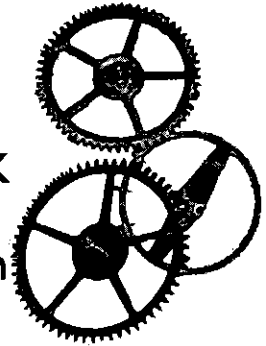


# The Sociology of Work

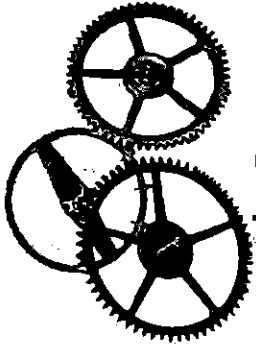
Introduction



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# 6

## Gender, Patriarchy and Trade Unions

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And thy estimation shall be of the male from twenty years old even unto sixty years old, even thy estimation shall be fifty shekels of silver. . . . And if it be female, then thy estimation shall be thirty shekels.

Leviticus, 27: 3-4

### Introduction

Gender inequality is nothing new. Both paid and unpaid forms of work have consistently exhibited patterns of inequality. One of the most persistent aspects of paid labour is that relating to gender-related inequality of rewards. Ignoring all the many problems involved in wage calculations which blur issues of skill, qualifications and hours etc., it is a sobering experience to consider the gendered wage differential. Studies of the sixteenth century calculate that, on average, women earned something between 52 per cent (Roberts, 1979) and 61 per cent (Kussmaul, 1981) of men's average earnings, hardly different from the prescribed differential set down in Leviticus. In 1913 the equivalent figure was 53 per cent (Grint, 1988) and the 1989 figure was about 67 per cent, with women's hourly earnings about 76 per cent of men's (Low Pay Unit, 1989; *Employment Gazette*, April 1990). By 1995 the latter figure had reached

79 per cent (*The Guardian*, 20 June 1995) and by 2000 it was 82 per cent (*Labour Market Trends*, 2003: 432).

This chapter considers the complex circumstances surrounding women at work by considering three related aspects: first, the various theoretical approaches; second, the post-war era (aspects of the pre-1945 period are discussed in chapter 2); and finally, the influence of trade unions. The approach is one that seeks to explore the various available viewpoints and then to use the one most heuristic to guide the necessarily brief review of the literature. The essence of the approach is one which perceives the position of women at work to be premised on three axial principles.

First, work patterns are necessarily related to their domestic responsibilities, so that the analysis of 'work' cannot occur in isolation from the analysis of the home-work link. Second, gender, although critical, is not uniquely important in explaining women's work patterns and experiences because individuals are heterogeneous composites: occupationally derived class and ethnicity are also relevant, as may be religion, age, nationality etc. In this particular text attention is restricted primarily to gender, class and ethnicity. Third, the experience of women is not one that can be read off from an 'objective' analysis of social categories but is quintessentially an interpretative process. These social categories influence but do not determine the experience of work. Indeed, what counts as a significant category is an interpretative and therefore contingent phenomenon.

### **Theoretical viewpoints on women and work**

The invisibility of gender within the classical approaches has given way in recent years to a plethora of competing approaches. Although a multitude of positions exists, Walby's (1986a) categorization is the clearest and forms the basis of this review. In sequence, then, the discussion follows the following plan:

- 1 Classical approaches to women and work.
- 2 Gender as irrelevant.
- 3 Gender as secondary to or derived from class subordination.
- 4 Patriarchally derived subordination, where gender inequality relates primarily to gender relations.
- 5 Symbiotically derived subordination, where gender inequality relates to the seamless interleaving of capitalism and patriarchy – capitalist patriarchy.
- 6 Dualist subordination, where gender inequality relates to the discrete interaction between two autonomous spheres of capitalism and patriarchy.
- 7 Composite contingent subordination, where gender inequality is derived from the heterogeneous interleaving of gender, ethnicity and class but the connections and their particular influences are both contingently interpreted and constructed and tension-ridden.

In what follows the first six approaches are schematically presented and an alternative formulation, which seeks to overcome some of the main problems of

the others, is developed. I then consider the heuristic utility of this alternative 'composite model' in an examination of historical and contemporary gender relations at work. In this instance most of the evidence relates to paid work and a majority applies to paid work outside the home. However, it will become apparent that the relationships between paid and unpaid labour, and between home and work, are so interlaced that the divisions are often merely for analytic purposes. Nevertheless, this chapter will focus, in the main, on paid labour outside the home. Unpaid domestic labour is discussed in chapter 2.

### *Classical approaches*

As noted in chapter 3, the contributions of Marx, Weber and Durkheim to the examination of gender relations at work are less than useful in the main. Certainly they all seemed to assume that gender inequalities were omnipresent in all forms of society, though Marx's collaborator Engels had put forward an argument for the initial existence of a matriarchal society which was undermined by the differentiation between production and reproduction. As production – the sphere of men – began to provide surpluses, so it achieved predominance over reproduction – the sphere of women – and led to the creation of a whole panoply of institutions associated with patriarchal control: private property, social classes and the state. In theory, since patriarchy was derived from private property, and since working men's exploitation of their female partners was a reflection of their own exploited position within capitalism, the elimination of capitalism and private property would reintroduce sexual equality (Engels, 1968). Engels's anthropological evidence for matriarchy is dubious and the connection between capitalism and patriarchy much more complex than he makes out (Delmar, 1976). That is not to say that there never were any pre-capitalist societies controlled by women: Chinese empresses and Assyrian war queens were as real as Boadicea (Fraser, 1988) or Cleopatra, and certain Pict tribes operated with matrilineal inheritance and descent (Chadwick, 1970: 118). Even though the vast majority of contemporary societies have patriarchal lines of property control some have long traditions of matriarchal control over property, the Reang hill tribe of north-east India being a case in point (*The Guardian*, 25 May 1988). In northern Albania, near Tirana, some villages retain a feudal custom in which families whose male line no longer exists (often through the effects of blood feuds) are headed by women, known as 'avowed virgins', who act, dress, talk and are treated as men (*The Guardian*, 7 May 1996).

However sympathetic to certain aspects of the women's emancipation movement in Germany Weber may have been (1948: 26), he regarded the existence of patriarchal domination as 'normal' in the light of 'the normal superiority of the physical and intellectual energies of the male' (1978: 1007). If anything, Durkheim was even more reactionary, though somewhat ambiguous about gender relationships and the relative benefits of marriage to men and women (1933: 57–60; cf. 264–5). In short, the classical theorists have little of substance to add to the debate on gender at work.

### Gender as irrelevant

The concentration upon men within sociology has, until very recently, been so common that it was seldom perceived to require an explanation; there is, as Marx argued, no greater power than when what is actually a sectional interest becomes represented and accepted as a universal interest, as common sense. There is some inconsistency within this rather heterogeneous group of approaches to gender, with some using individuals as the unit of study while others use the family, but it is only in conjunction with familially based analysis that theoretical justifications for the exclusion of gender are introduced. Both Goldthorpe (et al., 1980, 1983, 1984b) and Parkin (1972) argue that women's position is dependent upon the class situation of the family, which, in turn, is conditioned by the class position of the head of the family. Naturally, runs their argument, since the head of the family – i.e. the main breadwinner – is male, women's class position is determined by their husband's or partner's class. Of course, some women may have a higher social class than their partner, but they argue that this is unlikely to be a general rule. In fact, logically it cannot be a rule at all, for if a woman's class is determined by her partner's class then self-evidently the former cannot be different from the latter (Macrae, 1986; Walby, 1986a: 10). Goldthorpe's assessment (1984b) suggests that the determination of women's class position by their partners' (obviously single women have their own class) is a manifestation of sexism not within sociology but within society. Thus, he argues, it is because women's life changes *are* dependent upon their partners that sociologists should concentrate upon men.

There are several problems with this kind of approach. First, because it allocates women's class through the family it assumes that income distribution within the family is correlated with class: the higher the class of the male the higher the class of the female. But as pointed out in chapters 1 and 5, and as Brannen and Wilson (1987) and Gershuny (1983) have argued, male monopolization over economic resources makes a mockery of any assumed equality within the family, and it is therefore not possible to assume that women's class is identical with that of their male partners. Indeed, the differentiated control over resources is just one facet of a gendered inequality within the family that also encompasses several areas including domestic labour (see chapter 2) and especially domestic and sexual violence. In Britain only 10 per cent of convictions involve women (Bennett, 1996), only 5 per cent of convictions for violence are made against women (James, 1988), and while women are sometimes violent towards children (as are men), very few women are violent towards other adults – in sharp contrast to men (Rose, 1986: 166–8). It was not always thus: throughout history there have been many women who have breached the cultural stereotypes of their gender (Robinson, 2002). In eighteenth-century Portsmouth between 1696 and 1781, for instance, 2,891 women were charged with assault – that is, almost a third of all those charged with assault in the city, compared to the current proportion of between 10 and 15 per cent. During wartime the proportion of violence caused by women in Portsmouth increased to as much as 38 per cent (Warner, 2003: 13–15).

The actual extent of domestic violence inflicted on women by men is unknown, though a review of the evidence suggests that at least 500,000 women suffer in England and Wales alone (Home Office, 1989); on average about 150 people in the UK are killed by a current or former partner every year and one in four women and one in six men will suffer attack from their partner at some point in their lives (<<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crimpol/crimreduc/domviolence/>>). Yet Britain has 200 times more sanctuary spaces for abandoned animals than women fleeing violent partners (*The Guardian*, 6 March 1996). That is not to say that social, or rather societal violence, as opposed to individual violence, does not sometimes alleviate the subordination of women. Societally organized violence, especially in wars of liberation or resistance to foreign oppressors, 'appears to promote citizenship for women more than any other single factor' (Turner, 1986: 71). Violence, then, can both destroy and subjugate women as well as facilitate their partial unshackling.

Second, it is not possible to allocate all class categories to women through male partners because many women are unmarried or do not live with a male partner. In 1994 22 per cent of all families were headed by single mothers – up from 6 per cent in 1971; single fathers comprise 2 per cent of the total (*Social Trends*, 1997). The proportion of traditional households in Great Britain (two adults with dependent children) reduced from around 33 per cent in 1971 to just over 20 per cent in 2003. Over the same period, the proportion of single-parent households with dependent children almost doubled, comprising about 5 per cent of households by 2003 (<<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=10942&image.x=17&image.y=6>>). A further percentage have a different class from their male partners – or they would have if the criteria for class were individually based, not family based (Stanworth, 1984; Walby, 1986a; Macrae, 1986; Leिल्fsrud and Woodward, 1987). Third, even the focus upon men as heads of households is inhibited by the exclusion of their female partners, for it assumes that such men are completely unaffected by the resources brought into the family by women. This is markedly influential where analyses of social mobility are made, for although much has been made of the relative mobility of the British 'working class' in the work of Goldthorpe et al. (1980), more recent analysis indicates that although many male workers have been upwardly mobile, many female workers may have suffered a consequential downward mobility (Abbott and Sapsford, 1988). Fourth, in contrast to the above, the emergence of dual-income families within homogamous (same-class) marriages may well polarize the experiences of middle- and working-class families. That is, although the rise of cross-class families is important they do not represent the norm. Within that norm almost half of all wives were economically active in 1981 compared with 42 per cent in 1971. But, and this is the crucial point, the disparity between the classes is constantly growing: taking the Registrar General's classification of social classes, wives of professional-class males (class 1) increased their activity rate by 11 per cent over the decade but wives of semi-skilled and unskilled males increased their activity rate by only 3 per cent. The life experiences of British working-class women and middle-class women, therefore, are undergoing qualitatively different, that is polarizing, changes (Bonney, 1988; Truman and Keating, 1988), though American data imply that some form of convergence may be occurring (Treas, 1987).

Finally, Lockwood (1986) has argued that gender cannot be regarded as an explanatory category, not because women derive their class from their male partners but because women do not form a cohesive collectivity, capable of pursuing gender-based issues. This severing of the gender line through alleged political and organizational incompetence not only misrepresents the actions of many women and their organizations over many years (Bouchier, 1983; Boston, 1987), but imbues class-based movements with a coherence they simply do not have. Ironically, despite Lockwood's Weberian approach, such a definition of class is much closer to the 'class for itself' label which Marx introduced as just *one* facet of a class movement.

### *Gender as secondary or derived subordination*

One theoretical solution to the problems posed by a family-based analysis is to consider women both individually, through their occupational status, and collectively through their gender. This opens up a veritable Pandora's box, for women without paid employment, but who are not unemployed, appear to be in the same occupationally defined class. Such a class might well be extremely heterogeneous in terms of life chances, including female members of the 'idle rich' as well as the 'feckless poor', a combination that defies the conventions of stratification theory even if the patterns of life experience within the family *relative* to their male partners may be similar.

Alternatively, although the most orthodox of Marxists have ignored the gendered dimension to stratification some have regarded it as simply a by-product of class, and therefore of capitalism. Thus Edwards (1979), Braverman (1974) and Rubery (1980) all suggest, though in different ways, that gender plays a part in constraining the supply of labour but is not a central feature of segregation within work. Gender is also influential in so far as it is associated with capitalist strategies for control by 'divide and rule' (Stone, 1974).

A critical aspect of the controversy surrounds the question of exploitation: since domestic labour is not paid, the value it has lies in providing capitalism with a virtually free source of domestic servicing for its employees; capitalists exploit the domestic labour of women by providing wages for men that do not encompass the true costs of producing and reproducing the labour force. One branch of the argument asserts that women's domestic labour is productive in the sense that it is self-evidently labour; without it capitalism would not be viable, and anyway domestic and paid labour are so intertwined as to be mutually productive of value (Secombe, 1974, 1975). Himmelweit and Mohun (1977) place the emphasis on the consumption undertaken by domestic labour rather than production; a point of some importance to Marxism since only productive labour is deemed to be constructive of value for only this form is exchanged directly with capital.

A second branch is taken by Engels, who argued that a major step outside the boundaries of domestic exploitation for women would come when more women entered the labour force directly through paid employment, but it has to be said that almost the whole of this debate among Marxists has been conducted within the confines of the class-exploitative nature of capitalism. That

is, the issue of gender exploitation by men, and this includes both proletarian and bourgeois men, is either unimportant or relevant only in so far as it illuminates class-based exploitation. As Walby puts it: 'these writers face a serious inconsistency between asserting the derivative nature of women's oppression from capitalism, while recognizing the fact that this oppression pre-dates capitalism. It is illogical to suppose that a social system which arose after patriarchy could be deemed to create social inequalities which pre-date it' (1986a: 20).

A third position is pushed by Gorz whose rather heretical form of Marxism actually has strong resonances with Marx's critique of the commodification of all relations. The evisceration of social relations through the encroachment of economic relations was, according to Marx, an inevitable result of the market imperatives undergirding capitalism. Gorz's argument is that to suggest payment for domestic labour, as a solution to patriarchal and/or capitalist exploitation, is to substitute economic relations for social relations. Thus Gorz charges that although domestic labour is unpaid because it carries associations of servility and subordination to the economically oriented activities of paid labour, it is these associations that should be challenged, not the apparent 'problem' of uncommodified labour (see chapter 1).

A rather different approach, which explains gender exploitation through capitalism, is that associated with the diremption of the home from the central unit of family production through industrialization. Some of the historical evidence on this issue has already been covered above but the issue is theoretically as well as empirically important: the removal of women from paid labour enforces a level of economic dependence by women on men that would, in theory, serve to *exacerbate* patriarchal predominance in the home (Middleton, 1981), or as Zaretsky (1976) argues (though on the basis of inadequate information), to *instigate* patriarchal predominance in the home.

The final interpretation locks into an argument of Marx concerning women's role in the 'reserve army of labour' (Braverman, 1974), that is the pool of unemployed workers who are essential to the smooth functioning of the capitalist economy by providing the extra labour necessary in booms and embodying the deterrent to wage rises and industrial conflict during slumps. Unfortunately, the evidence for this theory is very dubious, primarily because it suggests that men and women are interchangeable in the labour market when in fact the labour market is highly sex-segregated (Alexander, 1976; Beechey, 1986). The argument seems to suggest that the functional utility of women as a cheap, docile labour force explains the development of capitalism; but since patriarchy predates capitalism, and since the reserve army of labour cannot both predate capitalism and be caused by it, the argument appears to suffocate itself in contradictory logic (cf. Barrett, 1980).

### *Patriarchally derived subordination*

The third approach to the explanation of gender inequality avers that capitalism is irrelevant, or at best subordinate, to the production and reproduction of male dominance. Since pre-capitalist and non-capitalist social formations



manifest patriarchal control, the origins and perpetuating forces must lie in gender relations themselves. One of the earliest and most influential writers in this radical feminist genre is Firestone (1974). She argues that women's subordinate position is directly related to the biological differences between men and women, and, more specifically, to the debilitating consequences for women of sexual reproduction in its various facets: childbirth, pregnancy, breastfeeding, childcare and menstruation. Adopting Marx's **base-superstructure** schema she asserts that reproduction is the base from which everything else follows: hence, again like Marx, she denies the value of tinkering with the superstructure while the reproductive base remains untouched (cf. O'Brien, 1981). Rather, the link between women and reproduction must be severed by the pursuit of a biological solution: only by constructing a reproductive system that does not depend on women can patriarchal power be broken. It is, then, to 'artificial' reproduction that women must look for liberation. However, this really begs the question of technical control. If patriarchy is dependent upon the biological link and, because of this, in control of technical and biological advances, then it would be irrational for patriarchy to allow the development of its own suicide note. Moreover, Firestone's argument seems to slip from the biological aspects of reproduction to the socially constructed aspects of child-rearing etc., without much concern for the distinctions; while only women can have children, not all women do, nor does this require that only women are responsible for childcare. Indeed, since many men either do not marry or do not father children it is difficult to explain how these individuals necessarily gain directly from the reproductive activities of most women. Other writers have located the locus of patriarchal power in rape (Brownmiller, 1976) or pornography (Dworkin, 1981). But despite the importance of these two facets of patriarchy in its self-reproduction, it is not self-evident that either or both are the *principal* means for this. It seems unlikely that a society without pornography or rape would necessarily exhibit gender equality, even if it would be a considerably better place to live.

Part of the problem with theoretical evaluations of the superordinate position of patriarchy is the ahistoricism and universalism that often prevails. Not only are men presumed to have been dominant through all time and space but all men are engulfed in the same unidirectional subordination of all women, who in turn have identical experiences. It is also difficult to see how such an invariant and omnipotent system of oppression could be challenged, let alone dissipated. It is problems like this that have encouraged the dismissal of patriarchy as the only independent variable and a return to the possibility of uniting capitalism and patriarchy as symbiotically related twin pillars of gender oppression.

### *Symbiotically derived subordination: capitalist patriarchy*

If patriarchy alone cannot fully explain gender subordination perhaps the solution is to draw the separate modes of exploitation together: capitalism exploits some women (and some men) economically; patriarchy exploits women

politically and socially. This position, most thoroughly argued by Eisenstein (1979, 1984), implies that capitalism and patriarchy are mutually dependent and self-reinforcing. In certain circumstances this may well be true, but there are contradictory forces within both that undermine the alleged mutuality. For example, capitalism is actually composed of discrete capitals whose interests are often incompatible in the sphere of economic exploitation of women, and each discrete capital harbours an inherent antagonism to the requirements of all others: it may be in the interests of one capitalist to exploit his or her employees by providing the lowest possible wages but the consumption of commodities is dependent upon a high level of general income, not a parsimonious one. Furthermore, the interests of men are riven by their contending economic interests as employers and employees (Grint, 1988), and are in no sense universally and congruously patterned by their gender. Capitalist men do not have the same interests as working-class men, even with regard to women workers. The former may consider women as a source of cheap and compliant labour, and prefer them to men as employees; for precisely the same reason working-class men may seek to exclude women from the labour market altogether.

#### *Dualist approaches: capitalism and patriarchy as autonomous*

Given the incompatible aspects of capitalism and patriarchy the final attempt to resolve the problem of gender-based oppression and exploitation is to reunite the two systems in parallel. A variety of routes are proposed in this field: Mitchell (1975) locates ideological control within patriarchy and economic control within capitalism, though this dualism is again one without clear lines of friction between the two. Indeed, the reduction of capitalism to material control, and patriarchy to ideological control, misunderstands the interleaving of each with the other. Thus male workers often fear and resist the encroachment of women not just because they regard 'women's work' as demeaning but because it is perceived as a distinct threat to their material standards of reward (Grint, 1988).

Delphy's (1977) dualism reverts to the conventional Marxist materialist analysis for both spheres: the domestic and capitalist modes of production. Both modes are sites for the exploitation and subordination of women because it is theoretically vacuous to hive off domestic work as unproductive while retaining all work under capitalist exchange as productive. Whatever activities are currently undertaken by women at home as part of their domestic duties are, with very few exceptions, executed for monetary reward outside the home. Indeed, one estimate of the cost of domestic work puts the total annual figure for 'replacing a wife' in Britain at £19,292, in 1987 prices (the figure is calculated by an insurance group to facilitate 'Family Income Insurance': PLA, 1987: 10). It is, then, not the content of labour that makes it productive or unproductive but the social relations within which it is performed. Nevertheless, according to Delphy, it is the domestic mode which is critical since this prestructures the pattern of gender-related inequalities in the capitalist mode of production.

One of the difficulties with this is that the domestic exploitation of women as a class by men glosses over the gross inequalities between women: both 'idle

rich' women and poverty-stricken working women are mutually exploited by their respective male partners. This is not to say that both may well be exploited, but it is to point out the greatly variant forms of exploitation that may exist. Furthermore, we need to be assured that households without men are either non-exploitative, or can isolate themselves from the power of patriarchy derived not from physical manifestations, *qua* men at home, but in its multifarious formations that exist irrespective of adult male presence. For example, the portrayal of women as subordinate in the media or in everyday life in the local neighbourhood or via male children, does not depend upon adult male presence for its viability. Nor do women need to live with a male partner to feel the effects of patriarchy at work. It is because there is no hermetic seal between home and work (unpaid and paid) that they continue to infect each other. If these opaque, and sometimes invisible, links between home and work are ignored, it becomes possible to argue that the under-representation of women amongst senior management has nothing to do with their over-representation at home. As Wolff puts it in her critique of organization theory that ignores the wider social context: 'we can see how long hours and inflexible working time militate against the employment of women with "two roles", but we cannot discuss the basic question of why women have two roles' (Wolff, 1977: 20). We also need to be clear about the exploitation of women by women in the domestic scene. Both white and black South African women may be exploited by men at home but black women servants are also exploited by their female white employers: as Orwell might have argued, under capitalist patriarchy all women are equal – but some are more equal than others.

While Delphy tends to stress the importance of the domestic mode, Hartmann's (1982) account inverts the hierarchy by highlighting the critical role of occupational sex-segregation. This patriarchal control of employment opportunities delimits the opportunities for women outside the home and therefore buttresses the ideological pressures on women to remain at home looking after children. One particular feature of this albeit contingent locking of patriarchy and capitalism is apparently demonstrated by the adoption of the family wage as a legitimate trade union principle for collective bargaining acceptable to male workers and capitalists alike. Nevertheless, it is not clear why capitalists should acquiesce to this demand since it keeps wages higher than they need be. Nor, of course, does it gel with claims that capitalism exploits women by *not* paying for domestic services provided by women. It may be that family wages provide an uneasy compromise by balancing the need for quiescent labour with the demands for cheap labour but there is little evidence that employers were anything but unwilling parties to this bargain (Grint, 1988).

The final version of dualism covered here is that of Walby (1986a). She retains the parallel aspects of patriarchy and mode of production but distinguishes between various aspects of patriarchal relations, such as domestic work, paid work, the state, male violence and sexuality, whose relative importance depends upon the nature of the link between patriarchy and the particular mode of production. Thus under capitalism it is paid work and the domestic division of labour which are critical, and they generate both a patriarchal, and essentially privatized, mode of production that exploits 'housewives' or domestic labourers,

and a capitalist mode of production that exploits proletarians. These two are correlated through the delimiting of opportunities for women in paid work which effectively renders them economically dependent upon their male partner.

### *Reconstructing the theories: a composite contingency model*

There is much to be said for Walby's suggestion (especially the more flexible approach developed in her *Theorizing Patriarchy*, 1990) because its contingent relationships between the different spheres of patriarchy can be used to explain the variations that exist in time and space; without this flexibility patriarchy becomes so inherently omnipotent as to be incapable of change within or between societies. Nevertheless, the model underlying many other approaches to gender inequality, appears to be, rather ironically, the nuclear family in which the primary breadwinner is a man in full-time employment. The implication of this conventional model (and its typicality is severely restricted in time and space with in the 1980s a mere 3 per cent fitting the single male breadwinner and full-time 'housewife and mother' 'ideal' in Britain and 7 per cent in the USA (BMRB, 1988; Kakabadse and McWilliam, 1987; Pahl (ed.), 1988: 12-15)) is that women who do not live with men are, by definition, less exploited than all those who do. This may be the empirical norm but it is not an axiomatic principle to be accepted a priori. Families or households where an egalitarian division of domestic labour exists between male and female partners may be atypical but their existence should warn us of the dangers of 'guilt by association'. That is to say that the blanket derivation of oppression by men, the concomitant location of oppression in all women, and the corresponding Manichaean distinction between exploiting employers and non-exploiting employees ought to be the subject of empirical investigation rather than theoretical generalization. Nor is it self-evident that the arena of paid work should be prioritized above that of domestic work: it is the case that the limited opportunities for paid work delimit women's freedom within the home but it also clear that women's domestic responsibilities prevent or deter them from seeking certain forms of paid work. It is the seamless web that knits home and 'work', unpaid and paid labour, that confounds the dualist models and the contingent position of individuals within the web.

In fact, while it may be useful for heuristic purposes to separate patriarchy and capitalism, three dangers remain: first, that of slipping from analytic distinctions to empirically discrete explanations; second, in subordinating forms of oppression which are not derived from capitalism or patriarchy; and third, in presuming that analytic models of oppression are the means by which most people understand the world. Hence, in facing empirical reality women do not necessarily confront 'men' or 'capitalists' but particular men who are heterogeneous or composite individuals or representative of such composites. They are white or black; and they are capitalists or supervisors or workers; and they are young or old; and where interpreted as significant they are Catholic or Protestant or Jewish or Muslim etc. Concomitantly, women do not form a homogeneous

collective but experience work as middle-class or working-class women; as white or black, and within the ethnic minorities as black or Asian or Mexican etc.; the fact of gender similarity says little about the specific form of oppression or the contradictions between women from different class or ethnic backgrounds (Ramazanoglou, 1989). Indeed, what exist in work situations are individuals and groups whose primary characteristics embody (at least) three distinctive facets of the stratification structure: class, gender and ethnic origin. This is not to deny that other issues are potentially divisive, nor does it deny that non-capitalist societies may be patriarchal and racist but it is to state that social relations are inherently more complex than those implicit in dualist theories.

It is not a question of theoretically unravelling the triple threads that go to make up individuals and groups so that they can be better analysed separately because they only exist as heterogeneous composites. For heuristic purposes, it is important that the threads are identified and most research has followed one such thread at a time (hence the structure of this book), but to postulate discrete hierarchies of influence emanating from each thread is to misunderstand the distinction between the composite as a whole and the sum of its parts. An analytic model may provide a picture in triptych form: for example, of an individual as a worker, as black, and as a woman. But the life experiences of this individual are more likely to be refracted through the multiplex network or prism of these social forms: as a black-female-worker. In sum, the analysis, in this instance of women and work, should proceed from the assumption that patriarchy, racism and capitalism form not parallel modes of oppression but a contingent and discordant whole riddled with internal tensions and contradictions.

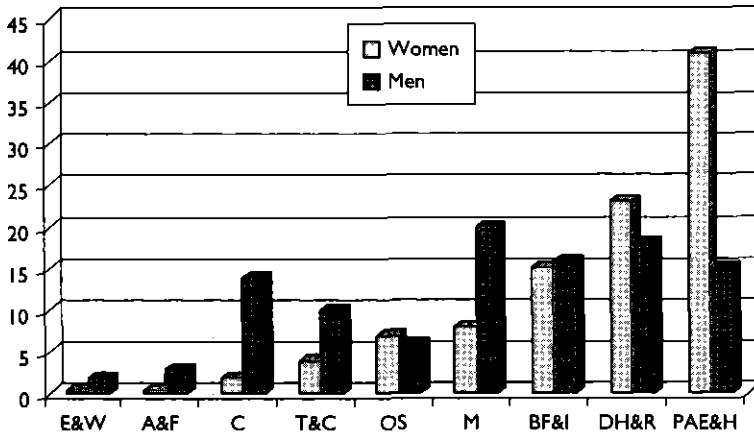
Perhaps a useful analogy to differentiate this model from dualist models that separate the threads is the distinction between interleaved metals and an alloy: bronze has properties which are distinct from the copper, tin and zinc or lead metals on which it is based. Where the analogy is limited is in the distinction between the tension-ridden and contingent social relationship and the static and stabilized relationship between the metals. This does not mean that there is no utility in considering race, class or gender separately: the material that can be marshalled to cover all these areas is immense, and much of it is constructed from viewpoints vastly different from this one, so the process of reconstruction in an introductory text of this sort is an inordinately complex task. And of course many social relationships do not involve all or any of the three aspects: relationships between white middle-class males may or may not involve aspects of gender, race and class: whether they do or not is a contingent aspect subject to empirical investigation. Since those areas where class and race are pre-eminent are covered elsewhere, the next section concentrates on the experiences of women in paid labour outside the home since 1945; unpaid domestic labour and home working are considered in chapter 1, pre-1945 work is covered in chapter 2. Furthermore, from a practical point of view analytic divisions have to be made if we are to avoid paralysing the reader with a morass of unstructured information. Ultimately, of course, to reproduce the divisions is to perpetuate conventions but neither the resources nor the research material to reconstruct the sociology of work afresh are yet available; this chapter can only point towards a future possibility for research. Readers interested in pursuing these debates

should consider the following: Bradley et al. (2000); Grusky (2000) provides a useful collection of articles; Hakim's (1996) work contains a vigorous attack upon some mainstream feminist approaches; McCall (2001) relates the arguments to the US economy; Rees (2003) considers the role of 'competencies' in the progress of women at work.

### **Women and paid labour: the contemporary evidence**

After the end of the Second World War the experience of women workers was quite different from those in 1919. First, no economic depression followed and, indeed, over two decades of uninterrupted economic growth spanned the period up until the early 1970s. As a result, the opportunities for women, married and single, did not suddenly disappear but rather continued to expand, so that in 2003 in the UK there were 15.2 million men working (54 per cent of the total) and 12.9 million women (46 per cent of the total). That represents an employment rate of 80 per cent for men and 70 per cent for women (<[http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme\\_labour/LMT\\_Jan04.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_labour/LMT_Jan04.pdf)>). Second, and relatedly, the shifts in the economy towards the service sector with its resultant increase in demand for white-collar labour, actually forced some employers into providing unheard-of levels of equality between men and women, most notably in these areas of white-collar shortage (Grint, 1988). Third, the proportion of women working part time continued to increase (to 42 per cent in 2003 compared with 9 per cent of men: see <[http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme\\_labour/LMT\\_Nov03.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_labour/LMT_Nov03.pdf)>), partly as a result of wartime experiences of women with domestic responsibilities and partly because it suited employers to use part-timers to soak up fluctuations in demand and yet avoid having to pay National Insurance contributions or involve themselves in the legal aspects of dismissing full-time employees etc. (Beechey, 1986: 28–9). Fourth, women began reappearing in the labour market after their children went to school so that a bimodal distribution was evident from the 1960s, in sharp contrast to the prior pre-1939 pattern (outside the wars themselves) where most women, but especially middle-class women, left the labour market permanently if and when they got married and had children.

Outside the limited areas where some degree of equality prevailed, levels and forms of segregation were and still are very common. The segregation of men and women into different occupations – horizontal segregation – is shown in figure 10. In fact, the relative crudity of the distinctions underestimates the degree of inequality in authority terms and some of the more detailed data are provided later (see also Hakim, 1979). At this point it is just worth noting a few points. First, there are no occupations, as classified here, that are exactly equal in gender composition. Second, the genders are distributed in a non-random way: women predominate in public administration, education, health, distribution, hotels and restaurants; men dominate manufacturing, transport and communications, construction, agriculture and fishing and energy; only banking, finance and insurance and other services are relatively equal in terms of gender distribution. Even when women acquire the necessary training in



Key:  
 E&W Energy and water  
 A&F Agriculture and fishing  
 C Construction  
 T&C Transport and communications  
 OS Other services  
 M Manufacturing  
 BF&I Banking, finance and insurance  
 DH&R Distributions, hotels and restaurants  
 PAE&H Public administration, education and health

**Figure 10** Gender and occupation (UK), 2003 (millions)

Source: Reconstructed from *Labour Market Trends*, November 2003: 538

male-dominated occupations, such as construction, it is still difficult for them to acquire employment because of the informal male networks that dominate the occupation (Clarke et al., 2004). Thus there are, at most, 16,000 women construction workers in the UK, compared to more than 1.5 million men; fewer than 10,000 women plumbers, compared to almost 200,000 men; around 64,000 women engineers, compared to almost 750,000 million men; and around 150,000 women IT workers, compared to 834,000 men. Not surprisingly, there are fewer than 10,000 male childcare workers, compared to almost 300,000 female (Ward, 2004: 9). Third, and as a summation of the previous points, there are strong connections between occupations related to the domestic sphere and poorer pay.

Inequality prevails, then, both because of the jobs that women do but also because of the unequal pay they receive when they do similar jobs to men. Most recent reviews would suggest that unequal treatment within jobs, rather than unequal access to particular jobs, is the critical problem for women (Horrell, Rubery and Burchell, 1989), though as figure 9 (p. 165) implies, unequal access is itself commonplace.

British women have, for the most part, never comprised more than a quarter of employers, more than a fifth of managers and more than a tenth of higher professionals throughout the twentieth century. Where there has been a considerable expansion in both the absolute and relative numbers of female employees

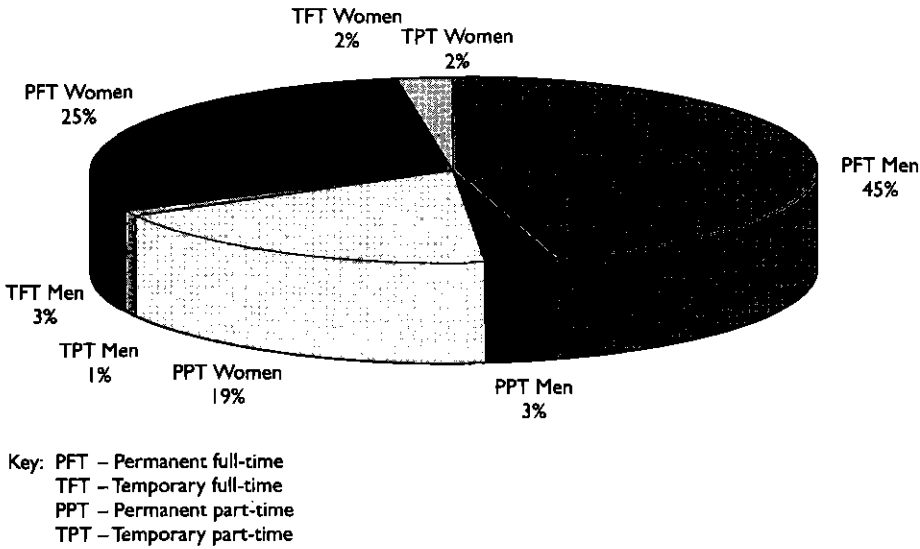
has been in the white-collar and service sector. Very roughly a quarter of all white-collar employees were women at the turn of the century whereas the equivalent figure towards its end is well over half.

One of the changes most often associated with the Industrial Revolution was the gradual eclipse of employment opportunities for married women. The 1851 Census in Britain records that 25 per cent of married women had an 'extraneous occupation' – a label perfectly in keeping with the subsequent Victorian ideology that came to perceive the woman's role as almost wholly encapsulated by the home and family (Alexander, 1976); and, despite the growing significance of factory labour for women from the last quarter of the nineteenth century onwards, the proportion of married women with paid employment dropped to under 10 per cent in the first three decades of the twentieth century before rising steadily to 22 per cent by 1951, just under 50 per cent by 1981 (Joseph, 1983: 6; Beechey, 1986: 13), and 54 per cent in 1989 (*Employment Gazette*, April 1990). Currently over 65 per cent of American mothers with children under 18 are employed (Meade-King, 1988), a midway point between Britain, where 48 per cent of mothers with children under 10 are employed (Martin and Roberts, 1984), and Sweden, where 82 per cent of mothers with children under school age are employed (Leiulfstrud and Woodward, 1987). Coincident with a rise in the proportion of married women within the labour force has been a rise in the number of employed women with sole responsibility for dependants. Although the conventional stereotyped male breadwinner may suggest that most men have dependants, in fact only 40 per cent of both men and women have them (Beechey, 1986: 9).

The increased rate of employment for married women generally is the most substantial single area of change in occupational activity since the beginning of this century. Generally speaking, since the Second World War, women have tended to adopt either a fragmented work career or a two-phase career with a substantial break of between five and fifteen years while they raise their children. Even when children become full-time pupils many women still structure their employment around their continuing domestic responsibilities so that school holidays and early finishing become an essential part of employment arrangements. In 1997 this division in responsibilities becomes partly visible in the proportions undertaking full-time and part-time labour. Including permanent and temporary workers together, approximately 21 per cent of the labour force are part-time women while only 4 per cent are part-time men. The data are reproduced in figure 11.

Married women, like the majority of all employees, tend, and indeed have always tended, to regard the monetary rewards of work as critical (Parker et al., 1967: 53; Roberts, 1985: 241–2; Burnett, 1984), though boredom at home and the need for company also figure prominently in the reasons given for taking up paid work (Hunt, 1968: 77). The pecuniary link is important not just because it delimits assumptions about women's work being for 'pin money' but also because economic rewards are themselves a manifestation of status. That is to say that money is both economically and socially essential, for it provides women with a large number of potential benefits: independent means, a higher familial standard of living, and higher social status etc. But,





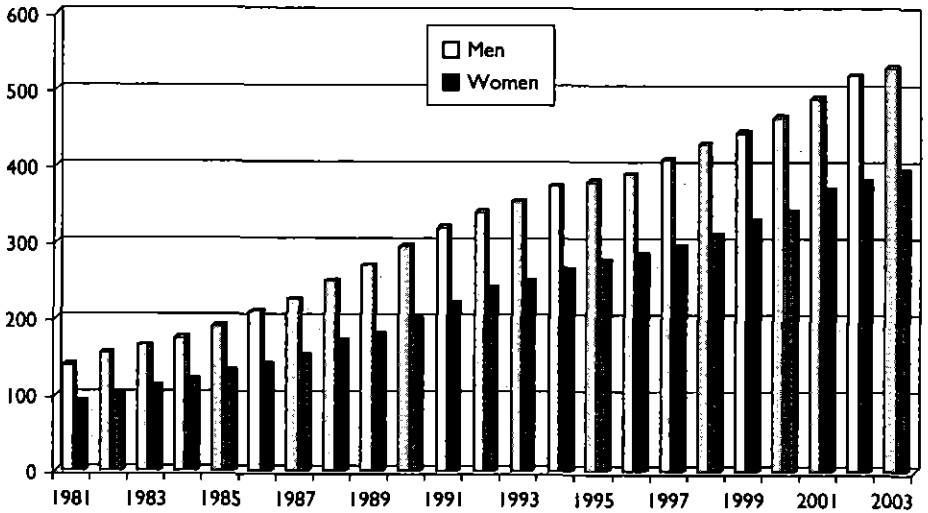
**Figure 11** The flexible British labour market

Source: *Labour Market Trends*, April 1997

as we shall see, the experiences of women are not identical, for they are pre-structured through their position as single or with a partner, with or without dependent children, middle-class or working-class, black or white etc.

### *Equal pay*

Of course, not all occupations are either sex-segregated or subject to unequal rewards. For example, the civil services of many countries, along with their associated public sector like education and health etc., often exhibit markedly egalitarian policies. Thus the British Post Office, Civil Service and teaching profession have relatively little in the way of official sexual discrimination, at least compared with the private sectors (Grint, 1988). On the contrary, all three have provided equal pay in certain areas for decades. That is not to say that equality was ever the primary intention behind the instigators of the policy, nor is it to suggest that these areas currently demonstrate an equality of distribution regarding positions of authority, career structures etc. Equal pay in the teaching profession, first mooted in the NUT referendum of 1919 and achieved by 1961, and a 60 per cent majority of the workforce being female, does not alter the fact that only 15 per cent of female primary school teachers are heads compared with 50 per cent of male primary teachers (NUT, 1988), even though women comprise 80 per cent of primary school teachers (De Lyon and Mignuolo, 1989), a level of inequality which worsens with distance from London (MacLeod, 1996). The pattern of wage movements for the average full-time male and female employee between 1981 and 2003 is shown in



**Figure 12** Average gross full-time weekly earnings in £ (UK), 1981–2003

Source: Reconstructed from *Labour Market Trends*, 2003: 602

figure 12. It should be clear just how stubborn the gap between men and women has been: both have been getting wealthier but the difference remains very reluctant to disappear.

Of equal relevance have been the activities of the state, in Britain most notably through the 1970 Equal Pay Act, the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act and the 1983 Equal Pay (Amendment) Regulations, and in the USA, for example, through the 1963 Equal Pay Act and 1964 Civil Rights Act. This earlier dating of the US Acts should not necessarily be taken to imply a greater concern for justice on the part of the American authorities: Frank Thompson, chairperson of the US House Select Subcommittee on the Equal Pay Bill is reputed to have filed documents relating to women under 'B' for 'Broads' (Randall, 1988), though the liberal ethos of Kennedy's era counteracted this to some extent.

Analyses of the effects of the two British Acts varies quite considerably. Gregory (1982) insists the effects were minimal, though Zabalza and Tzannatos (1985), Atkins (1986) and the Labour Research Department (1986), while noting the limited value of both Acts, suggest that some marginal advances were effected, and Marsh (1988b: 55) suggests that women's earnings were raised by about 5 per cent relative to men's to reach the plateau of 67 per cent that they have remained around since. In terms of the individuals who take their case to tribunals only between 1 per cent and 12 per cent were successful between 1985 and 1994 (*The Guardian*, 20 June 1995) and the actual process itself appears to be very stressful: only 11 per cent of applicants remained with their employers, and continued victimization is common. Given the economic rewards of a successful application (50 per cent of all awards are for less than £300 and 40 per cent of pay increases ordered were for less than £8 a week) it is small wonder that the tribunal option is so little used (Leonard, 1987). In fact, in

1995, of the 1,623 complaints about discrimination notified to the Equal Opportunity Commission, 823 came from men – the first time the majority have not been women. This is probably a consequence of two particular elements: first, the displacement of traditional ‘male’ jobs (mining and factory work) by ‘female’ jobs (clerical, nursing and retailing), and second, the increasing attempt by men to enter the latter arena (Freely, 1996; Boseley, 1996).

Also important at the time of the original Acts was the Social Contract negotiated between the TUC and the Labour Government between 1974 and 1977 which initially embodied an egalitarian incomes policy and facilitated the erosion of gender-based wage differentials (G. Thompson, 1984). It is noticeable that many ostensibly left-wing unions declined to appreciate the value of this to women and the low paid, and proffered instead ‘a cult of militancy which assumed that the low paid would be rewarded by the efforts of the higher paid, without recognizing that this pattern would only reproduce the balance of relationships which were precisely the problem, when what women workers needed was a redistribution within the working class, as much as redistribution between classes’ (Campbell, 1982b: 23). Hakim (1981) adds further support to the value of this period, noting a much greater decrease in segregation after the Act than would have been predictable on the basis of historical trends before it. Ultimately, the Equal Pay Act garnered support of one sort or another from many sections of the community, although the TUC had by this time recognized the growing importance of women as union members and begun to support the idea of equal pay for equal value while the CBI still preferred the idea of equal pay for equal work. The latter policy, enacted by the Act, enabled employers to maintain general patterns of gender-based inequality by ensuring that women did not undertake identical duties to men, or, where this proved impossible to maintain, introducing a token man to the ‘women’s’ jobs. However, a series of tribunal cases in 1984 following the Equal Value Regulations (enacted in January 1984 to bring Britain in line with EEC legislation), and Julie Heyward’s victory over Cammel Laird, began to undermine the conservative implications of the Act (Hadjifotiou, 1985). The case in favour of equal pay for equal value has recently taken a significant step forward with the sequence of judgements supporting Rene Pickstone. Ms Pickstone, a warehouse worker employed by Freemans’ mail order company, whose case was supported by the Equal Opportunities Commission, claimed that work of her type was of equivalent value to that undertaken by male warehouse checkers despite the fact that a token male warehouse worker earned the same as his female colleagues. Under the 1970 Equal Pay Act such a case could not be made but the Appeal Court ruled, on 25 March 1987, that Article 119 of the Treaty of Rome and previous European Court rulings were applicable in Ms Pickstone’s case, and the Appeal Court judgement was upheld by the Law Lords on 30 June 1988. Relatedly, in 1995 the House of Lords ruled in favour of 1,300 ‘dinner ladies’ who had been dismissed by North Yorkshire County Council and immediately re-employed at lower pay to defeat an outside tender for the meals service. This followed a previous acceptance by the council that women’s work was of equal value to the gardeners, road sweepers and refuse collectors who were overwhelmingly men (Clement, 1995).

Of course, securing the backing of the law is not the equivalent of removing sex discrimination, and many forms of discrimination are beyond the grasp of legal reclamation. Even those within the law are encumbered by the complexities of due process. For example, since the Equal Pay Act was introduced over 3,800 cases have been taken up but only twelve have made it through the fifteen-stage procedure to claim equal pay (Wintour and Tirbutt, 1988). Similarly, the existence of an Equal Opportunities Policy, in and of itself, says little about the effect this may have upon the reality of gender discrimination (Hughes, 1989), and fewer than a third of British companies actually appear to have a written policy (Dickens, 1989: 169). Nevertheless, we should be clear that the limited utility of legal restraint upon employers and employees in purely material or economic terms has also to be supplemented by the symbolic value of legal support for equality and the illegality of certain forms of discrimination (O'Donovan and Szyszczak, 1988). In November 1988, 310 Royal Ulster Constabulary women officers were awarded almost £1 million in damages between them in an out of court settlement in Belfast. The political embarrassment of acting illegally, to say nothing of the monetary costs involved, may act as a warning to other employers.

When the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts were passed by the British government in 1975, under Barbara Castle's guidance, it was the 42nd attempt to achieve equal pay at work. Since then, many men have assumed that women have had it all their own way. Franks (1998) certainly doubts this, for rather than 'having it all' – that is, a career, a family and a life – many women have ended up 'having none of it' because they have taken on the constraints of employment without being able to divest themselves of domestic responsibilities. Indeed, having taken the decision not to have children and to concentrate on their career, many 'career women' appear to be far more resentful than men of 'family-friendly' policies that discriminate in favour of parents (Bird, 2000: 5).

### *Hours, workers and class*

Women are also divided by their involvement with paid labour, particularly regarding their status as full-time or part-time workers. Part-time work, in Britain particularly, is overwhelmingly a female experience with fewer than 8 per cent of men undertaking it: six times less than women (*Social Trends*, 1997). Such work tends to be less skilled and is also concentrated in the white-collar, service and smaller enterprises – all issues which tend to inhibit trade unions and which undermine the likelihood of women furthering their careers.

It is not sufficient to say that women are, in some vague way, exploited by the dual forces of capitalism and patriarchy because a minority of women *are* capitalists and therefore exploit other women and men; yet others have sufficient income or wealth to off-load the most menial tasks on to poorer or less qualified women. Another important element of this is manifested in the means by which men construct career paths for women such that poor rewards actively

deter women from seeking careers; the result is a vicious circle of low levels of ambition, commitment and investment in human capital. This is particularly prevalent among working-class women, many of whom appear to consider pre-family work in factories and offices as a temporary phenomenon, a short intrusion prior to the 'real' career of marriage and motherhood (see Hakim, 1996 on a recent controversy on the 'real' preferences of women). Despite the fact that most women will spend three to four times as long in paid work than as a full-time home worker, the perception of paid work as temporary continues (Poilert, 1981; Porter, 1982). In contrast, Alban-Metcalf and Nicholson's (1984) review of women managers suggests that women are just as committed and ambitious, but with a higher level of qualifications than the equivalently placed male manager.

One important distinction to note here is that of class: the overwhelmingly heteronomous content of many working-class women's jobs with minimal prospects of promotion contrasts sharply with middle-class women's jobs which can combine both greater levels of autonomous activity and career prospects. It is vital, therefore, to retain a grip on both class and gender aspects when considering the evidence of work. Relatedly, although the importance of ethnic divisions is discussed in the following chapter, it should not be taken for granted that women, while united by exploitation from patriarchy and capitalism, form a naturally cohesive unit. It is sufficient to note the sharp fragmentation of attitudes and opinions manifest in Cavendish's (1982) *Women on the Line* to undermine any utopian images of natural sisterhood. In sum, there is no experience which is typical; there are instead a delimited number of compound experiences.

### **Labour market restructuring and professional women**

Since 1975, of course, the general picture of employment has changed quite considerably in Britain, most notably in terms of mass unemployment and shifts in economic and occupational structure away from the northern-based manufacturing industries towards the south-eastern service-based businesses. Walby (1986a: 222-30) suggests that although employers have tended to discriminate against women, the overall impact has actually been favourable to women, mainly because women have been over-represented in those industries least affected by the economic collapse; a point supported by the wider comparative study of Therborn (1986: 71-3) who suggests that there are links between gender and the patterns of unemployment but they are specific to each country rather than universal. Ironically, then, it has been the segregation of women away from 'men's work' that has protected many of them from the worst effects of the economic slump in Britain, and is currently providing greater opportunities for new employment than those available to, or rather appropriated by, men. Thus, women continue to be barely visible in engineering, particularly within the ranks of technical specialists or management, but also in the manual sectors (C. Smith, 1987: 78-9); whereas clerical work has come to be

pre-eminently the area of female predominance with around 75 per cent of the total currently being women (Crompton and Jones, 1982; Routh, 1980; *Social Trends*, 1997).

The current data suggest that most of the projected rise in the workforce until 2006 will involve women (Duffy, 1997: 13). Indeed, in the five years between 1983 and 1988 an astonishing inversion of traditional job creation and destruction has been evident. Over that period almost 0.75 million new part-time jobs went to women with just over half a million full-time positions in addition. In contrast, part-time jobs held by men increased by just under 0.25 million while full-time jobs held by men decreased by 100,000 (Gapper, 1989). Yet not all women have managed to survive the collapse of manufacturing unscathed, and women from the ethnic minorities have borne the brunt in some areas. These women have often been unable to find alternative work of equivalent reward within ethnic businesses (Phizacklea, 1987), as the compound threads of capitalism, patriarchy and ethnicity operate in conjunction against them. It is apparent too that in some areas previously associated with the growth of women's employment, such as the financial sector, the introduction of new technology has begun to impinge upon this expansion and, in some circumstances, to reverse it (Mallier and Rosser, 1987).

A more pervasive presence within a particular occupation does not, of course, ensure a greater presence within the hierarchy. For example, British banks have been a major source of employment for women but a minor source of managerial opportunities. About 1 million women currently work for British clearing banks and comprise 60 per cent of the total staff. Yet in 1986 only 2.5 per cent of Lloyds managers were women, 2.7 per cent of the Midland, and 1.8 per cent at the National Westminster. The most progress in the 1980s was made at Barclays, with the relevant figure standing at 4.3 per cent. How can we account for this, albeit extremely modest, differential? Basically, Barclays discarded their previously discriminatory recruitment channels (GCSE-level entrance for girls, A-level entrance for boys) after the Equal Opportunities Commission threatened to investigate the company's recruiting strategy: just as the screening of recruits can delimit the opportunities available to individuals from the ethnic minorities so too are women discriminated against even before they are employed. Of course, where the proportion of women achieving the prerequisite level of professional qualification is increasing, and the proportion of women finalists in the Institute of Banking examinations increased from 4 per cent in 1975 to 27 per cent in 1988 (Crompton, 1989; Crompton and Sanderson, 1986), then employers are discouraged from selective recruitment, even if it is not prevented. The most progress in the 1990s has been made by the National Westminster Bank, a member of the Opportunity 2000 group set up in 1991 to advance the position of women. In the first five years the proportion of managers who are women increased by 64 per cent. In fact Abbey National, another member, currently has women as two-thirds of its managers (Wylie and Papworth, 1996). The fact that some progress has been made here suggests that the inertia of tradition is not quite as immovable as many people suspect (Pagano, 1987), even if the cause may have more to do with labour market shortages than concern for implementing equal opportunities policies.

It has also to be remembered, however, that even the suspicion of immobility may be enough to render the attitudes of decision-makers, such as recruiters, impermeable to rational critique. As Pearn et al. (1987) argue, in respect of selection tests, even though such tests are not objective measures of ability the fact that recruiters *interpret* them as being objective ensures that they are used in this fashion, often to the detriment of prospective female employees. Career intentions and domestic arrangements are regular questions asked at interviews, but only of women; and the frequency of such events reflects the strength of stereotyping (Collinson, 1987). Some organizations, such as United Biscuits (Pizzaland, Wimpy *inter alia*), Marks and Spencer and John Lewis have even concerned themselves with the regularity of a woman's periods and, in some cases, the details of pregnancies; questions of dubious legality to say nothing of the questionable ethics involved (Macrae, 1988). Again, we have to be clear that such discrimination does not always occur. The study by Chiplin and Grieg (1986) of one Regional Health Authority in the National Health Service suggests that women are not discriminated against, at least not in the process of shortlisting candidates. But the occupational segregation was such that a non-gender-segregated service would require the reallocation of 70 per cent of the existing female employees. Women currently comprise 77 per cent of the NHS staff but only one in seven unit managers is a woman. Women do succeed in becoming managers but the majority do not stay within the service and over half of these leave for domestic reasons (Thayer, 1987).

This career break is crucial in explaining the relative absence of senior women managers in the NHS, for the 'golden pathway' to career success is essentially a male path determined by the requirement to be geographically mobile, and to enact a continuous commitment to the NHS, at least until the age of 30. Of course, many women leave to have children prior to this critical point and their domestic responsibilities often impair their geographical mobility; it certainly is not a case of men having superior qualifications, indeed the reality is the reverse. As a direct result the 'golden pathway' appears to be made with patriarchal bricks (Davies and Rosser, 1987).

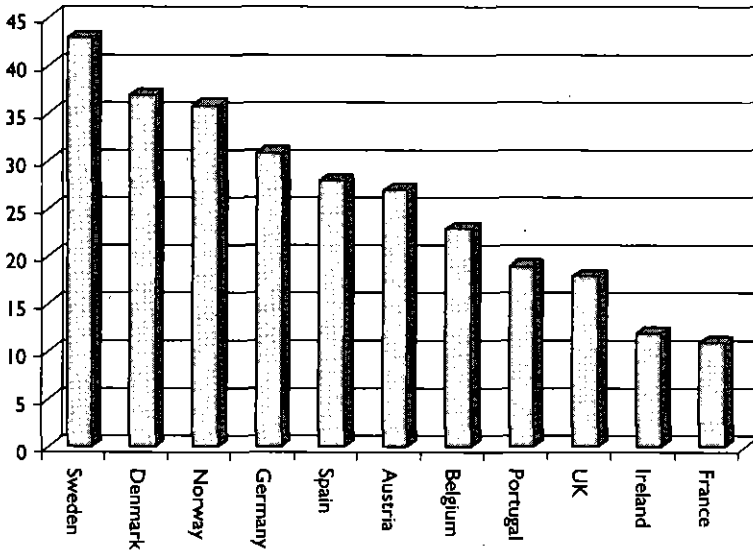
That the pathway only appears gender-biased from the viewpoint of women is represented by a survey of men in the insurance industry. This indicated that almost half thought women were uninterested in a career – yet three-quarters of the women employed in the same industry said they considered career prospects to be crucial. The insurance industry may be more patriarchal than some but it is by no means unusual: a third of senior male managers from all areas of business in the UK also think that women are inherently unsuitable for managerial jobs (Meade-King, 1986). What is apparent is that male managers seem willing to employ women in subordinate positions but not where they provide future competition for themselves or their male managerial colleagues.

In the USA, women still represent only about 2 per cent of the senior corporate executives, but this is still twice the rate in the UK (Marshall, 1987). By 1996 there was still only one woman in charge of a FTSE 100 company (Wylie and Papworth, 1996). However, by 1998 one-third of British company directors were women (*The Observer*, 1 February). Thus although the golden pathways

in the USA have some women on them they still tend to hit that all too familiar 'glass ceiling', composed of 'men only' translucent silicates; even those who pass through are wont to reappear within one of the 'triple P departments': purchasing, personnel and public relations (Meade-King, 1988). American women have also been notably successful in establishing their own businesses, currently owning 25 per cent of all US small businesses and starting new ones at five times the rate of men. They are equally well represented within the middle ranks of US corporations, compared with their European colleagues, though they are particularly poorly represented among the skilled blue-collar jobs. This higher level of discrimination within manual work is also evident within Britain where female trainees on skilled manual trades often find themselves shunted by their employers back into higher education on the completion of their training rather than taken on as qualified craft workers (YWCA, 1987). This particular problem was present within the British Youth Training Scheme of the 1980s, where segregated training into jobs conventionally associated with specific genders reinforced the barriers to women, with at least 75 per cent of those on the scheme undertaking sex-stereotyped jobs (Cockburn, 1986, 1987a and b). We should acknowledge that legislative control over discriminatory practices is not a precondition for success. For example, women in France do considerably better than their British counterparts yet France has little of the legislation in place which supposedly prevents discrimination (Dex and Walters, 1989). Here, then, cultural differences should be added to the composite model. In 1997, for instance, Britain was tenth in a review of sex inequality undertaken by the Council of Europe. In 1987 there were 41 women MPs in Britain and in 2000 there were 120, but the tripling of numbers still appears small compared to the number of male MPs, who represent over 80 per cent of the seats in the House of Commons. We might expect, as figure 13 shows, that Scandinavian countries have proportionately more women MPs than the UK, but so do China, Cuba and Argentina. In fact, New Zealand – the first country to enfranchise women – boasts a significantly better record than most countries: in 2001, a third of the MPs were women, the prime minister was a woman (Helen Clarke), as was the leader of the opposition (Jenny Shipley – the country's first woman prime minister); the attorney-general was also a woman (Margaret Wilson), and so was the chief justice (Sian Elias) (Barkham, 2001b: 8).

One of the most difficult aspects of this area of inequality is actually establishing the determinate explanations. For example, in 1984 there were only 93 women professors in Britain, accounting for barely 3 per cent of the total, and women comprise 31 per cent of contract researchers but only 7 per cent of tenured staff in 1988 (Bogdanor, 1990). By 1996 the proportion of professors who were women had increased to around 7 per cent (Major, 1996). Four years later the proportion had increased to 10 per cent (Ross, 2000) though, on average, male lecturers (70 per cent of the total) still earned over £1,500 more than female lecturers. There were some 'anomalies': the 59 female professors of nursing earn more than their male counterparts, but this is very unusual; on average, women veterinary professors earn £6,000 per year less than their male counterparts (Macleod, 2000: 14). Could this not be explained simply by the differing types of life pattern with women academics in part undermining

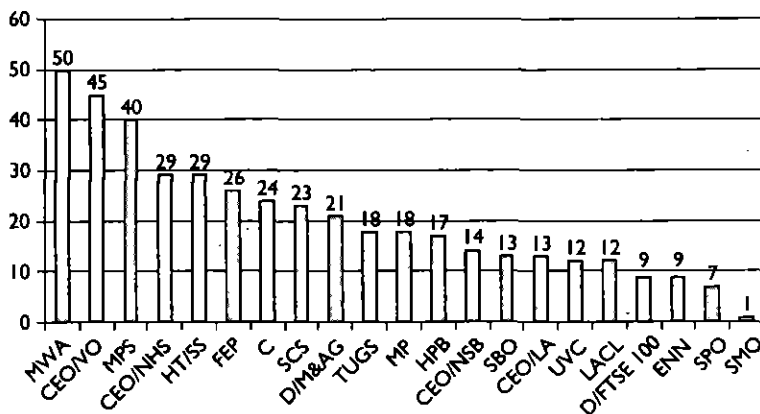




**Figure 13** Percentage of female members of European parliaments, 2001

Source: Reconstructed from Russell, 2001: 19

their own promotions by career breaks etc? Well hardly: of the 202 young professors, that is those under 40, only 2 were women. Unless we assume that an inordinate number of women academics have career breaks this ratio seems capable only of a discriminatory explanation. Furthermore, if there were institutions where women did achieve proportionate levels of professorial posts then the 'normal' pattern of male dominance would no longer be able to rest secure in an argument grounded in the 'inevitable and universal' nature of male dominance. Since in 1989 Bristol University boasted just one woman professor but University College London had fifteen we can be legitimately sceptical as to the claims of disinterested appointments. The record of Scottish universities is even worse than the overall British record, with a mere 1.5 per cent of Scottish professors being women (Wojtas, 1989). An American rule of thumb, used by the US courts, is to assume discrimination exists if the success rate of women is less than 80 per cent of that obtained by men. In British universities the method clearly reveals discrimination: only 11 per cent of the total number of academics are women; of these only 17 per cent will be senior lecturers or above, compared with 42 per cent of men; in 2004 only 8 per cent of university vice-chancellors were women (Smithers, 2004: 7). As Donoghue (1988) notes: 'the women seem to be 10 to 15 years behind the men in terms of promotion'. Even egalitarian Sweden can only manage to achieve a miserly 7 per cent as the proportion of professors who are women (Wennerås and Wold, 1997). Overall, although women in the professions remain significantly underrepresented, there are some areas where progress has been made. For instance, according to an EOC poll in 2004, women comprised only 7 per cent of the senior judiciary, 7 per cent of senior police officers, 9 per cent of top business leaders



- Key:
- MWA Members of the Welsh Assembly
  - CEO/VO CEOs of voluntary organizations
  - MPS Members of Scottish Parliament
  - CEO/NHS CEOs of the National Health Services
  - HT/SS Head teachers in secondary schools
  - FEP FE college principals
  - C Cabinet
  - SCS Senior civil servants
  - D/M&AG Directors of museums and art galleries
  - TUGS Trade union general secretaries
  - MP Members of Parliament
  - HPB Heads of professional bodies
  - CEO/NSB CEOs of national sports bodies
  - SBO Small business owners
  - CEO/LA Local authority CEOs
  - UVC University vice-chancellors
  - LACL Local authority council leaders
  - D/FTSE Directors of FTSE 100
  - ENN Editors of national newspapers
  - SPO Senior police officers
  - SMO Senior military officers

**Figure 14** Average percentage of professional female leaders (UK), 2003

Source: Reconstructed from Equal Opportunity Commission, *Sex and Power: Who Runs Britain?* Available at <<http://www.eoc.org.uk/EOCeng/EOCs/PolicyAndCampaigns/whorunsbritain.pdf>>

and 9 per cent of national newspaper editors. However, 23 per cent of the Civil Service top management and 36 per cent of public appointments were women and, as figure 14 suggests, from the British military officers (1 per cent) to members of the Welsh Assembly (50 per cent) there are wide variations in representation.

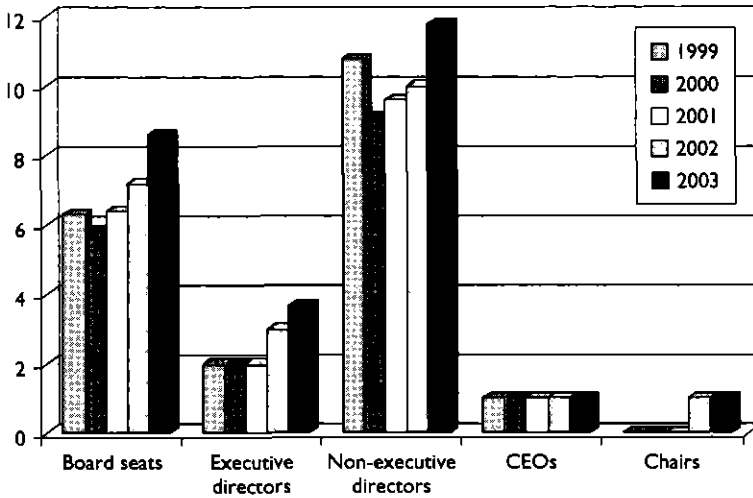
A depressingly familiar picture emerges from Spencer and Podmore's (1986) survey of the legal profession: more than 14 per cent of solicitors and barristers are women, representing around a fivefold increase since the mid-1950s but there are no female lords of appeal, only 3 per cent of high court judges are women (all in the Family Division) and a not too dissimilar percentage are circuit judges and recorders (Dyer, 1995). The reasons provided by male

solicitors for either not recruiting women or not promoting them when they are recruited typically centre on the issue of child-rearing and career breaks. But the level of inequality extends beyond prospective career structures to include current reward levels. Research by the Fawcett Society in 2004 suggested that 'entrenched discrimination and prejudice' were responsible for the presence of just one woman judge in the House of Lords; moreover women comprised just 5 of 43 chief police constables, 18 of 42 chief officers of probation, 7 of 42 chief crown prosecutors, and 31 of 138 prison governors (Dustin, 2004: 5). In the late 1970s the Royal Commission on Legal Services discovered that the average income of female barristers was some 50–60 per cent of their identically qualified and employed male colleagues. The route between articled clerk and senior position is littered with impediments for women: some involve the channelling of women into specialities that offer low prestige and little prospect of advancement, such as matrimonial and family law; others relate to the social lives of this very small group of professionals which are exclusively constructed around forms of assumed male superiority, notably the macho image of tough, competitive and aggressive courtroom professionals and the all-male clubs where judges and barristers dine together. Yet underlying the gloom is another picture of increasingly embattled senior men confronted by young women undeterred by history or tradition. By 2003 in the UK, 57 per cent of law students enrolled with the Law Society were women, though still only just over 20 per cent of lawyers and 9 per cent of circuit judges were women. Concomitantly, according to the Law Society, more female students currently get 'good' degree (1 or 2:1) results than men and men achieve a disproportionately high number of third-class degrees. By 2004 even the top of the legal pyramid cracked when the first female law lord, Dame Brenda Hale, was appointed, though there were already women in the highest courts in the USA, Australia and New Zealand. In Canada, where the legal system was led by a female chief justice in 2004, three of the nine strong supreme court judges were women; the Court appointed its first woman supreme court judge in 1982 (Dyer, 2003). Progress at the top end of the occupational ladder may be slow but it is progress, and it goes beyond that achieved in skilled manual jobs.

The medical profession is more open to women than law, though this has not prevented the monopolization of key posts by men, nor has it stanching the apparent influence of the old-boy network in maintaining male control. Sponsorship by a patron is one method by which the existing elite reproduce themselves in their own image, most notably within certain specialities. Women comprise 20 per cent of GPs and 13 per cent of hospital consultants, but 98 per cent of general surgeons are men (Allen, 1988). At the level of Medical Laboratory Scientific Officers (MLSO), the advance of new technology has not loosened up the 'genderarchy', as Harvey (1987) calls it, but actually polarized the career prospects of men and women with the latter increasingly locked into the subordinate career structure. Of course, the 'old-boy network' goes far beyond the medical world and it is probably more significant in the fields of business and politics, particularly through the network of male-only or male-dominated private clubs (Rogers, 1988; Coe, 1992), another reason for casting our analytic net wider than necessary just to cover employment organizations.

In engineering, that most archetypal male occupation, there are even fewer women in senior posts than elsewhere (though even the Royal Navy began appointing women as captains of warships in 1998: *The Guardian*, 7 February 1998). In 1980 22 per cent of the engineering labour force were women, but they comprised only 5 per cent of the qualified engineers, 3 per cent of the managers (Radford, 1993), under 3 per cent of the scientists, technologists and technicians and 0.25 per cent of the fellows of engineering institutions (Cockburn, 1983b). A substantial part of the explanation for this lies in the cultural attributes of society and its ramifications for the differentiated educational provision at schools which deter girls from taking subjects that are considered male (technical drawing, maths, chemistry and physics etc.). But a less evident causal factor is the recruitment policies of engineering departments in further education establishments. As Newton (1986) remarks, selectors seemed to recruit only those women whom they considered to be androgenous, rather than overtly 'masculine' or 'feminine' applicants, either of which would have been perceived as a threat. It is this kind of discrimination which has led to the recent WISE (Women Into Science and Engineering) campaign, which has produced a measured degree of success, boosting the proportion of women on engineering degree courses from 7.8 per cent in 1984 to 10.5 per cent in 1987 (Boseley, 1987).

The evidence relating to the development of computer studies is equally revealing here, for although 25 per cent of the entrants to UK computer courses at universities were women in 1976, by 1987 the percentage had dropped to 15 per cent (Gerver, 1989; Grint and Woolgar, 1997). Since those schools which delayed the choice of subject specialization until late (primarily Scottish schools), and those which taught computer studies in single-sex classes, did better than the rest, we can assume that the stereotypical notions of 'appropriate' subjects at schools play a large part in dissuading girls and women from such topics, and thus in delimiting their occupational choices. Since it is also the case that female pupils in America, Singapore and France show little of the same kind of gendered lack of interest in computers we can also assume that there is something particularly disadvantageous within the English system: in particular that computers were introduced to English schools through maths departments headed by male teachers and within a system that demanded early specialization. In effect, computer technology became gendered through the process of educational induction. In 1990 the business sector revealed that just 8 per cent of British managers were women, but by 1999 this figure had risen to just under 20 per cent. However, the very top of the tree remains just as difficult to reach for women, who comprise a mere 3.6 per cent of directors. Only 2 (0.4 per cent) of the CEOs of the 'Fortune 500' companies are women and only 3.6 per cent of the top corporate officers in these companies are women (less than 1 per cent were women of colour). Nonetheless, it is possible to achieve more substantial change: nearly 15 per cent of the directors of the group of companies in Opportunity 2000 (supporters of a UK government-sponsored pro-equality initiative) were women in 1999 (<<http://www.eurofound.eu.int/emire/UNITED%20KINGDOM/OPPORTUNITY2000-EN.html>>; see also Caulkin, 1999: 12). In Norway, the government has demanded that 40 per cent of



**Figure 15** Percentage of women on the FTSE 100 boards, 1999–2003

Source: Reconstructed from Vinnicombe and Singh, 2003

Norwegian business board directors should be women. Indeed, there is a North–South divide on this issue, but it divides Europe not the UK: Norway, Finland and Sweden lead the field, with 19, 14 and 13 per cent of women directors respectively, while Italy trails bottom with just 2 per cent (the UK has 10 per cent and the average in the European top 200 companies and their 3,600 directorships is 8 per cent) (Maitland, 2004: 9). Globally, and in terms of managers not directors, Russian companies are the most likely to have female managers (89 per cent), followed closely by the Philippines (85 per cent) and the USA (75 per cent); at the bottom of the pile is Pakistan with just 27 per cent (Paton Walsh, 2004: 13).

In the FTSE 100 companies, the numbers of women on the board has increased from 79 in 1999 to 101 in 2003 but, as figure 15 demonstrates (based on research by Cranfield University), the numbers still comprise very small relative proportions and there was still only one woman CEO of a FTSE 100 company in 2004 (Marjori Scardino at Pearson) and only one female chair (Baroness Hogg at 3i). Even those who break through the ‘glass ceiling’ are likely to find another problem: the ‘glass cliff’ – that is, women are often promoted to very risky jobs where failure is likely. The reason relates to the correlations that link women directors to failing companies (Judge, 2003), but the causation seems to run in reverse; in other words, only when companies get into financial difficulties do they tend to ‘risk’ appointing women – hence women are faced with situations that are often more difficult than those of their male companions (Ryan and Haslam, 2004).

Yet if the professions seem to be opening up to women, it remains the case that the leisure activities of the professional class remain a significant bastion to gender equality. Of the 35 sports that currently comprise the Olympics, only

one has a combined competition: equestrianism. Most attention tends to be focused on golf: two-thirds of complaints made to the British Equal Opportunities Commission in 1998 outside the work area related to golf clubs (Stuart, 1998: 2). The Sex Discrimination Act makes it unlawful to discriminate directly or indirectly on the grounds of a person's sex and marital status, or in recruitment, promotion, training and transfer, terms and conditions of employment and dismissal. However, there are several exemptions to this – for example, under section 29, private sports clubs are exempt from provisions of the Act (there are around 2,000 golf clubs in the UK), as are Working Men's social clubs (of which there are more than 3,000). Infamous excluders of women include the prestigious Royal and Ancient Golf Club at St Andrews, where, according to Chambers (1995), during a recent Ladies' British Open Amateur Championship a cloudburst forced all the women officials to huddle under umbrellas outside the clubhouse, from which they were banned. A man appeared from the clubhouse and the women assumed he had come to apologize for the exclusion and invite them inside to dry off, but instead he merely asked them to put down their umbrellas because they were obscuring the view of the men inside (quoted in Donegan, 2004: 6). New legislation to prohibit discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation, religion or belief is planned for 2004.

In the USA, the National Council of Women's Organizations also has trouble with golf: the prestigious Augusta National Golf Club – home of the appropriately named 'Masters' tournament every April, still has a 'No Girls Allowed' sign prominently displayed and refuses to allow women entry. The club only allowed African-American men in from 1990, but the campaign against its (legal) discrimination continues (Chambers, 1995; see also <<http://www.augustadiscriminates.org/>>). At the other extreme, the largest private employer in the USA in 2003, Wal-Mart, faces what may become the largest ever class suit in an alleged case of discrimination against its female employees, which may include 1.5 million women (women make up 70 per cent of Wal-Mart's employees but only 15 per cent of the management) (Campbell, 2003a: 20).

It remains illegal to pay women less than men for doing the same job, but in 2003 women working full-time earned, on average, £559 less per month than men (<<http://www.eoc.org.uk/>>). The British female-male pay gap, in 2003, stood at 18 per cent for full-time workers (equivalent to between £6,700 and £7,600 per annum depending on the figures used) and 39 per cent for part-time workers (of whom there are 5 million, almost all of whom are women) (Carvel, 2004a: 7). (The Fawcett Society, which has campaigned for equality for many years, suggests that the average British salaries in 2003 were £20,314 for women and £28,065 for men; see <<http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/>>.)

In 1979, the gap in Britain was 37 per cent. At the top end of the scale, more than 12 million people paid tax at the top rate (40 per cent) but only 500,000 of these were women. The long-term consequences of this inequality are significant: a middle-skilled childless woman, on average, receives £241,000 less than an equivalent male over a lifetime. Equally problematic, the consequence for women who devote their lives to raising a family rather than earning enough for a significant occupational pension is that 40 per cent of divorced British

women over the age of 65 end up in poverty – poor enough to qualify for income support (Carvel, 2004b: 13).

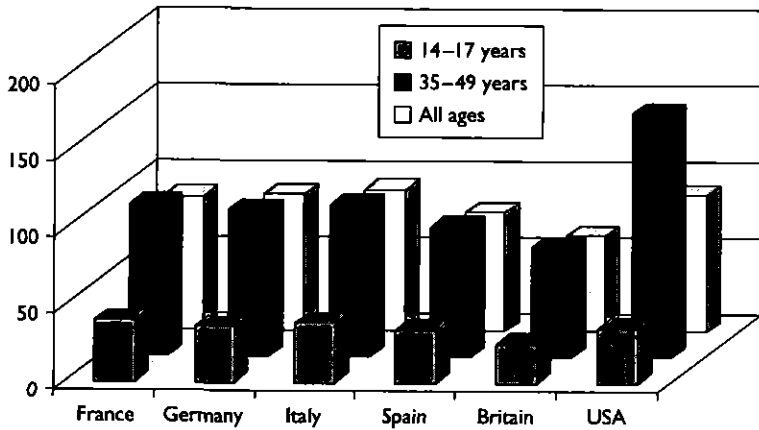
That inequality stems from the five reasons that have prevailed for some time:

- job segregation;
- low value on caring work;
- part-time penalty;
- attitudes of male managers;
- underselling by women.

The last issue is of some import and much controversy: historically, for example, it has concerned the way female pupils at school have under-performed to save embarrassing their less intelligent or less dedicated boyfriends, but more recently it has been suggested that women are simply 'too nice'. In Wood's (2001) terms, women assume (and are conditioned to believe) that being popular, attractive, sociable and deferential wins them promotion, when in reality the latter is linked to getting the job done – which may not require such skills at all. Yet research in 2001 by the *Wall Street Journal Europe*, amongst European women business executives, suggested that few regard their gender as important at work and few regard childcare benefits as important (Finch, 2001b: 29). Perhaps this is because women at this level (75 per cent of whom were mothers) are able to afford their own private childcare arrangements.

An 'Equal Pay' government task force suggested in 2001 that between 25 and 50 per cent of British gender inequality – which at 18 per cent was the highest in Europe – is due to simple discrimination, though the vast majority of employers surveyed denied that they had a pay gap. As a result, the task force advised that a pay review should be undertaken in order to make the inequalities more transparent. And though women now outnumber and outperform men at university, even by the age of 20 the average woman earns 10 per cent less than the average man (Carvel, 2001c: 10). More problematic, however, is the knowledge that pay in the public sector reflects not market demand but government policies. For example, the gap between the starting salaries of nurses and police officers has grown from 15 to 31 per cent, but that is despite the fact that the former group has a more significant labour shortage; the government has simply decided to pay the police proportionately more than the nurses (Garrett, 2001: 18).

In terms of which professional occupation is the most relatively advantageous to British women in general, the police and security forces offer the best deal – at 76 per cent of men's income in 2003. However, according to Doward (2003b: 13) the absolute salaries of the average woman in the finance sector (£24,457) still exceed that of the police and security sector (£23,070), even if the relative income is lower in finance (69 per cent). The Equal Opportunity Commission has slightly different data, putting women in the financial district of the City on an average of £23,500, while their male colleagues are on an average of £41,000; although that leaves women 41 per cent behind, the absolute rewards remain slightly higher in finance (Walsh, 2004: 2). Either way, the City is traditionally regarded as a bastion of patriarchy – in 2003 Cantor Fitzgerald paid a former employee £1 million in compensation for 'months of



**Figure 16** Women's pay as a percentage of men's at various ages, 2003

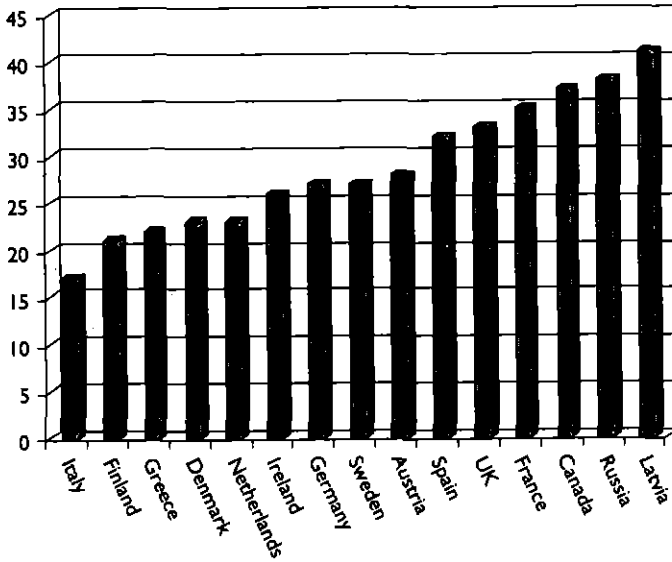
Source: Reconstructed from data in Doward and Reilly, 2003: 11

obscenities, threats and public humiliation' (Caulkin, 2004: 9). Witness also the tirade of chauvinist abuse suffered by Clara Furse who, in February 2001, became the first head of the London Stock Exchange in its 243-year history (<[http://www.ananova.com/business/story/sm\\_751469.html?menu=>](http://www.ananova.com/business/story/sm_751469.html?menu=>)>).

In comparative terms British women remain significantly worse off than many of their EU and American colleagues, as figure 16 suggests. What is important about the data here is not just that British women are so poorly paid relative to British men and relative to other women, but that the inequality is highest when women first start working as 14–17-year-olds and hardly recovers. Moreover, as the US figures suggest, American women actually earn more than their male colleagues at certain times (between 25 and 49), but that average is dragged down by the early and late inequalities. Nevertheless, the responsibility for the persistence of inequality also lies within the cultural confines of society, and this again is often related to age. Hence the most conservative groups tend to be older: in one survey in 2001, 80 per cent of 18–24-year-old British respondents *disagreed* with the statement: 'a man's job is to earn the money; a woman's . . . to look after the home and family' (quoted in Roberts, 2001: 6). On the other hand, as figure 17 suggests, simply in terms of the comparative proportion of managers who are women (the USA is excluded unfortunately), British women do relatively well – though whether the same measure is used in each country is very difficult to tell.

Although in 1970 women represented only 33 per cent of the British workforce (and earned 51 per cent of men's average wages), by 2000 they represented 50 per cent of the British workforce (and earned 72 per cent of men's average wages). Similarly, although in 1975 women represented just 35 per cent of British higher education students, by 2000 they represented 55 per cent of British higher education students (Roberts, 2001: 6–7). The implications of this figure are significant, not just for the debate of gender inequality at work but for inequality generally: women only won the right to matriculate at Oxford





**Figure 17** Women as a percentage of managers, late 1990s

Source: Reconstructed from data in *Guardian* 2, 31 March 2003: 9

University in 1920; eighty years later there were more women in the higher educational system than men and more of these achieved better degree results than their male counterparts. Thus one can either argue that women remain radically constrained by patriarchal forces within society, or one can argue that enormous progress has been made in a comparatively short space of time. Indeed, Judge and Cable (2004) have argued that an individual's height is more critical in explaining unequal rewards than is their gender; thus, an American man of five foot five inches is likely to be paid \$5,000 (£3,000) less than his colleague of six foot; every extra inch adds \$789 (£471).

Height notwithstanding, if the educational data imply that women are achieving equality, does this translate into women's attitudes to work? A survey of 5,000 working women in Britain, carried out for *Top Santé* magazine and Bupa in 2001, suggested that only 9 per cent of working women would continue with their careers full time if they could choose to do otherwise – but since we don't have any comparative figures for men we cannot really extrapolate from this. Yet 68 per cent of women also reported that they would enjoy work, if that was all they had to do. In other words, it is the conventional double-job, which lands women with the vast majority of domestic tasks, that undermines their ability to progress at 'work'. In fact, the proportion of both men and women who regarded themselves as 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with their careers dropped over the 1990s from 35 per cent to 20 per cent for men and from 51 per cent to 29 per cent for women. The majority of these people were most concerned by the increasing hours put in at work, which they insist they do because it is expected of them, rather than because they require the extra money (quoted in Branigan, 2001b: 11). The 'working all hours' culture

of the British National Health Service was particularly singled out by women doctors as the primary explanation for the persistence of gender inequality in the medical profession. Although women made up 50 per cent of medical students in 1991, by 1999 they still only formed 17 per cent of consultants in medical specialities in hospitals. With training often persisting into a doctor's thirties, and with long hours a precondition for promotion, almost twice as many women as men have suggested that they would choose part-time contracts, even if this were to compromise their career prospects (Meikie, 2001: 9).

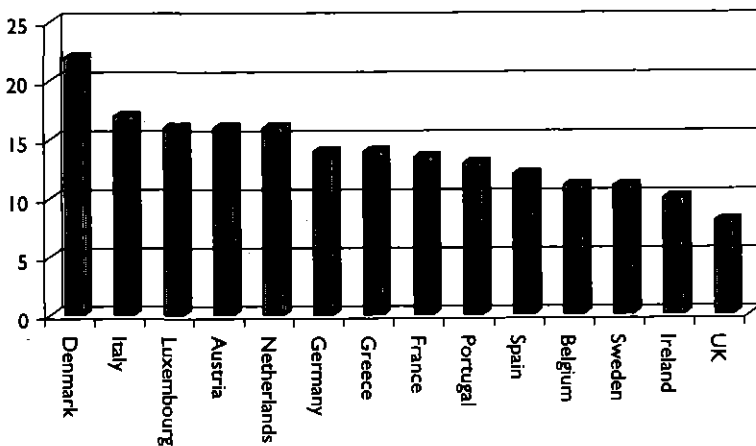
And, of course, if you are a woman and from an ethnic minority, then your chances of promotion are doubly hampered. Fewer than 1 per cent of senior directors of nursing in the British NHS are from an ethnic minority, even though they comprise 8 per cent of the total number of nurses (Ahmed, 2001: 10). Similarly, although black doctors comprise 3.8 per cent of the workforce, only 2.1 per cent of the consultants' posts are held by black people (Carvel, 2001a: 1). The level of racism in the NHS is, according to a government report in 2001, extremely high. The 100,000 staff from the ethnic minorities have been 'abused by their patients, ostracised by their colleagues and sidelined by bosses' (quoted in Carvel, 2001b: 4). As one Nigerian trainee surgeon was allegedly informed by her white boss: 'You are not operating on bloody Nigerians now. These are my patients – they are normal human beings' (quoted in Carvel, 2001b: 4). A survey on ethnic minorities for the Runnymede Trust of the top FTSE 100 companies in 2000 produced a very similar result: only 55 companies replied and only 27 collected data on ethnic origins; of these, 5.4 per cent of their staff were from ethnic minorities (the UK total is 6.4 per cent), but only 3.2 per cent of junior and middle managers and 1 per cent of senior managers were from ethnic minorities (Spence, 2000: 24).

Some women, naturally, break the mould and succeed to the highest level: in 2001 Ruth Simmons became the first African-American in the USA to lead an ivy-league university (Brown University). And in 2001 in the UK Carol Galley, for example, was the highest paid woman in Britain, having sold the business she ran, Mercury Asset Management, to Merrill Lynch for £3.1 billion. She then continued to work for the latter, earning an estimated £20 million per annum (Collinson, 2001: 3). As an end-of-term report might put it on the acquisition of equality at work at the beginning of the twenty-first century: 'A very poor start, some good progress of late, but could still do a lot better.'

It is significant that much of the progress that women have made since the Second World War has been in the 1980s and 1990s: one manifestation of this is not just the growing numbers of women within higher education but the age range of female business executives compared with their male counterparts. In 1988 only 24 per cent of British male executives (broadly defined) were under 35, but over 55 per cent of women executives are this young. Similarly, although the percentage of women assistant secretaries in the British Civil Service remains at a mere 13 per cent this represents a doubling of the proportion since 1982 (Hencke, 1988). Yet the net increase of women in the six highest grades from 1985 to 1995 was one and there are still no women heading ministries (Bevins, 1995). By 2000, however, 20 per cent of the British government's top 3,000 civil servants were women. This figure includes a tripling in

the number of permanent secretaries since 1989, but since in actual numbers this just meant an increase from one to three (out of a total of sixteen), it is a misleading statistic. Perhaps significantly, 50 per cent of new entrants to the Civil Service in 2000 were women. Progress in local government in England and Wales has been better: between 1991 and 1995 the percentage of women chief executives increased from 1.3 per cent to 4.9 per cent (Meikle, 1996). However, as we noted in chapter 2, it is the case that the current success of women professionals appears to be restricted, or at least related, to those who consciously decide not to have children. Certainly there is scant evidence that firms are rapidly coming to terms with the demographic changes to encourage women with families back to work (IMS, 1990). The future for women, then, is neither simply opening up generally nor reproducing the exclusions of old; rather, women are being asked to decide between one of two careers: home or work but not both. As Schwartz (1989) has argued, the structures and ideologies of work now force women to consider a twin-track future: 'career-primary' or 'career-family'.

For British women approaching the 'career-family' track, one important consideration is state provision. British maternity rights are the worst in Europe, as figure 18 suggests. Indeed, British rights are actually worse than those of women in Congo, Brazil, Peru, Angola, India and Bangladesh. However, there are no statutory rights to paid maternity leave in the USA or Australia, where only unpaid leave is available (Papworth, 2001: 10). It is also important to highlight the costs of childcare for those women with children intent on staying at work: research by the Daycare Trust suggested in 2004 that a nursery place in the UK costs almost 25 per cent of the average family's income (£134 a week) (see <[http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk/mod.php?mod=userpage&menu=1001&page\\_id=7&PHPSESSID=06bb6b7477771e177e3386cb67883139](http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk/mod.php?mod=userpage&menu=1001&page_id=7&PHPSESSID=06bb6b7477771e177e3386cb67883139)>). This is critical in understanding the debate about women 'having it all'. On the one hand, some of the shifts in women's attitudes against a career seem to relate



**Figure 18** Maternity entitlements in Europe, 1999 (equivalent number of weeks on full pay)

Source: Reconstructed from Income Data Services, November 1999

to the difficulties they face in trying to balance the double responsibilities of home and work in a way that seldom imposes itself upon men. Men may believe themselves to have less choice in this area than women – few men choose to become ‘househusbands’ and thus feel themselves driven to accept the ‘work-only’ route – but the greater choice available to women has often resulted in their having neither a successful career nor an acceptable family life. The result has often been a polarization of opportunities: many of the most successful professional women end up without children (42 per cent of ‘high salary’ American women are childless and the proportion increases as the reward levels increase), either by design or default; while many younger women seem to be opting out of the employment career in the knowledge that it bears significant domestic costs. Hewlett (2003) suggests in her book *Baby Hunger* that since women’s fertility rates drop by 50 per cent after the age of 35 and by 95 per cent after the age of 40, women are just going to have to accept that they cannot have it all and they must make a choice, and a choice relatively early in their careers. However, this is to ignore the potential role of the state in its tax regime and regulations about working hours that could – if it chose to do so – make it much more attractive for women to have children and a career (Ashley, 2002: 16).

As the demographic change gradually alters the ratio of young to old, the situation of one male-based institution that has suffered more than most in the last decade of economic restructuring will become ever more precarious: the trade unions.

### **Women and trade unions**

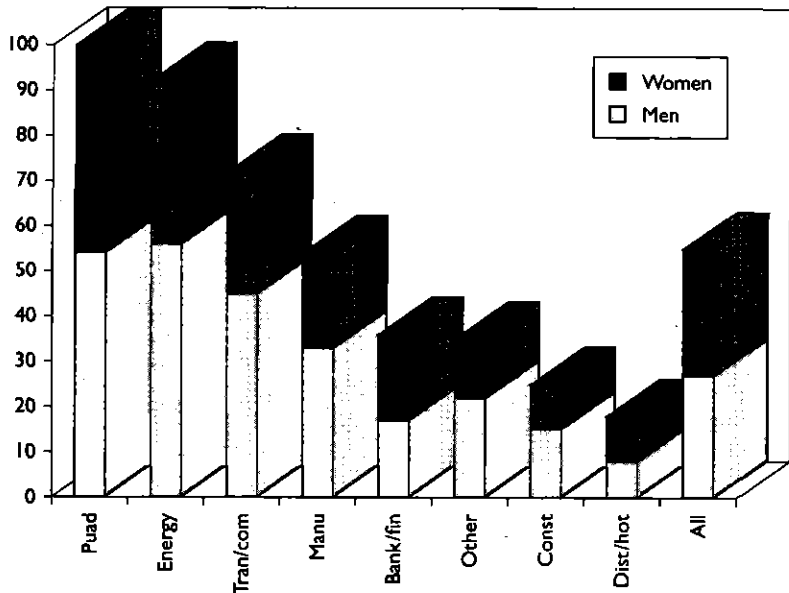
As has already been implied, the position of trade unions on the employment of women and the achievement of equality is less than auspicious. Despite the traditional exclusionary practices of such organizations, which derive their influence through limiting access to employment, the trade unions certainly entered the era following the Second World War with an unenviable record of discrimination against women, and, as demonstrated in the next chapter, against ethnic minorities too. As Campbell succinctly put it: ‘For most women, trade unions meet at the wrong time in the wrong place about the wrong things. For most trade unions, women are the wrong people in the wrong place at the wrong time going on about the wrong things’ (1982b). But just as labour market conditions and the influence of the state coerced employers and trade unions alike to acquiesce to some elements of equality in the Post Office and Civil Service, so too the same pressures began mounting through the 1950s and into the 1960s. An increasing proportion of female labour (especially well-educated female labour), an increasing competition between unions for members (especially as manual work declined in importance), and the generation of a reinvigorated feminist political and industrial movement by women for women, all pushed the union movement into reluctant action. Indeed, it has been the historical lack of interest of unions in women that has furthered the survival of a vicious circle of

union uninterest stimulating low female density thereby reinforcing the mutual ignorance and hostility of each to the other (Yeandle, 1984: 115–19).

Union density for women has only recently begun to approach the male equivalent. By 1978 the figure was still below 30 per cent but the rapid growth in women's employment facilitated a jump to the 1987 figure of 41 per cent, representing around 32 per cent of the total number of trade unionists. Union density rates are notoriously difficult to assess but the 1989 Labour Force Survey suggests that 39 per cent of all employees (including the unemployed) are members, encompassing 44 per cent of men and 33 per cent of women. Women, then, comprised 39 per cent of the current union membership (*Employment Gazette*, April 1990). According to the Labour Force Survey, by 1995 35 per cent of men and 30 per cent of women were unionized (MacErlean, 1996). Since almost 80 per cent of women tend to be employed within the non-manual sector rather than the manual sector, the discrepancy is more explicable in occupational rather than gender terms. Indeed, when the larger number of part-time workers are held constant the union density rates for men and women are roughly equivalent (Millward and Stevens, 1986: 54, 61–2; Horne, 1987: 78). However, by 2002, the trade union density for women was higher on both counts: amongst full-time employees, 33 per cent of women and 31 per cent of men were in unions, whereas for part-timers the equivalent figures were 23 per cent of women and 12 per cent of men. Yet despite the fact that over 38 per cent of TUC-affiliated union members are women only around 18 per cent of the delegates to the TUC are women (Trades Unions Congress, 1986).

Concomitantly, different occupations have very different levels of union density: the teaching unions recruit about 70 per cent of women members while unions in the retail sector recruit only 17 per cent of female employees.

Figure 19 shows trade union membership in Britain, in 1995, by gender and industry. In fact, the greatest variable is not between manual and non-manual work but between part-time and full-time work, and since women comprise the overwhelming number of part-time workers they are under-represented within the trade unions (Bruegel, 1983: 159–60; IRRU, 1984; TURU, 1986: 17). This under-representation is bolstered by the traditional difficulties trade unions face in recruiting part-time workers: they are more difficult to recruit because they are geographically dispersed and often work unsocial hours; and the unions have less incentive to recruit them because their turnover rates make membership records difficult to maintain and because unions have a history of hostility to part-timers. The inflexibility of trade unions is also relevant here, for few have proportionately reduced subscriptions for part-time members yet these are usually among the least affluent workers of all (Beechey and Perkins, 1987: 150–82). Such is the influence of skilled workers anyway that few unions are controlled by the less skilled and, since many part-timers are considered to be unskilled or at best semi-skilled, it is seldom that their interests prevail (Cockburn, 1987b). None the less, the switch away from full-time male employment in the manufacturing sector towards part-time female employment in the service sector is of some import to the unions, for membership has to follow job creation if the unions are to prosper. With the TGWU (Transport and General Workers' Union), NUT (National Union of Teachers) and CPSA (Civil and



Key:  
 Puad – Public administration, education and health  
 Energy – Energy and water supply  
 Tran/com – Transport and communication  
 Manu – Manufacturing  
 Bank/fin – Banking, finance and insurance  
 Other – Other services  
 Const – Construction  
 Dist/hot – Distribution, hotels and restaurants  
 All – All industries

**Figure 19** Trade union membership (%) by gender and industry, 1995

Source: *Social Trends*, 1997

Public Servants Association) all losing a third of their respective memberships between 1979 and 1986 (McIlroy, 1988: 29), hostility to part-timers represents organizational suicide.

Given the belief in the 1980s that at least 66 per cent of all new jobs in Britain in 1990–5 would be taken by women in part-time jobs, and that 90 per cent of the labour force growth over the 1990s would be from women (*Employment Gazette*, April 1989), it is a moot point whether the change of course for unions represented a change of heart or pure self-interest; it was possibly both, but probably the latter. Of course, the proliferation of policy statements and policies on women need not amount to any material gain but it is important to note that wage differentials based on sex are smaller within unionized enterprises than those without unions. However lethargic and uninterested unions may have been in the past they are at least beginning to have some impact upon the levels of gender-based inequalities (Metcalf, 1989).

By 1984 the TUC had increased the number of women's seats on the General Council to six, it had published a 'Charter for Women' and ensured that every

Regional Council in England and Wales had a Women's Advisory Committee. Individual affiliated unions had also begun to make progress: the General, Municipal, and Boilermakers' Trade Union (GMBATU) had a national Equal Rights Advisory Committee, and an equal rights officer in each region by 1980; and many, though by no means all, unions had undertaken internal investigations of their treatment of women (Walby, 1986a: 212-30). That said, only five of the TUC's eighty-four affiliated unions had women general secretaries in 1990, and only one (GMBATU) has a quota system to promote the selection of women as Labour parliamentary candidates. The Manufacturing, Science and Finance Union (MSF) and the National Union of Public Employees (NUPE) have reserved seats on the executive for women. It may or may not be coincidental that the three most recent female general secretaries led unaffiliated 'associations': the Police Federation, the First Division of Civil Servants, and the Royal College of Nursing. The real disparity becomes evident when we move beyond the national leadership level: of the three thousand officials employed by the largest five unions only seventy-seven are women (Heery and Kelly, 1988), and overall the proportion of full-time officers (FTOs) who are women appears to be about 8 per cent (Heery and Kelly, 1989), though the increase in the number of women full-time officers is three times that of men in the last few years; a movement similar to that among professional women. Nevertheless, whether this increase is an effect of union policies or coincidental is a separate issue; although most women FTOs are within the largest unions this merely reflects the more universal connection between size and numbers of FTOs irrespective of gender. Certainly, John Edmonds was vigorously denounced at the GMBATU's 1987 conference when he suggested that 'first class women should replace second class men' (quoted in Gow, 1987), and the vast majority of the women FTOs in the Heery and Kelly survey reported that they had been discriminated against both by lay members and fellow male FTOs.

There is still a long way to go: a Labour Research review of the ten unions with the largest proportion of women members shows four unions increasing the number of full-time women officials but four other unions decreasing the number. Over half of these ten unions had fewer than 10 per cent of their full-time officer posts filled by women (Beavis, 1988). Heery and Kelly (1989) suggest from their review, however, that women FTOs are more likely to be within unions with a high proportion of women because this tends to lead to a pool of female activists and because there is a build-up of pressure from the rank and file for FTOs which reflects the membership. Women FTOs are also more in evidence in unions which appoint, rather than elect, to such positions, mainly because election is often contingent upon long service which, in turn, is something that not many women members can achieve given their domestic responsibilities and bi-modal working careers.

It is also worth noting the unintended consequences of government restrictions on unions since 1979. In particular, it would appear that one effect of the 1984 Trade Union Act, which required that all voting members of trade union executives be elected by secret individual ballot, has cut away some of the male predominance in branch and mass meetings and actually facilitated the rise of women within union executives. For example: the National Union

of Taylor and Garment Workers now has eleven women out of a fourteen-strong executive; the Inland Revenue Staff Association now has seven women out of twenty-seven executive officers; and APEX and ASTMS (Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs) have both recorded increases in the proportion of women executive members. All these changes occurred after the Act, and all four witnessed a rapid increase in the proportion of women voting (Hague, 1986).

However, the issue of expanding women's trade unionism is not simply a matter of economic restructuring providing more jobs for women than men (albeit part-time jobs), or of delimiting the effect of patriarchally dominated modes of organization. As Bain (1970) argues, some of the new patterns of work up until 1970 were the very areas which have also exhibited the greatest levels of bureaucratization, particularly in the public sector, and the similarity of conditions engineered by bureaucratization has always proved conducive to trade union development. Of course, the gradual reduction in the public sector in the last two decades has interrupted this post-war development, as indeed did the much more hostile attitude of the Conservative government itself towards the recognition of unions within its own boundaries. Equally important, since 1970 the number of large plants (employing more than a thousand workers) has fallen while the number of small plants (employing fewer than a hundred workers) has risen, so that the unions who traditionally recruit best within large plants have been doubly hit (Lash and Urry, 1987: 103–5).

The greater likelihood of men to be found within large organizations, and particularly those within export-oriented manufacturing plants, also partly explains the predominance of men within industrial conflicts. As Purcell (1984) demonstrates, the fact that most women do not appear to be militant trade unionists – defined as those regularly involved in industrial action – obfuscates the point that most men are not militant trade unionists either. It may be more appropriate, then, to assume that certain occupations, and indeed certain regions, rather than specific genders, are militantly oriented (cf. Parkin, 1967; Stead, 1987; Dolby, 1987; Walby, 1988).

This need not, of course, undermine the notion that women are not typically involved in militant activity. Women tend to be drawn to the caring professions, though again it may not be the gender of the carer here which is critical but the fact that the individual is in a caring profession whose professional code of conduct and powerful ethical commitment constrain industrial action. Nor is there any exigent connection between industrial involvement and radical consciousness. As Wajcman's (1983) review of the Fakenham women's co-operative concludes, despite the engagement of women with both capitalist economic forces and patriarchal 'co-operatives', the majority retained their conservative beliefs in the sphere of politics and the home. Fatalism, not radicalism or militancy, is the typical reaction of most people, irrespective of gender, to a situation that appears to be beyond the influence of human agents (Purcell, 1984; Cunnison, 1984).

Where you would expect women to be more involved in union activity and industrial action would be where women have returned to work once their children have started school. This return provides several sources of independence



that might lead to union membership: an independent source of income; relative independence from children; and direct experience of power relations inherent at work. There is some evidence for this, though little for any direct decanting of resistance at work to supervisors, into resistance at home to men. Watts (1984) suggests that this barrier between industrial radicalism and domestic radicalism reflects the discrete patterning of the two areas of activity with the domestic mode subordinated to the industrial, but a different interpretation would be to substitute the term militancy for radicalism; militancy being concerned with the increased acquisition of economic rewards within the existing socio-economic structure, radicalism concerned with the restructuring of the system itself. If we assume that women can be militant at work without being radical at home, not only does this provide a different viewpoint on the division of ideologies but it actually reflects the normal pattern of most work-based groups: many such groups have long been associated with all manner of economic militancy, often in defence of privileges retained at the expense of the less well off; few such groups have ever been involved in the promotion of radical measures to restructure the industrial system itself (Grint, 1986: 106–26).

Another important aspect of the gradual increase in women's membership of the trade unions has been the success of the recruitment campaigns by unions themselves as they have struggled to stem the haemorrhaging of members through the collapse of the manufacturing sector. Partly, this has involved recognition of the problems of holding union meetings late at night, or in pubs; issues which reflect and reproduce the conventional patriarchal control over the night and most public arenas. But even the recognition of this kind of problem and the election of women to official positions in unions does not, in and of itself, secure equality; a women union official interviewed by Imray (Imray and Middleton, 1983) told how the 'chivalry' of male officials in driving her home or seeing her on the bus turned out to be a scheme by which the 'real' business of the branch could be conducted after she had left. It is not just a case of moving the location and timing of meetings, or even providing crèches. Part of the answer has to lie in re-educating the male membership to accept their share of the domestic responsibilities. It is of limited use just providing meetings at more convenient times if women are still held to be solely responsible for children and domestic chores; this not only leaves women with a double workload but ensures that any women with domestic responsibilities, paid employment and an active interest in union affairs has a triple workload (Central London Community Law Centre, 1987). Part of the answer also lies in the acceptance by men that real equality can only be achieved at their expense (Dale, 1987); not all power games are variable-sum ones.

Of course, very few men use whatever spare time they may have to attend their union's meetings anyway, and it has conventionally been understood that the figure for women must be lower. Little research has been undertaken in this area, and the levels of sex-segregated occupations always make comparisons difficult, though Harrison's (1979) survey of an ASTMS branch suggests that a higher proportion of women than men attended normal meetings. In many ways this is rather surprising given the conventions of unionism that clearly reflect male lifestyle. As Gill and Whitty argue: 'Without malice or design, but

also without concern, men have shaped trade union life to suit those who have no childcare or other domestic responsibilities and on an expectation that every trade union activist has endless evening hours to devote to union work' (quoted in TURU, 1986: 24). Certainly the female FTOs of Heery and Kelly's sample were three times less likely to have children than the average. Once again, it is the links to the domestic sphere which crucially constrain women in the roles they can undertake. It is this *form of discriminatory practice* that accounts for one survey that showed over 50 per cent of the female labour force to be either uninterested in or actively hostile to trade unions (Martin and Roberts, 1980). Even where trade unions develop non-discriminatory policies this would not necessarily lead to any wide-scale change, at least not immediately; for as Beynon and Blackburn (1984) suggest, even if all the evidence negates all patriarchal assumptions about women in unions the effect of traditions and misinterpretations is to buttress the position of men. Thus, if men *think* that women make poor union members then they will do little to recruit or retain them; as a result women will comprise a small percentage of union members, thereby 'demonstrating' the apparent validity of the patriarchal attitude (Pollert, 1981).

### **Masculinity, domestic labour and violence**

Often underlying some of the patriarchal assumptions about the superiority of men and their work are what appear to women at least rather thinly veiled strategies to protect male egos, though to men they may well seem invisible. Pollert's (1981) account of women factory operatives is a good example here for it reveals how women find security within their poorly paid jobs in part because their income level does not threaten their male partners' egos. Such low self-esteem, ironically premised upon the fragility of masculinity, merely reinforces the perception of work for many working-class women as an interruption between school and having a family, or as a place to secure 'extra' money and social friendship rather than a career in itself. Both of these may further undermine any assumption by women that trade unionism can play any important role in their lives. The analysis of girls at school supports the contention that females both consciously underplay their own abilities so as not to threaten the brittle egos of males (Sharpe, 1976; Horner, 1976) and consider the boredom of both school and employment sufficient to warrant a low level of interest in either. This throws a different light on the 1990s concern about the increasing polarization of school exam results as girls pull further and further ahead of boys in virtually all subjects (Sianne and Wilkinson, 1995; OFSTED, 1996; *Social Trends*, 1997). Correspondingly, the assumption that where jobs are short they should be reserved for men is not simply an assumption made by men; as some of the women in Pollert's (1981) study demonstrate, if they had to provide for their husbands or even earned more than them, many of the men would feel 'downgraded' and many of the women would suffer as a result. Even when male unemployment has left women's wages as the main source of income women still perceive their earning power to be auxiliary, rather than primary, within

the household (Morris, 1987; Mintel, 1995), and, as suggested in chapter 1, there is little evidence of unemployed men using their 'free' time to take over domestic responsibilities from 'working' wives.

The issue of time is relevant in another sense, for a primary distinguishing feature between male and female employees is the differential use made of 'free' time: men conventionally negotiate a shortening of normal hours to maximize their overtime potential, women prefer to use the extra time at home. In itself, this does not establish autonomously chosen alternatives: it has become a commonplace to acknowledge that men endure, rather than support, their wives' employment activities, and then only on condition that they do not interfere with domestic arrangements (Martin and Roberts, 1984).

Men, it would seem, have remained impervious to debates, complaints or arguments about sharing domestic work. This should not be such a surprise: in the early days of the Russian Revolution the Bolsheviks opened up all kinds of jobs to Soviet women, but Soviet men remained steadfast in their tenacious grip on tradition. As a consequence, women did 'men's' and 'women's' jobs, but men just did their 'own'. In fact, British women still did 75 per cent of the domestic work (excluding childcare) in 2001 (18 hours per week compared to men's average of 6 hours per week), and women's focus remained on the routine and the internal jobs (cooking, cleaning and caring), while men continued to do non-routine and external tasks, especially repairs. On a daily basis, the average (over a lifetime) British man spends three hours watching TV or listening to the radio – 22 minutes more than the average woman; he spends 45 minutes a day on housework – 93 minutes less than she does; and he spends 13 minutes looking after his children – she spends 23 minutes more than he does. If we take couples who *currently* have children, the average man spends 45 minutes a day with his children, while the average woman spends just over 90 minutes a day. On the other hand, over a lifetime he spends 193 minutes a day in paid work, while she spends just 75 minutes. And the consequence of all these activities is that his average weekly wage is £247 while hers is just £119. The downside for men of this inequality is that they are more likely than women to commit suicide, drink heavily, have a major accident and a heart attack, and they live five years less – to 75 on average. Men also comprise 80 per cent of the criminal population and are three times more likely to be attacked by a stranger than a woman is (Office for National Statistics, 2001).

Generally, women with more education and better paying jobs do less domestic work than their poorer educated and paid colleagues, not because the wealthier ones can buy more domestic technology – since this does not make much difference in hours devoted to the house; it just makes the house cleaner (Cowan, 1983) – but because they have a more egalitarian attitude to domestic work. Their greater earning power also provides them with a stronger bargaining position (Man-yea Kan quoted in Vasager 2001).

The real point of value is to note the connection rather than the contradiction between these two apparently dichotomous attitudes to time. It is only because men 'underachieve' at home that they can take advantage of the extra time: the time is made available not by their employers nor by their union's

efforts, but by their female partners shouldering most, if not all, of the domestic responsibilities. Thus the model of male work as full-time work, far from being separated from that of women, is intimately dependent upon it.

The issue is one that goes beyond unequal work loads and involves the importance of work and the family to men and women. Crehan (1986: 205–6) argues that many women do not just have obligations to their families, but their family life provides the central meaning of their lives. Crehan further asserts that this is not the case for men, but the evidence is restricted to women and comparative research tends to suggest that men and women both value family life higher than paid work (Feldberg and Glenn, 1984; Dex, 1985: 36–44). The point really is that men are not systematically faced with the dilemma of combining paid work and domestic responsibilities. As Crehan rightly concludes: 'being a conscientious parent and being a conscientious worker should not be competing options that individuals must choose between' (1986: 206).

A further twist in the tail of male egos must be the commensurability of masculinity with militancy. The world of work, in particular the world of male manual work, is one where the pursuit of proletarian maleness – aggression, domination and physical strength – is embodied in many notions of trade union power and working-class resistance. Perhaps the clearest demonstration of this, and the gulf between the prevailing cultures of men and women, is in Willis's (1977) descriptions of working-class boys at school preparing for working-class jobs in factories. It is essentially this preparation for work that carries with it the implicit degradation of women's work and women's worth and the double standards on sexual behaviour that are commonplace. Women also suffer from a more pervasive sexual harassment, that is 'behaviour of a sexual nature which is unwanted, unwelcome and unreciprocated and which might threaten job security or create a stressful or intimidating working environment' (WASH, 1987). The way such harassment is used to control women is another example of the opacity of privilege. That is the way that power often appears almost invisible to the those wielding it but self-evident to those suffering from it. Many men appear to deny their association with discriminatory practices, for such people sexual harassment is 'merely horseplay', and women have long been deterred from complaining about it in the sure knowledge that nothing will be done about an activity that will probably be considered by the (male) managers to be little more than 'fooling around' (Seddon, 1983). That sexual harassment is far from 'horseplay', and far from declining, is demonstrated in a survey of US students which revealed that 17 per cent of women were the victims of rape or attempted rape, and 7 per cent of men admitted committing rape or attempting to commit rape in the previous twelve months (*THES*, 9 September 1988).

Currently, the issue of sexual harassment at work is receiving a considerable amount of attention, both in its historical manifestations (Lambertz, 1985), and its contemporary forms (NALGO, 1981; Bularzik, 1978; Gordon, 1981; Hearn and Parkin, 1987; Rubinstein, 1989). The NALGO study is important in exposing the very high levels of harassment that exist; in their study of the Liverpool branch 25 per cent had experienced harassment at their current place of work

and 50 per cent at some time in their working lives. Subsequently, several unions have initiated policy statements, including NALGO, NATFHE (National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education), ASTMS, CPSA and the National Union of Journalists (NUJ). Even trade union officers themselves appear to be widely involved in such activities: in Heery and Kelly's (1989) survey of 87 women FTOs, 51 per cent complained of sexual harassment from fellow male officers, only marginally less than had complained about harassment from the male rank and file.

Yet some progress is visible. Since the 1980s British women have been awarded damages by industrial tribunals when sexual harassment has forced them to resign and, for the first time, this has been interpreted as unfair dismissal (Equal Opportunities Commission, 1987). However, the most progressive policies derive from the USA, especially since May 1988 when a district court judge ruled that a female Securities and Exchange Commission attorney was victimized and discriminated against by a 'pervasive sexual atmosphere' in the regional office between 1979 and 1984. This judgement is important because the defendant was not directly involved but argued that the tradition of granting favours and privileges to women employees who consented to managers' sexual advances generated a 'hostile and offensive workplace'. Thus, not only was the complaint upheld against a practice that did not directly involve the defendant but it was upheld against the culture of the organization rather than specific individuals (Hambleton, 1988). In 1996 even overtly macho organizations like the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) appeared to be resigned to a more egalitarian future when it accepted a Supreme Court order to allow women to register for the first time. But for such women there is a price: the VMI authorities have ruled that women must have the same levels of fitness, the same uniforms and the same haircuts as men (THES, 1996). As in the USA so it is in Britain that one of the most significant examples of the remaining barriers to the equality are the armed forces (the British military is exempt from the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act). Women have been recruited into the British Army for many years and 7 per cent of the army's total of 109,000 in 1998 were women, but 14 per cent of the recruits were women. (This is far higher than the proportion of female firefighters in the UK in 2002: just 1 per cent; Turner, 2002: 5). By 2000 there were 17,000 women in the army, as it responded not so much to equal opportunities as to a dire shortage of recruits. Indeed, the proportion of soldiers going absent without leave (AWOL) doubled between 1996 and 2000 to 1.3 per cent, with many blaming bullying, an unreconstructed 'macho' culture, and poor quality recruits (Burke, 2001: 5).

Unlike several other armed forces (notably Germany, New Zealand and Canada), British women remain restricted to specific roles (76 per cent of the total) and are not permitted to bear arms in 'direct combat'. Thus in 2004 Brigadier Patricia Purves was the highest-ranking woman in the British Army and the highest-ranking woman in a post open to both sexes. In the RAF there were already women fighter pilots, and many women serve on Royal Naval warships – but not on submarines. In fact, women have comprised a significant element of the combat arms of other nations for some time: the Soviet armed forces involved many women as infantry, tank crews and fighter pilots in the

Second World War and in 2000 were already in combat positions within the US, Canadian, Norwegian, Dutch, German and Israeli armies (Burke, 2000a; Hartley-Brewer, 2000; Krechtig, 2001: 14).

Tests carried out by the British Army in 1999–2000 seemed to suggest that women performed as well as their male counterparts (Burke, 2000b), though training injuries appear to be far more common amongst women (Fox, 2001: 5), and in 2000 the drop-out rate for women (8 per cent) from army training courses remained significantly higher than for men (2.3 per cent) (Evans, 2001: 7). (In 2002 Captain Philippa Tattersall, the first woman to pass the 10-week all-arms commando course, was awarded the Green Beret, undertaking exactly the same course as her male colleagues. The Royal Marines 42-week commando course is a separate requirement for those wishing to join the combat rather than the support units: Wilson, 2002.) Yet contrary to popular opinion, there is evidence to suggest that many women are at least as aggressive as men (Grint, Katy, 2000) or perhaps even more aggressive. Grossman (1998), for example, suggests in his review that women on the battlefield are twice as likely to kill as their male colleagues because to have reached that position they already need to have ‘proved’ themselves far more than their male colleagues. On the other hand, Nancy Mace – who became the first woman to graduate in 1999 from the Citadel in South Carolina, the USA’s toughest military college (Shannon Faulkner had enrolled earlier but dropped out after one week) – suggests that men can be very aggressive, at least in trying to keep women out (Mace and Ross, 2002).

In contrast, men in jobs more traditionally associated with women are even more visible by their general absence. For example, only 3 per cent of British nursery teachers and 17 per cent of primary school teachers are men.

## Summary

This chapter has outlined some important contemporary theories that attempt to explain the position and experiences of women at work, and provided a review of the nature of contemporary gender relationships in capitalist society. Self-evidently it has done little more than skim the surface on any of these areas, but that is the nature of such an introductory text as this.

It is important that the major themes are represented here so that their significance is not obscured in the detail. Fundamentally, an analysis of gender at work requires some form of coherent theoretical viewpoint; a glance at data tables may enlighten you as to how many women are executives but it cannot tell you why this number is as it is, or whether it is capable of alteration. Of the theories discussed earlier I hold little faith in the value of those which ignore gender because the relationships between men and women are crucial in the construction of work ideologies, structures and experiences. Theories which retain either capitalism or patriarchy as uniquely critical are inevitably partial and simply cannot explain the gendered work variations that exist in time and space.

The symbiotic mutualism theory that presumes capitalist and patriarchal interests are congruent is similarly incapable of accounting for the tension-ridden relationship between these two; and dualist theories that hold the two separated as autonomous forces neglect the qualitative changes that occur when the two are conjoined. The contingent and heterogeneous compound model illustrated here allows the model to encompass the issues of race and ethnicity, and hinges the whole on a respect for the importance of contingency that does not surrender to some of the traditional contingency approaches where everything appears to explain everything. Although the social world of work is inordinately complex the variables of class, race and gender are significantly superordinate in the quest for explanation. Relationships at work are not constructed by the interaction of men and women, workers and bosses, blacks and whites, but by white male bosses, and by black female workers and by all the other possible permutations of this triangular social construct.

The two other significant points that should be drawn from the review of the evidence are the insoluble link between home and work, and the historical patterning of gender relationships. Ultimately, the model of a full-time, single-occupation, male breadwinner who worked outside the home and kept his family achieved pre-eminence in the dominant ideology. However, this model is historically atypical and surrounded by so many qualifications that its period of relevance is restricted to between the last third of the nineteenth century and the first third of the twentieth. Equally important, the model was one of a modal representation: there may have been more such male workers around during this period than any other single group, but they did not form an overwhelming majority of the working population. The current pattern of paid work, though still undertaken away from home, has some features reminiscent of previous eras, particularly multiple incomes, bi-modal employment for women and transient occupations. What also exists today is a permutation of a pattern of gender-differentiated work experiences, occupations and rewards that has prevailed for much longer than the era of industrial capitalism. Thus women are paid less, have less chance of promotion, are less likely to be owners of businesses, are usually found in unskilled or semi-skilled service jobs, and tend to combine paid work with unpaid domestic work. Women are also less likely to be in unions and almost non-existent within union hierarchies. On the other hand, labour market pressures and the force of women's self-organization and commitment to change have begun to restructure their collective experience: they are now less likely than men to be unemployed and more likely to be found in executive positions than before, though still unlikely to be found in skilled manual jobs, especially in the field of engineering. Both employers and trade unions are now seeking to recruit women as never before and, however unimpressive the histories of both these groups have been in their relationships with women, a small but perceptible shift in attitude is developing. Marx was wrong in assuming that history was on the side of the proletariat, history is far more contingently constructed than this; but historically rare opportunities for the advancement of women at work are beginning to appear – whether they mature is another matter.

### Exam/essay questions

- 1 'A career or a family.' Must women choose one or is it possible to undertake both?
- 2 To what extent are women's careers the result of free choice?
- 3 'The sudden interest of trade unions in recruiting women merely represents self-interest, it does not demonstrate a sudden change of heart.' Discuss.
- 4 Which theory, if any, best explains the position of women at work in contemporary Britain?
- 5 'The solution to gender inequality at work is gender equality at home.' Is it?
- 6 If women are generally more skilled, more flexible and paid less, why do employers employ men?
- 7 'The future for men, for trade unions and for the unskilled looks bleak; the future is female.' Discuss.
- 8 To what extent does gender condition the experience of women?
- 9 'The highest levels of discrimination are not among the professions but among blue-collar industrial workers.' Discuss.
- 10 Is there a way through the glass ceiling for women?

### Further reading

For an historical overview of women in the twentieth century, try: Rowbotham's *A Century of Women: the History of Women in Britain and the US* (1997). A thorough account of various theoretical positions can be found in Walby's *Theorizing Patriarchy* (1990), while one of the most radical discussions is Haraway's *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* (1991). Closer to the world of work I would suggest the following: Cockburn's *In the Way of Women* (1991), Beechey's *Unequal Work* (1987), the volume edited by Crompton, Gallie and Pourcell titled *Changing Forms of Employment* (1996), and, finally, Rosener's *America's Competitive Secret: Utilizing Women as a Management Strategy* (1995).