

Introduction: what's new about gender inequalities in the 21st century?

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With the demise of the male breadwinner family, there has been something of a 'paradigm shift' in gender relations. But will this shift bring more or less equality? Major labour market changes, particularly in respect of women, together with dramatic changes in parenting and partnership, and greater recognition of gender equality issues in the policy arena, have served to break apart the traditional gender-role division. The expectation on the part of policy makers today is that women will be fully 'individualised' in the sense of economically autonomous, although policies are often ambiguous on this score. Social reality is more mixed; women are still disproportionately in part-time employment, and still do the bulk of unpaid care work.

The post-war welfare state in Britain in the 1940s was established on the assumption that men went out to work and women stayed at home. Both the system of work and the system of benefits depended on this male breadwinner model (Williams 2004). However, the model came under pressure to change in the 1960s and 1970s, partly in response to equality issues that were voiced by activists of the Women's Movement. It was also prompted by changing labour market opportunities and the recognition that most families required two wages to meet their housing needs and consumption aspirations. Certainly by the 1990s it was clear that the idealised picture of a male provider and female carer no longer captured the realities of people's lives.

However, shifts in gender equality have been very uneven across different sectors of society. There are marked differences by social class, ethnicity and age in the way gender inequalities are manifest. The persistence of gender and class inequalities, in particular, pose a challenge for those who argue that people's lives are becoming more 'individualised' and that the traditional social ties, relations and belief systems that used to shape people's lives are losing their significance. The claim made by Ulrich Beck and Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim, for example, is that things that once gave

a framework and rules to everyday life, including family unit, class and gender roles are continuing to crumble away. They go on to assert that 'For the individual, this brings historically new free spaces and options: he can and should, she may and must, now decide how to shape their own life within certain limits at least.' (2007: 502). Moreover, they claim that the other side of this individualisation dynamic is that institutions, including the labour market, the education system, the legal system and so on promote and demand an active and self-directed conduct of life.

To some extent the individualisation thesis can be seen as a correction to the overly deterministic materialist explanations of human behaviour that were common in earlier eras (Wrong 1961). Yet it is possible to swing too far the other way and, as the evidence in this book suggests, there are grounds for scepticism about the extent to which individual 'agency' and capacities for 'self-construction' have replaced structural constraints of all kinds. The discourse of individualism, however, has been extremely influential in both Europe and North America, and has many resonances with neoliberal thinking that has enjoyed such prominence in recent decades. Yet, although it is certainly the case that important changes have occurred in the way employment, class and family are being reconfigured in modern societies, the continuing influence they exert over people's everyday life experiences remains powerful. As far as women are concerned, one of the most significant elements of the way traditional practices are embedded in our social institutions is the persistence of the ideology of domesticity, in which the work of caring and nurturing is normatively assigned to women.

This introductory chapter is in four sections. First, we consider briefly the way that gender patterns in paid and unpaid work are changing across Europe and North America. Employment and family life are intrinsically intertwined but there remain pronounced differences in the work–family lives of men and women. Yet, in policy rhetoric, work–family conflicts are often framed in gender-neutral terms that ignore the persistence of the gender imbalance in paid and unpaid work. Second, we examine how the concept of gender alone is not sufficient for analysing inequalities, and, crucially, other differences such as class, race, ethnicity and age modify people's employment and family experiences. We focus particularly on the way that class interacts with issues of gender equality and we refute the claim that class no longer matters. Third, we examine longer-term trends in gender equality. We suggest that two contrasting stories can be told. One emphasises how much has been achieved in the struggle for greater equality over time, particularly in terms of the expansion of education and employment opportunities for women. The second emphasises the distance there remains to go in achieving gender equality and the slow

pace of change, particularly in terms of the shifts in the amount of caring and unpaid work that is undertaken by men. Both stories can be justified by the evidence and, by considering both the optimistic and pessimistic accounts, we adopt an appropriately nuanced position for considering gender inequalities in the twenty-first century. The final section discusses the origins of this book and provides a brief overview of the book and how it illuminates the new barriers and continuing constraints that characterise gender inequalities in the twenty-first century.

CHANGES IN PAID AND UNPAID WORK

In recent decades, both in Britain and in Europe, policies have explicitly been designed to raise employment participation amongst women. Thus, for example, in Lisbon in March 2000, the Heads of Governments of the European Union subscribed to the goal of raising the employment rate of women to 60 per cent by 2010.

Table I.1 shows the progress made by women in the total employment rate since 1960 across Europe, as well as in North America (Boeri et al. 2005). A glance at performance rates in 2000 as well as the ‘Lisbon distance’, the percentage difference between the female employment rate in 2000 and the 60 per cent target, shows that the gaps are still substantial in Mediterranean countries, and in Belgium, France and Ireland. The gender employment gap, defined as the differences in employment rate between men and women, is falling in all countries. On average the gender gap has nearly halved since 1980, from 30 per cent (not shown in the table) to 16.6 per cent by the year 2000. This reduction in the gender employment gap is continuing. Moreover, in 2009 in the global recession, at least in the USA and UK, the rate of job loss for males is far exceeding that for females, thus potentially narrowing the employment gap further. Employment forecasts in such uncertain economic times are fraught with difficulties. However, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (2009) predicts that, for men, the employment rate is expected to rise gradually through to 2010 and beyond, but for women the employment rate may fall. However, this gender difference is mainly because the age of state pension for women will be increased by stages from 60 in 2010 to 65 by 2020. Thus the increase in the female working age population may well exceed an increase in employment.

There is also a marked gender pay gap that is proving remarkably resilient despite the legal efforts in different countries that seek to ensure that men and women receive the same rates of pay, for comparable work. In Table I.2 we can see the gender–wage ratio in terms of median hourly wage

Table I.1 Female employment rates: 1960–2000 persons aged 15–64

		1960	1980	2000	Men 2000	Lisbon Distance*
Nordic						
	Denmark	42.7	66.3	71.2	80.4	11.2
	Finland	54.9	65.0	64.3	69.7	4.3
	Norway	26.1	58.4	73.4	88.1	13.4
	Sweden	38.1	67.6	72.1	76.2	12.1
Anglo-Saxon						
	UK	43.1	54.5	65.2	79.3	5.2
Mediterranean						
	Greece		30.7	40.4	70.2	-19.6
	Italy	28.1	33.2	39.7	68.5	-20.3
	Spain	21.0	28.4	40.3	70.3	-19.7
Rest of Europe						
	Austria		52.4	59.3	78.1	-0.7
	Belgium	29.6	35.0	51.1	69.8	-8.9
	France	42.9	50.0	53.1	68.1	-6.9
	Germany	35.0	34.8	58.1	73.5	-1.9
	Ireland		32.3	52.2	74.0	-7.8
	Netherlands		35.7	62.1	81.1	2.1
	Portugal		47.1	60.1	75.9	0.1
North America						
	United States	39.5	53.9	68.0	80.4	
	Canada		52.3	65.1	75.2	
Average			46.9	58.6	75.2	

Note: * Lisbon distance is the percentage difference between women's employment in 2000 and 60 per cent.

Source: Boeri et al. (2005: Table 2.1).

for three age groups (Boeri et al. 2005). The table shows that, with the exception of Italy, Denmark and Germany, the hourly female–male wage ratio is around 10 percentage points higher for younger women than for older women. Both age or life-course and birth cohort effects are at work here. First, younger women tend to show a greater similarity to young men in terms of labour market experiences. Second, for recent generations the education gap has narrowed substantially. The UK does not fare well in this cross-national comparison. Although the wage ratio among the youngest in the UK shows only an 8 per cent gap, this rises to 33 per cent for those aged 45–54 and is the worst gender wage-ratio among these 14

Table I.2 The gender–wage gap ratio by age (median hourly wages) for 1998

		25–34	35–44	45–54
Nordic	Denmark	92.8	92.5	90.5
	Finland	91.1	81.9	76.0
Anglo-Saxon	UK	92.0	70.5	67.1
Mediterranean	Greece	100.0	88.3	79.7
	Italy	98.5	97.3	92.4
	Spain	94.8	95.0	82.8
Rest of Europe	Austria	84.1	84.8	72.6
	Belgium	96.1	96.1	88.1
	France	95.1	86.0	86.1
	Germany	85.9	82.9	80.6
	Ireland	91.1	79.5	71.3
	Netherlands	98.6	84.6	76.9
	Portugal	86.8	83.9	81.6
North America	USA	83.3	74.7	70.4
Average		92.2	85.6	79.7

Source: Boeri et al. 2005, Table 5.2.

countries. It remains to be seen whether the wage ratio increases for the youngest cohort as they reach mid-life. Continuous employment is likely to reduce the gender pay gap, for those women who take minimal time out of the labour market to care for children or elderly family members. There are important class differences here, and professional/managerial women are more likely to be in continuous employment than women with routine and manual employment (Crompton 2006). However, there is strong evidence from longitudinal studies in the UK that women who take time out for caring work are paying an increased penalty over time, in terms of decline in occupational status (Dex et al. 2008). Thus while caring remains gendered, the gender pay gap will persist.

As Lewis (2008) and others have pointed out, the policy regimes of many industrialised countries were designed and devised around the model of a male breadwinner family where the man worked full-time and the women cared for the family and was not expected to be employed. This male breadwinner behaviour, in its pure sense, is hardly visible in industrialised

countries of the twenty-first century because of the huge increases in women's employment that have taken place. Of course, many women do take time out of the labour force to have and care for children, even though these periods have been getting successively shorter over recent generations (Macran et al. 1996). For policy purposes the male breadwinner model still exists, albeit in a modified form. A common modification is for the male partner to be in paid work and full-time hours and the female partner to be in paid work but part-time hours.

A range of models that address work–family balance, around child-bearing and childcare, together with the associated policies and example countries is set out in Table I.3 (Scott and Dex 2009). These policies are also associated with different models of gender relations and normative assumptions relating to masculinity and femininity (Crompton 1999; Gornick and Meyers 2003). Policies have grown up in very different ways in different countries, and the logic underlying the policies can vary considerably. In principle there are two extremes that policy regimes can adopt: they can either support adults, undifferentiated by gender, as paid workers; or they can acknowledge that men and women are likely to offer different levels of contributions to the labour market. No policy regime takes the extreme adult worker position, but the USA comes pretty close to this in only offering women rights to unpaid maternity leave since 1996. Scandinavian countries are often heralded as being more focused on providing equal opportunities to women and men, but policies also allow women's employment contribution to be different from men's in having longer parental leave, and long periods of part-time work following childbirth. When policies allow or encourage women to behave differently in terms of their employment participation or their hours of work, gender differences are tacitly endorsed. This 'difference' is often a reflection of gendered normative assumptions relating to women's and men's responsibilities for caring and domestic work. For example, the Netherlands is shown here as encouraging both mothers and fathers to work part-time, in order to share paid and unpaid work more equally. However, such encouragement is a very long way from achieving gender equality. Although the Netherlands has by far the highest rates of male part-time workers in Europe (about 13 per cent), women account for three-quarters of the part-time work force.

In order to link specific country policies with different time use patterns, Table I.4 shows the mean time in minutes per day that men and women spend on different types of paid work and unpaid work, for the UK, the USA, Sweden, West Germany and the Netherlands. These data are taken from time diaries of a longitudinal cross-national sample (Gershuny 2000). *Paid work* is contrasted with *Core domestic work* (referring to housework

Table I.3 Range of models of work–family balance

Model/author	Description	Associated policies	Example countries
<i>Adult worker model family</i> Comes in two forms:	Men and women are responsible for participating in the labour market.	Stimulate provision of formal childcare services, possibly subsidised.	Model encouraged in EU.
a) supported	Focus on getting lone parents and low earners into work.	In work-benefits, tax credits acting as subsidy to low paying employers. Tax relief or subsidy for childcare if women in paid work.	UK since 1999, more so since 2003.
b) unsupported	Gender-neutral, equality defined as sameness.	Earned income tax credits to make sure it is economic to work. No support for workers, except what is provided in the market. Little support in leave or pay for childbearing or income replacement while childbearing and child-rearing.	USA
<i>Gender participation model</i> , sometimes called the Nordic model, or 'gender-differentiated supported adult worker model' (Lewis, 2008)	Gender equality promoted, but makes allowances for difference.	Generous cash support for parental leave, services for child care and elderly dependents, but also for women to have extensive periods of leave (three years if two	Sweden. To a lesser extent in other Scandinavian countries. To a lesser extent in Germany.

Table I.3 (continued)

Model/author	Description	Associated policies	Example countries
		children born in quick succession) and rights to work part time until child is eight.	
<i>Gender equality based on a woman's model of equality</i> (Knijn, 2004)	All workers encouraged to reduce their weekly paid working hours to be part-time.		The Netherlands

Source: Scott and Dex (2009).

and cooking) and *Other unpaid work* (childcare, shopping and odd jobs). It is clear that women in all these countries do a greater share of unpaid work than men. However, two other facts about the gender division of work are worth noting. First, adding up women's and men's paid and unpaid work leads to near equality in the amounts of total work done by men and women, or men doing slightly more total work than women (the only exception being West Germany). Such figures suggest that claims of women's 'double shift' (Hochschild 1989) may be exaggerated. Second, the average amounts of domestic work and paid work vary by country as well as by gender, with relatively high total work hours in the United States, Sweden and West Germany and lowest total work hours in the Netherlands.

We argued above that policies that make allowance for gender differences in employment practice are likely to reinforce gender differences in domestic work. In Sweden it is clear that women are spending more time on core domestic work than men, despite an explicit policy commitment to gender equality. Nevertheless there is some evidence that policies supporting equality have some effect. The figures reported in Table I 4 show Swedish men having the highest number of minutes for men of core domestic work (56 minutes) of these countries and Swedish women spending the least time (143 minutes). Thus although, even in Sweden, equality of unpaid domestic work seems an elusive goal, it does seem that supportive policies can help nudge behaviour in the direction of greater equality.

Table I.4 Mean time spent per day on different types of work, in minutes

Country:	UK	USA	Sweden	West Germany	The Netherlands
Core domestic work					
Men	28	33	56	11	29
Women	177	182	143	238	188
Other unpaid work					
Men	83	97	117	84	84
Women	111	142	146	132	124
Paid work					
Men	367	406	379	418	325
Women	178	187	262	168	94
Total work					
Men	478	536	552	513	438
Women	466	511	551	538	406

Source: Gershuny (2000: ch. 7).

Is gender equality what people want? In the UK, fathers report being largely content with the hours they work even when their work hours are as much as 60 hours per week (O'Brien 2005). Mothers like part-time paid work; they like flexibility in their working hours; they are generally happy with care policies that acknowledge that women are different and treat them differently (Scott and Dex 2009). The case for preferences driving decisions about paid work has been argued by Hakim (2000), mainly in the context of the UK. However, preference theory is problematic, as Crompton (2006) argues, because 'preferences' are shaped and constrained by the context in which they are made. It is also the case that, as Nussbaum (2000: 114) argues, 'preferences' are not necessarily the best guide for policy making. She suggests that we also need 'to conduct a critical scrutiny of preference and desire that would reveal the many ways in which habit, fear, low expectations and unjust background conditions deform people's choices and even their wishes for their own lives'. It is certainly the case that the so-called 'choices' parents make about who is the primary earner and who takes time out to look after the children are still being made on a playing field that is not level or equal between men and women. There are a range of policies that support the male partner working longer paid hours than the female, and there remains, as we have seen, a marked gender pay gap. It seems unlikely that equality in either employment or family care will come from people's preferences, so long as employment and family norms reinforce the existing gender divide.

CLASS AND GENDER EQUALITIES

How does the class divide bear on questions of gender equality? The assertion that 'class' is no longer a concept relevant to the analysis of 'late modern' societies has been made so often as to be almost banal. The idea that in 'reflexive modern societies' the individual is author of his or own biography is one that has been repeatedly expressed. However, claims asserting the 'death of class' are greatly exaggerated. The importance of parental occupational status for children's educational outcomes has increased rather than decreased in the UK over the second half of the twentieth century (Schoon 2006). Beliefs that the UK is a meritocratic society have always been wishful thinking. How people speak, how people dress, their exposure to particular types of music and culture remain associated with social class. These 'soft skills' of conversation and taste are crucial for self presentation and 'know how' which, when combined with educational advantages and employer stereotypes, help perpetuate material class inequalities. Class and gender (along with other differences such as age and ethnicity) intersect to structure advantages and disadvantages in ways that reproduce existing social hierarchies in the life opportunities of new generations.

In this book we pay particular attention to how gender divisions are cross-cut by class divisions. In the UK, on average, women receive lower returns than men within all occupational class groupings, but the class differences between women are also considerable, and the educational attainment and employment prospects of adults and children are polarised by class as well as by gender. However, there is individual variation within social class groups and there has been an increasing interest in how some individuals 'beat the odds', overcoming early family disadvantage to achieve success in later life, in terms of educational qualifications, employment attainment, personal and family fulfilment, and quality of life.

Class matters. Women's decisions to go back to work may be different for different classes, with working class women more likely to work because they need the money. Patterns of childcare choices are also class-related, with lower social groups more likely to rely on relatives, while professional and managerial parents 'choose' the more expensive market-based care. Even the ability to achieve a work and life 'balance' has a significant social-class, as well as a gender dimension. Women from higher social classes have many more opportunities and fewer constraints than do lower-class women to achieve their preferred balance of employment and family care. Less privileged women often do not have the luxury of putting into practice their preferences concerning the ideal family employment

mix. One reason is that they lack the resources that benefit the middle class – both in terms of financial resources and in terms of knowledge of how to ‘play the system’; on the other hand, professional and managerial women who work full-time have markedly higher levels of work–life conflict than women in other classes.

There has been increasing recognition that there are a rather complex set of cross-cutting influences that modify experiences of gender inequalities. The claim is that an adequate representation of gender inequalities must simultaneously include class, racial, ethnic and other differences. However, it is not always possible or appropriate to focus on complex interactions, which the concept of ‘intersectionality’ implies. Yet this concept poses a useful critique to the naive forms of gender analysis that assume that male and female categories dominate all other forms of difference, and that boundaries between categories are static and universal. Instead, it is necessary to bear in mind that discrimination and inequalities will interact in certain ways that depend on the context and are specific to time and place (McCall 2005).

In this book we take it as axiomatic that context matters and that gender inequalities are specific to time and place. Gender inequalities in the twenty-first century are taking new forms that are partly shaped by the economic and socio-political and cultural climate of the global society in which we live. Different countries have very different levels and trajectories of inequalities. This applies to many different aspects of inequality including household income, employment opportunities, family circumstances, responsibilities for caring, work–life balance, or quality of life more broadly. Moreover, within-country inequalities are being played out in a rapidly changing context of labour market shifts, changing class divisions, ageing populations and new patterns of migration.

IS THE GLASS HALF FULL OR HALF EMPTY?

In looking at changes in gender equality across time, two stories can be told. On the one hand, it can be argued that huge strides have been made over the past half century in terms of opportunities for women. There is much evidence that supports the positive story. The proportion of women in the labour market has grown markedly; the pay gap has narrowed; notions that a woman’s place is in the home have eroded further; women have overtaken men in the numbers pursuing higher education. It is not just that increasing proportions of women are now gaining degrees, but it is also the case that female graduates now work in a much wider range of occupations than was the case 25 years ago. Women are increasingly

represented in the professional and managerial classes and at least some 'glass ceilings' are being cracked.

But there is also a story that is far less rosy. Gender segregation in the workplace persists in terms of there being male and female typical jobs – with economic penalties attached to working in the feminised sector. There is also evidence of continuing imbalance in women's and men's representation in top managerial positions. Moreover, even when women get to the top, they still get paid less than men. The gender pay gap, although much reduced, seems peculiarly resistant to elimination. Moreover, as the Fawcett Society report (2005) noted, in the UK, women still experience 'sticky floors', meaning that they get stuck at the bottom of the pay ladder, clustered in low-paid jobs. So-called women's work such as caring, cleaning and catering is not valued, has limited opportunities for training and promotion, and is not paid well. There is still a gender pay gap of some 18 per cent for full-time workers and 40 per cent for those women working part-time. Moreover, some 'glass ceilings' remain stubbornly intact. The lack of acceptance that senior jobs can be done on a flexible basis combines with discrimination to stop women with family responsibilities reaching senior positions. Moreover, even when they make it to the top, women's salaries are markedly lower than those of men.

One reason why there has been so much change in some aspects of gender equality, while there has been so little change in others, has to do with the asymmetry in the speed of gender role change. As Esping-Andersen (2005) noted,

when one studies life-course behaviour over the past, say 50 years, one is struck by a massive gender-asymmetry: all the while that women have adopted a new life-course, men have barely changed at all. We see a masculinisation of female biographies, in terms of educational attainment, postponed marriage and family formation and lifelong attachment to employment. This in turn underpins changing household structure, more fragile families, and declining birth rates. It also underpins the changing employment structure, as the disappearance of the housewife leads to the externalization of personal and social service activities. Possibly, women are reaching the limits of life-course masculinisation and, possibly, a new positive equilibrium will require that men embark upon a parallel feminization of their life-course (2005: 271).

It is possible for men to embark on a parallel feminization of their life course, but is it likely? There is some evidence to support the claim that the process of gender role change can be described as 'lagged adaptation' (Gershuny and Bittman 2005), with men slowly and somewhat unevenly increasing their contribution to unpaid work when their wives or partners return to employment following the birth of a child. Certainly, Esping-Andersen is right in depicting issues of gender equality as about the

relationship between women and men. Too often discussions of gender equality seem to implicitly assume that such concerns apply to only half the human race, whereas gender applies to us all. In this book we examine different aspects of gender inequalities in the twenty-first century. We consider new barriers that have emerged in the past few decades that slow or prevent progress in gender equality. We also identify some of the continuing constraints that face women and men, employers and employees, policy makers and practitioners who are working to achieve a more egalitarian society.

ORGANISATION AND OVERVIEW

This book builds on a collection of original papers given at a successful international conference that was held at and sponsored by City University in March 2008 on Gender, Class, Employment and Family (Lyonette and Crompton 2008). The conference was co-sponsored by the Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) Research Priority Network on Gender Inequalities in Production and Reproduction (GeNet). Some of the contributors to this volume are part of this Network, which consists of nine interlinked research projects that are together pursuing the common goal of examining the way men's and women's work and family lives are changing and how policy can intervene effectively to promote change towards greater equality (Scott 2004).

This book is organised in five parts. Part I contains three chapters that look at family and labour market change. Schoon considers the persisting importance of class and gender in becoming an adult. Comparing British cohorts born in 1958 and 1970 she finds continued reproduction of gender and class inequalities in aspiration, education and employment. Devine examines the way class reproduction works in terms of occupational inheritance and occupational choices. Using in-depth interviews with doctors and teachers, Devine finds little evidence of occupational inheritance, but a marked difference in terms of how parents viewed the desirability of the two occupations for sons and daughters. Dale and Ahmed explore ethnic differences in women's employment in the UK and focus particularly on Pakistani and Bangladeshi women. Using both official statistics and interview data they conclude that educational qualifications are of overriding importance in these ethnic minority women's decisions to enter the labour market.

Part II deals with occupational structures and national regimes. Webb focuses on recent changes in women's and men's paid work in the UK, USA, Sweden and Japan, which exemplify different forms of advanced

capitalism. She argues that gender and markets are mutually constitutive and the resulting social differences have different meanings in different societies. Warren examines the penalties of part-time work across Europe and finds that the association between part-time and low-level occupation is not universally applicable. Le Feuvre contrasts feminising professions in Britain and France and finds that the career patterns that are the most attractive to the vast majority of women in both countries are those that pose the least threat to traditional gender divisions of unpaid care-work.

The challenge of integrating family and work is tackled in Part III, with Kan and Gershuny considering the thorny question of how couples divide domestic labour and how men's and women's contributions to routine and non-routine domestic labour change with the move to partnership and parenthood. They find that while routine housework remains mainly 'women's work' throughout the conventional life course, care and non-routine domestic work are less gendered in nature. Crompton and Lyonette explore the way that mothers' employment and childcare 'choices' of couples are subject to very different opportunities and constraints depending on their occupational status. They demonstrate the persisting material inequalities associated with class. Scott, Plagnol and Nolan examine how perceptions of what matters regarding quality of life differ by gender and life stage. They find that the different caring and breadwinning roles of men and women lead to important differences in the way they perceive quality of life.

Understanding inequalities is the theme of Part IV. Bennett, De Henau and Sung examine the intra-household allocation of resources and control in the UK and show that different systems of money management are associated with which partner makes the main financial decisions in heterosexual couples. Birkelund and Mastekaasa examine how women's labour market participation leads to a reduction of earnings inequalities among households in Norway.

The final section, Part V, addresses the complexities generated by both the universal, but changing and variable, normative constructs of femininity as well as the conflicts between different 'feminisms' that these differences can generate. Ellingsæter examines the way different Nordic 'woman-friendly' policies are powerful ways of institutionalising changing social norms relating to 'good motherhood'. She suggests that the hard-line implementation of lengthy breast feeding can sacrifice the autonomy of mothers and the care-giving potential of fathers for a perceived, but not necessarily real, benefit to the child. Such perceived conflicts of interest present new barriers to the achievement of material gender equality, and open, yet again, the unresolved conflict between 'equality' and 'difference' feminism (Fraser 1994). Evans describes how normative constructions

of 'the feminine' shape both the unpaid and paid work of women, both equally necessary to society. Fashion is to a considerable extent dependent on the shaping of femininity. As a commodity it is class differentiated and produces an ever greater range of demand and desire. As such, it is a central element of the engine of capitalist production and reproduction. Yet, at the same time, women of all classes remain largely responsible for the vital, and unpaid, work of caring.

Taken together, the chapters in this book demonstrate that there are not only new barriers, but also continuing constraints to the achievement of gender equality in the twenty-first century.

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