an affair with someone that worked in the company; that worked at contract works, and that went very badly wrong. So that was why I tried to have a year's placement at the Council House which I did. And when I came back after the year and things had changed so hugely basically they didn't want me back.

REALLY WHY WAS THAT?

Well the girl that had taken over from me, I mean she'd wanted my job anyway. I just made it easy for her basically but getting myself in a mess. And when I came back, well she just made life as difficult as she possibly could.

RIGHT

I think she was also saying to the Director stuff, things that I had done wrong. I think she was just putting the boot in. And I had an interview with him and I didn't think, well I didn't think it was going to be a formal interview actually because we all have performance...

YES

And that's what it turned out to be although it was not signalled as one. And I'd never had one all the time I'd worked for him. He'd just never bothered to give me one. And because I'd been through all of this and I was pretty wobbly I walked out. Very stupid, I should have gone off on stress like everybody else because it was stress basically.

YES

And so I went to the solicitor and he said I probably could do something about it. But what you should have done was give him a chance to correct the situation, given him the chance to change it in some way saying things were wrong. But I don't know I'd just had enough by then.

RIGHT

I just hated everybody.

It is possible that Sarah would have had the affair anyway but what's important is the way that she has made sense of these events. Sarah says that these events were all part of a chain reaction starting with the breakdown of her relationship and resulting in her being unemployed, homeless, poor and alone. Sarah still lives alone, her working life causes her a lot of distress, she describes it as a continual fight just to find work. She has only recently been able to get back onto

the property ladder. Sarah is still married to her husband, he now lives in Estonia where he has started another business, he refuses to sign any correspondence connected with a divorce.

Sarah seemed to be the most insecure worker of all the cases. She had by far the most precarious of employment contracts, she didn't know where she would be working from one week to the next or if indeed she would have work. She was also the oldest worker of all the cases and her age was a big issue for her.

THINKING BACK TO YOUR OWN CAREER, WHEN DO YOU THINK YOU WERE MOST INSECURE?

Oh now definitely.

I think you feel more insecure as you get older. I think its pig Ignorance when you are young. I look back and I think god I was on my own with two children, swarming around doing this that and the other, how ever did I do it? I've no idea. I haven't a clue but we got through it somehow but how we did I've no idea. So it's really scary stuff when I think about that. But yes old age looming that's very frightening...You're frightened about ill health, you're frightened about not performing, you're frightened about young people zipping into your position.

Conclusion

The relationship between the amplified social network type and the insecure orientation was never going to be a directly causal one. However, in the cases where the individual did seem to have an orientation to work which seemed to contain a large element of insecurity, there was always an amplifying social network present. This suggests that social networks do have an important part in

determining whether individuals in precarious employment describe themselves as being insecure. In terms of the Amplified type, there are compelling accounts which link amplifying social networks with the phenomenon of job insecurity.

Gwyneth and Leon demonstrated that despite having an amplified social network and being in precarious employment it was still possible to construct a portfolio/boundaryless orientation to precarious work. This highlights that even taking into consideration the combination of work and social cues does not provide us with an infallibly complete picture. Other cues must also be at work.

Shielded

Features of the Shielded Cases

The following section outlines the basic demography of the individuals who were members of this type. Firstly, a wide range of ages were represented here from early twenties to post retirement. At the younger end of the scale there were individuals whose parents played the most important role in the shielding network. From late twenties onwards the emphasis usually shifts from the individual's parents to a partner. Secondly, both male and female individuals were represented in this type, roughly representing the gender breakdown of the total cases. Thirdly, and as with the cases in the amplified category, there was no sectoral bias one way or another; both the health and education sectors were represented.

Features of Shielded Social Networks

As this thesis has argued, people are social entities and do not try to make sense of their world inside a social vacuum. When there was a shielding social network present these detrimental cues were lessened or in some cases made completely irrelevant. The most common feature of a shielding network was a second income for the household. If the household does not rely totally, or at all, on the income produced by the precarious work it becomes less financially damaging if there is a period of unemployment. In most of the cases where there were two incomes coming into the household the precarious work income held a support role to a better paid full-time permanent work income.

Ingrid works as a research nurse for an organisation which does contract research for the NHS. She works in a hospital alongside other NHS staff. Ingrid's husband works as a Doctor in Sheffield. He is in the process of getting his own consultancy, which would mean much more money for the household. At the first interview they had one son of nursery age but by the time of the third interview they had had a new baby girl. Ingrid is 38. She works two days a week; Mondays and Fridays. At the first interview the research contract had been running for a year and had another year to run. During the research process her first research contract finished and she was offered another. The contracts ran concurrently. She was told early on that her work had been good on the first project and that the management would want to keep her at any cost. As a result, at the point of the third interview when she had her new baby, she was preparing to start work from home; this arrangement was set up to allow her to continue to work on the project.

Here Ingrid talks about the importance of her wage to the household finances:

I mean any money that I earn we are putting it for things in the house. So things like, we've bought new bookcases. We spend most of it every month but just on things that we wouldn't, if we didn't have the money you couldn't buy you know. We're getting a new washing machine and we're going to get a new vacuum cleaner. We're going to do this and then if I'm not working, if another baby comes along and I'm not working for any length of time well we've got these things anyway. So really it helps a bit but it is not essential when you think some people are reliant upon both people working.

We're not.

YES OK

So I think that sort of makes you feel a bit more secure in that you know it doesn't really matter.

Though Ingrid is on a precarious research contract which may or may not be renewed she is shielded from the cues associated with work because financially she doesn't have to work for the household to be financially secure. Ingrid is a fully qualified nurse. She moved from ward based nursing to research after having her first child because nursing hours weren't compatible with her family responsibilities.

The most striking feature about Ingrid's working life is the way in which her and her husband Tim have strategically planned their working lives out in order to support each other.

DO YOU THINK THAT YOU'VE HAD SOME SORT OF PLAN IN MIND FOR THE WAY THAT YOU AND YOUR HUSBAND'S CAREER AND FAMILY LIFE HAVE KIND OF GELLED TOGETHER AND PROGRESSED?

Yes. Yes we discussed it all before the move and before we had children. And yes I think we recognised that, a bit like you said earlier, that it's sort of a bit give and take really and sometimes the ownership is on one person a bit more than the other depending on what's going on in each others lives.

YES I MEAN DO YOU FEEL WHEN TIM SUCCEEDS DO YOU FEEL AS THOUGH PART OF THAT SUCCESS IS YOU KNOW IS SUCCESS FOR THE HOUSEHOLD, DO YOU FEEL PART OF ...

Oh yes Yes I mean without, I mean yes he'd have done it if he'd been on his own but then he wouldn't

have had a wife and some kids. So without us he wouldn't have done what he's done.

So we'd like to take some ownership of that too.

When Tim was training to become a doctor he earned relatively little, at this point in time Ingrid was a ward nurse highly placed on the seniority scale and at the time she was earning much more so she was able to support Tim through the lengthy qualifying process. Once Tim had become a Doctor, Ingrid was able to leave work to have their first child. The household also strategically planned the birth of their second child to coincide with the interval between Ingrid's research projects and the end of a series of exams Tim was taking to become a consultant. Ingrid's working life starkly underlines the way in which individuals' working lives and their social lives can be intricately interwoven.

In terms of orientation, Ingrid showed much greater alignment to the portfolio/boundaryless worker. At no point over the three interviews had she described herself as insecure. She also showed some of the key traits associated with this orientation to precarious work; she had returned to education to get a nursing degree before they were made compulsory in nursing thus giving her a great advantage in applying for work. Returning to the dual income feature of the shielding type, Ingrid was not alone in being supported by a partner with a high income.

Polly works for a city wide Health Authority as a Social Exclusion Officer. Formerly an Occupational Therapist, Polly returned to education and studied for a Masters in Healthcare Management. She has two children aged 4 and 6. Her partner works as a Mechanical Engineer. She suffered from stress related breakdown which was the impetus for her to switch from full-time to part-time work. She was on a three year contract when she was first interviewed.

Here Polly talks about the freedom to choose how she works which she links to the income provided by her husband. She also talks about the decisions about

childcare that she would have to make if that financial support wasn't available. These decisions about childcare figured as one of the features of the Amplified type.

Yes so career is quite important because I'm in a lucky position where you know at the moment the income isn't so vital. I mean just in terms of going from sort of full-time work to part-time work I think I mean in general talking about women that I know I think it's very, very difficult for women to you know be able to even do part-time work. A, because of you know childcare costs and b, they might not have such a supporting husband and somebody with an income. So I mean I'm in quite a privileged position and a lot of women haven't got that option really to do what they want to do really and I'm quite privileged in that sense because I'm doing what I enjoy doing. A lot of women who could do part-time haven't got that option. It's either or for them, either they stay at home and look after the children or they go for something full-time which means you know ok more money but they may not be as happy doing that job.

The plethora of formal qualifications and memberships of professional bodies again strongly suggests that Polly has an orientation that is closer to the portfolio worker than to the insecure worker. Again this was compounded by the fact that at no stage during the interview process did she describe herself as insecure.

Financial support may not necessarily have to take the form of a second income.

Brian is 60 years old. He works as a senior research fellow at a University. He has four children who no longer live at home and all have their own separate lives. He is married. His wife does not have a job and has never worked in the labour market. He is contracted to work a fifth of full time though he says that this always seems to add up to 30 hours. He has a degree and a doctorate from Oxford University and until very recently worked at another University in the same city as a head of department and a Professor but because of a disagreement with the University left, taking a large pay cut to resume his research at this other University.

Due to a stipulation in his contract with the University that he retired from, he is unable to work as a Professor at another University. He is now classed as a research fellow, and while it allows him to carry on his research, he gets paid much less. However Brian's wife has just inherited property in Oxford. The property is worth a substantial amount and as they already own outright their own house in the city that they live in now, financially they are secure for the foreseeable future. This is probably not a common occurrence and yet the effect it has on Brian and his wife's lives is considerable. Brian had been offered an unpaid position at Oxford University to carry on his research with full use of the University's facilities. He would have been unable to take up this position because of his financial position but this event has made such a move possible. Brian's wife had supported him with this financial windfall. This financial support provided him with more alternatives in his working life.

To suggest that a shielding social network is based purely on financial features would be to ignore another potentially important feature; emotional support. Splitting the support provided by a shielding network into financial and emotional was an arbitrary decision based on the most coherent method of presenting the findings of the research which were relevant to this type. In practice the distinction between financial and emotional support is much more permeable. The act of providing financial support is likely to be accompanied by

some degree of emotional support as well. To an extent this was demonstrated by both Polly and Ingrid's social networks; they were both in relationships where support seemed very important, though the focus has been on the cues derived from the social network for the individual, in the case of the shielding social networks, and in particular, Polly and Ingrid, support went both ways; they provided support for their partners.

Rosalind is a 25 year old Primary School Teacher. At the time of the first interview she was working as a supply teacher. Usually she would work for a week at a time. She has a contract with an agency but she isn't guaranteed any work. Rosalind has just left a 5 year relationship with her partner whom she jointly owned a house. Since then she has moved back into her parent's house. At the time of the second and third interviews Rosalind had a permanent contract, she had also moved out of her parent's house and had started to rent her own accommodation.

The end of her relationship has meant that her former partner had to buy her out of the house in which they were living. This left her without anywhere to live and waiting for her money, which had to go through a lengthy legal process involving solicitors. They also had to try to divide all the possessions which they had, together, accrued over the course of their relationship. Rosalind decided that she wanted to leave the area. Primary school teaching jobs tend to come up at Easter. As she had missed this point she couldn't find a permanent contract and was forced into supply work.

For the first time in a long, long time I've had to be financially independent and although at the moment its fine because I'm at my parents, so if all else fails I've still got a roof over my head, but you know that situation is not going to last forever and I will have to start being a bit more proactive with my finances, sort them out a bit better but I'm just waiting for this big

chunk of money to come through because I'm hoping that will just set me straight again.

The end of the relationship had ramifications for her working life, as she felt forced into precarious work. Her parents had provided somewhere where she can get back on her feet so she can decide what she was going to do next. She described it as though it was some sort of safety net and no matter what happened there would always be a place for her at home with her parents. Had there not been that shielding network, she would have been in the position where she had no home and no money – even with supply work, teachers get paid two months in lieu so she would have had no money for a deposit on rented accommodation. She would have found herself in precarious employment at the time when she needed financial stability the most. By the time that Rosalind was first interviewed it was clear that she was just getting back on to her feet and though she had been through a period of considerable upheaval she felt that she had turned a corner and was looking forward to the next period of her life; she did not describe herself in terms of being insecure.

Another way that families provide support was mentioned by a couple of the individuals is with childcare. Childcare was an issue which was often raised and featured in the earlier section on amplifying social networks. Families can often provide important caring outlets. Grandparents were a group which were identified as being important providers of childcare if for example the parent or parents were unable to move work commitments. Ingrid said that the distance between the two sets of grandparents was an important factor when she and her husband were deciding on where to settle and start a family.

People outside the family can also provide valuable support to precariously employed individuals. As has been mentioned the reason why the more generic term 'social network' has been used instead of family is because it is more versatile, and allows for more permutations of the sources of support, or indeed strain.

David, at the time of the first interview was a part-time lecturer at a University. He was also undertaking a PhD. He was timetabled on for around 15hrs of contact with the student body a week. He, like many part-time lecturers, did not get paid for the time it took to prepare the lectures. David was 33 and had no family of his own. David became very disillusioned with academic work. While he was working for the University his relationship with his superiors was causing him distress, he felt that as an environment it was characterised by self-interest and that his superiors weren't particularly interested in his development. David seemed to become obsessed with formal qualifications as a way of dealing with his own insecurities. To a large extent, at this point David was socially isolated. David will be encountered again in the following section about unmediating social networks. Though David is no longer a part-time temporary worker, his account remains important; that David has moved out of precarious work is an important research finding. What were the factors in his leaving part-time temporary work? Are there any signs that precarious work has changed the way that he approaches work (-work orientation)?

David left the University to become a secondary school teacher. He moved a considerable distance across the country to begin his training. He did not have friends or family in this new city; effectively he was starting again.

Oh, it's something that's very important to me and you know, I have a close friend here that I think we've been almost like companions during the course, a girl here. And throughout the course we've shared the various problems and that, and we kind of live like boyfriend and girlfriend, and have done for the year, but there's nothing sexual between us. And that's been quite good and quite – I suppose it's going to be quite nice to have female company like that. And I think she's enjoyed having just a friend if you like.

RIGHT.

So we've lived for the year almost like a couple, apart from the sexual side of things. And that kind of – it sort of works as a daily reminder that that is something that I want, you know, in my life. But because I'm here for ten months, then I'm moving on to wherever the job would be, I only just know where it is in the last month. You can't make those sort of connections.

David's description of his relationship with his friend seems very transactional. As he doesn't have time for a relationship with a potential partner this is the next best thing. This would be consistent with his orientation to work. Like Gwyneth, who was encountered in the previous section on Amplified social networks, David had made a conscious and deliberate attempt to become a Portfolio/boundaryless worker. This was underlined by the fact that he had read the work of Charles Handy and professed to have taken much of it to heart.

I read some stuff by Charles Handy which talked about ...

PORTFOLIO WORKING

Exactly yes and I really agree with that. There's no such thing as a job for life etc and I don't think anyone should want a job for life. I can think of nothing more boring. Certainly not particularly challenging. I think I like the idea that a person would have lots of strings to their bow and be as resourceful as they could with their experience and their qualifications so that they could dip in and out of things as and when they needed. And have several occupations or strings of income and have some variance to their working lives, something interesting. I like that idea and so I think

that's, although it seems to contradict the idea of the insecurity I don't think it does because it does represent security. Surely to draw your income from several different avenues then you are far more secure than somebody who has got all their eggs in one basket and then finds that a change in industry or whatever makes them redundant literally... you have to try and offset the way things are going by making sure your skills and experience and qualifications are able to meet the changing nature of work, the world of work. You never going to get that a hundred percent right but at least you feel that having your awareness guards you against some of the worst changes that might come along.

DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF TO BE A PORTFOLIO WORKER? DO YOU THINK YOU FIT HANDY'S DESCRIPTION OR PREDICTION?

...I always have worst case scenario, worst case scenario for me would mean that I would be back to driving a truck because I've got a truck driving licence. To me that represents a little piece of security because I can always do that. I can teach guitar. If I needed money tomorrow and I had no other way of getting it I could teach guitar and bring in some money that way. And these are avenues I never expect to have to use again because I'm trying to build up more professional ones but you are aware of them and you don't stop looking for others.

DO YOU THINK THIS KIND ASPIRATION TOWARDS A PORTFOLIO OF DIFFERENT SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS HAS COME AS SOME SORT OF REACTION TO AN EXPERIENCE IN YOUR PAST WORKING LIFE?

No I just think its leaving school two years into the, Thatcher's first term and seeing a great, living in the north-west Merseyside area, seeing a lot of recession and a lot of unemployment guards you a little. And you are trying to make sure that's sort of, the desperation you saw at that time doesn't actually ever come to your own door. I think its about, it gives you an awareness that employment is fickle and people get four weeks notice and they are out of a job. And so that recession and living through that I think really guarded me against the future and made me realise that it was important to have something to call yourself, something that was needed. It was also important to keep your skills up to date and to try and have a diverse way of, diverse income streams and getting that truck driving licence was the first step I suppose. That was the first time that I had something to call myself. You can't call yourself a musician and go and look for a job. It doesn't work that way. You generate that work yourself.

YES

So I just, its probably just part of an awareness born of that whole recession, that whole early eighties desperation that existed in the north-west and gave rise to that you know. I saw Boys from the Blackstuff a few months ago, well about a year ago now and it just reminded me of what a desperate time that was. People forget so quickly.

In the second and third interviews David did not describe himself as insecure. He stated that his security came from his education and he was confident that this

would ensure that he avoided the negative features associated with precarious work such as unemployment. There seem to be two possible reasons why David's social network did not seem to play an important part in his sensemaking process. Firstly, the situation is as it appears, in David's sensemaking process, cues derived from his social network are not considered as important as cues derived from a need to be as employable as possible. This seems feasible. David is a recent divorcee and the breakdown of his marriage may have affected the way in which he relies on other people. The second possibility is that he simply fails to realise the importance of his social network on his life. After all when he had an unmediating social network he described himself as being insecure but when he had a more shielding network he described himself as being secure. This would follow if social networks were the most important factor in the sensemaking process of a precariously employed individual.

Phrases like 'work/life balance' give the impression that individuals have two entirely separate spheres in their lives, their work sphere where any relationships are entirely work based and their social sphere where they interact solely with friends and family. Setting such a definite barrier between the two is common (McRae 1989; Baldry, Bunzel et al. 2000; Hogarth, Hasluck et al. 2000; Hogarth, Hasluck et al. 2001) and while its use in analysis can be understood, sometimes the distinction is too simplistic. Colleagues at work can also be part of an individual's social network.

Again we return to Ingrid. Ingrid was concerned as to how her job and role would be affected by the birth of her second child. While Ingrid and Tim had tried to time the pregnancy with an interval between the research projects it proved impossible for Ingrid to return to work for the start of the project. Ingrid enjoyed a strong supportive relationship with her supervisor Professor Smith. In the past he had helped Ingrid get published in medical journals. As a result of this relationship Professor Smith made changes to the research process so that she would still be able to continue working, despite the fact that she had just given birth.

SO WHEN YOU GO BACK IT WILL THE NEW PROJECT BE STARTED?

Yes, yes. Someone's already collecting the data and my job initially will be to input all that data in to a computer.

RIGHT.

So the Prof is going to set something up over the Internet so I can do that from home. With only working eighteen hours a week I can fit that in two hours a day or something.

THAT WILL BE USEFUL WON'T IT, YES?

Yes I'm hoping so. Just until Eleanor is old enough to go to nursery. I don't want her to go until she's had all her jabs.

RIGHT.

Equally with it being research work he doesn't want the research to stop for a year so I'm going to put all the data in and probably by about Christmas time then actually go in to work.

Ingrid proved to be a particularly good example of an individual with a shielding social network. Her social network contained all the identified elements of a shielding social network, her husband was very supportive, her family offered their support in terms of childcare, she had a network of friends of mums of other children William's age who also could provide childcare in an emergency and she also had a superior who was very supportive and accommodating.

Conclusion

With the *Amplified* Social Network, where the individuals had mostly orientations which were close to the 'insecure worker' type, there were two exceptions where, despite having amplifying social networks, individuals maintained an orientation which was closer to the portfolio/boundaryless worker. The individuals with *Shielding* Social Networks proved to have orientations which were strongly aligned with the portfolio/boundaryless worker with no exceptions. This goes some way in explaining how some people whose work seems to be extremely precarious still do not describe themselves as insecure.

Mediated

The first case in which an individual had a mediating social network was Francine. During the first interview Francine's situation placed her in the Amplified social network type; her marriage was ending and she was having to support three children through an expensive education. By the third interview her circumstances had changed. The employment journal that Francine worked on had moved to another University and Francine had continued to work on the journal as managing editor. Unfortunately, Francine and the new editor did not enjoy a very good working relationship. The following quotation from Francine demonstrates how Stephen, the former editor and owner of the journal is providing her with support.

HOW HAVE YOU FOUND YOUR NEW CIRCUMSTANCES IN THAT RESPECT AND -?

Well, I do have difficulties with the new editor which I've coped with but Stephen is still on the scene as consulting founding editor. So maybe for a couple of days he will also be in the office. And Stephen is also still sharing the ownership of the journal with the publisher who still has a significant financial interest. And I haven't complained to him but he has picked up on things.

RIGHT, OKAY. IF IT'S NOT TOO PERSONAL, IN WHAT WAY ARE THINGS BAD THEN? I MEAN -

Well, without mentioning the name of the person concerned, I don't think the new editor appreciates

what it takes to edit... he let me down a number of times, you know; oh, I forgot to put you in my diary or whatever, so I'm – "okay". And it came to a head the week before last because he said well, I need to see you and I said yes, I need to see you. So he said the only time I've got is nine o'clock on Wednesday morning. Fine, I said. That's great. I got out of bed at five o'clock because I was at my home in another city; I'd been working there. I got up and drove all the way down, got into my office at eight thirty, put the papers together, the secretary came in; oh, he can't come in. He's taking his partner to the airport.

RIGHT.

Now that I think is a fairly intolerable state of affairs. And I think – and then he did actually turn up later in the day and he said when are you here this week? And I said, I'm here today, that's the whole of Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. I need to see you at some point. I hadn't seen him by Friday and I discovered he'd gone off to Spain on holiday and hadn't told me. So basically there is a huge problem with communication. There is a huge problem in that I don't think he knows what goes into the process of getting the journal out and the volume of work and the deadlines, and so I think really he just needs a gentle introduction to what it means and has to make the decision as to whether or not he can do it.

RIGHT.

Or whether he wants to do it, because of the commitment and workload.

I GUESS YOU MUST BE VERY GRATEFUL YOU'VE STILL GOT THOSE LINKS WITH STEPHEN THEN?

Oh yes, yes. I mean if he had done what I think he originally considered, which was to sell the journal – it would be hopeless because I would have no recourse...And Stephen and I must have put in a hundred hours between us in the last two weeks, trying to get this journal out. And this guy has not been seen for dust. So if Stephen hadn't have been there I think I'd have found things pretty awful actually. But he is there and he is sorting it and I'm very grateful for that. And it's not sorting things that I need to sort directly; and I say to him no, it's my responsibility to sort out the problems of his lack of communication. But Stephen as consulting and founding editor obviously needs to say to him I don't think you're – you're doing this as I would have wanted it. Because essentially he has the say together with the publisher as to who the editor should be.

RIGHT.

And if he doesn't make the right choice there's a problem.

IS IT A PERSONALITY CLASH DO YOU THINK?

I think that the person concerned feels that he has the right of veto in any decision making and the board of the journal has never operated in that way. There's always been full consultation between the editors. And then obviously Stephen as owner in liaison with the publisher would have had the final say, but in

actual fact there was never any conflict as far as I can recall.

YES.

But this man does not believe in consultation and that is what upsets Stephen particularly as owner - not to be consulted. He was also very angry because for the first five months of my employment there I did not get a single pay cheque.

RIGHT.

And he had to pay me out of whatever account he keeps the profits – From the ***** journal, a notional sum just to keep me ticking over.

RIGHT.

In the end I thought we were – it was towards the end of May, I thought we were coming close to a settlement on the contract. And it was quite clear to me at this point that what the new editor was doing was trying to get me onto the fixed term three year contract which I wouldn't have been prepared to accept. And Stephen, I told this; I told Stephen what had happened, I said I'm nowhere nearer getting a contract sorted out. They came up with a new reason why it was all going to be held up. I forget what they called it but it was some sort of transferring of the journal meant something in law... Stephen went down to personnel and raised hell, and within five hours I had a contract... But if he hadn't have done that I still would not have been being paid, which is amazing. So I worked for five months with no pay. So you can see that things haven't been all sweetness and light,

and if Stephen hadn't have been there I'd have been in real trouble.

YES.

In fact I would have had to leave I think probably, because I mean who would have given me the money after five months!

YES.

So there we are.

OKAY. I GUESS, I MEAN LIKE YOU SAY STEPHEN'S KIND OF WORKING THINGS KIND OF GENTLY TO TRY AND IMPROVE THINGS FOR YOU.

Yes.

HOW DO YOU THINK THAT WILL GO? WHAT DO YOU THINK WILL HAPPEN?

I think that the new guy will – I think he'll be furious.

RIGHT.

And there's a letter waiting for him because once again, he said he would be in on Friday and he wasn't. So a letter was left for him together with a huge pile of backlog work and things I can't action because he's never around to clear the backlog.

And I think he'll take it very badly and I think – I'm not going in until Wednesday afternoon and I think it would give him adequate time to reflect, and I've said

to Stephen I would really rather he were also there on Wednesday afternoon because I think things could become quite difficult. I'm not terribly worried about it; I think what will happen is either the guy is going to have to change which may just be temporary, but – or he will decide to resign, in which case the journal will move on.

This long quotation was included because of the way it demonstrates the features of Francine's social network and the way in which these features were interacting at the time. It also epitomises the qualities of this type of approach to the subject of job insecurity by highlighting how complex an individual's social context can be. Her relationship with the new editor was amplifying the cues derived from her employment contract (or lack of). Francine had worked with Stephen for two years prior to Francine moving to the new University. Stephen had been very supportive of Francine throughout the divorce. He had also offered Francine career advice; encouraging her to apply for other jobs and looking over her job applications. It is clear that Francine felt that Stephen would shield her from some of the pressures that she felt the new editor was placing on her. It was clear that she thought that if Stephen's support had not been provided she would have had to resign her position because she didn't think that she could cope with the situation on her own.

Francine's orientation to work seemed much more positive in the third interview than it had previously. Many of the amplifying features of her social network had been resolved. Her divorce had been completed which in turn released capital, allowing her to buy a flat closer to the new job. At the first and second interview Francine expressed herself in a way which suggested that she was feeling very isolated. Francine who was 55 at the time, felt that after being married for 25 years she would have to get used to life on her own. Her self confidence was very low. She was also feeling isolated at work, citing the fact that there was no sense of social community at one of the universities she was working at. She left this University when the employment journal moved and aside from the

problems with the new editor she said that she was much happier. At the time of the third interview, Francine had recently started a new 'romantic' relationship. While she remained defiantly independent from her new partner, particularly financially, the change in her was palpable. Much of the cynicism and fatalism about life and relationships was no longer there. In terms of the orientation to precarious work; she was still close to the 'insecure worker' type. She was still concerned about the renewal of her contracts. Assuming the relationship continues to develop it would be reasonable to predict that she would feel more and more shielded from the cues derived from precarious work.

The second case that fits the mediated social network type is also an individual who has been encountered in a previous section.

Monica had an orientation which was closest to the 'insecure' worker at the time of the first and second interviews. Her job had been subject to dramatic organisational change; she was partly responsible for financially supporting two children at University and her husband had just been diagnosed with a degenerative eye condition. By the time of the third interview Monica's life had changed quite dramatically. The two children had reached the point where they had become self sufficient. Financially this took a lot of pressure off the household. Monica's husband (Trevor) was a secondary school teacher during the course of the research. During the period between the first and second interviews (10 months), he was involved in legal proceedings that he had brought against his Local Education Authority (LEA). Trevor had been Acting Deputy Head in the school where he was already working as a teacher. The LEA refused to pay him anything other than his normal teacher's wage. This culminated in an industrial tribunal, which took place just prior to the third interview with Monica. Trevor's case was successful and the LEA agreed to pay him the increased wage as well as backdating this wage increase to the time when he had taken on this extra responsibility. This ruling had a profound effect upon the finances of the household; they received a large one off payment and were to receive a greatly increased income.

I mean my husband last time I think I told you was – had been promoted at work but was in dispute with his employer over whether they should pay him. I'm pleased to say that has been resolved in his favour. He had a lot of help from the union.

RIGHT.

I don't know, over a legal point or something, that they had offered him this salary and entered into a verbal agreement and they should consider it binding. So they've agreed to pay him. I mean they haven't actually paid him yet so he's got about ten months back pay eventually coming to him. But they have said they'll do it so.

RIGHT.

That's great.

SO HAS THAT BEEN A GREAT RELIEF THEN? FOR BOTH OF YOU?

I think for him, I mean I'm pleased because obviously there's going to be some extra money. I think he was actually less concerned about the money, it was much more the point of principle for him. He felt very strongly that it was wrong for them to try and get him to do this job without being paid for it.

RIGHT.

But I don't think he's so worried about the money. But it was good that it was resolved because it was making him feel quite negative about doing the job I think.

RIGHT.

I mean he was even thinking of going back to the head teacher and saying that I don't want this job.

RIGHT.

So that's made him feel better about it.

Financially Monica's household was dramatically better off at the point of the third interview than it was at earlier interview points. These features constitute the shielding elements of the mediating social network.

In the period between the second and third interview, Trevor's sight had deteriorated to the point where they had begun to seriously consider alternative sources of income to replace his salary. At the time of the third interview, Monica and her husband had decided that they would use their savings to buy property in the South West of England to rent out as holiday accommodation. Monica had serious reservations about the venture, in particular she was concerned that the housing market could collapse after they had made their investment.

IS THAT SOMETHING THAT'S GOING TO PROVIDE MORE SECURITY OR DO YOU THINK IT'S GOING TO BE A SOURCE OF WORRY OR IS IT TOO EARLY TO TELL?

Well, it's already a source of some anxiety because it's always a risk, I mean you know, there's always something in the news about property prices going up being unsustainable and that there may be a drop in

the value of houses, and mortgage rates going up. The buy to let market collapsing and all that kind of stuff, so.

LET'S HOPE THAT'S A LONG TIME OFF.

Yes, I know, that's right! It's in an area of the country that's very sought after for holidays so I think it will be all right. But it is a source of a little bit of anxiety another reason why we've done it is that we want to retire to that part of the country, and so it's really an investment.

However Monica saw no other viable alternative to maintaining their standard of living. Trevor's eye condition was a powerful amplifying feature of Monica's social network. It places much pressure on her to provide a regular and stable income despite being in precarious work. Monica also feels that it had pressured them into a precarious situation that they would not have chosen to place themselves in otherwise. Monica was still closer in orientation to the 'insecure' worker than to the portfolio/boundaryless worker. If anything she had become more concerned about the precariousness of her contract, probably because she felt as though circumstances were going to dictate that her income would become crucial to the household's financial solvency. The end of her secondment was also approaching and although her contract still had over a year to run she was unsure as to what she would be returning to due to all the organisational change that had taken place in her absence.

Conclusion

This social network type proved to be a useful tool when individuals whose social network had important elements of both an amplifying and shielding nature. The two individuals that did conform to this type, both had orientations to precarious work that were closer to the 'insecure' worker than the 'portfolio/boundaryless' worker. This is more likely as a result of their individual circumstances. This social network type is more complicated than the other three (Amplified, Shielded and Unmediated), it allows for a wider range of possibilities which is why there is probably no direct relationship between this type and either of the orientations to precarious work.

Unmediated

In the three cases that supported this social network type, the individuals were men, two of whom were in their early thirties, and one in his early forties. All the individuals had more than one job or role, so though the point of contact was their part-time temporary status, in terms of the hours they actually worked they were more like full-time workers. These men were very career driven; whether this aspect had put the importance of a social network on the back burner or whether their lack of a social network forced them to seek meaning in their work is hard to tell. One of the individuals, David, has been encountered already.

David whom was encountered previously was at the point of the second interval of interviews at which time he, and his social network, fitted the shielded type. Eight months before this point his circumstances were much different. David was originally from a working class family in Liverpool. The early part of his working life was characterised by precarious low paid work. This started when he was working as a YOP (Youth Opportunity Programme) apprentice where he was paid very little and had few employment rights. David also had a period where he worked as a professional musician. Again this was never well paid and involved less than ideal working conditions. His experiences in precarious employment prompted him to return to education at the age of 28. David found the transition back to being a student difficult and daunting at first but he excelled academically, progressing from a position where he had no qualifications to the point where he was a year and a half into his doctoral programme. This came by way of A levels, a First at Bachelor Degree level and a Distinction at Masters level. At this point David began a training course to qualify to become a secondary school teacher. He had only progressed 6 months into this yearlong course before he decided that it wasn't for him. He then moved from the Northwest to a city in the Midlands to take up a position as a PhD student and as a lecturer. It was a year in to this period when he was interviewed for the first time.

Out of all the individual's interviewed David's sensemaking process proved the most difficult to decipher. On one hand there were a number of cues that were obviously sources of insecurity for him. The past five years of University education had come at a price; at the time of the interview he was about thirty thousand pounds in debt with no prospect of being able to tackle this in the short term.

DO YOU HAVE A LOT OF LOANS? ARE YOU IN SIGNIFICANT DEBT?

If I just think about the academic stuff you know I've well the student loans from ninety-five to ninety-eight. I then I also have the student loans to do with the PGCE I started and didn't finish partly because of my PhD. So yes quite a, a massive overdraft that goes with that. It's just I guess its part of the price of trying to gain some qualifications. In that sense you have to take a step back before you can take any steps forward.

And I'm still trying to take the step forward.

His relationship with his supervisors was also a source of conflict. At the time that he was interviewed, David felt he had been unfairly treated by his PhD supervisors; he was working hard and felt that his supervisors were using him to further their own research interests without ever giving him the credit he was due.

They are the experienced academics if you like. They are guiding the work and so I wouldn't feel strong, even if I had a strong argument I feel if they needed the work doing and if they said it had to be done. I mean I've had this problem over a research proposal and things I've had where they've required more work

off me than I felt was necessary and lots more work. But you just have to keep bounding and go on with it and putting your head down and getting on with it. And sometimes you feel they're just hanging their hat on something to show you who they are.

These cues were already starting to push him away from an academic career but ultimately it was the cues that came from his own aspirations that led him to leave the University. He had become disillusioned by the poor wages associated with academia. He also felt that the much vaunted flexibility and control associated with an academic job was something of a mirage because of the amount of work that was expected meant that little control was actually available.

The cue that seemed to play the largest part in his leaving academia was the desire to have a profession. David felt that having a profession would be a guard against job insecurity; his skills portfolio would always be in demand within a teaching context. This was the only time that the concept of professionalism was raised by one of the interviewees.

That's everything I'm working towards. I don't have a pension now and I'm aware of that and I can't have one. I can't afford one and for the moment that's extremely important to me. Professional security, I don't need security from an organisation. What I need the security from is from qualifications. I'm happy to keep changing employers according to you know to how my qualifications are best used and where I can get the most useful experience.

It was as though David was unable to feel at ease unless he was in the pursuit of self-improvement. While he was working at the University he was also pursuing an unrelated ICT (Information Communication Technology) qualification in his 'spare' time.

In the end, David felt no loyalty towards his superiors. Once he had decided to terminate his PhD and lecturing job he took all the annual holiday time he was entitled too, then told his supervisors that he was ill and subsequently he stopped responding to any of their attempts to communicate with him whilst he was still getting a grant for his PhD research. He didn't seem to have any problem justifying this to himself, since he thought that they had treated him particularly badly.

David didn't have any close social network to speak of at this point in his life to either act as a shield or to amplify the cues related to precarious work. He was living in shared accommodation but never made much effort to get to know his housemates. He worked in an office on his own and would go in very early and leave late, often not seeing anybody all day. He had very little contact with his family; his mum and dad lived in the far south west of the country, his sister had emigrated to Australia and he was not on speaking terms with his brother.

David's orientation to precarious work was resolutely in the portfolio/boundaryless worker domain. In particular, his commitment to lifelong learning strikes strong resonance with the theories behind this orientation. It was clear though that this orientation had little to do with his social network. Even when he didn't have a network to provide him with support, he did not express himself in terms that would be associated with the 'insecure' worker orientation. However, when there was a more supportive social network present he found it easier to maintain his orientation to work; there were no cues that were causing conflict (such as his debt and his relationship with his superiors), as there were when he was interviewed the first time around. As an individual David does not completely discredit this social network hypothesis. He does, however, begin to show that for some individuals it does not go very far to explain their orientation to precarious work.

The second individual who fits this type is Chris.

Chris is 34. His job title was Research Fellow when he was first interviewed. His role within the University also included a substantial amount of lecturing. Chris successfully completed his PhD two years ago. He has been with the University for seven years. Chris worked as a civil servant before moving into academia. Chris lived alone. His fellowship was on a part-time temporary basis. The completion of this contract coincided with him getting his PhD. Since then he has been promoted to Senior Lecturer and he has taken on his own PhD student.

Chris was also very career driven. At the time of the first interview he was working very long hours. This was not because he was contracted to work to these lengths but because of Chris's own desire to 'put the hours in'. Chris was in the very fortunate position of really enjoying his job as the following quotation demonstrates:

I get to study and do research in an area that otherwise would be a hobby. In terms of research it's interviewing people, which you know, talking to people is good fun. I enjoy it.

YES

And reading, I do a lot of reading around the subject area anyway. The hours are flexible. I'm my own boss. I get to pick and choose bits and pieces of teaching as well which is good fun.

So all in all a damn sight better than a civil servant.

Chris was single when he was first interviewed; in fact he had been single for the last eight years. He said that he was just been too busy to get involved with anybody in the past. As with David, it is hard to untangle cause from effect; did Chris throw himself into his work because of a lack of a meaningful relationship or was it as Chris described that he was working so hard that he did not have

time to develop that area of his life? In terms of his sensemaking process, it is understandable that Chris prefers to describe events in a way that emphasises his control and ability to actively make choices even if the 'reality' is somewhat different, because by doing so, Chris protects his own sense of identity, a feature that is important in the sensemaking process.

Chris's family lived in a different area of the country so he didn't have much contact with them. The amount of work that he was committing to meant that he didn't have much social contact outside of the work environment. These are the reasons why Chris fitted the unmediated social network type at the time of his first interview.

Here Chris talks about the temporary nature of his contract:

RIGHT SO DO YOU THINK THAT YOU WOULD ACTIVELY SEEK A PERMANENT CONTRACT IN THE FUTURE? IF I MEAN ALL THINGS BEING EQUAL DO YOU PREFER, HAVING NOW BEEN ON A PERMANENT CONTRACT, DO YOU THINK YOU PREFER THE FEATURES THAT THAT BRINGS TO YOUR LIFE? OR DOES IT NOT MATTER?

Yes in some ways. I mean I was kind of you know a bit blasé about being on a fixed term contract before and in a sense I do see advantages in fixed terms.

WHY DO YOU THINK YOU WERE BLASÉ ABOUT IT?

That's how I am. I'm not worried, I'm not, blasé is perhaps not the right word but I do actually see the positive side to a fixed term. Permanence means that at least you've got more choices. You know if you do move on then they are your choices. The down sides on that you just get stuck in a rut and don't look

around. I like the aspect of being able to choose your role deliberately you know.

I'm terrified of forgetting to choose.

Chris's orientation was much closer to the portfolio/boundaryless type. He didn't mind at all being on a temporary contract. Like some of the individuals who also had portfolio/boundaryless orientations to precarious work, Chris felt that he was in a better position to move to another job if he wanted to because the contract was temporary. This seems to be an important finding; that individuals associate temporary contracts with freedom and permanent contracts with restriction seems to contradict much of the insecurity literature. Such a belief doesn't appear to be based in any way on employment law, usually an individual can choose to end a permanent employment contract at any time, as long as they give the required amount of notice. This endorses the 'plausibility over validity' feature of sensemaking. Perhaps this reasoning helps Chris feel positive about the precarious nature of his job.

The third individual who fits this type is John.

John has two part-time temporary contracts, he works as a Mental Health Nurse at a large city hospital. The hospital is part of a University where he also works as a lecturer. He is 44 and at the time of the first interview was living alone. He had occasional contact with his adult age offspring. He had recently been through a divorce, which he himself described as "messy". He then took courses to become a psychiatric nurse and a counsellor; these are the areas in which he lectures.

John's work history is varied:

I left the educational system aged seventeen, half way through my A Levels and decided I couldn't be arsed to do them so what did I do? It's a long time ago. But

I went back into education in my thirties you see. So the current jobs I've done, I worked in a tax office for a year. I did painting and decorating for three years, self employed then I went into a business with my brother and it lasted seven years until we went into receivership and that was immediate term corporate finance breaking down in Hertfordshire. We had a group of companies, I was Director of four and then they all went belly up in the recession in 1990. Then I did my nurses training and my counsellor training simultaneously. So I became a psychiatric nurse and went into teaching counselling and a year ago my main job now three days a week is teaching mental health nursing at the University.

RIGHT

The other two days a week I'm still, I work for a mental health trust.

John's work history alone suggests a portfolio/boundaryless orientation to precarious work. It also hints towards Sennett's prediction for the end of the 'career' as we know it (Sennett 1998). Periodically, John had abandoned a 'career' and started all over again in a new line of work.

In the following passage John describes the way that his work and family lives interact.

What really, really drives me more than anything else is my personal development and fulfilment and my own creativity and being able to express myself and to be creative in my work. And so I just become very, very focused and I trust my decision making. I trust my judgement, you know, and I trust my guts. I trust

my gut feelings about work and work opportunity. I don't panic. I'm quite calculating.

You know, I came into nursing when I was thirty five and I'd had a lot of life experience. I was a director of four companies at one point. A real yuppie in the eighties, you know, and I've had my family. I think that's part of it, but my children are all grown up and there's this sense, I mean I'm very supportive of my kids and that but there's this sense that actually I can do whatever I like. You know, if I wanted to I could emigrate. And at the end of the day, well, on the one hand yes, I've got a good job; I'm feeling fulfilled and creative in my work but it wouldn't be the end of the world if it all collapsed around me because I've experienced that all collapse around me, you know, ten years ago. And you know, I know that I'll come through it.

I started out in life as a painter and decorator and at the end of the day I think I could be quite happy painting and decorating! You know, listening to the test match up a ladder, you know, like I used to do. I love my garden. I love gardening. I can be quite content with the simple life. I could go travelling if I wanted to. You know, and rent the house out and just vanish off to the Far East for a couple of years or something. You know. I suppose what I'm saying is I do feel secure enough in myself to do the right thing and to pursue what I want in life.

The passage contains a number of interesting points, which point to John's orientation to work as well as justifying his inclusion in this social network type. The passage opens with an emphasis upon John's own personal development;

this is in step with the portfolio/boundaryless orientation to precarious work. He emphasises his own self reliance in the passage and did so throughout the course of the three interviews, any decisions that needed to be made, were made by him and him alone; he did not need any support from his social network in order to make them. In the three interviews he expressed himself as though the breakdown of his marriage and the fact that his children have their own lives has brought him a distinct sense of freedom; he can do what he likes now no one has any expectations or needs of him in his social network. Unlike the amplified social network, it is not the case that John's social network was a source of cues which were having a negative role in his sensemaking process, John's identity was being constructed in the absence of cues from his social network, hence his inclusion in the unmediated social network type.

John also reveals his work history in the passage. A recurring theme in a number of individuals who had portfolio/boundaryless orientations to precarious work was the experience of the 1980's. The excesses of the 80's followed by the depressed economy of the early 90's has shaped some of the individuals expectations of work. In John's case, he had come through a period of huge instability, which saw the businesses he was involved with go into liquidation, and though John had to retrain, he managed to survive this period. This experience has provided John and the others with something to measure the precariousness of their current working situation against and has no doubt contributed to their orientation to work.

Conclusion

Though there were few individuals who fitted this social network type, that these cases were so similar provides strong support for the type and conclusions drawn from it. All three individuals were men. It is very possible that this type predominantly favours men; though such a claim would be based on a very limited number of cases. They were all in the same age group (mid thirties to

early forties). Though it is not their age that is important per se, it is the breadth of their experience. All three experienced work in the volatile '80's and early '90's; as they have that benchmark, the precariousness of their current situation is put in perspective. They have all experienced dramatic changes in their working lives. David went from being a Professional Musician to becoming a Postman, then an Academic, before finally becoming a Teacher. Chris went from being a Civil Servant to being an Academic. John went from being a Painter and Decorator to being an Entrepreneur before becoming a Mental Health Professional. All three were socially isolated, in two cases this was in part due to the collapse of a longstanding relationship.

In terms of orientations, this social network type showed the best 'fit': all three individuals were very close to the 'portfolio/boundaryless' orientation to work. The relationship between this social network type and the portfolio/boundaryless worker is very strong and provides support to the thesis' main claim that social networks have an important role to play in terms of orientations to work.

Chapter 5:- Conclusion

The conclusion of the thesis is broken into two distinct sections. The first section summarises the thesis and research project. The second section highlights some of the drawbacks to the approach that this thesis has taken to job insecurity. This section also suggests how the approach could be adapted for future use.

Summary

The starting point of the project was the phenomenon of job insecurity. Job insecurity as an issue was receiving more and more attention in the media (OECD 1997; Smith 1997). Actual levels of job security or insecurity in the workforce as a whole seemed to have stayed reasonably static throughout the mid '80's and mid '90's.(Burchell, Ladipo et al. 2002) A disaggregated view of job insecurity shows that while overall levels have remained the same, there have been pockets of dramatic change in the more white collar sectors of the labour market(Burchell, Ladipo et al. 2002).

There seems to be a consensus that the use of precarious forms of employment in sectors previously characterised by permanent full-time jobs has been responsible for changes in job insecurity. There certainly seems to be some mirroring of the sectors where job insecurity has risen and the sectors which have seen large rises in the use of precarious forms of work. This does not however constitute a causal link; job insecurity is not the result of precarious work. It would suggest that job insecurity is more likely to be associated with precarious work than work that is not precarious.

The growth of precarious work has drawn criticism from many quarters. Not least because of this strong association with job insecurity. Workers in precarious jobs have been portrayed as being potentially very insecure, never really settling

into their job because of a need to always worry where the next job will come from or whether their contract is going to be renewed. Portrayals such as this were homogenised into one orientation to work – ‘the insecure worker’. Diametrically opposed to the worker with this orientation is the worker who revels in the short term challenges thrown up by precarious forms of work. Such a worker orientation was labelled as ‘portfolio/boundaryless’ after the two main contributing theories; social commentator Charles Handy’s ‘Portfolio Worker’ and Career Theorists Gunz, Evans and Jalland’s ‘Boundaryless Worker’.

The thesis then used these two ideal types to investigate workers in precarious jobs. Part-time temporary workers were chosen as it was one of the most precarious forms of work. These workers were located in the public sector as this was an area which had been suggested to have a growing rate of both job insecurity and precarious forms of work.

Early work on worker orientations done in the 1970’s had noted the importance of the worker’s social circumstances in determining their orientations. Emerging research in the field of job insecurity also highlighted a loop between the individual’s orientation to work and their family, for example research done by Nolan (2002) was demonstrating that precarious work was affecting the individual but it was also having a negative effect on the family. Jarvis (1999) demonstrated how households were developing strategies to deal with insecurity.

The thesis rests on three interweaving key concepts, including worker orientations. Sensemaking, a theory of how people make sense of all the different features of their world, was adopted as the key to understanding how worker orientations were being constructed. The theory of social networks was adopted by the thesis as a way of drawing the role that family, friends and colleagues play for the individual in question together. Preliminary research suggested that there were four social network ‘types’. The ‘Amplifying’ social network, where the individual interprets his family and friends as amplifying the pressure that they already feel from their work; the ‘Shielding’ social network, where the individual interprets their family and friends as shielding them from the pressure they feel

from work; the 'Mediating' social network where the individual interprets their family and friends as having features which both shield and amplify the pressure they feel from work; the 'Unmediated' social network, where the individual interprets their family and friends (where applicable) as playing no real role in affecting the pressure felt from precarious work..

The results of the research bore out the importance of social networks in the construction of the individual's orientations to work. Of the cases where an amplifying social network seemed to be present, the majority of individuals used language which suggested that their orientations were close to the 'insecure worker'. In Francine's case, where her relationship to her husband had broken down irrevocably, the change in her social network seemed to have placed incredible pressure on her and had changed the whole meaning of work for her.

There were two exceptions to a directly causal link between the amplified social network and insecure worker orientation, Gwyneth and Leon. Leon might have appeared to be in precarious work but on closer inspection this precariousness is superficial. Leon, the Clinical Psychologist, was at the top of his career and as Purcell et al (1999) had predicted, flexible work brings many benefits to workers in this position; Leon had had control over the type of contract he was employed on, he chose the hours that he wanted to work and he reported that he was in no fear that his contract would ever not be renewed. Gwyneth despite initially being on a precarious contract used language which strongly resonated with the 'portfolio/boundaryless' orientation to work. This seemed to be due to her past work experiences. She had been involved in the voluntary not for profit sector earlier in her working life, a period which seems to have been defined by a constant battle for funding in order to prolong ventures and thereby her own employment going. This seems to have been a much more precarious period of her life. This highlights an important conclusion of the research, whilst not directly linked to workers' social networks; it was a significant finding nonetheless.

The Importance of Past Work Experience

Sensemaking is a retrospective process whereby the individual weighs up current cues and stimuli with their past experiences. These past experiences are crucial in determining how the individual gives meaning to the world that they currently find themselves in. This was also highlighted in some of the literature on job insecurity where it was suggested that workers whose past working lives were characterised by permanent full-time work would find the experience of precarious work more traumatic. This was ably illustrated by Francine. The opposite also proved to be an important finding whereby individuals who had experience of precarious work always had that point of reference thereby eliciting “well if I got through that I can get through this” responses as illustrated by Gwyneth. In particular, workers whose fortunes largely rested on the boom and bust economic cycles of the eighties and early nineties seem (such as David, Leon and John) particularly unfazed by their own present precarious working conditions.

Returning to the social network theory used in the thesis, individuals whose social network had played a shielding role, all used language which suggested an orientation similar to the ‘portfolio/boundaryless’ worker without exception. This represents powerful support for the theory that an individual’s social situation plays an important part in determining whether they define themselves as insecure. All these individuals seemed able to be more relaxed and pragmatic about the precariousness of their working conditions, seemingly because of the way that their network was able to offer them support. The most obvious example of the support given was financial support from a partner’s income. There were other less obvious forms of support which also had important roles to play. For example Rosalind’s parents providing her with accommodation, David’s friend providing him with emotional support and Ingrid’s friends looking after her children for her when she couldn’t manage to change her working patterns.

The mediated social network type in itself does not produce separate significant findings. Individuals whose network seemed to be close to this type, had orientations to work which reflected the balance of the shielding and amplifying features of their social network. The mediated network type reflected that some individual's social networks had particularly complicated roles.

The unmediated social network, where the individual has little or no social contact, proved interesting. It might have been expected that without a significant social input into the individual's sensemaking process, leaving only the cues from the precarious work, might have produced a range of different orientations depending on the individual. This was not the case. All four individuals who seemed to have unmediated social networks used language which strongly suggested a portfolio/boundaryless orientation to work. This group was closer to the idealised orientation than any of the other individuals, one of the four, David, had even read much of Handy's work and taken the ideology to heart and described himself as a portfolio worker.

Evaluation

The lack of a coherent theory of job insecurity that took the social circumstances of the individual into consideration prompted this research project and thesis. The phenomenon of job insecurity is a very complex personal issue and to not consider such an important feature which has the power to influence the meaning of work for the individual seems to be an obvious omission. As a result this thesis has tried to create a more holistic theory about job insecurity.

The theory of social networks was used as a way of simplifying the complexity of the individual's social circumstances. This approach is not without its drawbacks. The theory of social networks used in this thesis focused on the connections that make up social interaction; it did not readily appreciate the features of the individual. Important features such as the individual's age, per se,

were not taken into consideration; aspects associated with age were uncovered by the research process such as family status and previous work experience but whether an individual's orientation to precarious work is affected by age was beyond the scope of the conceptual framework used in this thesis. Despite this there were the signs that this could be an avenue of research that would prove fruitful for future academics:

THINKING BACK TO YOUR OWN CAREER, WHEN DO YOU THINK YOU WERE MOST INSECURE?

Oh now definitely.

I think you feel more insecure as you get older. I think its pig ignorance when you are young. I look back and I think god I was on my own with two children, swarming around doing this that and the other, how ever did I do it? I've no idea. I haven't a clue but we got through it somehow but how we did I've no idea. So it's really scary stuff when I think about that. But yes old age looming that's very frightening...You're frightened about ill health, you're frightened about not performing, you're frightened about young people zipping into your position.

The way the concept of social networks has been used in this thesis has placed emphasis at a localised level; generally the network has included family, friends and in some cases work colleagues. This is not to say that there are not forces at a more centralised level which shape the individual's experience of precarious work. The new legislation on temporary work for example had had a distinctive affect upon a number of the individuals' working lives. The new legislation theoretically prevents workers being denied employment rights by being on continually rolling fixed term contracts. Some of the workers in the Higher Education sector had been moved to permanent contracts before this legislation had come into effect. A number of individuals reported that the University had taken the steps to ensure that when the law was passed they would already be in a compliant position. Research has also shown that Trade Unions can also profoundly affect workers' experience of precarious work(Heery and Abbot 2000).

During the course of the field work it was highlighted that events on an international scale could also affect the individual in a very distinct way. The research was conducted to the backdrop of a period of international turmoil. During the interval between the first and second interview, on September 11th 2001, the World Trade Centre in New York was attacked by terrorists. Since then a US led coalition has fought a 'war against terror' first in Afghanistan and more recently in Iraq. In the second interviews many of the individuals said that the events of September 11th had left them with a feeling of insecurity. The following quote is representative of these individuals:

The other area of insecurity or a major thing that has happened which I share with most people is just in terms of the terrorist act and America and all the, everything that has followed that and the war against terrorism and the implications I suppose of that going wrong. So there's a general sense, there's a bit of a background sense of insecurity about the world as a whole engendered by all that kind of thing.

A noticeable omission in the scope of the use of 'social networks' in this thesis was that none of the interviewees described their social network as a tool for securing other work (should their present contract not be renewed or as a way of moving to a new job). This omission can be explained by the temporariness of the work investigated by this thesis. Perhaps temporary part-time workers have neither the time nor the inclination to put the effort into 'networking' since they know that their time is limited. Alternatively, there could have been a failure to identify an issue that was present within the cases.

Many of these drawbacks were anticipated and accepted as being inevitable and it was felt that the benefits of this approach outweighed the limitations.

This thesis concludes that despite problems with the approach taken there is a link between job insecurity and the individual's social circumstances. Many of the case studies used in this thesis involved very similar working conditions.

Individuals were working in the same sector on the same length of precarious contract and yet they had very different orientations to work. The individuals' social network provides a plausible explanation as to how individuals in similar working situations can define themselves very differently.

Risk Revisited

This research can be placed in context amongst other theories. In Chapter 2, Beck's 'Risk Society' was discussed. Beck had suggested that employers who had previously been subject to risk derived from the market have transferred this risk directly to the worker through the use of precarious contracts. When the employer's products or services are in demand, the worker's position should be safe and their contract would be renewed. If the market is not so positive towards the organisation, the worker on a precarious contract may not have their contract renewed as the employer attempts to match the shortfall in demand for their product with a reduction of their workforce.

Beck's theory considered the individual in isolation but in effect this risk is being passed on to the worker's social network as well. As has been demonstrated, sometimes the individual may feel shielded from this risk by their social network. In some of the cases demonstrated by this study the support provided by the social network brings into question the concept of risk. 'Risk' implies a meaning is being attached to work, that a worker would be considerably affected by the loss of their job, when a shielding network exists this is not necessarily the case. When the individual is being supported by a partner on a stable high wage the 'risk' involved in losing their job, is very different to the 'risk' involved for an individual whose income is supporting the social network.

The wealth of variety that was found in just fifteen workers' social networks was remarkable and the research captured a very rich sense of this: a baby was born; families dealt with bereavement; individuals chose to leave careers to start again in something new; people dealt with the end of long standing relationships;

others started new relationships; children left home and others came back needing support. This sense of dynamism underlined that the individuals and their worlds were ever changing; sometimes events would precipitate a dramatic change which would be translated into a shift in their orientation to precarious work. Sometimes changes were more subtle, for example as some of the individuals with orientations which seemed close to the portfolio/boundaryless type approached their contract renewal they seemed to be less sure of themselves and conversely some of the individuals with an orientation closer to the insecure model seemed to be more relaxed once their contract had been renewed for another year. The number of interview intervals and the duration of the research period helped to add to the richness of the materials gathered, it also helped to provide vibrant narratives about these individual's lives instead of merely a snapshot.

This approach has provided an insight into the social dimension that has lain untapped by some of the more traditional examinations of job insecurity.

Further Work

Two different ways in which this research could be developed suggest themselves. Firstly, the same approach and conceptual framework could be brought bear on either a different group of workers; this group could be much larger than the one found in this study. A larger study of the same type of workers would enable the conclusions of this study to be tested and a study involving a different type of workers would test the universality of the studies conceptual framework.

Secondly, the rich materials gathered by this study could be used again to pursue other aims and objectives. A number of themes emerged in the course of the analysis; some of them have been mentioned here in the conclusion. Of particular note were the themes of gender, career cycle and their relationship with

precarious work. These themes were outside the scope of the study but were significant enough to be able to be developed further.

Appendices

Appendix 1

OUTLINE OF FIRST INTERVIEW

Introduction

Myself
Project/PhD
Anonymity assurance
Data Security
Record interview

Biographical Data

Members of Family
Members of your Household
Dependents in the your household
Relationships of over 3yrs
Education qualifications

Work History

List all jobs stating:

Type of employment contract
Salary
Number of dependents
Age

Present Job

Current job title
Job Tenure
What is your salary?
How long do you think you will continue to work in the same job?
More than one job? If so describe
Which is main job
What are the positive and negative points to job/s?

Present Financial Situation

Own/Rent Home
Cars
Loans
Holidays
Children's Education

Flexibility

How free are you to decide:

When you work

The number of hours or days a week/month/year you work

How fast you work

Where you work

Who you work for

How many people you work for

When to change jobs

Is it important for you to be able to decide these things?

Pay

How are you paid?

Can you choose how you are paid?

Would you rather be paid differently? Why?

The employment relationship

Do you feel you could refuse to work if the employer asks you to?

What would happen?

Security

Would you define yourself as being insecure?

If so where does this insecurity derive from?

How important to you is security or stability in your work, in the sense of having:

a secure and regular income

a pension
a career structure

Can you think of any situations when insecurity derived from this job has had a distinctive affect on your life?

Future Job

If/when you do change jobs what will be the reason for the change?

How hard do you think it would be to find similar type of work?

Where do you see yourself in seven-eight months time?

Anything to add that we haven't covered?

Appendix 2

OUTLINE FOR SECOND AND THIRD INTERVIEW

Topics To Be Covered In The Course Of The Interview

Introduction

Myself
Project/PhD
Anonymity assurance
Data Security
Record interview
First Round Interview Transcript
Any errors or misrepresentations

Present Job

Current job title
Job Tenure
What is your salary?
How long do you think you will continue to work in the same job?
More than one job? If so describe
Which is main job
What are the positive and negative points to job/s?

Present Financial Situation

Own/Rent Home
Cars
Loans
Holidays
Children's Education

Change

Tell me about the last eight months of your life
Important Events
Jobs

Life

What were the reasons for the changes?

Is there anything from the first interview that surprised you and made you reflect?

Is there anything from the first interview that now you strongly disagree with.

How have you as a person changed

Has there been any domestic based changes

Insert personal questions

Security

Would you define yourself as being insecure?

If so where does this insecurity derive from?

Can you think of any situations when insecurity derived from this job has had a distinctive affect on your life?

Future Job

If/when you do change jobs what will be the reason for the change?

How hard do you think it would be to find similar type of work?

Anything to add that we haven't covered?

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