

The background features stylized, overlapping silhouettes of human profiles in various shades of grey and brown. A thin orange diagonal line runs from the top left towards the bottom right, crossing the silhouettes.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

EXPLORING THE PROMISES
OF GENDER EQUALITY

REPORT

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with Laura Bradley,
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POSITIVE IDEAS
for CHANGE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

If the UK is a dramatically different place than it was in the post-war era, it is arguably women who have experienced the most dramatic changes of all. However, these changes are often presented in a familiar narrative of linear progress, which masks the different ways in which economic, social and cultural changes have affected women from different backgrounds. Much of the debate about 'gender equality' is either narrowly focused on women at the top or takes place in the abstract. As such, it leaves us with a weak political voice for the collective demands required to transform the majority of women's lives.

Through this report, we aim to spark debate about the priorities for the next era of gender politics, and about the strategies and agencies required to achieve change. Drawing on quantitative and qualitative research comparing today's generation of young women to their mothers' and grandmothers' generations, we explore how women's aspirations and expectations, the nature of gender relations, and the underlying structure of opportunities for women have changed over time.

Methodology

IPPR conducted quantitative analysis of the 1958 National Child Development Study, the 1970 British Cohort Study and the Understanding Society household panel survey (wave 2, 2011) to explore trends in gender relations and paid and unpaid work. We also conducted a combination of group and individual, semi-structured interviews with 50 women across 16 families in London, Belfast, Greater Manchester, Liverpool, Edinburgh, East Yorkshire and Oxford. These sought to explore women's aspirations, expectations, attitudes and experiences around education and work, relationships and care, and the portrayal of women in everyday culture. We used purposive sampling to ensure a diverse sample of women from different ethnic, socioeconomic and educational backgrounds.

There were two limitations: sample sizes were too small to make analysis of same-sex couples possible; and there was a lack of representation of women without children over the age of 30. Further research will be necessary to properly represent the views of these groups.

Women in the paid economy

In terms of the aspirations and opportunities available to women, the most dramatic changes appear to have taken place since the 1980s. Female employment soared in the 1980s, girls have been outperforming boys at school and at university since the mid-1990s, and in the last decade the gender pay gap between men and women in their 20s has almost disappeared. Increased female earning power has also transformed gender relations in some households, driving a small but steady increase in the number of house husbands and men who share in the housework and childcare.

On many common measures of gender equality, therefore, the economic model of the last 30 years appears to have delivered for women. The period has also seen an increase, albeit slow, in the proportion of women in professional and managerial jobs. Given women's strong performance in education, however, the continued dearth of women in public life suggests that gender is still a strong determinant of progression, despite the achievement of formal (legal) equality. Thus, progress in this area is often used as

a yardstick for gender equality, and the number of women on boards and in politics is one of the rallying issues for feminist politicians and pressure groups.

However, IPPR's findings suggest that legalistic reforms and formal measures of gender equality – such as the number of women in parliament or how gender pay differentials have improved over time – can be misleading, and that the reality of women's emancipation is much more complex and more uneven than the familiar narrative of advancement suggests. Improvements in the difference between the 'average man' and the 'average woman' since the 1980s have taken place against a backdrop of stagnant social mobility, rising economic inequality, and a dramatic shift in the nature of work available.

Changes in the economy and the labour market have affected women (and men) from different backgrounds in very different ways. The growth of managerial and professional jobs in the public and private service sectors created more opportunities for women. Yet the shift from an industrial to a service economy was also associated with a decline in the employment and earning prospects of men, particularly those with lower levels of education. For some families, therefore, dual-earning came to reflect a financial necessity, not simply changes in attitudes and aspirations among women. In many parts of the country, relatively well-paid jobs in manufacturing have been replaced by low-paid, low-skilled jobs in the private service sector, carried out largely by women on a part-time basis. Space for autonomy and creativity in these jobs has declined over time.

Debates on gender equality and women's rights often take place in the abstract, and are divorced from an understanding of the structural constraints that underpin women's disadvantage in the labour market. Discrimination and sexist attitudes are an important factor but they are only part of the story. The lack of women at the top and the concentration of women in low-skilled, part-time jobs are both closely linked to their primary responsibility for care, particularly childcare. Despite the fact that many women, and particularly those who go to university and postpone having children, are able to progress in work in a way that would not have been possible for previous generations, the lack of higher-skilled jobs that accommodate childcare responsibilities means that many degree-educated women 'downgrade' to relatively low-skilled jobs after having children. IPPR's quantitative analysis shows that women with lower qualifications and those who have children at a younger age are finding it harder to secure good jobs and opportunities in the workplace.

Younger women without children are far less likely to see gender as a limiting factor in their choices around education and work than their mothers and grandmothers did. But awareness of gender disadvantage rises significantly once women have children, or start to think about having children. The lack of flexible working opportunities in professional jobs outside the public sector and the reality of the British part-time economy restricts many women's options to relatively low-paid, low-quality jobs in which 'flexibility' is primarily defined on the employer's terms. The low pay and discontinuity that characterises a significant minority of women's working lives has a sharp impact on their financial security and independence, made worse in old age by the decline of public sector pensions and the lack of pensions in the low-paid private services sector.

The narrow focus on women at the top and on work as purely emancipatory ignores the polarisation of women's experiences of work and glosses over the fact that men also occupy different positions of power and class. Furthermore, the suggestion of

linear progress for women risks reaffirming the current economic and political model, at a time when deep rethinking is required. The narrative of progress resonates with some families, but life has not gotten better for all women. Some compared their life to their grandmother's, and felt it was worse.

'I worked part time for a number of years, and that affects your pension, and it affects your economic situation. It's very difficult and stressful going through your childcare years and juggling that with work.'

Aged 49, London

'You get to my stage in your career, and it's assumed that you will sprog up at some point and you'll go a bit funny for a while. "Do we really want to rely on her?" ... I've heard my current MD refer to another colleague coming back from maternity leave, and they were talking about whether she could take on an account and he said "No, 'cause she'll be a bit wobbly".'

Aged 30, Oxford

'I work in a supermarket now ... I just do it because it fits in with [my children]. I enjoy the people that I work with, but it's not very fulfilling ... I just keep thinking there's got to be something better. ... I think children hold you back, a lot, because you've got to be there, to fit in with school hours. And there's not a lot of jobs that fit in with school hours.'

Aged 44, Greater Manchester

Women and unpaid work

Many women's working lives are put under further pressure by the fact that they are still overwhelmingly responsible for unpaid work in the home, despite their growing importance in the paid workforce. The average time men spend on housework and particularly childcare has risen since the 1970s, but this has occurred mostly among men with higher levels of education. In recent years, moreover, the time women spend on childcare has also increased. Most families still organise work and care along traditional gender lines.

One common explanation for this is that women, with formal barriers to equality removed, have revealed their true preferences – and many have made 'home-centred' choices. Yet the debate on women's choices is polarised between those who idealise the role of mothers in society and defend a nostalgic status quo, and those who advocate a fervently pro-work agenda in pursuit of individual self-sufficiency. In reality, neither of these reflects the difficult and often imperfect trade-offs that parents are forced to make to meet their work and care commitments.

IPPR's qualitative research shows that women's views on motherhood and gender norms are plural, complex and ambiguous. Some women see themselves primarily as wives and mothers and lament the lack of value placed on these activities. But women, like the vast majority of men, increasingly want and expect to be able to combine a family with a rewarding working life, even as they understand the former may have an impact on the latter. Women today are also more likely than previous generations to accept the role of formal childcare services and also to expect their partners to share responsibility for childcare and other domestic work.

While raising children can be extremely rewarding, it can also be hard, especially for families with little time or money and for those who lack wider family support. Across all three generations it was perceived that sole responsibility for care, particularly childcare, could lead to social isolation and depression. Community-based childcare services are viewed primarily as a tool to enable maternal employment, but they can also play a role in tackling isolation by providing spaces for parents to meet, interact and access advice. The cost of childcare and the rise in working and single parents means that family members, particularly grandparents, are a significant source of support, as they have always been.

Greater sharing of responsibilities with partners helped to ease the pressure and was seen to enable fathers to develop stronger relationships with their children, but the British policy environment does not currently encourage this. Despite some improvements in family policy in recent years, the combination of a relatively long period of maternity leave, meagre paternity leave, and a lack of affordable childcare for children under the age of three tacitly supports a male breadwinner model. The workplace reform agenda has sought to ‘nudge’ employers into better accommodating family responsibilities and as such has been predictably weak. The assumption that care is primarily the mother’s responsibility is reflected in the assumption among some women that they should be ‘grateful’ if their partners are active parents.

The focus on personal choice and responsibility frames care as a private matter, and in doing so can undermine ‘public’ arguments for increased support for shared responsibility both in the home and the community. Efforts to raise maternal employment rates have led to improvements in childcare provision, but these are nowhere near ambitious enough. The exclusive focus on employment also risks undervaluing healthy family life; children’s wellbeing should be at the centre of collective solutions to care, and men should be encouraged to contribute in the home.

‘[To daughter] The happiest time in my life was when I was pregnant with you. I was in this nirvana. Husband, wife, baby, married, home, husband in job – ta da! That was the bubble, but of course the bubble burst ... I must’ve been missing something ... I did what I was supposed to do, but I just got depressed didn’t I? ‘Cause I just became this other person.’

Aged 61, London

‘I’m not with his dad at the minute, but he has his full social life. If he can help it, he won’t see [his son]. He’s definitely not one of these that runs around in Batman suits.’

Aged 46, Greater Manchester

‘I have to say my husband’s always been very supportive. In fact, that’s why I’ve been able to do what I do, because [my work] is so unsocial – because [the parenting] is shared, so if I have to work until 8 o’clock at night, he would actually stay ... I also think that’s how a man gets to know his kids.’

Aged 50, London

Women in cultural life

Over the past few decades, the passive wife, mother and hostess has been replaced across mainstream cultural forums by a more assertive and sexually empowered woman. This more confident expression of femininity suggested that women could do or be anything they wanted. Yet critics noted that this portrayal of the new empowered woman was often vapid, with her choices narrowly centred on shopping, marriage and babies.

IPPR's findings reveal a pervading unease about the portrayal of women in public and cultural life, and about the values and views promoted by the media and popular culture among young men and women. Some of the women we interviewed were concerned that the media and 'celebrity culture' reinforce traditional gender norms and promote an increasingly narrow way to be a woman, while the realities of women's lives are rarely represented.

There was consistent concern that, rather than promoting resilience and confidence among women, elements of the media, advertising and entertainment industries play on and drive women's anxieties about the way they look. The scrutiny of female celebrities' appearance in magazines was seen as confusing and suggests that women 'can never get it right'. Increasingly, men's bodies are also subjected to a narrow view of attractiveness. Moreover, some minority ethnic women raised concerns about the dominance of white beauty norms, and the lucrative sale of damaging hair-straightening and skin-whitening products.

The debate about the representation of women in cultural life has taken on a new dimension in recent years. Across all ages, generations and backgrounds, women expressed concern about the sexualisation of women in popular culture. The portrayal of women in lads' mags, celebrity culture and pornography was seen to promote an unrealistic view of women's bodies and of sex. It wasn't nudity, or even pornography, that offended most of the women interviewed, but the way in which women are portrayed as objects, reduced to the sum of their body parts – in the words of one woman, 'as if that's all we're good for'. A core concern is the impact on teenage relationships, and the disturbing rise of phenomena such as 'sexting', where young women are encouraged to text pornographic photos of themselves to their partners, which are in some cases shared more widely or used as leverage in the relationship.

Concern about the portrayal of women in everyday culture appears to have helped drive a feminist renaissance that takes a far broader view than the focus on high-powered role models which permeates mainstream debates. The emergence of new feminist thinkers and writers and the rise of media campaigns tackling sexist advertising and sexualised norms also offer opportunities to harness consumer concerns. A healthier representation of women in public life should not be reduced to the portrayal of more empowered women, as this risks creating a decoy effect, giving the illusion that women have 'made it'. Instead, the focus should be on breaking down stereotypes, with non-traditional roles that show there is more than one way to be a girl – or a boy – and reflecting the realities of growing up and growing older in today's world.

‘In the magazines, it’s all to do with diet, for women it’s all to do with weight and being conscious of how you look and your appearance ... [I’d like to see] successful women, but successful because of their career, not just because their parents are rich. And I’d like it if there was as well, maybe, nothing to do with how you look.’

Aged 17, London

‘It went from empowering women to women are just items again. It’s gotten even worse, because women are just portrayed as if they’re just a piece of meat ... It’s dead, it’s cold. We’re not even human beings – it’s just, equality’s just gone well out the window ... I’ve been on a date, right, and the guy was trying to practically maul me – just because he’d bought me something to eat, he thought he had the right, do you know what I mean?’

Aged 19, Greater Manchester

‘I think men are increasingly under pressure to be fit and muscly, and they all drink these protein shakes ... I know we talk about it with women all the time ‘cause it’s so obvious, but I think it is tough on men ‘cause they all have completely different body shapes as well, but then there’s this one body shape – and it’s unattainable for most men ... I’ve noticed pretty much every guy my age does do that.’

Aged 23, Belfast

‘I mean nudity itself – there’s nothing wrong with the human body, it’s a wonderful machine. It’s never been bettered anyway, even with a computer! I think the human body is a wonderful thing, and to desecrate it in this way ... If you don’t legislate to limit the publication of [sexualised images in magazines], you have to balance that with education to teach these young girls to be proud of their bodies and not to flaunt it in a provocative way, but to be proud of themselves ... You have a much better relationship between men and women if there is respect on both sides.’

Aged 73, East Yorkshire

Towards a new gender politics: conclusions and recommendations

Break-the-glass-ceiling approaches have come to dominate mainstream political debates about gender equality, and have led to a narrow focus on formal, legal equality. While discrimination and sexist attitudes clearly still exist, such approaches are limited in their ability to bring about change or in their relevance to most people’s lives. A more meaningful gender politics requires a move away from abstract debates about how the ‘average woman’ fares compared to the ‘average man’, and towards a set of policies and positions, rooted in women’s lived experiences, that seek and support democratic renewal of the economy, society and politics.

The economy: from individual empowerment to collective power

Formal, legal equality is important but not sufficient. Equality is also about how people are treated, and our ability as individuals to shape the decisions that affect our lives. This requires less focus on women's individual rights and advancement, and more on the collective power of underrepresented groups to shape the world they live in. For example, those interested in gender justice should ask whether equality is best advanced through more women on corporate boards, or by giving poorly paid workers, who are more likely to be women, greater power in corporate governance.

Gender justice at the top is not enough. Mainstream debates on gender must also grapple with how to address increased insecurity at the bottom end of the labour market – including the challenge faced by poorly protected, self-employed women – and the implications for many women in old age. Part of the solution should involve raising the quality and status of the jobs that women do, rather than simply encouraging a less gendered division of work – for example, through a new funding settlement that supports a social care system characterised by a living wage and well-trained staff. Money currently spent on tax relief on pensions could be deployed to support lower-paid workers, who are more likely to be women, to save for retirement through matched contributions from government.

In the heyday of the Women's Liberation movement in the 1970s, leading feminists debated the sort of economy that would enable women and men to use their talents and creativity in the workplace. More democratic forms of finance, governance and ownership that encourage workers to participate in decision-making – such as cooperative and mutual forms of ownership – can support better quality work, as well as consumers' interests in more ethical business models. Workers are represented on the boards of all companies over a particular size in most other European countries and, in the US, employees have a 'right to buy' when the owners of a privately owned company decide to sell the business. Combined with efforts to harness the collective power of consumers, for example through community representation on regulatory bodies, this could also help to ensure that the retail and media industries are more responsive to public concerns about gender stereotyping and sexualisation.

Society: from personal responsibility for difficult choices to collective solutions to common problems

Collective solutions to care should be at the heart of debates about gender, and about the sort of society we want to live in. Women are currently presented with a false choice between policies to support them into work or to enable them to stay at home. All families must make trade-offs, but the current choices are too sharp. People need to earn enough and also to carve out time to spend with their families. Some families need more work, others need more time. To ensure women do not carry an unfair burden requires men to do more in the home.

This requires an approach that supports working parents and encourages a shift in the role of fathers. Various northern European countries have introduced shared parental leave, paid at a generous level – at least two-thirds of a person's salary, with a cap on high earners to reduce costs – with use-it-or-lose-it components which serve to encourage parents to think twice about who takes up the right to paid leave. The UK should move towards a similar model gradually, funded by frontloading cash benefits for families with children, such as child tax credits, which currently stretch across childhood and adolescence. High-quality, affordable childcare from the age of one, combined with

breakfast clubs and after-school activities for school-age children, would support mothers and fathers to meet their work and care commitments.

Economic production should not come at the expense of friendship or family life. A long-term workplace reform agenda should seek to support a better balance between work and social life, starting with enforcement of the 48-hour week. The Coalition government's extension of the right to request flexible working to all employees, not just parents, is very welcome. Based on the Swedish model, a reformed Health and Safety Executive made up of employer and employee representatives could, over time, test the impact of further limits on working time and a right to work flexibly – beyond simply the right to request to do so.

Politics: from state-led change to democratic renewal

In recent years, many of those working for social change have become reliant on sympathetic politicians to bring it about. This attitude is reinforced in part by the belief that women in positions of power will represent the interests of other women in wider society. However, this overestimates what individual politicians are able to achieve without broader coalitions of support and fails to present any challenge to today's crisis of elite politics. The professionalisation of UK politics means that political debates and priorities risk becoming increasingly remote from people's lived experiences. This is exacerbated by the lack of democratic debate about the means and aims of gender equality in mainstream political forums.

Efforts to democratise and diversify the UK's political landscape should go further than simply trying to even out the gender divide. A more democratic political culture would also seek to represent men and women with expertise and experience across more diverse walks of life. Trade unions, for instance, should draw on the many talented female activists in the labour movement to put forward candidates for election in seats being fought with all-women shortlists, as they do in other seats. Democratic renewal of public and economic institutions more generally – for example, through devolved and democratic local decision-making forums – could also open up new routes into local and national politics for men and women from different backgrounds, ensuring that political leadership is grounded in the situation of the people they represent.

Historically the state has been a key agent in protecting and extending women's rights, but those interested in gender politics must recognise the limitations of state-led change. For example, in Sweden a ban on advertising to children under the age of 12 has helped to give families a buffer against the excessive commercialisation of childhood and the gendered, often sexualised, norms promoted in many markets. But legislative approaches are weak in the face of changing technology and the fact that, with the rise of 'sexting' and homemade pornography, some of this is no longer driven by companies but by teenagers themselves. This suggests the need for radical alternatives in film, media and even pornography, an agenda which might draw inspiration from the feminist publishing houses that successfully shifted the sexist nature of children's literature in a more positive direction in the 1980s.

A healthy political sphere will always depend on the strength of wider social forces. A key question for gender politics, therefore, is whether those working for social change are willing or able to rediscover the tradition of organising in the political sphere. The recent lively currents of feminist thinking and campaigning present a new opportunity to find ways of working with, not for, people to bring about change. A greater number of intra-

feminist debates about the core political issues affecting men and women could unite these efforts and ensure that they are informed by open, honest and vigorous deliberation. More relational forms of activism such as community organising – which uses trained campaigners to organise people across different community institutions around issues of common interest – offer opportunities to involve women in setting the priorities and shaping and participating in the actions to bring about change.

Conclusion

Mainstream debates on gender politics are still narrowly focused on ‘women-on-the-board’ approaches. A re-examination of the meaning of gender equality is required to shift the debate so that it is better focused on the perspectives and interests of women from different backgrounds, and on how to involve them in shaping the world they live in. Overall, we need a gender politics that is less about how women can succeed in a man’s game, and more about how to change the rules of the game.

INTRODUCTION

Arguably, feminism has been one of the most successful movements the UK has ever seen. The women's liberation movement challenged assumptions about the role and ability of women in society, and led many women to broaden their own aspirations and expectations of life. In recent years, following a long period during which feminism was distinctly unfashionable, new networks, books and campaign groups tackling discrimination and sexist attitudes have thrived once again, boosted by new technology and social media. Through this research we aim to generate debate about the priorities for this next era of gender politics, and about the strategies and agencies required to achieve change.

Historically, legislation guaranteeing protection against discrimination has been the main tool to address women's disadvantage, and the dominance of men in positions of power relative to women is often taken as a benchmark of wider success (or failure) in furthering women's rights and equality. Rarely does a month go by without the a new report or event highlighting the dearth of women in the upper echelons of politics, business, media or sport, or the lower pay they receive relative to their male colleagues. It is sometimes asserted that having more women in positions of power will do more to advance other women's interests. Potentially, this suggests, greater gender equality at the top could also have a transformational impact on gender relations and on the nature of political, economic and cultural power.

In previous generations, however, feminism was characterised by intense debates about whether these 'women-on-the-board' measures create only the semblance of progress, leaving in place the political, economic and cultural inequalities that affect working-class, disabled, elderly and ethnic minority women most profoundly. The African American feminist Bell Hooks (1987), for example, once alleged that middle-class white women interested in women's rights are reluctant to call attention to race and class privilege. The broad focus on discrimination, Hooks argued, asserts biological solidarity between women who, in reality, have very different political priorities.

This paper seeks to examine these debates by exploring the impact of economic, social and cultural change on women from different backgrounds. IPPR interviewed 50 women from 16 families across three generations – grandmothers, mothers and daughters within the same families – to gather evidence about the changes in women's expectations, as well as reviewing the statistical evidence regarding women's progress over the last 40 years (see Methodology below). Our findings suggest that mainstream debates often fail to reflect the everyday struggles and compromises that face women in the modern economy and society. We argue that the focus on individual empowerment and women at the top can obscure the greater need to build the collective power of women to shape the world they live in. We set out a way forward that seeks to transform family and economic life, and to support better choices than those currently available.

Methodology

IPPR conducted quantitative analysis of the 1958 National Child Development Study, the 1970 British Cohort Study and the Understanding Society household panel survey 2011 to explore trends in gender relations and paid and unpaid work.

We also conducted a combination of group and individual, semi-structured interviews with 50 women across 16 families. In most cases we interviewed grandmothers, mothers and daughters in the same families. These interviews sought to explore women's aspirations, expectations, attitudes and experiences around education and work, relationships and care, and women in cultural life. We used purposive sampling to ensure a diverse sample of women from different ethnic, socioeconomic and educational backgrounds.

The women were aged between 14 and 85, and included five minority ethnic families of West African, North African, Caribbean and Latin American descent. The majority lived in London, Belfast and Greater Manchester. Interviews were also conducted with women in Liverpool, Edinburgh and East Yorkshire, reflecting that family members do not always live close together. The purposive sampling also ensured that we included a mixture of mothers who had their first child in their teens, 20s and 30s, and of lone parents, married, widowed and separated women across all age groups. Of the women of working age, it included women earning between £5,000 and over £50,000 a year, and some who were unemployed.

The quantitative data made analysis of same-sex couples impossible as sample sizes were too small. We recognise that this is a limitation of the analysis. A further limitation of the qualitative sampling framework was the lack of representation of women without children over the age of 30, due to the focus on mothers and daughters. Further research will be necessary to properly represent the views of these groups.

Structure and scope of the report

The issues covered in this report are not exhaustive. Glaring omissions include the welfare system, elderly care, and a better examination of how race, age, sexuality and disability interact with gender and class. The focus is on work, care and the representation of women in popular culture.

Chapter 1 examines the apparent improvements for women in education and work at a time of rising inequality and stagnant social mobility. It explores women's aspirations for and experiences of the labour market. Through analysis of the data, we make the argument that women at the top and comparisons between the 'average man' and 'average woman' are not good markers of women's progress. The recommendations call for more focus on the nature of flexibility at the bottom of the labour market and the structural factors that underpin women's disadvantage.

Chapter 2 looks at women and the unpaid economy, particularly their primary responsibility for childcare and domestic work. It explores recent trends in responsibility for unpaid work, and the experiences of women in the home. The language of 'choice' and the ideology surrounding the role of mothers in society are presented as reinforcing the idea that care is the private responsibility of women and as ignoring the difficulty many

women face in meeting work and care commitments. The recommendations call for more support to encourage shared responsibility for care and a shift in the role of men.

Chapter 3 explores the representation of women in cultural life. We illustrate a pervading sense among women that the representation of women in advertising, media and popular culture has become increasingly unrealistic, with particular concerns about the commodification and sexualisation of women. We argue that the traditional legislative tools are limited in the face of these issues, and outline a reformist approach.

The final chapter examines the implications of these issues for gender politics, and sets out an agenda for democratic renewal of the economy, society and politics.

1. FALSE PROMISES? WOMEN IN WORK

In mainstream debates, the political priorities around gender have focused on enabling women to compete on an equal footing with men, largely through legalistic measures to tackle discrimination and – more recently – through quotas to increase the proportion of women in positions of power. Progress against these aims is most commonly measured by looking at how women compare to men in terms of their employment rate, average pay and ability to advance to senior positions. Through this chapter, we suggest that these measures can be misleading, and that the reality of women's emancipation is much more complex and more uneven than the familiar narrative of linear advancement suggests. This debate often takes place in abstract terms; arguably, there should be a clearer focus on the underlying causes of women's disadvantage, particularly the poor quality of work at the bottom of the labour market and the impact of women's primary responsibility for care on their employment prospects.

1.1 Gender politics today: measuring women's progress

In terms of the aspirations and opportunities available to women, the most dramatic changes appear to have taken place since the 1980s. Girls have been outperforming boys at school since 1996. The number of young women going to university has outstripped men since 1992, across different ethnic and class groups, and young women are also more likely to obtain a first or upper-second degree than their male contemporaries (Thompson and Bekhradnia 2009). Women now make up half the workforce – compared to 36 per cent in 1971 and 29 per cent in 1931 – and the proportion of married women and mothers in work has risen substantially over the same period, to the extent that dual-earner couples now represent a significant proportion of all households.¹ While the earnings of full-time female workers still trail those of men by more than 10 per cent, the gender pay gap between men and women in their 20s has almost disappeared. Increased female earning power has also transformed gender relations in some households, driving a small but steady increase in the number of house husbands and men who share in the housework and childcare.

Raising women's aspirations and challenging discrimination in the workplace have been core strands in efforts to break the economic dependence on male breadwinners and challenge traditional gender expectations. An exhibition at the Women's Library in 2012 exploring women and work² showcased books encouraging women to choose atypical careers that dated back to the 1920s. While women were never simply housewives, as folk history would have it, the second world war propelled millions of women into roles that challenged traditional gender expectations, and in the process expanded their skills and horizons. Women's employment grew throughout the post-war era, as the expansion of university and the growth of middle-class jobs, combined with increasingly loud calls for women to be able to fulfil their creative potential alongside men. Following pressure from the women's liberation movement, the 1970s saw a series of legislative measures to promote gender equality, including the 1970 Equal Pay Act and the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act. Another relic included in the Women's Library exhibition was a poster campaign produced by the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) – a body set up in the mid-1970s to enforce the new gender equality legislation – urging women to

1 Analysis of the Family Resources Survey 2010/11 suggests that 16.2 million people live in a household headed by either a single person or an adult where all adults work full-time. A further 8.1 million people live in a household headed by a couple with one working full-time and the other working part-time, compared to 6.6 million in households where one person works full-time and the other does not work. See page 76: http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/hbai/hbai2011/pdf_files/full_hbai12.pdf.

2 The Women's Library, All Work and Low Pay: The Story of Women and Work, exhibition until 25 August 2012. www.londonmet.ac.uk/thewomenslibrary/whats-on/exhibitions/all-work-and-low-pay-the-story-of-women-and-work.cfm.

consider non-traditional career choices, from bus drivers and railway workers to scientists and engineers. Gendered educational and occupational choices persist, but nevertheless there has been improvement since the 1970s.³

In the 1970s and 1980s, second-wave feminists not only rallied around issues of discrimination but also debated the sort of economy that would enable both men and women to use their talents and creativity in the workplace. Many prominent feminists at the time were closely aligned with the socialist movement, and ideas for a more democratic economy – rooted in a belief that people should be able to influence the decisions that shape their lives – were designed to support political renewal on the left.⁴ In the end, however, it was the political right that was able to regroup and renew itself. The Thatcher government drew on the language of the counter-culture movements of the 1960s and 1970s to argue that greater flexibility would unshackle human creativity and drive innovation (Wainwright 2012, Fraser 2009). Thatcher broke the labour movement's industrial base, deregulated the labour market, and supported a dramatic restructuring away from industry and towards financial and service sectors.⁵

Perhaps the most visible sign of these dramatic economic changes was the rise in female employment. The growth in female-dominated occupations in the personal services sectors contributed to the entrance of women into the workforce, while the fall in employment in male-dominated sectors such as manufacturing led to a parallel decline in male employment rates.⁶

On many common measures of gender equality, therefore, the economic model of the last 30 years appears to have delivered for women. The period has also seen an increase, if slow, in the proportion of women in professional and managerial jobs, which now constitute the UK's largest occupational category, at 15.5 per cent of the workforce (Dolphin et al 2011: 9). By 2009, women held just over a third (34 per cent) of managerial positions, just over two-fifths of professional jobs (43 per cent) and half of associate professional jobs (EHRC 2011b). However, women still have only a weak presence in the upper echelons of economic and political life. According to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) – the successor to the EOC – women make up less than a quarter of all MPs in the UK parliament, for example, and 12.5 per cent of directors in FTSE 100 companies (EHRC 2011a). Thus progress in this area is often used as a yardstick for gender equality, and is one of the core rallying issues for feminist politicians and pressure groups. The Fawcett Society runs a campaign on the underrepresentation of women in positions of power,⁷ and in the run-up to International Women's Day in 2012, Cherie Blair and several other high-profile women argued that gender parity on company boards was a defining issue for women's equality. Wider debates raged on whether legal quotas should force the issue.

3 See for example Francis 2000: 9, DfES 2007: 9

4 See for example Rowbotham et al 1980: 9

5 In 2011, 82.4 per cent of jobs in the UK were in service sector industries, with the largest categories accounted for by the public sector (27.2 per cent of total employment) and wholesale and retail (15.3 per cent). Manufacturing accounted for just 8.2 per cent of employment, with the rest in construction, utilities, agriculture and mining (Dolphin et al 2011: 10–11).

6 The proportion of women in work increased by more than 50 per cent between 1971 and 2008, while male employment was up just 2.5 per cent over the same period. Between 1971 and 2011, the employment rate fell from 92 per cent to 76 per cent for men, but increased from 53 per cent to 66 per cent for women (Dolphin et al 2011: 10–11).

7 See www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/index.asp?PageID=1207.

1.2 Women's aspirations and opportunities over time

IPPR's qualitative findings with women across three generations reflected some of the considerable achievements of feminism, not least in the changes in the views and aspirations of many women themselves. In the 1960s, pioneering feminist thinkers such as Juliet Mitchell (1966) argued that women's choices around work and care were not just restrained by practical circumstances but also by the fact that women were brought up to think of themselves as future wives and mothers. The aspirations of the older generation of women we interviewed were shaped by traditional views about gender and the role of women in society. Some women felt they had encountered practical barriers to achieving their ambitions in education and work, but others had aspired to traditional 'female' roles in work – such as teachers, nurses and midwives – or saw themselves primarily as homemakers. One 76-year-old woman – who was educated at Oxford University but then married and became a housewife soon after graduating – noted that the prestigious university, rather than seeking to expand women's minds, had encouraged them to see a woman's role as being 'to serve'.

'I was at Oxford [University] and in our last year there was a sort of careers advisory person you went to see, but if you clearly weren't going to be in the higher reaches of academia you tended to be firmly pointed in the direction of teaching ... I did teach for a while but I got married almost immediately ... The ethos of the school was that if you were a woman you were there to serve.'

Aged 76, London

Women entered university in large numbers for the first time in the 1960s. This coincided with a post-war cultural shift that prioritised the importance of work in self-identify, leading to greater expectations among the baby-boomer generation of the importance of finding a 'career', rather than simply a job (Dench 2010). Many of the second generation of women interviewed had benefited from the expansion of university in the post-war period, including some women from working-class backgrounds. Their expectations and experiences of work were often radically different to their mothers' and grandmothers', and some had risen to senior positions. Several spoke of how they had experienced discrimination in work and, in some cases, how they had fought to challenge established notions of a woman's role. One 49-year-old mother of two spoke of how she had resisted attempts by a careers officer, apparently driven by racist as well as sexist assumptions, to steer her into teaching.

'Anything I wanted to be, I've been put off – it's usually a careers teacher. At one point I wanted to be a social worker, and I remember the careers officer at the university saying "Oh it's impossible to do that – you've not got any experience" ... and when I look back now, I think that can't possibly have been true. In the 1980s they must've been crying out for black social workers.'

'And the other thing I wanted to do was be a barrister, and this same careers officer said "You'll never be able to do that ... you've got to have connections". And I said what about a lawyer? And he said "It's so difficult to do that" and then he quoted the failure rates of the profession ... I look back now and I think what a load of rubbish, I would've passed my exams ... He just wanted me to be a teacher – it's like a cracked record, all my life people wanted me to be a teacher and I've never wanted to be a teacher.'

Aged 49, London

Women of the youngest generation interviewed were far less likely to see gender as an explicitly limiting factor in their choices around education or work than their mothers or grandmothers. Most were better educated than their parents and, although gendered choices were still evident, their ambitions and experiences in work were characterised by greater diversity. Some aspired to professional or managerial roles, and one young woman thought that ‘for my generation, girls get on better than boys’, and that the young women she knew had more drive and determination and better interpersonal skills than their male counterparts. A 23-year-old graduate from Belfast spoke of how she felt that it was expected that she would go to university, both by her family and wider society. This was in contrast to her mother and grandmother, who had both married and had children young, and had taken long breaks before returning to work.

‘I don’t remember having any ambitions at all ... I ended up being various things. I was a secretary for a while, I was a typist for a while, I was a bookkeeper for a while, and then I married, had my family and was at home for 22 years.’

‘I felt that the expectation of me and all the girls of my generation was that you go to uni ... I always felt like it was expected of me to make the most of the opportunities that I got because [my mum] didn’t do it ... I don’t think I’ve ever really thought about getting married or having children – I mean obviously I will one day, but this comes first, getting a career.’

Grandmother, 81, and granddaughter, 23, Belfast

The story of women’s progress resonated strongly with women in these families, and reflected the important achievements of feminism as well as the wider economic and social changes that have meant a more diverse range of opportunities in education and work is available to women. The situation was far less clear-cut in families from lower-income or with lower-level educational backgrounds, however, particularly when it came to experiences of the workplace.

1.3 Service nation: a middle-class story of progress?

Accusations that feminism has largely benefited middle-class women have dogged the movement since as long ago as Emmeline Pankhurst’s prioritisation of suffrage over issues of maternity. The focus on women’s formal, legal rights to equality seeks to grant women a political voice and recourse to take on discrimination and sexist attitudes. But it may not, some critics argue, transform the quality of most women’s lives. Thus Jenny Turner (2011) has accused feminists today and historically of being ‘mostly white, mostly middle-class, speaking from, of, to themselves within a reflecting bubble’. For Turner (among others) feminism has come to represent a sharp-elbowed aspirational project that supports the empowerment of women as individuals but leaves only a weak political voice for the collective demands that seek to transform family and economic life. For some, feminism has not only ignored the concerns of marginalised women but actively undermined them. The Labour MP David Lammy (2011:11) has controversially argued that the women’s liberation movement fed into an individualistic ‘my rights’ culture that facilitated the rise of neoliberalism and is evident in the consumerist values of many young people today.

As outlined above, the biggest rise in female employment occurred in the 1980s, supported by growth in female-dominated occupations in the personal services sectors. However, changes to male employment and earnings also had a ‘push’ effect in some communities. Men make up the majority of employees in most sectors, but the industries in structural decline, particularly large parts of the manufacturing sector, are male-

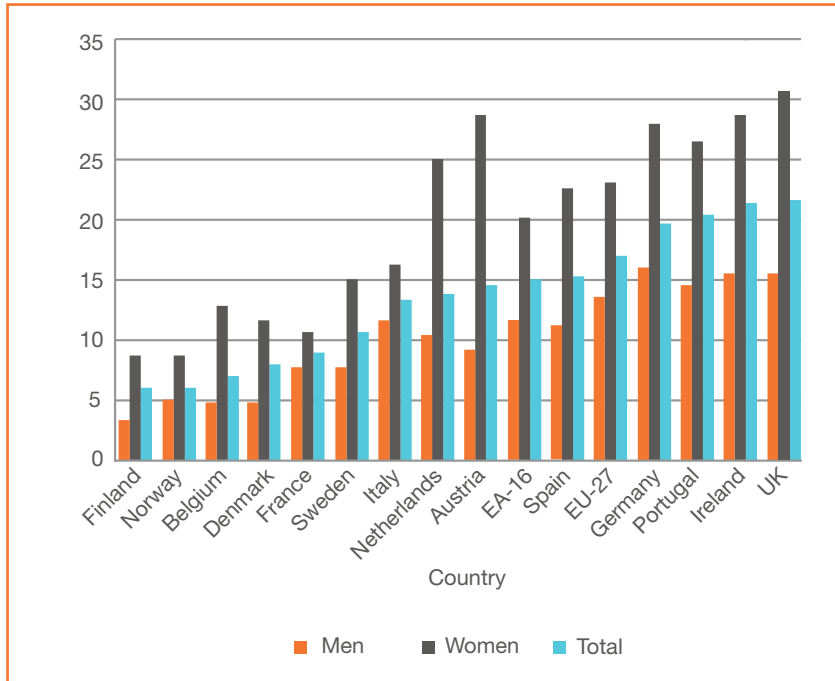
dominated, and men with lower levels of education in particular have experienced a decline in their earnings and employment prospects. Men born in 1958, who hit the labour market on the cusp of deindustrialisation in the 1980s, were more likely than their fathers to suffer from job losses, negative changes in occupation, and falling in earnings (Dex et al 2008). Between 1979 and 2010, male inactivity rates rose from five per cent to 17 per cent, while female inactivity rates fell from 45 per cent to 30 per cent (Dolphin et al 2011: 14). While the main reason for economic inactivity among women is looking after a family, studies have linked high rates of male inactivity with former industrial towns and, in particular, with the kind of mental health and substance misuse problems associated with long-term unemployment.⁸ The narrowing down of routes into well-paid and skilled jobs in manufacturing has led to a fall in household incomes that has meant, for some families, that dual-earning reflects a financial necessity, not simply changes in the attitudes and aspirations among women (Crompton and Lyonette 2005: 3).

Improvements in the representation of women at the top are not necessarily a good measure of success in employment in the experience of most working women. In many areas, well-paid jobs in manufacturing have been replaced by relatively low-level, low-paid jobs in the private services sector, staffed by a cheap, flexible and largely female workforce. This process has been termed by some as the ‘feminisation’ of poverty.⁹ At the turn of the century, women made up 84 per cent of workers in personal services, 78 per cent of administration and secretarial workers, and 71 per cent of sales and customer services workers, and the heaviest concentrations of women were in the relatively low-paid ‘five Cs’: caring, cashiering, catering, cleaning and clerical work (House of Commons Trade and Industry Committee 2005). A significant proportion of women in low-paid jobs work in small and medium-sized enterprises, which often lack progression routes, and in 2011 about 1.2 million women were self-employed, following a sharp increase after the economic downturn. These women have very few employment rights, and evidence suggests that the rise in self-employment is likely to reflect workers attempting to avoid unemployment, rather than a sign of revived entrepreneurship (Philpott 2012). Thus, although the UK was performing well on the proportion of women in managerial positions before the economic downturn, we also had one of the highest levels of women in low-paid work in Europe, and very high rate of low-paid work overall (see figure 1.1). This situation was little changed in 2010 (see figure 1.2).

8 See for example Webster et al 2010

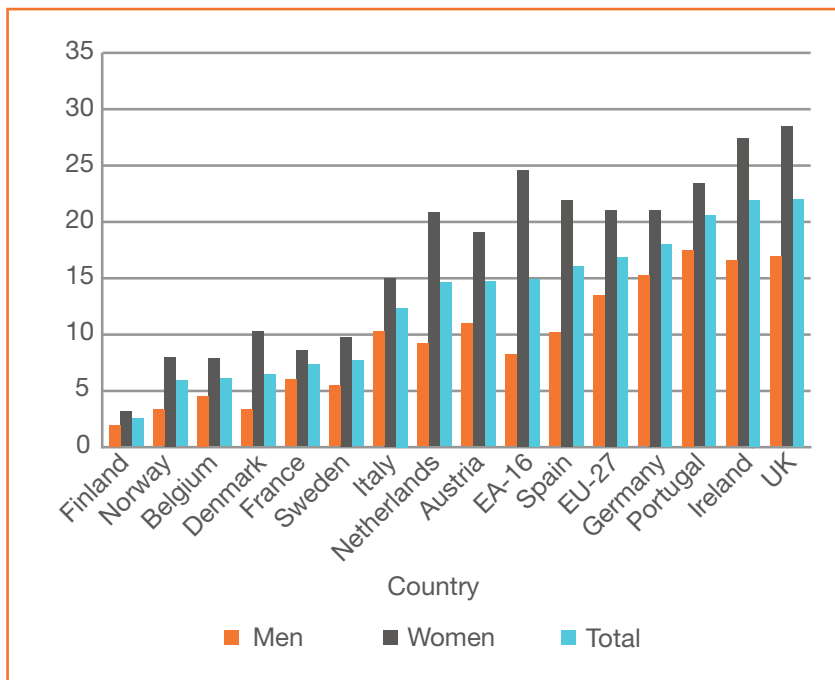
9 See for example Power 2009

Figure 1.1
Low-wage earners
among full-time
employees, by gender,
2006



Source: Eurostat 2006¹⁰

Figure 1.2
Low-wage earners
among full-time
employees, by gender,
2010



Source: Eurostat 2010¹¹

¹⁰ See http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php?title=File:Figure2_Proportion_of_low-wage_earners_%25_2006_and_2010.png&filetimestamp=20130201090333.

¹¹ *ibid*

In a study of full-time workers in 12 European countries including the UK, Schäfer et al (2011: 12) found that a large service sector, public or private, increases women's chances of securing work in a high-status occupation, but that a stronger reliance on the private services sector is associated with more polarised experiences and high levels of low-paid work among women. The study found that a large public sector and/or high trade union density is associated with a smaller proportion of women in low-paid jobs and a less polarised workforce.

More recently, the public sector has been an important source of employment for women in the UK. Green (2012) calculates that the proportion of women employed in 'non-market services' – a broad category often used as a proxy for the public sector – increased by 34 per cent between 1990 and 2010. The public sector currently accounts for about 40 per cent of female employment, compared to 15 per cent for men (EHRC 2011b). Crucially, the expansion of the public sector has traditionally provided access to quality jobs for women, including through better access to training and progression opportunities, fairer pay, and stronger family-friendly working practices than the private sector (Green 2012). However, the UK's public sector is relatively small compared to the Scandinavian countries that have high female employment rates, and trade union density is very low in the private services sector. Furthermore, the Coalition government's cuts to public spending have resulted in substantial job losses in the public sector – these cuts have affected women disproportionately, and there are still more to come (TUC 2010).

The experiences of women in work have been characterised by a diverse and increasingly polarised range of experiences, and as such improvements in the difference between the 'average man' and the 'average woman' may also be misleading. The gender pay gap is one of the most commonly cited measures of female disadvantage in the labour market, reflecting the centrality of campaigns for 'equal pay for equal work'. IPPR's analysis of the 1958 National Child Development Study and the 1970 British Cohort Study explored the impact of gender on wages over time,¹² and how this differs for men and women from different backgrounds.

Controlling for education, social class, geography and whether or not and at what age respondents had children, our analysis of full-time workers shows that women born in 1958 were, at the age of 41–42, expected to earn almost 35 per cent less than men born in the same year. This figure fell to 29 per cent for women born in 1970, asked at age 38–39. However, pay inequality within each gender is much greater than the difference between men and women. Our analysis suggests that women, as a gender group, are more unequal in their income than men, but the difference appears to have narrowed between the two cohorts, as inequality has increased significantly among men. The effect of social class is also much stronger between men from both cohorts than it is between women. (See annex 1 for coefficient estimates from each regression model.)

- Controlling for other factors and looking only at full-time employees, women born in 1958 earned almost 35 per cent less at age 41–42 than men born in the same year (see annex 1, table A1.1). However, professional women earned nearly three

12 All calculations are based on weekly wages for those in full-time employment only. For the purposes of the regression modelling, the outcome variable, weekly wage, was converted into its natural logarithm form. This is to eliminate any skewness in the variable so it can be analysed in linear form. Unfortunately the cohort studies did not conduct questionnaire waves within identical age periods. To overcome this, the analysis investigated the closest and most up-to-date age points possible: ages 41–42 taken in the 2000 wave for the 1958 cohort and ages 38–39 taken in the 2008 wave for the 1970 cohort. The results were then interpreted by observing the exponentiated values of the regression coefficients.

times as much as women in unskilled jobs born in the same year (table A1.3), while professional men earned 45 per cent more than men in unskilled jobs (table A1.2).

The pay gap between men and women born in 1970, tested at a similar age (38–39), dropped slightly to 29 per cent (table A1.1). During the period, inequality fell between women and rose between men. Professional women born in 1970 were still likely to earn 80 per cent more than unskilled women (table A1.3), while professional men now earned 61 per cent more than unskilled men born in the same year (table A1.2).

- Changes in the labour market have disproportionately affected men and women with lower levels of educational attainment. Among those born in 1958, both men and women without qualifications (a minority category) had worse earnings prospects than their parents (Dex et al 2008). As a result, the gap between the earnings of less-well-educated men and women has declined over time, while it has remained more constant for those with tertiary education (see OECD 2011b). IPPR's analysis shows that, for both men and women, higher levels of education lead to higher wages in both cohorts. The premium associated with a degree is higher for women than it is for men, although men with and without a degree could still expect to earn substantially more than their female counterparts in both cohorts. This premium fell slightly for women born in 1970, reflecting the expansion of women attending university. In contrast, the graduate premium increased for men, which may be a reflection of the stagnation of wages for men with lower levels of education.
- A man born in 1958 was likely to earn 14 per cent more for holding a degree (asked at age 41–42), while a man born in 1970 was likely to earn 17 per cent more for holding a degree (at age 38–39) (see annex 1, table A1.5). A woman born in 1958 was likely to earn nearly 34 per cent for holding a degree. This declined slightly for women born in 1970, who could expect to earn 32 per cent more than women without a degree (table A1.5). This shows that a degree benefits a woman more than it benefits a man, although the gap has closed.
- Although a woman enjoys a higher premium for a degree, she still earns much less than her male counterparts. Holding everything else equal, a woman without a degree born in 1958 was expected to earn about 52 per cent of the amount a man without a degree earns, based on weekly wages, while a woman with a degree was expected to earn about 71 per cent of a male graduate's wage (table A1.5). Among the 1970 cohort, women without a degree could expect to earn 59 per cent of a (non-graduate) man's wages, while a female graduate could expect to earn 75 per cent of man's wage (table A1.5).¹³

This analysis is based on full-time workers, but the pay gap between full-time and part-time workers is much larger (over 36 per cent, compared to 10–15 per cent for full-time workers) and has hardly fallen at all over the last 30 years (TUC 2012b). A report by the House of Commons Trade and Industry Committee (2005) estimated that 36 per cent of the gender pay gap was due to different employment patterns, including women's greater likelihood of being in part-time work compared to men.¹⁴

13 These results utilised an interaction variable isolating the effect of both being female and holding a degree-level or higher education.

14 The report estimated that a further 41 per cent of the gender pay gap was due to discrimination and other factors affecting women's employment choices, 15 per cent to the fact that sectors and occupations with higher concentrations of women have lower levels of pay, and 8 per cent to the fact that, historically, women have spent fewer years in full-time education than men and so have lower qualifications.

Part-time work began to grow in the 1960s and consisted almost entirely of low-paid jobs in the service and manufacturing sectors, occupied primarily by women with children (Dex and Bukodi 2010: 13). Between 1971 and 1993, a massive 93 per cent of the total increase in women's employment was in part-time work, and the proportion of women working part-time increased from one-third in 1971 to almost half (46 per cent) by 1993 (Court 1995: 13). The proportion of women in part-time work has since fallen to 39 per cent, but this is still the third-highest rate in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), behind only the Netherlands and Switzerland (Plunkett 2011). Female employment in manufacturing has declined since the 1980s, as it has for men, and most of the growth in part-time work since has been in low-paid occupations in the service sector, such as hotels and restaurants, retail, health and social work and education (Grant et al 2006: 13–14).

While part-time work in other northern European countries has been used as a tool to retain workers and promote a healthy family life, in the UK the growth of part-time work is due to weak statutory regulation and its promotion since the 1980s as part of a more 'flexible' labour market. In a survey of 22 workplaces across England, Grant et al (ibid) found that the main motivation for employers in taking on part-time workers was to keep wage costs down and deploy staff flexibly. Employers told the researchers that they had been able to maximise productivity by redesigning jobs to focus on specific tasks and limiting the number of hours that workers such as care assistants, learning support workers and cleaners have to finish the job. This sort of tight task control constrains employees' ability to use their talents and skills at work. Space for autonomy and influence in work – an important measure of job quality – has declined over the last 30 years, with the sharpest contractions occurring in female-dominated low-paid sectors (Green 2009). The current economic downturn has led to a significant decline in real earnings for female part-time workers, which between 2009 and 2010 fell by 4.3 per cent in the bottom decile and 3.4 per cent at the median level (Grimshaw 2011). There has also been an increase over this period in the number of male workers who are in part-time work because they cannot find full-time work.

1.4 Class, aspiration and opportunity

IPPR's qualitative research found that, across all three generations of interviewees, women's aspirations were shaped and constrained by the actual opportunities available to them, which were restricted not only by gender, but also by class, geography, race, age and disability. One 85-year-old woman said that she had never thought about promotion opportunities when she was young because, as an Afro-Caribbean woman, 'it wasn't offered to you'.

'You never got to a place where, if you do so-and-so, you get upgraded. The bosses were there, and the workers were here. There was very little hope [for women] of rising to the next level in my time ... And especially with the colour, don't forget the colour.'

Aged 85, London

The gap between what-was and what-might-have-been was perhaps most obvious for women from more highly educated backgrounds. Women from working-class families often said they had little option but to leave school at 16 and take up factory work, unless their parents could afford to send them to secretarial college. Not many of these women could afford to give up work for long periods of time when they had children.

'Out of my class in primary school, you could count on one hand the number of girls who got any further education at all. There was a

spinning mill and a stitching factory and there were some very clever wee girls who had no alternative, they just went to work in the mill ... I was fortunate, my mother said no – I was sent to the best business college at that time.'

Aged 81, Belfast

'My mother, she worked really hard in the factory ... and when I turned 14, she was determined that I wouldn't go into the factory ... It was money really [that held you back] ... Nowadays there are grants and things, but there was nothing then, if you didn't have money.'

Aged 69, Belfast

Class and educational differences between women have strengthened over time. The lives of the women who did not benefit from the expansion of university education did not differ so dramatically from their parents'. These women had an ambiguous relationship with the workplace – some saw it as purely a necessity, while others thought there were positive aspects, such as setting an example to their children or getting out of the house, but felt the job opportunities available to them were of poor quality. Almost all of the younger generation of women interviewed had aspirations for the future, but some who lived in areas of high unemployment felt that opportunities in work had worsened over time. One 19-year-old from Greater Manchester talked about the sense of decline, insecurity and lack of hope on the estate where she lived. She felt that university was unlikely to provide the sort of opportunities that it had in the past, particularly in light of the current job market and the rise in tuition fees. Her grandmother and mother, who had both found jobs easily when they first left school, reflected on how the labour market had become more hostile to school-leavers compared to when they were young.

Daughter: 'There isn't a single job so you can actually pay your way through university, so you're just going to get into debt and then you're still not going to get a job afterwards, 'cause there are no jobs. It's just ridiculous. There's just no point in getting yourself into a load of debt for nothing, that's the way I look at it. So I'd rather go into work.'

Grandmother: 'Things have changed so much because when I was younger you could walk out of one job right into another, in the '60s. But now there's nothing. I feel sorry for young people today.'

Mother: 'And when I was younger, you'd be able to just knock on the door and get a job. And now you need CVs, you need experience. Before you could just knock on the door and they'd train you. And now it's so hard.'

Granddaughter, 19, grandmother, 67, and mother, 39, Greater Manchester

Gender still has an independent impact on women's earnings prospects, but our findings suggest the need for a more nuanced understanding of how gender interacts with class disadvantage. Race, age and disability are also poorly represented in the mainstream debates that centre on achieving gender parity in the workplace. Older women (and men) are increasing as a share of the population and, without significant social care reform, these changes are likely to raise new issues of gender politics. Some of the older women we interviewed were isolated from family members living in other parts of the country. Some, such as those who had problems with ill-health and mobility or who relied on state pensions, found it particularly hard to get out or to build wider social support networks. Current discourse does not necessarily reflect these different political priorities. Asked

what ‘feminism’ and ‘women’s equality’ meant to her, one woman answered ‘someone who’s in a high-class, you know a high-up job’ and ‘bitchy women’. Others had a more positive reaction, but this suggests that, for some women at least, feminism has come to be seen as an elite project.

1.5 Beyond abstraction: class and the motherhood penalty

Discussions about gender and pay are often divorced from the wider structural context that underpins female disadvantage in the labour market. This is closely associated with their primary responsibility for care, particularly childcare. Female employment rates are much lower for mothers than for women without children, and there is much more variation in employment rates between mothers and women without children than there is between men and women without children (Plunkett 2011). The gap between the average wages for full-time male and female employees has declined steadily over time and has all but disappeared for men and women in their 20s, reflecting an increasingly well-educated female cohort. Yet this gap opens up again when women hit their 30s, around the average age that women have children.

IPPR’s analysis of the 1958 and 1970 cohort studies suggests that the effect of having children on women’s earning and employment prospects has, in the aggregate, improved slightly over time. Most of the mothers of children born in 1958 would have taken a long break from work after having children, and those in relatively good jobs experienced a fall in occupational status and earnings. By comparison, their daughters were more likely to return to work more quickly and to maintain occupational status after having children (Dex et al 2008). Our analysis of full-time workers born 12 years later, in 1970, shows another small improvement, although mothers are still penalised by comparison both with women without children and men with children.

- Mothers born in 1958 can expect to earn 14 per cent less than they would if they did not have children. This penalty shrank somewhat for women born in 1970, who could expect to lose 11 per cent of their wages for having a child (see annex 1: table A1.4).
- A mother born in 1958 who had children by the age of 40 could be expected to earn a third (32 per cent) less than a father born in the same year, holding all else equal. This penalty declined slightly for those born in 1970: mothers in their late 30s could expect to earn just over a quarter (26 per cent) less than the average father (table A1.4).¹⁵

However, things have not improved for all women. Average improvements appear to reflect the fact that the earnings prospects of women who postpone having children have improved, while things have gotten worse for women who have children earlier. IPPR’s analysis shows that women born in 1958 and 1970 are worse off for having kids at a younger age, and the effect appears to have strengthened over time.

- Women born in 1958 who had their first child later (between the ages of 25 and 32) were likely to earn 12 per cent less than women without children. For women born in 1970 this difference decreased to less than 10 per cent (table A1.3).
- Women born in 1958 who had their first child between 18–24 years of age were likely to earn 17 per cent less than a woman without children. Those born in 1970 who had children at the same age were likely to earn 20 per cent less than women without children (table A1.3).

15 These results utilised an interaction variable isolating the effect of both being female and having a child (the ‘mum effect’).

There is a strong association between occupational class and the age women have children. Professional men and women are more likely to have children when they are older and much less likely to have children in their teens and early 20s, compared to lower-skilled and, in particular, unskilled men and women. Professional and managerial women are also more likely not to have children, in contrast to men, for whom no such correlation emerges (see annex 2).

In fact, male earning prospects may actually be enhanced by having children. Holding all other factors equal, fathers born in 1958 could expect to be earning 16 per cent more by the age of 40 than had they decided not to have children. This reward for fatherhood increased to nearly 19 per cent for those born in 1970. There was no evidence that the age men had children had any effect for those born in 1958, but for men born in 1970 those who had children later in life also appeared to do slightly better than those who had their children younger. In a comparative study, Lundberg (2012) found that both the ‘motherhood penalty’ and the ‘fatherhood bonus’ appear to be strongest in countries with policies and cultural values that support the ideal of the male breadwinner and the female homemaker. The study found a slight correlation between higher inequality and a bigger fatherhood bonus, and suggested that this may be because employers have more space to pay fathers more than non-fathers when there is greater income variation overall. Thus, rising inequality in the UK may explain why men who have children later are doing slightly better than men without children.

1.6 Women’s experiences: the impact of care

Legislation to protect women from discrimination on the basis of maternity leave or childcare duties has been a lynchpin in the struggle for equality in the workplace. Many of the older women we interviewed had been openly discriminated against by their employers after having children. One woman from Belfast noted that until 1979 women were required by law to leave the Northern Irish civil service once they got married. Another had nearly lost her job in the mid-1990s because she could not find childcare arrangements to fit with the hours her employer, a public library, wanted her to work. She noted that her employer ‘wouldn’t make any allowance for you if you had children, but we all had children’. She cited the importance of antidiscrimination legislation in ensuring that this form of direct discrimination no longer took place.

Indirect discrimination is far harder to legislate against, however. Our findings suggested that women become far more conscious of the impact of gender on their opportunities when children enter the picture, reflecting their greater awareness of the likely impact of motherhood on their earnings and progression prospects. One 30-year-old working in the PR industry felt her managers were already making assumptions about her ‘reliability’ should she choose to have children, and cited cases when women had been sidelined after maternity leave.

‘You get to my stage in your career, and it’s assumed that you will sprog up at some point and you’ll go a bit funny for a while. “Do we really want to rely on her?” ... I’ve heard my current MD refer to another colleague coming back from maternity leave, and they were talking about whether she could take on an account and he said “No, ‘cause she’ll be a bit wobbly”.’

Aged 30, Oxford

Antidiscrimination legislation has also been limited in addressing the wider culture and organisation of work that fails to accommodate family or intergenerational care commitments and penalises career breaks. While women are no longer expected to give up work when they have children, many of those interviewed cited the impact on their financial independence, progression prospects and long-term economic security, such as pension provision.

‘I think your opportunities are more limited [as a woman], particularly if you take breaks in your career ... I did work part-time for a number of years, and that affects your pension, and it affects your economic situation.’

Aged 49, London

This situation affects the majority of women who have children. The lack of good flexible working options in well-skilled and better paid occupations means that many women are confronted with a stark choice between pursuing a career and supporting family life. One survey found that nearly half (44 per cent) of women take on a job below their skills and experience after having children (Alakeson 2012). Schuller (2011) has suggested that increasing levels of overqualification are partly driven by the large numbers of women who downgrade after having children, as education levels have improved among women without corresponding efforts to ensure jobs are designed in ways that support caring responsibilities. A proportion of those we interviewed reported that they had moderated their aspirations after having children.

‘I have had to moderate my ambitions a bit, when I started off I thought I would be chair of [the company] by the time I was 30, and lots of things blow you off track, so I think in some ways my ambitions are a bit unfulfilled really ... I do think that when I was in my 20s there was this image of the corporate go-getter with tremendous shoulder pads out here and a helmet of hair marching through boardrooms kneeing men in the balls ... The glass ceiling does exist but it’s harder to spot ... If you choose to get married and have children, something has to give, you can’t have it all ... or you can but the cost is very high.’

Aged 49, London

The over-representation of mothers in part-time jobs, many of which are concentrated in low-paid sectors with seriously limited progression prospects, leaves many women languishing in jobs below their potential. At the bottom of the labour market, however, ‘flexibility’ is experienced in a very different way. A significant minority of women’s experiences of work after having children are characterised by discontinuity, insecurity and low pay. One mother of two teenage girls in Greater Manchester had wanted to stay at home longer when her first child was born 15 years ago, but could not afford to and so returned to work after six weeks. She has worked part-time ever since in a retail job that is low-paid but allows her to meet her family commitments. She enjoys the social aspect of the job, but does not feel that the job stretches her or makes the most of her skills and talents. She noted that, while she was expected to be flexible, her managers were often unwilling to change her shifts to accommodate her family responsibilities.

‘I work in a supermarket now ... I just do it because it fits in with [my children]. I enjoy the people that I work with, but it’s not very fulfilling ... I just keep thinking there’s got to be something better ... I think children

hold you back, a lot, because you've got to be there, to fit in with school hours. And there's not a lot of jobs that fit in with school hours.'

Aged 44, Greater Manchester

Studies show that mothers with lower levels of education and those in lower-wage jobs, part-time jobs and jobs in sales and elementary occupations are more likely to move in and out of work, and that the wages of those with lower levels of education have not kept pace with average wage growth (CASE 2011). In contrast to the past, when middle-class women were most likely to be out of work, today those least likely to work are mainly women with low qualifications and few job options, particularly lone parents and those with disabled children. In our sample, one 25-year-old woman with a five-year-old child wanted to be an interior designer, but was worried that her skills and confidence had declined after having been out of work for so long. Her mother had her first child at age 16. She had wanted to train to work in childcare, but had three more children and was never able to return to study. At age 46, she has only ever worked sporadically in casual care and catering jobs. More recently, the needs of her youngest son, who has behavioural problems, have shut her out of work altogether.

'Before you can even start looking for a job, you have to think about [care]. Like where we are now with [my son], he has additional needs and he's never done a full day in school. Today he was home by 11am and that's pretty much how it is, they bring him home from school before it escalates, and there's just nobody that I could rely on ... not "rely on", but I wouldn't expect them to do that. That's why I've had a break since my last job.'

Aged 46, Greater Manchester

1.7 Women in top jobs: a model of change?

Improvements in the difference between the 'average man' and the 'average woman' since the 1980s have taken place against a backdrop of stagnant social mobility, rising economic inequality, and a dramatic shift in the nature of work available. Our findings show that, while the gap between the average wages for full-time male and female employees has declined steadily, the gains have been uneven. Many women as *individuals*, particularly those who go to university and postpone having children, are able to progress in work in a way that would not have been possible for previous generations. Yet women with lower qualifications and those who have children at a younger age are finding it harder to secure good jobs and opportunities in the workplace.

It is often stated that women in positions of power may support working cultures that are more sympathetic to active parents. This was not, however, the experience of our interviewees. All of the women interviewed thought it was fair for women to be able to compete for top jobs on an equal footing with men, but few had faith that this would support better outcomes for women as a whole. Several women said that, in their experience, female bosses were not necessarily more sympathetic to childcare problems, particularly if they did not have children themselves.

'If you're a career-minded woman who doesn't have children, they are actually the worst women to think about [reconciling work with family responsibilities] because they don't have that compassion that you've got children. They just think, "Well if it's sick, just take it to its grandparent or whoever you can find".'

Aged 49, London

Others questioned the broader premise that women are more likely to champion new forms of management. While some women said that they tried to challenge macho work cultures, the vast majority of those interviewed thought that women often have to ‘act like a man’ to get ahead, and that most women take on the culture and norms of the institutions that have promoted them, as do most men.

‘It concerns me in my industry that a lot of women have had to compromise things to get ahead, like their ethics [and] their concern for colleagues, because they know that if they behave in a certain way they can compete with the guys. Generally, just more senior women to me, that I’ve worked with – obviously there are different people and different varieties, different working styles – but generally the most successful do not speak about their children, if they have them ... They have to take a more masculine approach, which I struggle with a bit. I tend to be more concerned about the people I work with ... I’m more concerned about [colleagues] being successful. I will push them forward, but then that means that I’m not seen as successful as some of the others.’

Aged 30, Oxford

1.8 Conclusion

The growth of the service sector has supported an increase in the proportion of women in management positions. But paid work is not a liberating or fulfilling experience for all women, and space for autonomy, creativity and influence in work has declined over the past 30 years. Through the evidence presented in this chapter, it is clear that these problems are unlikely to be addressed by measures that target discrimination against women or a more equitable distribution of reward at the top. Instead, they require far more focus on the quality of work across all sectors, occupations and regions of the British economy, and on the extent to which workplaces accommodate family responsibilities. The following chapter explores in more detail women’s experiences of unpaid care and domestic work.

2. WHO CARES? WOMEN AND THE UNPAID ECONOMY

Work historically carried out by women, unpaid, in the home – raising children, caring for people who are ill, disabled or elderly, and doing the housework – is crucial to supporting the paid economy. However, recent improvements to support families to meet these commitments have been limited by the view that more far-reaching reforms would place undue burden on employers or taxpayers. Strong ideological commitment to the role of mothers in society reinforces the view that child and elderly care are primarily the private responsibility of families and, most often, of women. Through this chapter we explore the considerable tension and compromise that exists in how families organise work and care. For any fundamental change to occur, care should be placed at the heart of how society is organised, in particular through measures to support and encourage greater collective responsibility for child and elderly care.

2.1 Care as a private matter

No debate on the meaning of gender equality is complete without a discussion of women's primary responsibility for domestic work. This was a central issue for second-wave feminists. Who vacuums the house, looks after the children and cooks the dinner was not, they pointed out, a trivial matter. The undervalued role of unpaid domestic work in supporting the paid economy led the controversial figure Selma James to set up the 'Wages for Housework' campaign (which is still going today). Most British feminists rejected this on the basis that it would entrench existing gender relations, but they agreed that women's responsibility for housework and childcare underpinned their disadvantage in society and the labour market. They called instead for a shorter working week to enable men to be more active parents, and for a reorganisation of domestic work through the social provision of childcare, nurseries and parks.

Historically the UK has provided very little support for working parents, in part due to an ideological commitment to the male breadwinner model. Care has traditionally been seen as a private matter and primarily the responsibility of women. More recently, however, calls for greater equality in the workplace have combined with concerns about maternal employment to push childcare provision up the political agenda – now it forms part of the policy repertoire for all the main parties. Yet childcare remains a long way off being either universal or affordable. Free childcare is only available for children between the ages of three and five, and is limited to a maximum of 15 hours a week. This will soon be extended to 'disadvantaged' two-year-olds, but this still leaves a considerable gap that parents (and usually mothers) must fill. On average, parents of children under two currently spend over £5,000 a year on childcare, with costs increasing much faster than either earnings or inflation (Daycare Trust 2012). Furthermore, cuts to subsidies for low-income families made by the Coalition government are likely to further restrict access to childcare.

In addition to these limitations, the focus on employment and poverty reduction has not been balanced by significant concern for goals around gender equality, care or work–life balance. As a result, progress on elderly care has been extremely weak, and family policy remains at least tacitly committed to a traditional gender division of paid and unpaid work. The lack of affordable childcare for children under three, combined with a relatively long period of maternity leave,¹⁶ effectively traps women on the motherhood track.¹⁷ Labour introduced a right to request flexible working for parents of young or disabled children, but this was aimed at, and largely taken up by, mothers. The Coalition government plans to extend this right to all employees, not just parents, and has proposed further flexibility

16 At up to 52 weeks, maternity leave is generous compared to other OECD countries, while paternity and parental leave are among the least generous (Ben-Galim 2011).

17 For comparative evidence, see Misra et al 2010

in parental leave arrangements, meaning mothers will be able to transfer their leave to fathers after two instead of 20 weeks, as is currently the case. However, this will only be available on a low-paid basis and, given that most women earn less than their partners, take-up is likely to be low.

The case for more far-reaching reforms is sometimes countered by the argument the traditional division of labour in the home reflects women's preferences for balancing work with care responsibilities. The British sociologist Catherine Hakim (2006), for example, has argued that the revolution in contraception, milestones in legal equality and rise of white-collar and part-time jobs have dramatically expanded the choices available to women. With more equal opportunities, Hakim argues, women have revealed their true preferences – and many have made 'home-centred' choices.

The language of individual choice, freedom and aspiration has permeated public life over the last 30 years, and is often underpinned by an ideological belief in economic liberalism, a smaller state and greater personal responsibility for 'how life turns out'.¹⁸ Rhetorically, these arguments draw on the language of female empowerment that originated in the women's liberation era, but individualism and personal responsibility are not necessarily compatible with earlier feminist arguments for the transformation of the home and the workplace. Hakim (2006) uses the notion that women choose lower-paid, part-time jobs to argue against reforms to make the workplace more family friendly. In wider debates, such reforms are frequently painted as a 'cost' to society and a burden that the private sector cannot afford. The CBI (2011), for example, has voiced concern over the government's proposals to extend parental leave, arguing that this could encumber job creation at a time of weak growth. This stance reinforces the view that child and elderly care are still primarily the private responsibility of families and, most often, of women.

2.2 Muddling through: trends in responsibility for unpaid work

Most heterosexual couples¹⁹ still organise work and care along traditional gender lines. Around three-quarters of women are the primary carers for children (SIRC 2011) – particularly, some studies suggest, the more gruelling, more mundane, physical and routine care (see for example Hook and Wolfe 2012). When a relationship breaks down and there are children involved, in nine out of 10 cases it will be the woman who becomes the primary carer (Smallwood and Wilson 2007).

The time women spend on other domestic chores excluding childcare has decreased over time, but this is thanks largely to labour-saving devices such as washing machines and dishwashers (SIRC 2011) and gendered roles are particularly entrenched in this area. Among married couples of working age, women undertake an average of 15.4 hours of housework (excluding childcare) a week compared to an average of 5.8 hours for men (Kan 2012). The division of tasks suggest that traditional gender ideologies are at work, with men more likely to do DIY and women more likely to do the cleaning and cooking (Gershuny and Kan 2009).

Highly gendered patterns of employment restrict the extent to which men are able to participate actively in family life. On average, British men work much longer hours than women, and flexible working is least likely to be available in male-dominated sectors such as manufacturing. More than one in six men (17 per cent) work more than 50 hours

18 See for example David Cameron's 2010 article 'Return to responsibility: With less bureaucracy and greater personal responsibility, people are more likely to make ethical decisions', www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/feb/27/david-cameron-personal-responsibility.

19 The data did not allow us to explore patterns among homosexual couples.

a week, compared to six per cent of women.²⁰ Research shows that men's working hours, and particularly whether they work weekends, is negatively associated with the amount of time they spend with their children (Hook and Wolfe 2012).

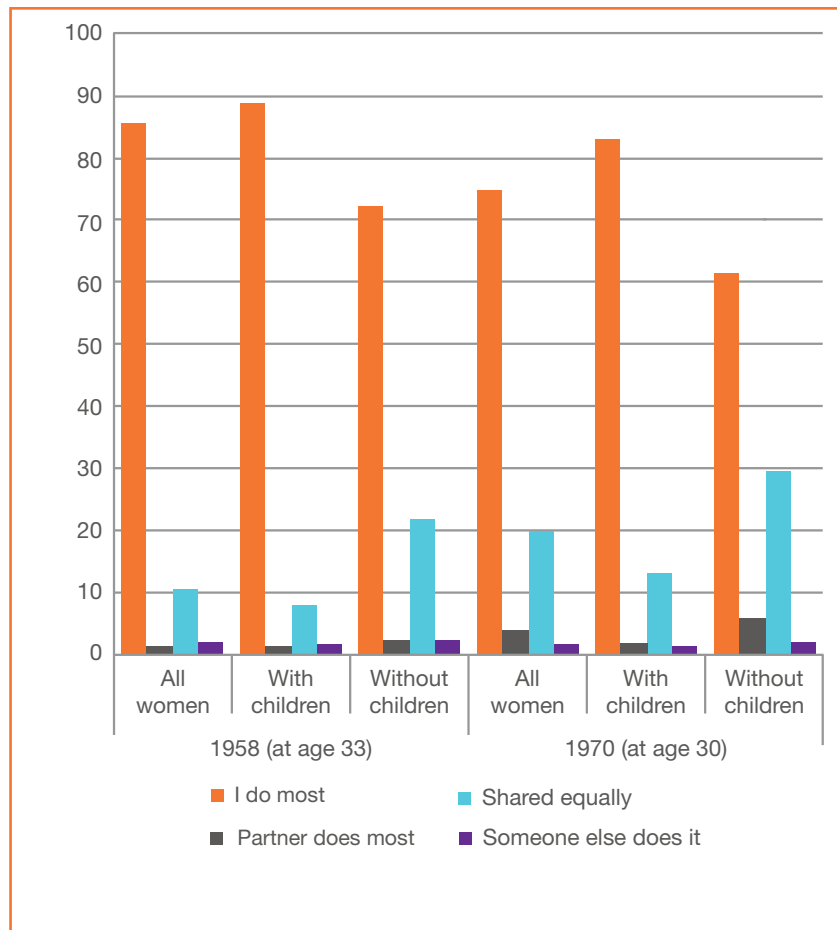
Despite this, the growing importance of paid work for women has been accompanied by a shift in the contribution of men in the home. This is most clear in the relationships of men with their children. Since the 1970s, the average time men spend on childcare, and to a lesser extent housework, has increased (Sullivan 2011). Most British fathers now attend the birth of their children, change their nappies, and spend some time looking after them alone each week. The time fathers spend caring for infants increased by 700 per cent between 1975 and 1997, from 15 minutes to two hours in the average working day (Burgess 2011). By the early 2000s, about a quarter of British fathers were spending substantial amounts of time (over 28 hours a week) with their children. This compared to 10 per cent of German fathers and 50 per cent of Danish fathers (Smith and Williams 2007). Men are also keen to do more: nearly half of fathers would like to spend more time with their children and less time at work (Ellison et al 2009).

IPPR's analysis of the 1958 National Child Development Study and the 1970 British Cohort Study shows an increase in shared responsibility for housework (excluding childcare) between men and women over time. When they were in their early 30s, married participants in both cohort studies were asked who was responsible for doing the 'laundry and ironing'. More than eight out of 10 married women (85 per cent) born in 1958 said they do more 'laundry and ironing' than their partner, while just over seven out of 10 women (75 per cent) born in 1970 agreed. The proportion saying that housework is shared equally with their partner doubled from 10 per cent among women born in 1958 to 20 per cent among the 1970 cohort.

Couples without children are the most egalitarian and have seen the biggest improvements over time. Among married couples born in 1958, women without dependent children were nearly three times more likely to say that responsibility for 'laundry and ironing' was equally shared. Women without children also saw the biggest improvements over time. Just over one in five (22 per cent) women born in 1958, without children, say their partner shares laundry and ironing equally. Almost a third (30 per cent) of women born in 1970, without children, agreed. Having children, however, appears to entrench traditional gender roles in the home – and the more children, the more entrenched these differences become. Research shows that a higher number of dependent children increases the time spent on housework for both men and women, but that the effect is stronger for women (Kan 2012).

20 See OECD 'Better Life Index' for the UK www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/topics/work-life-balance/.

Figure 2.1
Who does the laundry and ironing, by relationship make-up



Source: 1958 National Child Development Study and 1970 British Cohort Study

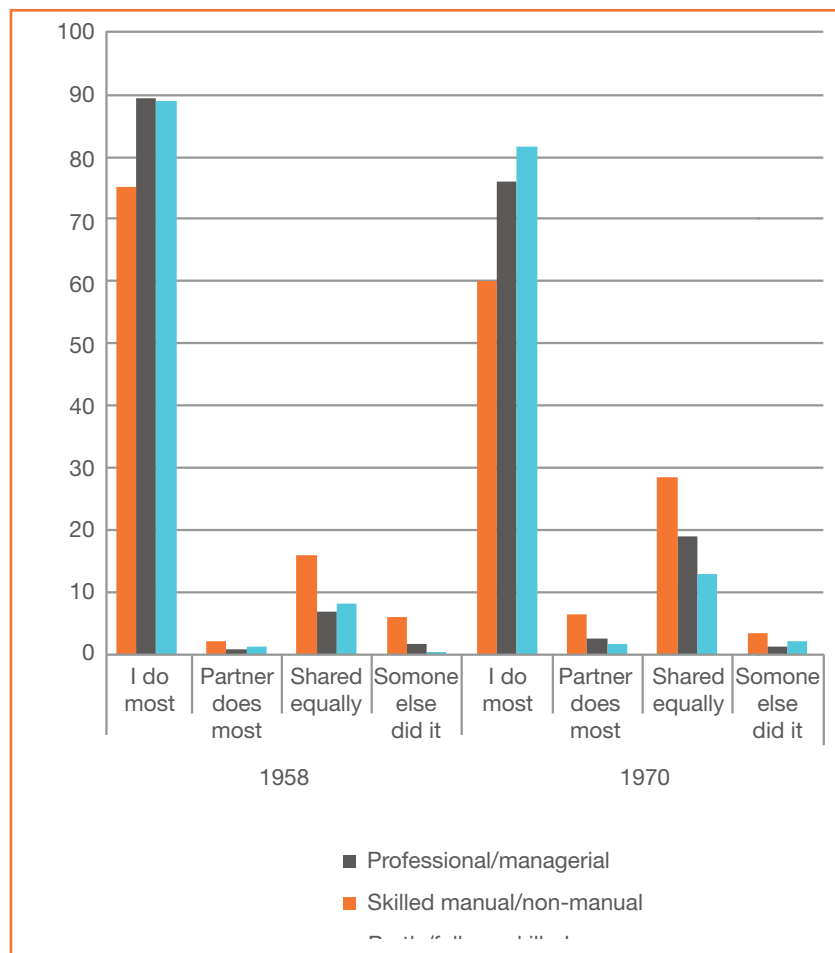
There are also marked educational and class divides in the role of fathers in childcare, which has not led to a parallel decline in the time spent on childcare for women. Sullivan (2011) found that mothers and fathers are both spending more time with their children, but that this shift has occurred mostly among more highly educated parents, with implications for the inequalities of time and resources invested in the education and development of children from different family backgrounds.²¹

Similarly, the shift in the division of domestic work differs significantly across different class and educational backgrounds. IPPR's analysis showed that mothers in higher-paid occupations have seen a greater shift towards more shared responsibility for housework compared to mothers from lower-level occupational backgrounds. The proportion of women with children from professional and managerial backgrounds saying that they do most of the laundry and ironing declined from 75 per cent among those born in

²¹ Exacerbating these inequalities is the fact that men and women are also increasingly likely to choose a partner similar to themselves (see Annex 3). This so-called 'assortative mating' is partly driven by positive changes such as the rising number of educated women who study and work on a level with men from similar backgrounds, but the implication is that wealth and poverty are increasingly concentrated in different households. Across the OECD, this social segregation contributed to 11 per cent of the rise in household inequality since the mid-1980s (OECD 2011a).

1958 to 60 per cent among those born in 1970, with most of the fall accounted for by an increase in the proportion saying that the housework was shared equally (up from 16 to 29 per cent). Among women in skilled (manual and non-manual) occupations, the proportion saying that responsibility for housework fell mostly to them dropped from 90 per cent among the 1958 cohort to 76 per cent among those born in 1970. The proportion of women in partly skilled and unskilled jobs saying that they did most of the housework fell by a much smaller margin, however, from 89 per cent among the 1958 cohort to 82 per cent among those born in 1970. Higher socioeconomic groups are, predictably, more likely to have 'laundry and ironing' done by someone other than a woman or her partner, but the proportion is small and appears to have declined over time.

Figure 2.2
Who does the laundry and ironing, by occupational level



Source: 1958 National Child Development Study and 1970 British Cohort Study

Commentators read different things into trends. Some suggest the changes reflect the increased bargaining power of women in higher-earning jobs. The 'new man' phenomenon is a popular staple on the telly, suggesting that more egalitarian values underpin the change. Others lament the lack of progress around unpaid work, and argue that gender ideology still plays a powerful role in determining who does what. Whatever the combination of drivers, the increased diversity in the configuration of work and care between couples represents a 'muddling through' as much as anything else. One survey

found that over half of parents feel their arrangements are due to necessity rather than choice. The survey showed that only a third think that parents have a choice about whether to spend time at work or with their children, with parents on lower incomes particularly likely to say that their arrangements are driven by necessity (Ellison et al 2009).

The next section draws on IPPR's qualitative research to explore how women's expectations around work and care have changed over time, the constraints that inform their decisions, and the sometimes difficult reality of meeting their different commitments.

2.3 Organising work and care: expectation, 'choice' and reality across generations

The majority of the older women we interviewed had given up work when they had children, mostly in their late teens or early 20s, and had become financially dependent on their husbands. Some of these women thought that women were 'naturally' more suited to caring roles, and said they had neither encouraged nor wanted their husbands to help out in the home. One 81-year-old mother of three from Belfast said she had seen the home as her domain and would not have welcomed her husband's help. She also thought that when her children were young, no one would have considered getting outside help from a childminder or a nursery. In her words, 'you had *your* child, and *you* looked after it' [her emphasis]. Some of these women were disapproving of working mothers.

These traditional views about men and women's social roles have faded over time. British Attitude Survey data shows that the proportion of women who think 'a man's job is to earn money and a woman's job is to look after the home' declined from 46 per cent in 1986 to 15 per cent in 2006 (Dench 2010). Brought up to expect that they will have the same opportunities as their male peers, the younger generations of women interviewed were notably less prescriptive in their views of a man and woman's 'natural' role. Women today are more likely than previous generations to accept the role of formal childcare services, and all of the younger generation of women interviewed thought that men should contribute equally in the home if both couples work full-time, sometimes in contrast to the views of their mothers and grandmothers.

Mother: 'I'm old-fashioned I suppose – I like the woman's role, if you like, the cooking and the cleaning, making the house look nice.'

Daughter: 'But at the same time, if you were both working full-time ...'

Grandmother: 'I think it's how you're brought up ... I've always done everything. I did the housework and all the DIY.'

Interviewer: [To daughter] 'Would you like to have split roles?'

Daughter: 'No! It should be even. Just thinking, if I've been at work and if he's not been at work all day, he should be doing it. Do you know what I mean – I shouldn't be expected to cook it should I? That's how it's meant to be if you're a couple – manage it together, not all one-sided.'

Mother: 'Whereas, with me and my mum, if we were going to be at home all day, we'd make sure the dinner was ready the night before [laughs] ... I think that men should go out and work and things like that.'

Mother, 39, daughter, 19, and grandmother, 67, Greater Manchester

For most interviewees, however, the binary distinction between work- or home-centred preferences did not fit. Many women, like the vast majority of men, increasingly want and expect to be able to combine a family with a rewarding working life, even as they

understand the former may have an impact on the latter. There were women across all ages who wanted to stay at home when their children were young and work in ways that enabled them to play an active role in their children's upbringing. One 50-year-old mother of two adult children from Belfast had given up a training contract with a company when she became pregnant and stayed at home for 12 years. While she said that in hindsight she might have waited, she wanted to give her children stability and did not regret her decision. She had also been responsible for the cooking and cleaning, but noted that her husband had worked longer hours, and in that sense she had felt that their contributions, while different, were shared.

'My husband worked shifts, so that was another reason for me to stay home. I mean, I wanted to stay home anyway but I thought, if he worked shifts and I worked too, the children would just be passed from pillar to post. Children need stability and so I thought I should be there and he worked God all hours. And because he worked God all hours, I thought that the time he was [at home] should be nice time and he should be able to enjoy the time with [the children]. Before we had children and we both worked, he did help with the hoovering and that, but when I had children, everything fell to me – but I didn't mind that, I was perfectly happy to do it.'

Aged 50, Belfast

These women stressed that caring for children and elderly relatives was important and could be very rewarding. Some also expressed anxiety about the impact that an emphasis on paid work could have on family and community life. But women who stayed at home for long periods when their children were young were often still keen to find a fulfilling job that enabled them to meet other people and have a level of independence upon their return. The woman from Belfast was lucky. She found a job she enjoyed that enabled her to retrain and progress when she re-entered the job market, but she recognised that the options of other women she knew had been more constrained.

Constraints and trade-offs in decisions about work and care

Women's views and feelings about motherhood and work are complex, ambiguous and plural. There was considerable conflict and compromise involved in most of our interviewees' decisions about how to organise work and care, which were often seen as far from ideal and shaped by necessity and circumstance. The persistence of the gender pay gap still defines many couple's choices, and several women said that they had stayed at home or worked part-time after having children because their partner earned more than they did. In other cases, limited household finances meant that some women who had wanted to stay at home were not able to.

Working patterns were not the only factor in determining who did what, however. Among our interviewees, some women worked full-time and yet still did most of the cooking, cleaning and childcare. Gendered patterns of care were often set during the first months of a child's life. Previously egalitarian couples found that the woman took on more of the housework while on maternity leave, but that when she returned to work this continued. Practice had also made her better at childcare, so those duties too seemed to fall to her, despite the fact she and her partner both continued to work. In contrast to their own experiences, many women said that their partners' lives barely seemed to change at all after having children. Many women's working lives are made more intensive by the fact that they are still largely responsible for unpaid work in the home. This led some to

question whether paid work has really improved women's lives in the way the popular narrative suggests.

'I think it's a lot harder now for a woman, I really do. My dad always went out to work, my mum was a housewife and looked after the children and that was it. She didn't work. He went out and earned the money. But it doesn't work like that today.'

Mother of two, 67, Greater Manchester

'My generation of women ended up achieving the freedom and the opportunity of going to university and going to work but they ended up with two roles ... I sometimes wonder if it was such a good idea ... When [women] come home they have to go to the supermarket, to cook, do the shopping, supervise washing the clothes of the children – and men don't do that.'

Mother of four, 60, London

In a few cases, women earned more or had more demanding jobs than their husbands, and this sometimes led to responsibilities being more evenly shared. Yet several women questioned the idea that anybody, male or female, is able to successfully meet work and family commitments without making some sacrifices in one or both realms. One woman had worked more than one job to make ends meet; another had alternated shifts with her husband in order to cover childcare, meaning that they rarely saw each other. Similarly, some of the women who had pursued a career noted that long-hours cultures meant they had missed out on important moments in their children's lives, and that the same was true of men who work a lot.

'For my job, I would sometimes work late and sometimes on a Saturday, so my husband would look after the kids then ... There was a point where they went to an afterschool club and I never saw them at all.'

Aged 49, London

The risk of the 'solitary confinement' approach to care

Regardless of their own views or expectations around work and care, for many women the reality of trying to meet family commitments and earn enough to maintain a decent standard of living could be very hard, particularly when they had to do so without wider support. The majority of women, even as they talked about the joys of young children, stressed the immediate and often dramatic impact on their working and social lives, and on their relationship dynamics. One 69-year-old woman from Belfast said that she did not go out with friends until her children were teenagers. While this was not the case among the mothers in younger generations, it was common for women to talk of losing any 'me time', to learn, think, go out with friends, or to pursue their passions, in work or otherwise.

'Everything changes [when you have children] and it changes much more than you think it would ... In terms of social life, that came to an end, a full stop, and in terms of my relationship, that changed dramatically, because there's another person ... It all seemed nightmarish looking back, it was a nightmare, the first 10 years were a nightmare.'

Aged 49, London

Sole responsibility for childcare, particularly in the early months and years of a child's life, can be extremely isolating. At least one in 10 women experience serious bouts of

depression after having children, and up to 80 per cent experience some form of ‘baby blues’ (4Children 2011). Loneliness, shock and depression were common experiences across all three generations. One woman from London, now 61, had her first child at 16, and brought him up alone. In her 30s, she met and married a man who ‘had an old-school view of what a wife does’, and she became pregnant with her second child. She quit her job to become a housewife and initially felt that after a tough period as a single mother her life finally ticked all the boxes. The reality, however, was isolating and monotonous. She became depressed and the relationship broke down a few years later.

[To daughter] ‘The happiest time in my life was when I was pregnant with you. I was in this nirvana. Husband, wife, baby, married, home, husband in job – ta da! That was the bubble, but of course the bubble burst ... I must’ve been missing something ... I did what I was supposed to do, but I just got depressed didn’t I? ‘Cause I just became this other person.’

Aged 61, London

The experiences of isolation were compounded for women who did not have the support of wider family or friendship networks, or those who were isolated from the wider community. One 54-year-old woman, originally from Morocco, married and moved to Scotland at age 17. She fell pregnant with her first child immediately, followed soon after by a second, and as a result was not able to work or learn English until several years later. Her husband worked most days until late. When her children reached school age, she found a job in a factory. Work, she said, was a ‘release’ from the monotony of home life, and it enabled her to meet and interact with the outside world. These experiences prompted her, later in life, to volunteer with a black women’s support group to help newly arrived migrant women to integrate.

‘Everything was new. I had to learn everything: the language, the culture. And the first two years I never managed to do anything, because when the first child was three months old I fell pregnant with the second one. I was so busy with my life, I never had a chance to learn, or to see what I wanted to do, apart from look after my babies.’

Aged 54, Edinburgh

Care can also be particularly hard for those living in depressed or violent communities, where opportunities to meet other parents and find activities for children may be more difficult. A young mother in Greater Manchester said that she did not like to take her five-year-old son to the park because it did not feel safe. Her mother lamented the loss of family services, drop-in centres and play schemes in the area, which she felt had enabled local parents and children to meet one another in a safe and friendly environment.

***Mother:* ‘Now, you can’t take [my grandson] to the park, can you? You have to check that there’s no drug paraphernalia or anything like that ... They used to have play schemes. You didn’t have to pay to take them in everyday – you’d take them in with a packed lunch and there’d be loads of stuff for them to do. There’s nothing like that anymore. It’s just kids walking the streets.’**

***Daughter:* ‘I feel like not wanting to go places [with my son] ‘cause of the way other kids are – like you go to the park and you see a man smoking, drinking. I don’t feel safe anywhere.’**

Mother, 46, and daughter, 25, Greater Manchester

Family breakdown does not have to mean that one parent becomes solely responsible, but it often does. Our sample included single mothers in all three generations, and in all cases, separation resulted in an extremely limited role for fathers, both financially and in terms of childcare. It was not always the father's decision to end involvement: some women felt that they were better off with no contact – due in at least one case to domestic violence. However, in other cases fathers failed to stay involved. In the words of one single mother of four: 'If [my ex-partner] can help it, he won't see [his son]. He's definitely not one of these that runs around in Batman suits.'

Sharing the joys and burdens of family life

Greater shared responsibility makes an enormous difference to the opportunities available to women, and is also good for fathers. In general, men report significantly higher levels of work–life conflict than women; at the same time, fathers who work flexibly and spend more time at home show improved physical health and psychological wellbeing (see Fatherhood Institute 2011). One 50-year-old mother of two teenagers from London is often expected to work unsocial hours. Her husband's work is less demanding, and as a result he has played a more active role in their children's upbringing. She felt this had enabled her to make more choices about her career and to progress at work, and highlighted that it had also had a positive effect on her husband's relationship with the children.

'I have to say my husband's always been very supportive. In fact, that's why I've been able to do what I do, because it is so unsocial – because it is shared. So if I have to work until 8 o'clock at night, he would actually stay ... I also think that's how a man gets to know his kids. If you go back to the '50s, men didn't really know their kids. I think it's really nice, if it's the dad that stays at home rather than the mother. In fact at one point my husband was unemployed for 18 months, and [my children] are actually used to him looking after them.'

Aged 50, London

Many parents, particularly among the rising number of dual-earning couples and single parents, rely on wider family networks to help with childcare. Of course, this has always been the case. One 54-year-old mother of four described how she had tag-teamed work and childcare with her sister when their children were young in the 1970s. Both sisters worked in the same factory but arranged to do alternate shifts, with one taking the morning shift from 7am to 2pm and the other taking the late shift from 2pm to 9pm. A teenage neighbour looked after the children for the 15 minutes required for the changeover.

Formal childcare services are more widely available today than in the past, but high costs and concerns about quality mean that informal arrangements with wider family networks still play an important role. Today, over half of parents rely on some form of informal childcare, with grandparents the most likely providers (Rutter and Evans 2011). However, given that three in 10 grandparents are under 60, and most of them are working,²² the ability and willingness of grandparents to play this role may have diminished over time. In one family from Belfast, both the mother and grandmother interviewed had relied heavily on elderly relatives to enable them to work, but neither was in a position to support the next generation in the same way.

22 See http://www.grandparents-association.org.uk/images/general_leaflet2010.pdf

Grandmother: ‘I always worked. I worked part-time, and the two grannies looked after the children for me. I worked at night. My husband came in [from work] at 6, and I went out ... But you had support, you had his mum and my mum, you didn’t have to pay out big money for it like you do now. It’s a big barrier now, childcare.’

Mother: ‘I have four daughters and my husband had two elderly aunts who looked to him to look after them ... and basically that was my childcare. So I worked all the time and my husband worked all the time too. You only got six weeks’ maternity leave then ... I work, so my daughter doesn’t have the support of me ... so she’s kind of missing out because we work – two people have to work nowadays.’

Grandmother, 69, and mother, 47, Belfast

Similarly, the cost and low quality of elderly care services can put considerable financial and emotional pressure on families. We found greater resistance to using elderly care services than childcare, in part due to concerns about quality. One 73-year-old woman, for example, had helped her sister care for their mother, who had a nervous breakdown after the death of their father. Her sister resisted seeking any help, financial or otherwise, from the state. Eventually, however, social services intervened and supported them to access a daycentre that provided much-needed physical and social support. Another woman talked about the emotional strain of caring for her husband’s elderly aunt, who, lacking social support or access to suitable services, was unable to cope on her own.

‘It’s difficult. [My husband’s aunt] has been living with us for coming up to six years. She’s physically and mentally fit, but just the isolation, she can’t cope. It’s not easy. It’s like having someone in the house 24–7 ... and if it was your own mother or relative, you could say “for God’s sake” if you get annoyed ... but because you don’t have that closeness with them, it’s difficult at times.’

Aged 47, Belfast

These findings suggest that the failure to support a more comprehensive reorganisation of domestic work, either in the community or the home, to support the increase in maternal employment and the demands of an ageing society, has led to a ‘care deficit’ (Lister 2005), as well as intensifying many women’s working lives.

2.4 Implications for gender politics: collective responsibility for care

People adapt their decisions according to context, and their actual choices and social roles are not, therefore, necessarily a sound guide for policy (Leahy and Doughney 2006). The choices available vary considerably in different countries depending on the level of support available for working parents and the extent to which society is organised to support care and a healthy work–life balance. The development of different welfare regimes in post-war Europe reflects the relative influence of different social forces, such as religion, women’s groups or business interests, and the ideology surrounding mothers’ roles in society (see Esping-Andersen 2009). They also reflect the importance placed on employment relative to the quality of care of children and the elderly.

The limited provision of childcare in the UK context has not kept pace with the increase in the number of dual-earning and single parent families, and contradicts the political rhetoric on the importance of female employment. As one 61-year-old mother of two said: ‘They

really need to sort that out – you can't say to women, "Go out to work" and then not provide childcare.'

Female citizenship has been a central goal in the Scandinavian countries that are generally seen as being closest to achieving a revolution in gender norms. In these countries, childcare systems are both affordable and flexible. Open from early until late, parents are able to choose the hours they need support, and high-quality childcare services with well-trained staff also ensure that children have more equitable access to developmental activities. Evidence shows that universal, affordable childcare has a significant impact on women's employment and earning prospects (see Ben-Galim 2011), and that women from all social classes benefit from public provision of childcare, which supports employment among women with low-to-medium levels of education and the ability of more highly educated women to progress into top jobs (Korpi et al 2010).

However, a focus on paid employment alone risks undermining the importance of wider social, civic and political life. Calls for greater access to and equality in the workplace need to be balanced with concern for the wellbeing of children and the contribution of men, particularly fathers, in the home. Other countries have attempted to support a healthier work-life balance through more flexible working patterns and limits on working time. The Netherlands, for example, has promoted quality part-time work for men and women (although in practice it is mostly women who take it up) while France has opted for a shorter working week of 35 hours for all employees. In various other northern European countries, employees also have a right to work flexibly, rather than simply a right to request to do so. This enables men and women to move into part-time work at certain periods of their lives, and in most of these countries employees also have a right to return to full-time work when they so desire (Asher 2011).

There are cultural as well as institutional barriers to greater involvement of fathers in childcare, and in recent years several countries have introduced 'daddy leave' – well-paid, protected leave entitlements for fathers – to encourage couples to share responsibility more equitably in the early years of a child's life. Norway was one of the first countries to introduce this, and studies suggest that it has led to a more egalitarian division of both the joys and burdens of childcare (Hook and Wolfe 2012). As one woman we interviewed pointed out, a shift in the role of men in the home may also change employers' expectations about who does what.

'I think in terms of [gender] equality, the one thing that will change that will be if men get equal paternity. That's the only thing I can think of that will make a difference ... I have conversations with men in business who say that they can't do anything because of maternity, and that everything's skewed towards women, but actually if men were given paternity and could take that paternity for as long as women, I think many more men would do it and that would equalise things.'

Aged 30, Oxford

2.5 Conclusion

The debate about women's 'home-centred' choices echoes suggestions by neoclassical theorists such as Becker (1981) that women have a comparative advantage in the home and choose to organise their work accordingly. In an article on ConservativeHome, for

example, the Conservative MP Nadine Dorries sympathised with the difficulty many women face around work and care, but concluded that women's liberation had 'created unrealistic expectations', and that feminism should instead be about 'allowing without censure or prejudice, women to make the choices they want for themselves'²³. In these debates, choices are presented as binary and solely a function of women's preferences, with little recognition of the financial realities behind many decisions or the trade-offs that have been explored in this chapter. The lack of a feminist movement means that there is a weak political voice for social care reform or greater support for working parents, but it also means that women themselves often see the work-life problem as having individual rather than collective solutions (Lister 2005). A healthier political discourse would seek to nurture and protect the interests of children and life outside the workplace, while challenging this is necessarily the concern of women alone.

23 'Feminism has advanced equality for women but it has also created unrealistic expectations'.
<http://conservativehome.blogs.com/thecolumnists/2012/07/nadine-dorries-mp-feminism-has-advanced-equality-for-women-but-it-has-also-created-unrealistic-expec.html>

3. WOMEN IN CULTURAL LIFE

The representation of women in the media and popular culture can either reinforce or challenge traditional gender norms. Over the past few decades, the passive wife, mother and hostess has been replaced across mainstream cultural forums by a more assertive and sexually empowered woman, in control of her own choices. While she can ostensibly be anything she wants, however, critics have noted that her choices appear to be narrowly centred on shopping, self-improvement, marriage and babies. Through this chapter, we explore women's attitudes towards the representation of women in cultural life. Instead of reinforcing a narrow, unrealistic and sexualised vision of what it is to be a woman, everyday culture should promote resilience and help women to navigate the realities of growing up and growing old in today's world.

3.1 The rise of 'girl power'

Internal disagreements led to the fragmentation of the women's liberation movement in the 1980s. Although many feminists took the ideas into wider political and environmental organisations, as a social movement it ceased to exist and increasingly came to be defined as outdated by the mainstream press. The 1990s, however, saw the rise of girl power. Epitomised by the Spice Girls, this more confident expression of femininity suggested women could choose to be sexy and powerful at the same time, and gave many young girls the message that they could do or be anything they wanted. This view rejected 'old' feminism as militant and prone to portraying women as victims, in favour of a more upbeat version that celebrated women's power, femininity and sexuality (Lister 2005). The presence of fiercely independent, ambitious and empowered women across TV and music appeared to mirror young women's sexual and cultural emancipation from marriage and motherhood, and suggested that they could 'have it all'.

Critics, however, have argued that this new empowered woman was often vapid and that her choices bore little resemblance to those faced by women in the real world. In this way, rather than simply mirroring society, the media arguably amplifies particular people, values, attitudes and issues (Douglas 2009).

Concern about the values and attitudes promoted by everyday culture also appears to have politicised a new generation of young women, and has arguably helped to drive new currents of feminist thinking and collective action. The relentless focus on women's appearance in mainstream culture issue has been the subject of various critical books and campaigns, for example, and feminist networks, blogs, media campaigns and pressure groups are attracting increasing numbers of young women to protest on issues such as the normalisation of lapdancing clubs and advertising for cosmetic surgery. This next emergent wave of feminism has a dynamism that is almost completely lacking in 'women-on-the-board' approaches, bringing fresh ideas and energy to old debates.

3.2 Role models, pathways and politics

Studies have shown that the portrayal of men and women in public life can reinforce ideas about 'male' and 'female' roles, making it harder to imagine ourselves in less traditional jobs or creating anxieties around ability (see Fine 2010). Most of our interviewees thought that diverse and positive portrayals of women were important in challenging stereotypes and raising women's awareness of what is possible. Some of the older women felt that women are today portrayed in a more varied and confident range of roles compared to the 1960s and '70s, when the main role for women on TV was as a gameshow hostess.

'I think it's got much better. There are a lot of good announcers on the news and they hold their own with the men. And now you have women

comedians. You just didn't have them, they didn't exist. You had Bruce Forsyth and things like that, and [his assistant] did a twirl, and it was still the pretty little airhead kind of thing. You still get that to some degree, but you don't have quite as much bias to the men who are the ones in charge ... If you've got a role model, it inspires you and you know then that you don't have to get married. You see when I was young – I really was totally out of the pattern. The people that I trained with for example, one of my close friends, their whole ambition was to get married and have children.'

Aged 73, Yorkshire

However, none of our interviewees thought there were enough positive role models for young women, and the vast majority felt that the portrayal of women in the media and mainstream culture had gone backwards. Some suggested the rise of 'celebrity culture' and more aggressive advertising had driven a more consumer-oriented ethos among young people and that this was shaping the aspirations of young women. Interviewees felt that women are either portrayed in a traditional homemaker role, as political and royal wives, or as part of a celebrity culture that promotes 'vacuous' people and values that suggest women are only interested in men, money, shopping or sex.

'Either [women] are portrayed as stupid, emaciated, vacuous, their only talent is entertainment ... I'm constantly horrified by the female inspirational figures. Currently there is what, Michelle Obama, who is actually widely in the media doing anything positive, and as it is she's a woman doing a wife's job.'

Aged 30, Oxford

While popular culture has tended to promote the idea that women can be whatever they want to be, an emerging theme from the interviews was that, in reality, it promotes an increasingly narrow way to be a girl or a woman. Films targeted at women, such as *Sex and the City* or *Bridget Jones's Diary*, tend to suggest that the route to women's fulfilment is finding 'Mr Right' and having babies (Power 2009, Gill 2007). Similarly, in recent years a string of popular pseudo-scientific books have argued that men and women are hard-wired to be different. Men are portrayed as rational, logical beings, suited for science, maths and leadership roles, while women are more emotional, compassionate and so prefer or are 'naturally' suited to domestic and caring roles (for example, Gray 1993). Some of our interviewees reflected that clothes and toys have become highly gendered, with dolls, hairdressing kits and cooking sets marketed to girls and trucks, machines and soldiers marketed to boys. Flicking through a magazine during the interview, one 22-year-old from London observed that the adverts were all highly gendered, prompting her grandmother to question why advertisers lack the imagination or courage to question traditional stereotypes.

Daughter: 'This is fascinating – two ads. We've got Aptamil milk, we've got the mum with the baby. Then we've got eco-cleaning, we've got the daughter with her mum. I don't think there will ever be a day when you've got a man and a woman [represented in adverts like these].'

Grandmother: 'See, I don't see why not. Why can't the man be seen to be doing the ironing, even his own shirt, in advertising? ... Why not? Are they afraid to do something different, the publicity people?'

Grandmother, 85, and daughter, 22, London

Rarely are the everyday struggles faced by women and girls represented in mainstream culture. One woman noted that working-class and ethnic minority communities are typically portrayed as targets of ridicule in shows such as *Little Britain*, *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*, and *The Only Way is Essex*. Women held up as role models tend to be rich and successful, but the challenges they face bear little resemblance to the lives of ordinary women. In November 2012, for example, the free women's magazine *Stylist* ran an article on 'power maternity leave' that celebrated women who had set up new businesses while on maternity leave.²⁴ The article sparked lively criticism among feminist bloggers. Kate Murray-Browne (2012) for example, who writes for the *Vagenda* blog, noted that most women are not in a position to do this. She lambasted *Stylist* for the apolitical nature of the article, which made no judgment on the fact that most of the interviewees had felt their previous employment was incompatible with family life.

3.3 Beauty and body confidence

The aspirational messages for young women promoted in popular culture often centre on how they look, with advice on exercise, make-up and diet. The attitudes of our interviewees to their bodies and appearance differed considerably. Some said that they paid little attention to the fashion cycle and spent minimal time on their appearance. Others stressed the sense of identity and enjoyment they got out of fashion and make-up, citing the ritual nature of 'getting ready'. All of the women interviewed thought the most important thing was for women to feel comfortable in their own skin.

However, there was consistent concern that, rather than promoting resilience and confidence among women, elements of the media, advertising and entertainment industries play on and drive women's anxieties about the way they look. This can have an obvious impact on women's self-esteem. The large number of makeover programmes and the scrutiny of female celebrities' appearance on the Daily Mail Online and in magazines such as *Heat* and *Grazia* were examples of how appearance consistently trumped other portrayals of women. Some interviewees felt that these forums promoted a narrow and increasingly unobtainable view of conventional beauty, with an overwhelming focus on the need to be skinny and on extreme looks only achievable through plastic surgery.

'Stick thin, like a model, and the thing is it's all photoshopped and edited but a lot of young people they don't realise that so they think, "Oh I'll just go and get surgery", to get bigger boobs so I can look like them even though they've just been made to look better by a computer. And even other things in the magazine, it's all to do with diet, for women it's all to do with weight and being conscious of how you look and your appearance. And to be beautiful, you have to be really thin and really pretty ... [I'd like to see] successful women, but successful because of their career, not just because their parents are rich. And I'd like it if there was as well, maybe, nothing to do with how you look.'

Aged 17, London

Ideology about race, class, age and disability are reflected in beauty norms. Some of the older women interviewed felt that there was an obsession with youth in mainstream cultural forums that alienates many women, noting that female presenters and actors are typically young, blonde, slim and beautiful – a requirement that does not appear to apply to their male counterparts. Several mentioned the controversy over decisions at the BBC

²⁴ See <http://www.stylist.co.uk/stylist-network/power-maternity-leave>

to drop older women from primetime television shows, while older male TV presenters do not suffer the same fate. Similarly, some ethnic minority women raised concerns about the dominance of white beauty norms, and the lucrative sale of damaging hair-straightening and skin-whitening products.

'I'm concerned about diversity – some magazines I wouldn't buy because I don't feel they represent me or here in the urban London kind of culture ... Particularly women of colour, definitely ... [Young girls] aren't seeing something that represents them, so [they think] their hair has to be straight and their skin has to be a lightened shade.'

Aged 50, London

'You know Vogue? One day I'm going to take a photo [of myself] and I'm going to send it to them and say, "What about us?"'

Aged 85, London

While some of these women stressed the singular view of beauty and femininity, others noted that the scrutiny of women was often confusing, promoting a need for constant monitoring, attention and self-improvement.

'It's all about body image and it's very confusing. It's like, this one's too fat, this one's too thin. And I don't know how girls are supposed to tell what actually looks good because it's so confusing ... I think that they have this notion of what's perfect – and that's why so many girls spend so much money on fake tans, and cosmetic procedures and hair and everything like that, and it is because they see it in magazines constantly and that's what we should look like everyday. And it is completely unattainable – nobody should have any imperfections – women aren't like, celebrated in any way. We should just all look perfect, and we should all look a certain way ... I think women can't ever get it right.'

Aged 23, Belfast

The pressure around women's appearance was hard to ignore, with interviewees citing women's attempts to conform to a sometimes unhealthy image of beauty, reflected in the rise of plastic surgery and eating disorders. While some women said they ignored and resisted this pressure, others highlighted the importance of looking good in terms of how they are perceived and how they perceive themselves. One young woman would not leave the house without several hours of preparation, and another felt that her appearance was under greater scrutiny at work than her male colleagues, suggesting that the way women are portrayed has a complicated impact on wider public life.

All interviewees felt that women are subject to greater scrutiny than men. However, several women suggested that men's bodies are increasingly subject to similar pressures. Some of the younger women interviewed said that their male friends and acquaintances were preoccupied with achieving a 'manly' or muscly body through an obsessive focus on exercise and weightlifting and the use of protein shakes or steroids. None of these women saw this as a positive development.

'I think men are increasingly under pressure to be fit and muscly, and they all drink these protein shakes ... I know we talk about it with women all the time 'cause it's so obvious, but I think it is tough on men 'cause they all have completely different body shapes as well, but then

there's this one body shape – and it's unattainable for most men ... Even [my brother] drinks protein shakes and he's always lifting weights, but he's tall and he's slim, and he's never going to be like, you know, but he does it anyway ... I've noticed pretty much every guy my age does do that.'

Aged 23, Belfast

3.4 Self-scrutiny and the rise of the internet

The debate about the representation of women in cultural life has taken on a new dimension in recent years. Across all ages, generations and backgrounds, women expressed concern about the sexualisation of girls and women in popular culture, noting that the vision of an empowered woman – from the fashion, music and film industry to computer games and children's toys – has edged closer to the stereotype of the heterosexual male fantasy.

'Fashion at the moment seems to be what I would've considered what a prostitute would look like 25 years ago. These incredibly high heels that women can barely move in, short skirts, really low-cut tops, showing their boobs and their legs, really tight tight tight clothes, this bodycon. And that seems to be quite normal ... I don't think it sends a very good signal to young women.'

Aged 49, London

Several mothers interviewed said that they felt it was harder to bring up children today than in the past, citing the commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood among other factors. Interviewees highlighted the marketing to young girls of 'sexed-up' dolls, padded bras, thongs and T-shirts with provocative slogans, or stationery marked with the Playboy bunny logo. This echoes concerns raised by government reviews commissioned by both the Labour and Coalition governments. Papadopoulos (2010) argued in a review for the Home Office that adult sexuality was being imposed on children before they were emotionally, mentally or physically able to deal with it. Later, the Bailey review (2011) found that 88 per cent of parents agreed with the statement 'these days children are under pressure to grow up too quickly'.

The debate on the impact of the sexualisation of adult culture has been framed by debates about the choices of the women who strip, pose or participate in pornographic films and photoshoots, and the idea that the market is simply responding to people's preferences. Among our interviewees, however, there was unease about the use of the language of sexual liberation to describe women's choices, with concern that it served to promote jobs such as glamour modelling and lapdancing as empowering career choices, when the reality may be very different. One young woman went for an audition at a well-known lapdancing club when she was 18. She had thought that stripping would be a well-paid and empowering job, but the women were poorly paid and forced to compete with each other for tips and private dances. She found the atmosphere hostile and competitive, and was put off by the idea of having to flirt with men for money. Although she got the job, she did not go back.

'Because of the way women are perceived now – it's all about being sexy and being able to get a man, you know, via your body, via sex – you know, sex sells, and because I knew [working as a stripper] paid quite well, I wanted to do it. But then when I got there, it wasn't as fun as it looks. There was a woman dancing and it's like, they have to get men

to buy them drinks, so they see any woman that comes in as a threat, so they were all looking at me giving me dirty looks ... I got talking to one of the girls that worked there and she was saying that you get more money if you get guys to buy you drinks, and I can't flirt to save my life, so I would've been rubbish ... You've got these men sitting by the bar and you've got to talk to them to get them to buy you drinks, and be like 'hey' – and I was 18.'

Aged 22, London

The portrayal of women in lads' mags and celebrity culture was seen to promote an unrealistic view of women's bodies and of sex. Women's bodies have to be waxed and taut; the ideal body shape often requires plastic surgery to achieve. Some of the younger women interviewed had experienced young men's prescribed view of female bodies. One 16-year-old girl from Belfast had overheard a teenage boy at her school ask another boy why he liked a particular girl given that she did not have a 'thigh gap'. Some said they felt pressure to conform.

Mother: 'I think they're putting more pressure on the average woman to look like that ... Men will read through lad's magazines, watch videos and, I don't know, expect you to be, or be disappointed that you're not the same as that.'

Daughter: 'They expect girls to look like that ... It does worry me at times,

'cause I think, does [my partner] think I should look like that?'

Grandmother: 'Well why is he with you then?'

Daughter: 'Cos he couldn't get anyone like that.'

Mother, 46, daughter, 25, and grandmother, 85, Greater Manchester

Of particular concern is the impact of widely available pornography on teenagers' expectations and experiences of sex and relationships. In a disturbing article in the *Times Educational Supplement*, teacher Chloe Combi (2012) points out that the concern is not that teenagers are exploring their sexual identity, rather it is that the norms governing this experimentation are being set by the sex industry. Much of the criticism has focused on the role of the industry in promoting these norms, but with the help of the internet and new technology, it is also being driven by teenagers themselves. All of the younger women we interviewed knew of incidents of 'sexting', where young women are encouraged to text pornographic photos of themselves to their partners, which are in some cases shared more widely or used as leverage in the relationship. Two teenage sisters from Greater Manchester said it was common for young boys in their school to look at homemade pornographic videos on their mobile phones in class, and a 15-year-old from London talked about websites where women could upload pictures of their breasts to be rated by men.

'All the sluts in school – that sounds really awful doesn't it – but they don't mind it [when boys look at pornographic videos on their phones], but I don't like it ... the fact that someone would do that for money, it's like being a prostitute ... I can't stand it, I think it's horrible.'

Interviewer: 'Would you ever say anything to them?'

'No, I just sit there and get on with my work ... All boys think girls have got big boobs and bums and that, and that that's what's pretty.'

Aged 14, Greater Manchester

'It's degrading. Like they have pictures of them naked with 'rate my tits' and it's just, I don't understand why people find it necessary, like why would you want to send in a picture of yourself, like if you get a high mark to feel better about yourself ... [Boys] probably think girls are a lot looser, easier to get.'

Aged 15, London

As these quotes show, various interviewees were concerned that society promotes to young men the idea that women are sex objects. For most women, it wasn't nudity, or even pornography, that offended, but the way in which women are reduced to the sum of their body parts – in the words of one woman, 'as if that's all we're good for'. One 19-year-old from Greater Manchester thought that the portrayal of women 'as if they're just a piece of meat' meant that men her age were more likely to expect women to be sexually available.

'It went from empowering women to, women are just items again. It's gotten even worse, because women are just portrayed as if they're just a piece of meat ... It's dead, it's cold. We're not even human beings – equality's just gone well out the window ... I've been on a date, right, and the guy was trying to practically maul me just because he'd bought me something to eat, he thought he had the right, do you know what I mean?'

Aged 19, Greater Manchester

3.5 Resistance, protest and alternatives

The majority of the young women interviewed were highly critical of the media portrayal of women, and felt that vulnerable or less confident women were most susceptible to pressure to conform. Resistance came through self-confidence and a mature attitude to appearance and sex, promoted in some cases by supportive parents or by wider cultural norms. A 35-year-old Muslim woman, for example, said that her father had never allowed her to wear make-up, follow fashion norms or go out with boys, and as a result she had sought her own alternative identity by getting involved in sport.

Solidarity between young women could also be important. One 23-year-old from Belfast noted that both the year before and after her at school had experienced problems with sexting, but her year did not because 'the girls stuck together and it was just boys being boys, and we sort of looked out for each other'. Several interviewees suggested that more access to critical discourse and debate, for example in schools or through protest groups, could help to mitigate the impact on teenage relationships and promote body confidence, resilience, and an open and mature attitude to sex and sexuality.

'I mean nudity itself, there's nothing wrong with the human body, it's a wonderful machine. It's never been bettered anyway, even with a computer! I think the human body is a wonderful thing, and to desecrate it in this way ... If you don't legislate to limit the publication of [sexualised images in magazines], you have to balance that with education to teach these young girls to be proud of their bodies and not to flaunt it in a provocative way, but to be proud of themselves ... You have a much better relationship between men and women if there is respect on both sides.'

Aged 73, East Yorkshire

A healthier representation of women in public life should not be reduced to the portrayal of women in high-profile roles. Susan Douglas (2009) has argued that the dominance of powerful women – lawyers, doctors and politicians – on US television has had a ‘decoy’ effect, giving the illusion that women have ‘made it’, while failing to reflect the realities of working-class lives. Instead, the focus should be on breaking down stereotypes, with non-traditional roles that show there is more than one way to be a girl – and a boy – and reflecting the realities of growing up and growing old in today’s world. Douglas called for a return of shows in the US such as the 1990s sitcom *Roseanne*, which depicted a working-class family struggling with life’s essential problems, and argued that issues such as inadequate childcare, dead-end jobs and long-hours culture should be given more airtime. The feminist thinker and academic Nina Power (2009), a powerful critic of the contemporary economic and cultural subjugation of women, notes the lack of coming-of-age films for women when compared to men. She suggests that filling this gap might be one way to challenge stereotypes and allow young women a more realistic and diverse exploration of sexual identity, sexuality and ways of being in contemporary society.

3.6 Conclusion

Our findings reveal a pervading sense of considerable unease about the portrayal of women in the media and popular culture. It is natural for men and women to want to fit in with and aspire to cultural norms about appearance and behaviour, and normal for teenagers to experiment with sex, sexuality and sexual identity. Yet as a society we should be concerned that the norms promoted by industry and popular culture encourage resilience, confidence and non-sexist values. In the 1970s and ’80s, the portrayal of women and girls in cultural life was a target of radical feminist critique, and led to the establishment of feminist and all-female publishing houses that had a lasting (if not comprehensive) effect on children’s literature (Lehtonen 2007). Similarly, the alternative comedy movement in the 1980s led temporarily to a move away from the sort of comedy that poked fun at women, ethnic minorities and disabled people. Such approaches suggest ways to promote a healthier and more diverse depiction of women in everyday cultural life, while the latest wave of feminist protest movements offers opportunities to harness the collective concerns of consumers.

4. TOWARDS A NEW GENDER POLITICS: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The focus in mainstream debates on discrimination and legal equality assumes that all women have the same political priorities, based on their collective identity and oppression. Politicians in particular often choose to appeal to women as a broad group with shared concerns around discrimination and sexism. For example, former Conservative MP Louise Mensch (2012) has said that: 'Most Conservatives would define feminism as supporting equal rights and opportunities for women. In that sense it is a movement of women, not of right or left.'

Through this report we have suggested that these broad approaches fail to represent or engage with the complex, plural and ambiguous views of different women. Gender discrimination is certainly not a thing of the past, but the way in which gender disadvantage interacts with class, race, age and disability generates particular challenges and perspectives that mainstream debates fail to reflect. Broad calls for 'equal opportunities' gloss over the fact that men also occupy different positions of power and class, begging the question, as critiques such as Bell Hooks' (1987) have pointed out, of *which* men it is that women want to be equal to.

A focus on gender equality and women's rights solely in abstract terms is inadequate, and hence not nearly radical enough. The dominance of this kind of approach in mainstream debates leaves only a weak political voice for the collective demands that are required to transform economic, social and political life, and to support better choices than those currently available. Furthermore, the suggestion of linear progress for women risks reaffirming the current economic and political model, and in doing so could undermine such demands. The task ahead is not one of an unfinished revolution. The current political and economic crises facing us demand deep rethinking and radical change.

Historically, the state has been a key tool of change for women. In the 1970s and '80s, the women's liberation movement called for greater provision of care services, refuges for women suffering from domestic violence, and welfare reform to support women's financial independence from men. These demands met with varying success, and the findings in this report lead to the conclusion that there is still a need to mobilise more state resources in some areas, such as to provide better support for men and women trying to meet family responsibilities and intergenerational commitments.

However, many of those interested in gender equality have come to rely on the state to the detriment of social action and other forms of agency, and in particular on the constitutional and legislative tools of the state. Legislative change has made some headway in eroding the gender pay gap and ensuring fair hiring practices at work, but it is not capable of leading a broader transformation in the everyday experiences of sexism and the culture of democratic institutions and the workplace. The heavy hand of the central state is particularly weak when it comes to some of the new challenges explored in this report, such as the impact of mass access to pornography on young people's views of sex, beauty and relationships.

The means by which we achieve change matters for other reasons too. In important debates about domestic violence, the representation of women in the media, or the impact of the Coalition's public spending cuts, women are frequently portrayed as victims and service-users. The proposed solutions often fail to distinguish between the importance of the redistributive role of the state, and the top-down, bureaucratic and antidemocratic way in which the state distributes power and resources. These approaches betray the tendency on the left, criticised by the New Left thinkers such as Raymond Williams back in 1961, to reduce the people they govern to 'masses', as objects upon which to act rather than as participants in their own fate (Williams 2001: 33).

Drawing on our findings as to how women's lives have changed across three generations, this chapter explores the means and aims of gender politics. We argue that the goal of a new feminism should be to generate a set of transformative political demands that are rooted in women's lived experiences. This requires a move away from abstract debates about how the 'average woman' fares when compared to the 'average man' and towards a set of policies and positions that seek and support democratic renewal of the economy, society and politics.

4.1 The economy: from individual empowerment to collective power

Break-the-glass-ceiling approaches have come to dominate mainstream political debates about gender equality and, to a lesser extent, racial equality. Addressing the appalling dearth of women in top professions or on company boards may be desirable on the grounds of fairness and the need to challenge gender stereotypes. But such approaches are limited in their ability to enact change or in their relevance to most people's lives. Professional networking groups for women and ethnic minorities mirror, rather than challenge, the privilege enjoyed by the 'old boys' networks of Eton and Harrow. The Forbes 100 most powerful women and the Powerlist of influential black people celebrate the exceptional achievements of people from traditionally excluded groups. Yet they do little to articulate or advance the collective interests of these groups, or to challenge the structural conditions that exclude them.

Formal, legal equality is important but not sufficient. As Jon Wilson has argued, equality is not just about equal access to the same resources and goods. Equality is also how we are treated, and 'our ability to shape the world we live in together with the people around us' (Wilson 2012: 43). This requires less focus on women's individual rights and opportunities to advance, and more on the collective power and interests of underrepresented groups to influence the decisions that affect their lives. For example, those interested in gender justice should ask whether equality is best advanced through more women on boards, or by giving poorly paid workers, who are more likely to be women, greater power in corporate governance.

Gender justice at the top is not enough. Mainstream debates on gender must also grapple with how to address increased 'flexibility' at the bottom end of the labour market, including through efforts to tackle low pay in small businesses and the insecurity faced by the increasing number of self-employed women. Part of the solution should involve raising the quality and status of the jobs that women do – for example, through a new funding settlement that supports a high-quality social care system characterised by a living wage and well-trained staff – as well as by challenging the idea that this is necessarily 'women's work'.

Elderly care and pension reform should seek to address gender and class disadvantage in old age. The Coalition plans to introduce a citizens' pension as a good start.²⁵ But reform is also needed to the system of encouraging people to make private provision for their old age. The bulk of the tax relief on pension contributions (around two-thirds of the total) currently goes to those paying the higher rate of income tax, people – more likely to be men – who have the funds available to save and need little incentive to put money aside for when they retire. The money currently spent on tax relief could be better deployed to encourage lower-paid workers, many of whom are women, to save into pensions. For example, the government could match every £1 in contributions with 50p, up to a certain limit. Or a

25 Proposals for a citizens pension would mean paying out the same amount to everyone who is above the state retirement age (subject to a citizenship or residency test) and remove the need for complex pension credits. The poorest pensioners would gain, as would many women who do not have the national insurance contribution record needed for a full pension under the current system.

more complicated system could be introduced that involved matching a first tranche of contributions pound-for-pound up, 50p per pound for a second tranche and so on, with support tapering off to zero above a certain level. Details would depend on the funds the government was prepared to make available, but tax relief for pension contribution currently costs the government around £20 billion a year in foregone revenues.

The economic model of the last 30 years has generated opportunities for many women. But towards the promise of an economy that enables men and women to fulfil their creative potential, progress has been uneven at best. The goal should be democratic renewal across all sectors, regions and occupations. Hilary Wainwright (2012) has argued for 'frameworks of economic organisation that place human creativity, including a creative, respectful relationship to nature, at their centre', and suggests that this would lead us to explore and foster new, more democratic models of finance, governance and ownership. Unionised workplaces, cooperative and mutual forms of ownership, and business cultures that encourage workers to participate in decision-making are characterised by fairer pay, higher levels of trust, legitimacy, and greater employee commitment to company success (see Lanning and Lawton 2013 forthcoming). Workers are represented on the boards of all companies over a particular size in most other European countries, and in the US employees have a 'right to buy' when the owners of a privately owned company decide to sell the business. If more than 10 per cent of employees register an interest and together submit a credible business plan, a trust is established to enable them to borrow the necessary funds.

In other European countries, employee participation has often supported consumers' interests in more environmentally and socially responsible business models. Combined with wider efforts to harness the collective power of consumers, such as consumer activism or community representation on regulatory bodies, this may also help to ensure retailers, publishers and the media, among others, are more responsive to concerns about gender stereotyping and the commodification and sexualisation of women in popular culture.

4.2 Society: from personal responsibility for difficult choices to collective solutions to common problems

In mainstream debates, women are presented with a false choice between policies designed to support them into work or to enable them to stay at home. All families must make trade-offs, but the current choices are too sharp. People need to be able to earn enough and also to carve out time to spend with their families. Some parents need more work, but others need more time. Recognising the needs of children and the value of healthy family and community life need not be nostalgic, or constitute a call for a return to a rose-tinted past when men could count on a family wage and their wives dedicated themselves to bringing up children and building community spirit. Rather, it means protecting social and personal life from both economic insecurity and long-hours cultures, while challenging the notion that family and community is the realm of women alone. This requires an approach that puts care at the centre of how society is organised, including high-quality childcare and measures to encourage a shift in the role of men.

In the northern European countries that come closest to achieving a revolution in gender relations, childcare is not seen in purely instrumental terms but instead has been central to efforts to support female citizenship and child development. High-quality, affordable childcare from the age of one would prevent women from being locked out of work for long periods of time and, combined with after-school activities, would support mothers and fathers trying to meet their work and care commitments. Childcare services are not simply tools of female employment, but can help to address educational inequalities

between children and the social isolation that many parents feel. Based on the Danish model (see Cooke and Henehan 2012), the goal should be a network of local childcare institutions that focus on children's development and also provide social activities, advice and support for parents. Local authorities, parents and employees should sit on governing boards to ensure decisions are locally accountable and informed by both the priorities of parents and the knowledge of professionals. At a time of tight finances, the need for transformative services may need to be prioritised over universal cash benefits.

Economic production should not come at the expense of friendship or family life. Working time is a key tool in promoting a healthier balance between work and civic, social and family life. The lack of flexible working opportunities in professional jobs and male-dominated professions prevents men (and an increasing number of women) from playing a stronger role in the home. Shifting this pattern could challenge assumptions about how men and women spend their time (Coote 2012). Limiting working time may make sense for other reasons as well. France and the Netherlands both introduced more family-friendly working arrangements during prolonged periods of high unemployment in order to encourage more job creation. One option would be to reform the governance of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to include employer and employee representatives, and expand its remit beyond basic health and safety to a broader definition of worker wellbeing. This would enable it to develop, negotiate and test out policies to support a healthier balance between health and social life. A similar approach in Sweden has led to steady improvements in job quality and work-life balance over a number of decades (Green 2009). The Coalition government's extension of the right to request flexible working for all employees, not just parents, is a welcome first step. The government should further this agenda by introducing a 48-hour week. The HSE could then test the scope for further limits on working time and a right to work flexibly, rather than simply a right to request to do so.

Patterns of paid and unpaid work in the household are often set when couples have children. To address this, various northern European countries have introduced shared parental leave paid at a generous level – at least two-thirds of a person's salary, with a cap on high earners to reduce costs. Use-it-or-lose-it components for both parents aim to shift the conversation around the kitchen table, encouraging parents to think twice about who takes up the right to paid leave. Iceland provides the fairest model. Since 2003, mothers and fathers have had access to nine months' parental leave paid at 75–80 per cent of earnings (with a cap for higher earners), with three months reserved for each parent on a use-it-or-lose-it basis. Parents can also use this leave flexibly, for example by taking it on a part-time basis over an extended period, and can choose whether to take it consecutively or non-consecutively. Couples have responded to these incentives positively, as documented by high take-up rates among fathers and strong maternal employment rates (Asher 2011). The UK could move towards a similar model gradually, funded by frontloading cash benefits for families with children, which currently stretch across childhood and adolescence.

4.3 Politics: from state-led change to democratic renewal

The scale of the agenda set out so far may seem ambitious. Many people may feel that the cost of extending support for working parents and undertaking workplace reform at a time of fiscal austerity and deep scepticism of the central state is unrealistic. Some may argue that, at a time of high unemployment, any job is better than no job. But many of these issues are not new, and before we give up, it is worth asking why, in the UK, advancement towards these goals was so limited even before current fiscal constraints were in place.

Whether transformative demands make it onto the mainstream political agenda depends on the strength of voice behind them. The impressive levels of gender equality achieved in countries such as Sweden, Norway and Denmark were won by broad feminist mobilisations, in which trade unions and pressure groups lobbied alongside feminist politicians for state resources, public institutions and social entitlements to support better choices around work and care, to promote shared responsibility in the home, and to improve the lives of carers, children and the elderly (Alestalo et al 2009). Evidence suggests that feminist movements are powerful harbingers of change in other spheres too. In the largest global study ever conducted on violence against women, Weldon and Htun (2012) found that the ‘mobilization of feminist movements is more important for change than the wealth of nations, left-wing political parties, or the number of women politicians’. Without feminist movements, the authors found, violence against women was rarely raised as an issue.

In the UK, social movements and alliances have been comparatively weak. Women’s liberation achieved some important legislative changes and helped to drive an unprecedented cultural shift in attitudes towards sexism, domestic violence and traditional gender roles, particularly in mainstream debates and among many women themselves. But the more radical demands for 24-hour childcare, a shorter working week and a reorganisation of paid and unpaid work were defeated. This was not helped by the decline of the trade union movement in the 1980s or the ‘NGO-ification’ of wider social movements that followed. Activists took the ideas that came out of debates between different strands of feminist thought into wider social movements and pressure groups, often set up to give voice to issues that were not on the political agenda, such as environmentalism, migrant rights or violence against women. But many NGOs became dependent on the state as a source of sustainable funding, making it harder to maintain a critical stance. Over the course of the 1990s, critiques of how class and race disadvantage were interacting with gender and debates about the sort of political economy required for change were marginalised and replaced by promises of individual empowerment and economic independence for women.

In recent years, many of those working for social change have become reliant on sympathetic politicians to bring it about, an attitude reinforced in part by the belief that women in positions of power will represent the interests of other women in wider society. Access to sympathetic politicians under a Labour government added impetus to the abandonment of strategies to organise, educate and agitate in the political sphere. But this overestimates what individual politicians are able to achieve. In the Labour administration’s first term, for example, some female MPs previously active in the women’s movement found their more radical demands sidelined, in part because they lacked a wider coalition of support to make the political case to male colleagues bent on ‘consensual’ politics (see various contributions to Coote 2000).

The over-reliance on political representatives and women in power also fails to present any challenge to today’s crisis of elite politics. All-women shortlists have led to improvements in the proportion of women in politics, but today’s newer intake of MPs, male and female alike, grew up in an era where individual choice, rights and empowerment dominated contemporary debates about justice. They are overwhelmingly middle class and university-educated, and many have only ever worked in politics. Most postpone having children in order to have a career. This professionalisation of UK politics means that political debates and priorities risk becoming increasingly removed from people’s lived experiences, and is exacerbated by the disappearance of democratic debate about the means and aims of gender equality from mainstream political forums. The consequences of this are

the dominance of women-on-the-board feminism, once dismissed by UK feminists as bourgeois, and the weak political voice for collective solutions to care. It also highlights the inevitable reality that many women, once indoctrinated within the corridors of power, seem to take on the received wisdom, culture and values of the institutions they occupy. As do most men.

Efforts to diversify the UK's political landscape should go further than simply trying to even out the gender divide. A more democratic political culture would also seek to represent men and women with expertise and experience across more diverse walks of life. The labour movement could play an important role here. While trade unions often put forward male candidates for election, they rarely do so for seats being fought with all-women shortlists. And yet the typical trade union member is now more likely to be female, and there are many talented female activists from different backgrounds who could stand for election. Resolutions at the Trades Union Congress (TUC) women's conference in 2012 suggest that issues such as childcare, low pay and insecurity at the bottom end of the labour market rank high on the trade union agenda, in addition to issues of representational equality, such as women on company boards (TUC 2012a).

Democratic renewal of public and economic institutions more generally could also open up new routes into local and national politics. In the feminist reworking of George Orwell's classic, *Road to Wigan Pier Revisited*, Beatrix Campbell (1984) described a visit to a cooperatively owned housing estate, where women had led the call for control. The women – mostly mothers who had left school at 16 – had to buy land, negotiate grants, hire architects and collectively plan the construction of their new homes, and they learnt new skills in the process. Self-determination in housing and other spheres, Campbell argued, creates opportunities for involvement in local politics and is personally transformative for those involved. Similarly, recent debates about the future of public service reform on the centre-left have suggested politicians could devolve control over areas of funding to local councils, who in turn could be required to nurture the involvement of citizens and stakeholders in making decisions about public services (see for example Wilson 2012, Cooke and Muir 2012). Such approaches could also be used to create pathways into national politics for men and women from different backgrounds, ensuring that political leadership is grounded in the situation of the people they represent.

A healthy political sphere will always depend on the strength of wider social forces. The state is a powerful tool of social change, but it has its limitations. For example, a ban on advertising to children under the age of 12 would give families a buffer against the excessive commercialisation of childhood and the gendered, often sexualised, norms promoted in many markets. But the strong arm of the state feels heavy-handed when it comes to the impact of internet pornography and the sexualisation of popular culture on teenage and adult men and women. Legislative power is also weak in the face of changing technology and the fact that, with the rise of 'sexting' and homemade pornography, some of this is no longer driven by companies but by teenagers themselves. Schools could promote greater resilience among young people through more discussion of these issues in schools, but it is natural for teenagers to explore their sexual identity and seek out sexual images. This suggests the need for radical alternatives in film, media and even pornography. This agenda might draw inspiration from the feminist publishing houses that successfully shifted the sexist nature of children's literature in a more positive direction in the 1980s.

The strength of the women's liberation movement lay in the deliberate efforts to involve and organise women from all different backgrounds in debates about social change.

Active involvement in political activity, including ‘consciousness-raising’ meetings between women, was personally transformative for the women involved. The result was that many women brought feminist ideas into their homes and workplaces. A key question for gender politics is whether those working for social change are willing or able to rediscover the tradition of organising in the political sphere. The recent resurgence of interest in feminism is driven in no small part by increasing concern about the stereotyping and sexualisation of women in popular culture, and may present new opportunities for finding ways of working *with*, not *for*, people to bring about change.

This burgeoning next wave of feminism, evident in the emergence of new feminist thinkers and writers and the rise in media campaign groups, offers renewed energy and ideas to take on seemingly impenetrable authorities on topics far broader than the dry, mainstream focus on top-jobs equality. The campaigning blog Pinkstinks²⁶ for example, was set up by concerned parents to challenge the ‘pinkification’ of girlhood, and has orchestrated successful campaigns to challenge sexist labelling of children’s toys and clothing. Resistance to austerity measures has also led to some interesting new political alliances between trade unions, charities and campaign groups. Mobilising around the analysis showing that cuts to the public sector will disproportionately affect women as both workers and service users, these new alliances have allowed different organisations to coordinate their messages around issues on which they agree.

A greater number of intra-feminist debates about the core political and cultural issues affecting men and women would help to bring these diverse initiatives together and ensure that they are informed by open, honest and vigorous deliberation. Men must also be part of these debates. While social media can be very effective at mobilising people, it is likely to attract women who are already engaged in particular issues and is less well suited to building sustained relationships for change. More relational forms of activism, such as community organising (a US technique pioneered in the UK by the broad-based movement Citizens UK)²⁷ offer the opportunity to involve a much broader base of women who may not otherwise identify themselves as political. This method uses trained organisers bring together people in different community institutions – such as schools, housing associations and religious organisations – to organise around issues of common interest. Crucially, people are involved in setting the priorities and shaping and participating in the actions to bring about change.

4.4 Conclusion

Through this report, we have sought to start a conversation about the meaning of ‘gender equality’ from the perspectives and interests of women from different backgrounds, and how best to bring about the change they seek. In doing so, we call for a re-examination of the issues those of us interested in gender politics prioritise. We should ask whether women’s interests are best served by a focus on women’s ability to compete on an equal footing with men, or by raising the status of the jobs that women do. Whether the gender pay gap is better addressed by promoting women in top jobs, or by tackling low pay and insecurity at the bottom. Whether the difficulties faced by working parents are better addressed by defending women’s right to maternity leave, or a transformation of the role of men in the home. And how much of this can be achieved by state capture, and how much requires us to build democratic coalitions for change. Overall, we need a gender politics that is less about how women can succeed in a man’s game, and more about how to change the rules of the game.

26 See www.pinkstinks.org.uk/.

27 See www.citizensuk.org/.

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ANNEX 1

REGRESSION MODELLING

All models within the annex apply Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regression techniques.

Table A1.1
Explaining wage differences between genders for full-time employees

Dependent variable:				
Log (wage)	1958 (age 41/42)		1970 (age 38/39)	
	β	SE	β	SE
Female ¹	-0.50**	(0.03)	-0.41**	(0.03)
Age had first child (no children ref)				
17–	-0.06	(0.07)	-0.13	(0.10)
18–24	-0.02	(0.02)	-0.03	(0.03)
25–32	0.08**	(0.02)	0.07**	(0.02)
33+	0.07*	(0.03)	0.08**	(0.02)
Social class (unskilled ref)				
Professional	0.62**	(0.07)	0.57**	(0.09)
Managerial	0.52**	(0.06)	0.48**	(0.09)
Skilled non-manual	0.24**	(0.06)	0.21*	(0.09)
Skilled manual	0.16**	(0.06)	0.18*	(0.09)
Partly skilled	0.00	(0.07)	-0.06	(0.09)
Father's social class (unskilled ref)				
Professional	0.13*	(0.05)	0.24**	(0.05)
Managerial	0.04	(0.04)	0.13**	(0.05)
Skilled non-manual	0.03	(0.04)	0.15**	(0.05)
Skilled manual	-0.02	(0.03)	0.07	(0.04)
Partly skilled	-0.05	(0.04)	0.05	(0.05)
Qualification (no degree)				
Degree	0.13**	(0.03)	0.16**	(0.02)
Female*degree	0.16**	(0.04)	0.12**	(0.04)
Region (North ref)				
Yorkshire and the Humber	0.05	(0.05)	0.10*	(0.05)
East Midlands	0.06	(0.05)	0.09 ⁺	(0.05)
East Anglia	0.20**	(0.06)	0.19**	(0.05)
South East	0.25**	(0.04)	0.26**	(0.04)
South West	0.08 ⁺	(0.05)	0.00	(0.05)
West Midlands	0.11*	(0.05)	0.08 ⁺	(0.05)
North West	0.03	(0.04)	0.09 ⁺	(0.04)
Wales	0.00	(0.05)	0.05	(0.05)
Scotland	0.10*	(0.04)	0.09*	(0.05)
<i>Constant</i>	<i>5.60**</i>	<i>(0.08)</i>	<i>5.81**</i>	<i>(0.10)</i>
<i>R-squared</i>	<i>0.256</i>		<i>0.3345</i>	
<i>N</i>	<i>5,310</i>		<i>3,310</i>	

** p<0.01; * p<0.05; † p<0.10

¹ This is a binary variable and therefore indicates the difference between females and males.

Table A1.2
Explaining wage
differences
between men

Dependent variable:				
Log (wage)	1958 (age 41/42)		1970 (age 38/39)	
	β	SE	β	SE
Age had 1st child (no children ref)				
17–	0.23 ⁺	(0.14)	0.12	(0.17)
18–24	0.11 ^{**}	(0.03)	0.13 ^{**}	(0.04)
25–32	0.19 ^{**}	(0.03)	0.17 ^{**}	(0.03)
33+	0.12 ^{**}	(0.03)	0.17 ^{**}	(0.03)
Social class (unskilled ref)				
Professional	0.37 ^{**}	(0.08)	0.48 ^{**}	(0.10)
Managerial	0.38 ^{**}	(0.07)	0.43 ^{**}	(0.09)
Skilled non-manual	0.16 [*]	(0.08)	0.19 [*]	(0.10)
Skilled manual	0.06	(0.07)	0.15	(0.09)
Partly skilled	-0.09	(0.08)	-0.08	(0.10)
Father's social class (unskilled ref)				
Professional	0.22 ^{**}	(0.07)	0.24 ^{**}	(0.07)
Managerial	0.09 ⁺	(0.05)	0.18 ^{**}	(0.06)
Skilled non-manual	0.12 [*]	(0.05)	0.18 ^{**}	(0.06)
Skilled manual	0.04	(0.04)	0.10 [*]	(0.05)
Partly skilled	-0.03	(0.05)	0.09	(0.06)
Qualification (no qual ref)				
GCSE	0.07	(0.05)	0.01	(0.05)
1 A-level	0.10 [*]	(0.04)	-0.01	(0.04)
2+ A-level	0.17 ^{**}	(0.05)	0.17 ^{**}	(0.05)
Diploma, degree	0.26 ^{**}	(0.05)	0.21 ^{**}	(0.04)
Postgrad	0.37 ^{**}	(0.07)	0.32 ^{**}	(0.06)
Region (North ref)				
Yorkshire and the Humber	-0.03	(0.06)	0.04	(0.06)
East Midlands	0.04	(0.06)	0.04	(0.06)
East Anglia	0.22 ^{**}	(0.07)	0.18 ^{**}	(0.06)
South East	0.24 ^{**}	(0.05)	0.24 ^{**}	(0.05)
South West	0.03	(0.06)	-0.06	(0.06)
West Midlands	0.11 ⁺	(0.06)	0.06	(0.06)
North West	0.00	(0.05)	0.04	(0.06)
Wales	-0.03	(0.06)	0.01	(0.07)
Scotland	0.11 [*]	(0.05)	0.07	(0.06)
<i>Constant</i>	5.49 ^{**}	(0.09)	5.71 ^{**}	(0.11)
<i>R-squared</i>	0.1912		0.283	
<i>N</i>	3,377		2,080	

** p<0.01; * p<0.05; + p<0.10

Table A1.3
Explaining wage
differences
between women

Dependent variable:				
Log (wage)	1958 (age 41/42)		1970 (age 38/39)	
	β	SE	β	SE
Age had first child (no children ref)				
17–	-0.23**	(0.08)	-0.30*	(0.12)
18–24	-0.19**	(0.04)	-0.22**	(0.04)
25–32	-0.13**	(0.04)	-0.10**	(0.03)
33+	0.09	(0.08)	-0.05	(0.04)
Social class (unskilled ref)				
Professional	1.08**	(0.15)	0.60+	(0.33)
Managerial	0.67**	(0.13)	0.43	(0.33)
Skilled non-manual	0.36**	(0.13)	0.17	(0.33)
Skilled manual	0.33*	(0.14)	0.10	(0.33)
Partly skilled	0.20	(0.13)	-0.07	(0.33)
Father's social class (unskilled ref)				
Professional	-0.09	(0.09)	0.19*	(0.09)
Managerial	-0.08	(0.07)	0.03	(0.07)
Skilled non-manual	-0.13+	(0.07)	0.09	(0.07)
Skilled manual	-0.13*	(0.06)	0.00	(0.07)
Partly skilled	-0.10	(0.07)	-0.03	(0.07)
Qualification (no qual ref)				
GCSE	0.07	(0.07)	-0.09	(0.08)
1 A-level	0.13*	(0.06)	-0.11+	(0.06)
2+ A-level	0.18	(0.07)	-0.05	(0.07)
Diploma, degree	0.37**	(0.06)	0.19**	(0.06)
Postgrad	0.48**	(0.11)	0.28**	(0.08)
Region (North ref)				
Yorkshire and the Humber	0.17*	(0.08)	0.21**	(0.08)
East Midlands	0.09	(0.08)	0.18*	(0.08)
East Anglia	0.18+	(0.10)	0.17*	(0.08)
South East	0.27**	(0.07)	0.28**	(0.07)
South West	0.18*	(0.08)	0.10	(0.08)
West Midlands	0.12	(0.08)	0.10	(0.07)
North West	0.11	(0.07)	0.17*	(0.07)
Wales	0.07	(0.09)	0.13	(0.08)
Scotland	0.11	(0.08)	0.09	(0.07)
<i>Constant</i>	5.02**	(0.15)	5.64**	(0.34)
<i>R-squared</i>	0.2257		0.3411	
<i>N</i>	1,933		1,230	

** p<0.01; * p<0.05; + p<0.10

Table A1.4
Explaining wage
differences between
gender and
the mum effect

Dependent variable:				
Log (wage)	1958 (age 41/42)		1970 (age 38/39)	
	β	SE	β	SE
Female	-0.24**	(0.04)	-0.18**	(0.03)
Parent	0.15**	(0.03)	0.17**	(0.02)
Female*Parent	-0.30**	(0.04)	-0.29**	(0.04)
Social class (unskilled ref)				
Professional	0.54**	(0.07)	0.52**	(0.09)
Managerial	0.46**	(0.06)	0.44**	(0.09)
Skilled non-manual	0.18**	(0.07)	0.18*	(0.09)
Skilled manual	0.13*	(0.06)	0.16+	(0.09)
Partly skilled	-0.02	(0.07)	-0.08	(0.09)
Father's social class (unskilled ref)				
Professional	0.12*	(0.05)	0.24**	(0.05)
Managerial	0.03	(0.04)	0.15**	(0.05)
Skilled non-manual	0.03	(0.04)	0.15**	(0.04)
Skilled manual	-0.03	(0.03)	0.08+	(0.04)
Partly skilled	-0.06	(0.04)	0.05	(0.04)
Qualification (no qual ref)				
GCSE	0.07+	(0.04)	-0.03	(0.04)
1 A-level	0.12**	(0.04)	-0.04	(0.04)
2+ A-level	0.19**	(0.04)	0.10**	(0.04)
Diploma, degree	0.32**	(0.04)	0.21**	(0.03)
Postgrad	0.43**	(0.06)	0.33**	(0.04)
Region (North ref)				
Yorkshire and the Humber	0.06	(0.05)	0.10*	(0.05)
East Midlands	0.07	(0.05)	0.08	(0.05)
East Anglia	0.20**	(0.06)	0.18**	(0.05)
South East	0.26**	(0.04)	0.25**	(0.04)
South West	0.09*	(0.05)	-0.02	(0.05)
West Midlands	0.12**	(0.05)	0.06	(0.05)
North West	0.04	(0.04)	0.08+	(0.04)
Wales	0.01	(0.05)	0.07	(0.05)
Scotland	0.11*	(0.04)	0.04	(0.05)
<i>Constant</i>	<i>5.42**</i>	<i>(0.08)</i>	<i>5.73**</i>	<i>(0.10)</i>
<i>R-squared</i>	<i>0.2625</i>		<i>0.3495</i>	
<i>N</i>	<i>5,310</i>		<i>3,310</i>	

** p<0.01; * p<0.05; + p<0.10

Table A1.5
Explaining wage
differences between
gender and having
a degree

Dependent variable:				
Log (wage)	1958 (age 41/42)		1970 (age 38/39)	
	β	SE	β	SE
Female	-0.50**	(0.03)	-0.41**	(0.03)
Age had first child (no children ref)				
17–	-0.06	(0.07)	-0.13	(0.10)
18–24	-0.02	(0.02)	-0.03	(0.03)
25–32	0.08**	(0.02)	0.07**	(0.02)
33+	0.07*	(0.03)	0.08**	(0.02)
Social class (unskilled ref)				
Professional	0.62**	(0.07)	0.57**	(0.09)
Managerial	0.52**	(0.06)	0.48**	(0.09)
Skilled non-manual	0.24**	(0.06)	0.21*	(0.09)
Skilled manual	0.16**	(0.06)	0.18*	(0.09)
Partly skilled	0.00	(0.07)	-0.06	(0.09)
Father's social class (unskilled ref)				
Professional	0.13*	(0.05)	0.24**	(0.05)
Managerial	0.04	(0.04)	0.13**	(0.05)
Skilled non-manual	0.03	(0.04)	0.15**	(0.05)
Skilled manual	-0.02	(0.03)	0.07	(0.04)
Partly skilled	-0.05	(0.04)	0.05	(0.05)
Qualification (no degree)				
Degree	0.13**	(0.03)	0.16**	(0.02)
Female*degree	0.16**	(0.04)	0.12**	(0.04)
Region (North ref)				
Yorkshire and the Humber	0.05	(0.05)	0.10*	(0.05)
East Midlands	0.06	(0.05)	0.09*	(0.05)
East Anglia	0.20**	(0.06)	0.19**	(0.05)
South East	0.25**	(0.04)	0.26**	(0.04)
South West	0.08*	(0.05)	0.00	(0.05)
West Midlands	0.11*	(0.05)	0.08*	(0.05)
North West	0.03	(0.04)	0.09*	(0.04)
Wales	0.00	(0.05)	0.05	(0.05)
Scotland	0.10*	(0.04)	0.09*	(0.05)
<i>Constant</i>	5.60**	(0.08)	5.81**	(0.10)
<i>R-squared</i>	0.256		0.3345	
<i>N</i>	5,310		3,310	

** p<0.01; * p<0.05; + p<0.10

ANNEX 2

AGE FIRST HAD CHILDREN FOR MEN AND WOMEN BORN IN 1958 AND 1970

Figure A2.1
Age first had children,
men born in 1958
(at age 40 to 41)

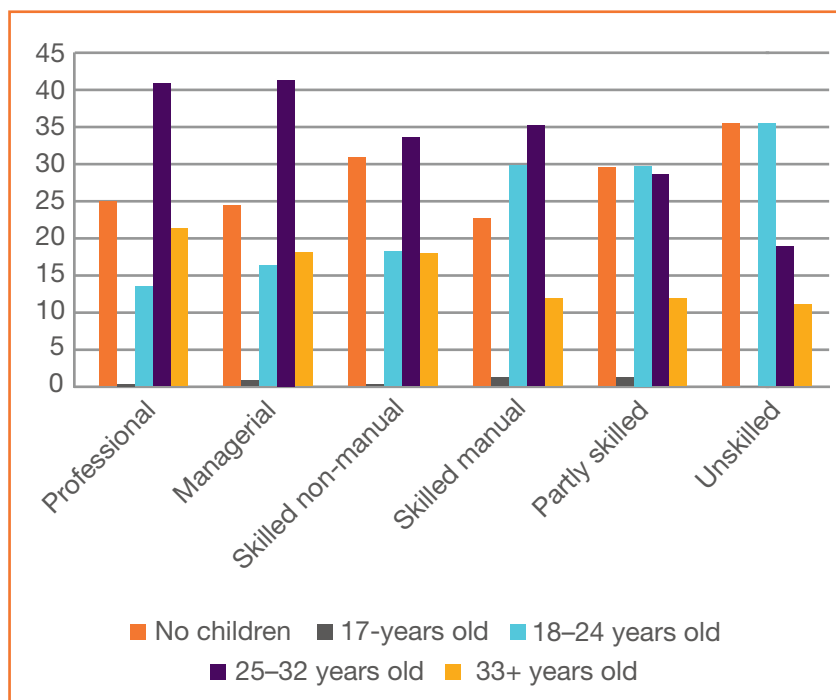


Figure A2.2
Age first had children,
women born in 1958
(at age 40 to 41)

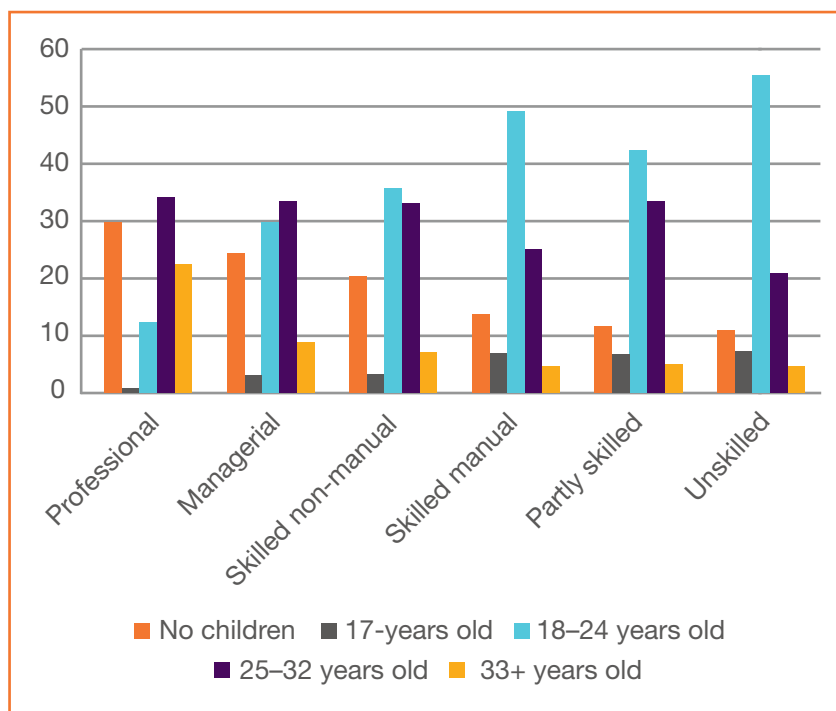


Figure A2.3
Age first had children,
men born in 1970
(at age 38 to 39)

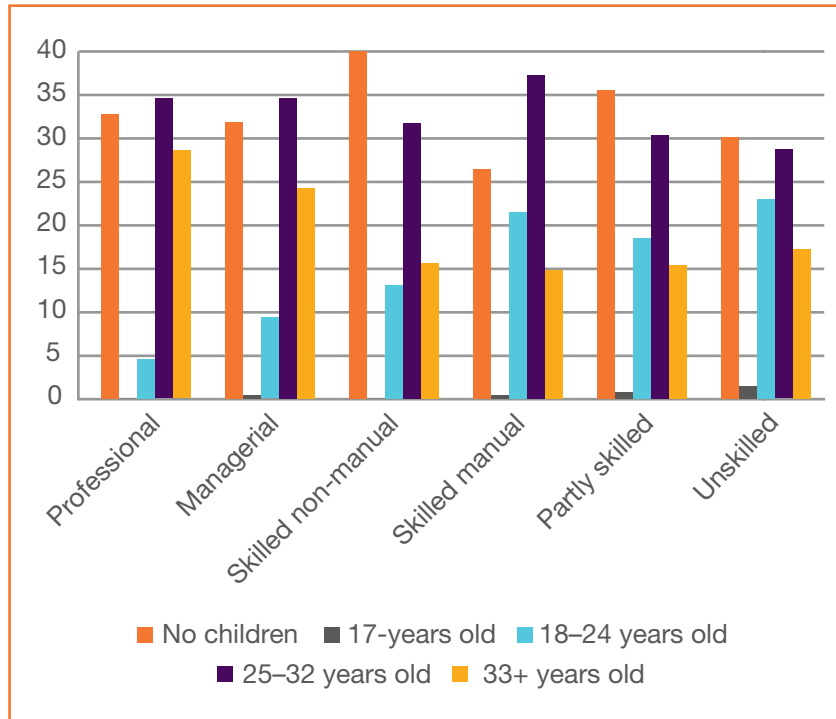
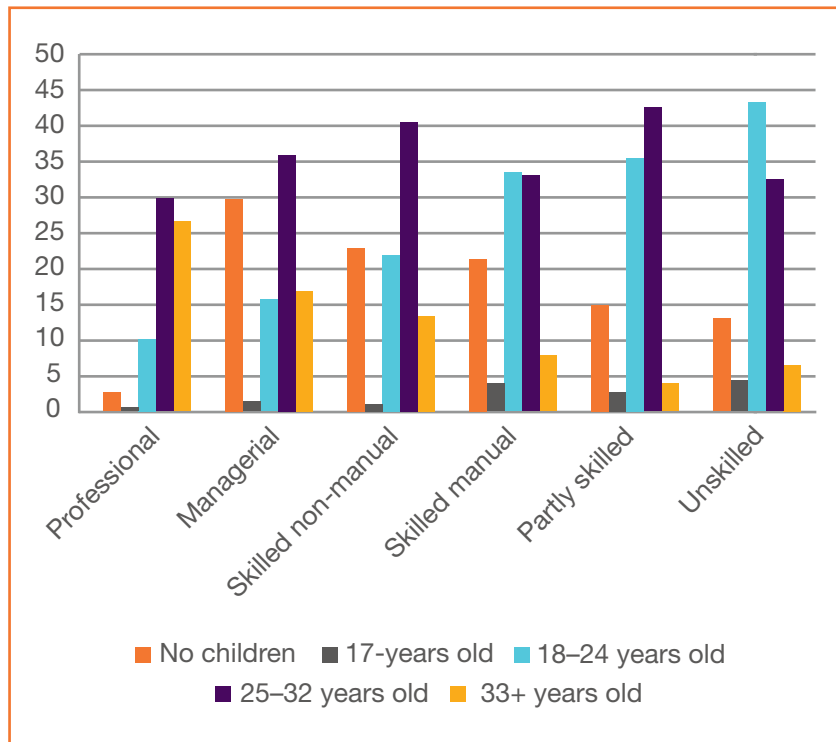


Figure A2.4
Age first had children,
women born in 1970
(at age 38 to 39)



ANNEX 3

ASSORTATIVE MATING FOR WOMEN BORN IN 1958, 1970 AND BETWEEN 1976–1981

1958 (33 years)	Partner's social class						
CM social class	Professional	Manager/ Technical	Skilled non- manual	Skilled manual	Partly Skilled	Unskilled	Total
Professional	33.64	36.45	12.15	11.21	3.74	2.8	107
Manager/Technical	11.4	45.16	12.52	19.78	9.41	1.73	1,158
Skilled non-manual	6.26	32.42	13.89	31.9	13.11	2.41	1,533
Skilled manual	2.94	23.9	13.6	39.71	15.81	4.04	272
Partly Skilled	3.95	22.25	8.93	41.73	18.74	4.39	683
Unskilled	3.45	14.78	6.9	43.35	24.63	6.9	203

Note: CM = Cohort member

1970 (30 yrs)	Partner's social class						
CM social class	Professional	Manager/ Technical	Skilled non- manual	Skilled manual	Partly Skilled	Unskilled	Total
Professional	32.84	40.3	5.97	19.4	1.49	0	116
Manager/Technical	12.33	47.03	9.74	22.98	5.94	1.07	1,006
Skilled non-manual	5.26	29.95	16.17	34.59	10.78	2.51	1,153
Skilled manual	1.61	18.55	15.32	45.97	14.52	2.42	212
Partly Skilled	3.57	20.54	8.93	44.64	16.52	4.91	324
Unskilled	2.33	13.95	6.98	53.49	18.6	4.65	62

Note: CM = Cohort member

1976–81 (28–33 yrs)	Partner's social class						
CM social class	Professional	Manager/ Technical	Skilled non- manual	Skilled manual	Partly Skilled	Unskilled	Total
Professional	29.49	42.21	10.34	12.9	5.06	0	86
Manager/Technical	7.35	50.99	12.12	17.87	9.64	2.03	438
Skilled non-manual	7.14	32.09	16.96	28.48	10.39	4.94	288
Skilled manual	6.47	32.66	9.23	37.21	7.97	6.47	60
Partly Skilled	2.71	21.4	13.05	37.93	19.3	5.61	139
Unskilled	1.37	32.75	0	20.35	22.12	23.41	20

Note: CM = Cohort member

Analytical note: Data for the 1958 and 1970 cohorts were taken from National Child Development Study and British Cohort Study studies respectively. In order to produce a third, younger cohort, a 1976-1981 group was created using the Understanding Society data series. This cohort is a combined group born within a five-year timespan to assure a large enough sample size for analysis.