BLOCK 2 FAMILY, GENDER AND WELFARE

UNIT 8 MASCULINITY, HOMOPHOBIA AND SEXUALITY
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Unit 8 MASCULINITY, HOMOPHOBIA AND HOMOSEXUALITY

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The major aim of this unit is to help you think critically about the nature of masculinity in Britain today (The next unit, Unit 9, examines women's roles.)

A short opening section will ask you to revise what you have already learnt about the way in which gender differences are socially produced. Although you may still want to argue for the primacy of 'biology' and 'the natural' over the social, you should by now have marshalled a considerable number of objections to holding such a view, and the introduction should help you to take stock of these arguments.

Sections 2 and 3 then contain the main ideas of the unit. One focuses on masculinity, the other on homosexuality.

Section 2 aims to assist you to unpack some ideas on masculinity. Starting with a short overview of some anthropological research, you will be asked to consider how different masculinity can be in other cultures, and then to provide a list of attributes of what it means to 'be a man' in modern Britain. The concept of 'patriarchal masculinities' will be introduced. We will also look at four perspectives that have been used to understand masculinity: 'role theory', 'power theory', 'socialization theory' and 'social constructionism'. You should be able to appraise such theories by the end of this section, and also to sense the possibility of changes in patriarchal masculinities. Television programme 4, 'Becoming a Man?', contains groups of boys aged 11–13 and 17–18 talking about new conceptions of gender as it affects schooling, employment and work in the home.

Section 3 will turn to an examination of some aspects of male homosexuality. At first sight you may feel it is a little curious to discuss homosexuality in such detail in a unit dealing with masculinity, after all, you might say, they seem to be opposites. But the argument developed here will suggest that the maintenance of patriarchal masculinities is in part dependent upon maintaining hostility towards homosexuality. The concept of 'homophobia' will be introduced, and you will be expected to understand some of its dimensions.

Just as gender is socially constructed, so too is homosexuality. It can hence change significantly over time. Becoming a gay man in the 1930s was very different from becoming a gay man in the 1980s, when AIDS has become so significant. Some of these changes will be briefly discussed before a more detailed analysis is provided of what it is to be young and gay in Britain today. You will be asked to think about the differences between a teenage boy who is growing up to be a patriarchal male and a teenage boy growing up to be gay.

A concluding section will consider the potentiality of change in both the male role and the gay experience. The potential effects of AIDS for such changes will be considered.
1 INTRODUCTION: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER

Some of the most popularly held assumptions about gender rest upon conceptions of it as somehow ‘natural’ and ‘biological’. ‘Motherhood is natural to women’, ‘sex is a naturally powerful drive’, ‘men are naturally more aggressive’, ‘some men can’t help rape, it’s their sex drive which is too strong’, ‘men are naturally promiscuous’, these and hundreds of similar observations – perhaps you could list some more – are pervasive, common-sense assumptions found in everyday life. Sexual differences are, after all, ‘only natural’.

Turning to the scientific literature, it is easy to find a large amount of research to justify this ‘only natural’ view of the world. From the writings of the early social Darwinians to contemporary sociobiologists, from research on ‘hormones’ to research on ‘sex differences in the brain’, from theories of ‘aggression’ to theories of ‘male bonding’, many writers who claim the authority of science have been concerned with laying out the biological foundations for gender.

Now although nobody would wish to deny the role of the biological substratum in human activities (it clearly sets constraints on what is humanly possible), sociologists suggest that some of these biological claims are extravagant and overstated. Since you have already encountered some of these criticisms in previous units, it will be useful for you to revise and review them here.

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1. Think back over the previous units of the course and consider where biological arguments have been analysed.
2. Make a note of where these biological arguments have been discussed.
3. Briefly suggest the main problems that social scientists find with biological/natural arguments. You should then compare your list with mine below.

Comment: some general problems with ‘natural’ arguments
The main criticisms which sociologists present against ‘natural’ or ‘biological’ explanations of patterns of human behaviour are the following.

The problem of history, culture, the social and the symbolic
Whatever the biological substratum of human life, there is much evidence from the humanities and the social sciences which suggests significant variations in human experience across cultures and history – from classic anthropological work which claims to show that men may be ‘feminine’ and women may be ‘masculine’, to historical research which suggests how living arrangements such as ‘the family’ can be organized very differently. The ‘biological’ always has to be mediated by the symbolic in order for it to be social. Imagine, for instance, what human sexuality would be like if it was unmediated by meaning. A world of unco-ordinated erections and lubrications, of sexuality without rule or fantasy, of fumbling inabilities to interpret acts. Orgasms, objects or people as sexual. Biology may provide cues, impulses and constraints, but all of this has to be interpreted through history and culture. Human beings are symbol manipulators who make and inhabit worlds of meaning which can be transmitted and modified from generation to generation. We have ‘culture’ and a ‘history’ in ways that other animals do not. In your notes above, you might have pointed to the way Block 1 discussed ‘stages of life’ (birth, childhood, adolescence and old age) as stages which are apparently natural, but in which the process of social construction (the culture of a society) is central to our understanding of those stages.

The problem of reductionism
Biological arguments have a tendency to be overly simple, reducing vastly complex human civilizations and historical epochs to a chromosome, a hormone, a gene. Male
dominance, for instance, can be simply explained by testosterone it is suggested by some sociobiologists (for example, Goldberg, 1974) that all the complexities of long historical processes and variations can be squashed into one hormone. Often such claims are used not only to capture the past and the present, but also the future. Consider a famous observation by one of the world’s leading sociobiologists, E O Wilson:

In the hunter-gatherer societies, men hunt and women stay at home. This strong bias persists in agricultural societies and on that ground alone appears to have a genetic origin. The genetic basis is intense enough to cause a substantial division of labour even in the most free and most egalitarian of future societies (quoted in Sayers, 1982, p 29).

Even without any training in sociobiology, you can probably see some criticisms which might be made. Would it be fair to say it is reductionist and oversimplistic (i.e., does it reduce complex social phenomena to unitary biological ones)? Wilson is one of the most sophisticated sociobiologists and there is much of value in his work, but he is still capable of making generalizations which pay no attention to the complex variations of human societies.

Problems of science and refutation
Although there are many biological explanations of most social phenomena – from crime and race relations, to the family and gender – in most cases there are strong disagreements among biologists. Claims of truth are made prematurely. There are endless controversies even within biology over the role of hormones, chromosomes and genes. Those interested in reading a biologist’s analysis of the evidence on gender might find the book by Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Myths of Gender: Biological Theories about Men and Women* (1985), to be valuable. She is a biologist, and reviews the evidence on such issues as hormones and aggression, menstruation and female behaviour, intelligence and men, and in all cases she finds little evidence of a straightforward biological causation of human behaviour.

Problems of ideology
It is important to ask just why the ‘it’s natural’ type of arguments are so popular, when the world is more complex and the explanations it provides are too simple. The answer to this may well lie not in the truth of the biological claims but in the ways in which they can be socially used. They come to serve ideological functions – in providing simple, uncomplicated answers which typically re-affirm the existing social order and the division of gender roles.

Problems of the future and change
However biological sex may be, we are also moral and political animals. Hence biological arguments cannot be produced to legitimate biological male dominance and biological male aggression. The moral dimension is not the same as the biological. As Janet Radcliffe Richards, a ‘sceptical feminist’, has put it:

And suppose that men are naturally dominant because of the miraculous testosterone of which we hear so much these days. Why should feminists be reluctant to admit, or anti-feminists to think that it clinches their case? Even if men are naturally inclined to dominance it does not follow that they ought to run everything. Their being naturally dominant might be an excellent reason for imposing special restrictions to keep their nature under control. We do not think that the men whose nature inclines them to rape ought to be given free rein to go around raping, so why should the naturally dominant be allowed to go around dominating? (Richards, 1982, p 44)

A further classification: sex and gender
Several distinctions are commonly made in writings on gender and sexuality, and you should be clear about these conventions. *Sex* refers to the strictly biological. This is usually taken to have six major components:

1. Chromosome make-up
2. External genitals
3. Internal genitals
4. Reproductive organs
5. Hormonal states
6. Secondary sex characteristics
In general, we can speak of a female as having 46 XX chromosomes, clitoris and vagina, ovaries, oestrogen and breast development, and the male as having 46 XY chromosomes, penis and testicles, gonads, testosterone and a beard. There are, however, enormous variations within the two sexes in genetic and hormonal endowment: an infant may be born with too few or too many X or Y chromosomes, giving it the chromosome make-up of one sex and the genitals of another.

*Gender* refers to all the social aspects of sexual differences. Thus whereas sex may be 'male' or 'female', gender refers to the social meaning of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. Since this stresses the social aspects, you will note that it is gender that is used throughout this course and not 'sex'—which would be more appropriate for a course in biology. Under the term gender are several key linked concepts.

*Gender identity* refers to the psychological state in which someone comes to say 'I am a man' or 'I am a woman'. It is perfectly possible (and not uncommon) to believe that one is a woman whilst having all the biological sex attributes of a male (currently, such experiences are often designated as 'transsexualism').

*Gender role* refers to learning and performing the socially accepted characteristics for a given gender. The content of this may differ enormously across cultures and even within a culture. Again, it is possible to hold a gender identity (e.g. I am a man) which crosses with a gender role (I wear a dress) this is the case of what contemporarily is referred to as 'transvestism'.

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All the above issues of *sex* and *gender* need to be distinguished from the *sexual* and the *erotic*. Whereas sex and gender involve languages of 'male' and 'female' and 'masculinity' and 'femininity' respectively, the sexual and the erotic involve a language of 'heterosexuality' and 'homosexuality'. This language is much more concerned with types of sexual activities and partners. Again, this has a biological substratum — of orgasms and physiological changes — but most of what is distinctive about human sexuality comes from the fact that it is hugely symbolic and social. Gender identity ('I am a man') often becomes the basis for organizing the erotic ('therefore I am a heterosexual interested in women'), but it does not have to. Most male homosexuals have no doubt that they are men, but have a sexual interest in the same sex. In that sense, it is quite mistaken to see male homosexuality as necessarily linked to effeminacy.
2 THE PROBLEM OF PATRIARCHAL MASCULINITIES

The main aim of this section is to examine some of the features of 'being a man' in modern Britain. At the end of it you should be able to describe some of the characteristics of what I will be calling 'patriarchal masculinities', and you should have some theoretical tools to analyse this idea.

Before we start, be clear about the background assumptions of this block

(a) Masculinity, like femininity, is a cultural construction We will not therefore be considering biological issues here

(b) The content of masculinity - even the very idea of what 'it' is - shifts across time and space. We will be dealing in the main with the modern British male, though some parallels may be drawn with men in the Western world generally

(c) Social structure and culture are not the same as biography (though they interact) Hence personal lives are always more ambiguous and contradictory than general theories In this section we will be discussing 'ideal types', many individual men will not fit these generalizations precisely

2.1 On masculinities

Cultural values about what is considered 'masculine' and what is not vary from one society to another, and from one historical period to another. Not only do such values vary, but so do the sexual activities in which people engage. In Ancient Greece the notion of 'masculinity' included homosexuality, whereas in our culture the two tend to be seen as mutually exclusive. In Ancient Greece sexual activity between males was required in some social relationships - between a mature aristocratic man and a younger male, for example. Love between two males was held in high esteem at the time of Plato (427-347 BC) in the city-state of Athens. 'The Symposium', one of the main texts written by Plato, consists of a discussion of love in a culture which assumed, without much argument, that homosexual love between men was a 'higher' form of love than that between a husband and wife. Nor was this confined to the Athenians. The soldiers of the army of Sparta practised homosexuality. The assumption was that such relationships led to soldiers fighting better in order to protect their lovers.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some British males, especially at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, used the works of the Ancient Greeks to legitimate homosexuality. These values were seen to be in contrast with those of Christianity in this period.

Anthropologists have reported on cultures which have provided social roles for 'homosexual' males. For example, among the North American Sioux, the role of the berdache was available, indeed prescribed, for a boy or young man who, having dreamt he was doomed to be like a woman, gave up being a warior and hunter and performed women's tasks instead. Some, but not all, berdaches were married to another male (see Williams, 1986).

These examples illustrate the variability in values and in conceptions of what is appropriate to masculinity and male identity. There are also some similarities between these cultures and our own - a central one being that it is males who are seen as most suitable to be warriors or fighters (This issue will be discussed in Unit 10, and the role of women in Unit 9.) Among the Ancient Greeks the males were the fighters and soldiers, but unlike the situation in the modern European and North American armed forces, they were allowed, even encouraged, to practise homosexual love openly.

Before turning to look at modern Britain in more detail, I would like you to read the following extract from an anthropological study, Guardians of the Flutes by Gilbert Herdt (1981), and to consider what it tells you about masculinity in another culture.
Herdt conducted fieldwork in the 1970s amongst a New Guinean tribe which he called the Sambia (a fictitious name to protect their identity). His study is the most recent in a long line of anthropological investigations which highlight the cultural relativity of gender (of which Margaret Mead’s work is the most widely cited, although it is now heavily criticized – see Freeman, 1983). Herdt’s study is fascinating because it suggests that in some cultures what we call homosexuality is actually a prerequisite of masculinity. Such ‘ritualized homosexuality’ has been reported in at least twenty New Guinea societies, besides Sambia it is not as esoteric as it may seem at first glance (see, for example, Stoller, 1985, p. 169). In Britain, by contrast, many people tend to identify homosexuality with being effeminate – the opposite of masculinity. In a later section we will see that the taunt of ‘being a fag’ and ‘being a sissy’ is a major strategy by which conventional masculinity is enforced and sustained in our society.

Read the following short extract carefully and answer the questions that follow:

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Herdt, 1981, pp. 2-3)
Q. Having read the above extract, try to answer the following questions:

1. Describe the main behaviour patterns of a Sambian boy with (a) other boys and (b) women.
2. Why is it important for Sambian boys to consume semen?
3. Do Sambian boys grow up to become adult homosexuals?
4. How does a Sambian boy come to see himself as a man?

Life among boys and men in the Samba is clearly not like life among boys and men in modern Britain. In Britain, there is no ritualized homosexuality among all young boys in order for them to become 'men', quite the opposite – if boys are found to be involved in sex with other boys, they are presumed quite often to be passing through a brief 'phase' or they are seen as being effeminate and 'queer'. It is certainly not socially sanctioned, indeed, we will see in Section 3.3 just how difficult it can be for some young men who want to be gay in this society.

You should by now have a sense of how masculinity can and does vary across cultures. This is a striking, even exotic example, but it is possible to find examples much nearer home. For instance, some older, Latin men in Europe may, indeed, show less another man when greeting him. Likewise, I recall on my first visit to Italy the sight of many young Italian men walking arm in arm in the street. Being naive at the time, I thought this meant that homosexuality was more acceptable there. In fact, I doubt if this is so, but masculine affection is much more permissible. There is, then, much variation in masculinities.

**Stereotypes of men in modern Britain**

*Before discussing the stereotypes of men in modern Britain, here is another exercise for you to do.*

I want you to think about what it is to 'be a man' today in Britain. To start with, list below the five attributes which you think belong mainly to women and those which belong to men.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes of men</th>
<th>Attributes of women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When a mixed group of sociology undergraduates were asked to list 'five characteristics' of masculinity, they came up with the following list:

- aggressive, assertive, sexually voracious, ambitious, physically and mentally strong, controlling, dominant, rational, independent,
- responsible, non-effeminate, lack of expressiveness, distant, lack of emotion, financially capable, self-confident, assured, more intelligent, arrogant

How does such a list compare with yours? Of course, everyone in the class recognized that they were dealing in stereotypes – those 'pictures in our heads' that help us organize our experiences but which are invariably distorting. Nevertheless, they do capture a kernel of truth. You might like now to examine the following list which one social scientist produced for North American men.
### Stereotypic traits

**Male-valued traits**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>Knows the way of the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Feels not easily hurt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemotional</td>
<td>Adventures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hides emotion</td>
<td>Makes decisions easily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>Never cries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easily influenced</td>
<td>Acts as leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant</td>
<td>Self confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likes maths and science</td>
<td>Not uncomfortable about being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not excitable in a minor crisis</td>
<td>Aggressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Ambitious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive</td>
<td>Able to separate feelings from ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical</td>
<td>Non dependent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worldly</td>
<td>Not concerned about appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled in business</td>
<td>Thinks men are superior to women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Talks freely about sex with men</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Female-valued traits**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avoids harsh language</td>
<td>Interested in own appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talkative</td>
<td>Neat in habits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactful</td>
<td>Quiet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gentle</td>
<td>Strong need for security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aware of feelings of others</td>
<td>Appreciates art and literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>Expresses tender feelings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Franklin, 1984, p 5)

Finally, you may like to watch one episode of any soap on television, and see how far the men you see in it match the above characteristics. Hopefully this will allow you to mix study with a pleasurable activity.

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How closely does this represent the stereotypical image of masculinity?
Throughout this unit I will be using the term 'patrachal masculinities' to refer to those versions of being a man which support and reinforce patriarchal ideologies. 'Patriarchy' is a very controversial subject around which there is little real agreement. In the block introduction we have used this term to mean that 'women should mother babies and young children' and that 'men should be prepared to fight for their countries, class or ethnic group'. This is not the only definition possible. It concentrates on cultural values surrounding gender roles. (This definition of patriarchy will be discussed in Unit 10 in this block.) More commonly and most generally it signposts the power of the man over the woman. This definition concentrates on the social structural aspect of 'patriarchy', that is on which groups have power over others in a given social formation. I choose to describe some masculinity as patriarchal in order to allow for the possibility that not all masculinity must necessarily be patriarchal. Non-patriarchal masculinities would be those where men consciously and clearly remove themselves from the domination and power over women. Some commentators think that a so-called 'new man' has started to appear in the wake of the growth of the men's movement in the 1970s and its critical analysis of traditional (i.e. patriarchal) masculinity. But this is a very controversial analysis: some find very little evidence of such a 'new man' (e.g. Lewis and O'Brien, 1987), while others hold that such a 'new man' may actually be avoiding responsibilities (e.g. Ehrenreich, 1983).

From patriarchy to the 'new man' is there any evidence?

### 2.2 Perspectives on masculinities

So far we have listed a number of stereotypical attributes that seem to belong to some men in modern Britain. But clearly these are only stereotypes and they do grossly distort the actual lives of men.

What we need now is a way of looking at masculinity in more detail and depth. In fact, this is no easy task, since men have rarely been studied as men, and those studies that do exist tend to reiterate in various ways the stereotypes we have so far considered. The study of masculinity is a relatively new and rather thin field of inquiry. Ironically, since the advent of women's studies and feminist social science in the 1970s, we have come to know much more about women as women, the 'problem of men' has rarely been the focus. As Michael Kimmel says in the introduction to a selection of essays on masculinity:

We study men as scientuts, as authors, as presidents or other government officials, as soldiers or kings. But rarely, if ever, do we study men as men, rarely do we make masculinity the object of inquiry as we examine men's lives. If men have traditionally been the norm (and women the 'other'), then studies of men and masculinity have never made masculinity itself the object of inquiry. Men's studies take masculinity as problematic and seek to explore men's experience as men. (Kimmel, 1986, p 519)
In such work as has been written up since the 1970s, four main traditions for conceptualizing masculinity have emerged. One, emerging largely from young male academics worried about 'the hazards of being male', has turned to a rather traditional analysis of the 'male role'. In effect, as we shall see, this does little more than provide yet another laundry list of stereotypes similar to the ones we have produced earlier. It is largely outmoded. The second tradition, emerging mainly from within feminism but incorporated by some 'male feminists', has turned to an analysis of masculinity as a power relation. This also has limitations in that it is often overgeneralized and essentialist. A third tradition examines the problem of gender socialization and focuses upon the processes of acquiring gender. It harbours much theoretical diversity ranging from behaviourism to psychodynamic theory. A fourth perspective, which is currently emerging, is one which focuses on the production and reproduction of 'masculinities' in specific historical contexts. For want of a better phrase I will call this social constructionism. In what follows I briefly outline and comment upon each in turn.

The 'male role'

Role theory became very influential in North American sociology during the middle decades of this century. Focusing upon cultural patterns of normative expectations (that is, the social expectations of how people should and would behave), it attempted primarily to map out how societies 'hang together' through the routinization and internalization of norms. In the writings of the American sociologist, Talcott Parsons, for example, 'sex roles' were seen as being either 'expressive' or 'instrumental', as being internalized by young children, and as creating a neat division of labour between men (instrumental) and women (expressive) in an orderly society. At their worst, such roles may lead to conflicts and strain where men and women cannot live up to the expectations placed upon them.

Although it is far from new, the language of the 'male role' became very popular during the 1970s. For an interesting history of its use you could look at Caughlan, Connell and Lee's 'Towards a new sociology of masculinity' (1985), but here I would like to provide one illustration of how the male sex role was characterized in a very popular US text of the later 1970s, David and Brannon's The Forty-Nine Per Cent Majority: The Male Sex Role. The great strength of their analysis – and many similar ones – is that they move away from the biology of sex and turn to a cultural concern with gender. At the outset they quote approvingly from Margaret Mead's cross-cultural study of gender. She writes:

Many, if not all, of the personality traits which we have called masculine or feminine are as lightly linked to sex as the clothing, the manners, and the form of head-dress that a society at a given period assigns to either sex. The evidence is overwhelmingly in favour of social conditioning. (Mead, 1935)

From this, David and Brannon go on to suggest four themes which seem to comprise the core requirements of the contemporary male role in the USA:

1. No Sissy Stuff: the stigma of all stereotyped feminine characteristics and qualities, including openness and vulnerability.
2. The Big Wheel: success, status and the need to be looked up to.
4. Give 'Em Hell: the aura of aggression, violence and daring. (David and Brannon, 1976, p. 12)

We have encountered all this before. It is another shopping list of stereotypes. What counts in this analysis, however, is the discrepancy between role expectations and actual role behaviour. Few men can live up to such demands, and therein lies the 'problem of masculinity.' As David and Brannon say,

While this description summarizes the total male role in pure form, it is obviously unrealistic and unbelievable. Real people do not and cannot fulfill the idealized...
cultural prescription in every respect and are not expected to. Some men are obsessed with the male role and some think of it very seldom, but very few men are totally unaffected by it. (David and Brannon, 1976, p 36)

Q

1 How valuable a description of the male role is David and Brannon's four-theme characterization? In particular, consider whether both working-class and middle-class men in Britain today generally follow such expectations.

2 Consider some of the principal objections you would make of role theory, and in particular the idea that 'masculinity' can be seen as a 'male role'.

In my view, 'role theory' is seriously flawed in too many ways to be more than just a starting point in understanding masculinity. For example, it is, arguably,

(a) too simple it tends to overstate how men are different from women and to provide an oversimplified view into which men won't fit

(b) too deterministic it suggests men get 'trapped' in such roles, that they can do little about them, in practice, many men may reject the role

(c) too descriptive it is in many ways simply a more systematic reworking of the lists with which we started this section, and it fails to explain anything

(d) too static, and cannot easily account for the fact that male roles change. It needs an historical analysis, too

(e) too uniform and consensual surely there is not just one male role?

(f) too concerned with normative expectations to the neglect of the wider economic and domestic power issues

Some 'male role theorists' do try to circumvent some of these problems. Joseph Pleck, for instance, in his influential The Myth of Masculinity (1981), has suggested the importance of looking at historical variations in male roles and the inconsistencies and conflicts that can be generated. Thus, for instance, he distinguishes between a traditional male role which is 'validated ultimately by individual physical strength and aggression', where men are not expected to be 'emotionally sensitive to others or emotionally expressive', and a modern male role 'validated by economic achievement and organizational or bureaucratic power', but where 'the capacity for emotional sensitivity and self-expression in romantic relationships with women' (but not men) is also valued (see Pleck, 1981, p 140). Others may take this further and suggest that since the recent rise of the women's movement another role, 'the new man role', has emerged. Here is the man who may raise the child, is intimate and emotional, who refuses power, achievement and authority! For some, he is the 'wump'. For others he is running away from his earlier responsibilities! (See Ehrenreich, 1993, for a commentary on this.)

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There have been attempts, then, to resolve some of the problems of role theory, by adding historical dimensions and stressing diversity. Still, there remain serious flaws with role theory. Perhaps a feminist analysis of power can provide a better basis for considering masculinity.

**Masculinity as power and domination**

Although such conceptions of the male role do have the advantage of stressing how gender is social, they clearly do not carry analysis much further than our earlier checklists. Perhaps the key objection is that they fail to develop what most feminists would regard as being central: that masculinity is constructed in opposition to femininity, and that this is crucially a power relation. Men wield power over women, they can, and often do, exploit, dominate, subordinate, and oppress women. One French writer on masculinity has argued that masculinity involves competition for power between men.

Relations between men centre around the struggle for power, whether individually or in a group, they are permanent rivals in the appropriation of women, wealth and glory. It does not generally occur to a man that he can establish non-competitive relationships, he constantly needs to measure and place himself on a hierarchical ladder (Reynaud, 1983, p. 96).

For Reynaud, the whole of history may be seen as 'a power struggle between men' (Reynaud, 1983, p. 105). The search for power — vanity — governs man’s existence and ‘drives him to engage in a perpetual battle, expressed in a series of victories and defeats’ (p. 101). Hierarchy and competition help to maintain both the massive conflicts and inequalities of class, race, nation and religion and the smaller conflicts of a local gang, a trade union or a boardroom discussion.

Understanding the prevalence and forms of male power has largely been the concern of radical feminist theory. (Not all feminist positions subscribe to this view.) Andrea Dworkin, for example, is a leading North American feminist who has suggested the centrality of male power and outlined its seven key dimensions. An extract from her writing follows below. You should read it carefully with a view to suggesting some problems you may find within it.
This is just one of many similar statements about the all-embracing and universal
ture of male power over women – physically, linguistically, economically,
sexually. You have encountered examples of this before in this unit through the
sexual division of labour in which women become materially dependent upon men,
through the home as a prison which restricts women’s potentials, through sexuality
and violence, notably in rape and wife-battering as forms of control. In this power
analysis, the prime concern is to understand how structures evolve and maintain
themselves continually to give men all this power and to keep women subordinate.
In this view, ‘roles’ are merely surface manifestations of deep underlying structures.

So what problems do you find with the ‘power’ model? The following seem
important to me:

(a) Essentialism: the categories used are often rendered as universals (‘men’
dominate ‘women’) and are insufficiently sensitive to nuances and variations of
class, age, ethnicity, background, etc. (see Connell, 1985)

(b) There is a tendency towards biologism, or a cultural rigidity, which makes any
kind of change seem very difficult. If all men have always had all this power, is
there any way in which it can be removed from them?

Power theorists tend to focus on wide structural and historical sources of women’s
subordination, with the economy and sexuality usually seen as the prime sites of
male dominance. We know, however, from the research of historians and
anthropologists that the power of men over women is not a uniform, universal or
unique form. There are significant variations in the extent and structure of power
relations between the genders in different societies. (For an excellent review of this
in 150 societies, see Sanday, 1981.)

Furthermore, important as this analysis of power is, there are other theories which
try to deal with the more immediate, or proximate, sources of gender. These are the
socialization or gender acquisition theories. They deal with how a biological male is
transformed into a little boy and later into a man.

**Gender acquisition**

There is a huge amount of research and theorizing on gender development, but three
broad traditions can be briefly distinguished (for fuller reviews see Franklin, 1984,

**Social learning theories** suggest that differences in gender behaviour are learnt, in
the same way as all behaviours, through a mixture of rewards, reinforcements and
punishments. From its earliest day the baby boy is rewarded for behaving in ‘boys’
ways and punished for being ‘girl-like’. Often this theory suggests how boys come to
model themselves upon or imitate the behaviour of other men and boys, as this will
be most highly praised and rewarded. The boy, in effect, thinks ‘I want rewards. I
am rewarded for doing boy things, therefore I want to be a boy’. It is a very widely
held theory, and a very simple one, although the literature on it is actually very
complex.

**Cognitive theories** suggest that differences in gender emerge through a
categorization process in which boys come to place themselves in a ‘masculine’
category and proceed to organize their experiences around it. Here the boy in effect
says ‘I am a boy, therefore I want to do boy things’. Some of these theories suggest
that there may be pre-formed stages at which such identifications can take place,
while others suggest that the identities emerge out of social contexts (Kohlberg is a
major proponent of this view).
Psychodynamic theories suggest that differences in gender emerge out of emotional struggles between the infant and its caretakers in the earliest years of life. Most classically, a boy’s emotional structure emerges from the conflict between the love of his mother and the fear of his father which, if resolved successfully, will eventually lead the boy to identify strongly with his father and hence with masculinity. Psychodynamic theorists disagree with each other over the nature of this conflict and its timing, but it is basic to this theory that gender is structured (unconsciously) into a deep emotional form in early childhood.

Each of these theories has many variants, is very widely held and has spawned a massive research and analytic literature. In general, the virtues of one theory are the weaknesses of the other, and each theory has its own emphasis: behaviour, cognition or emotion. It is way beyond the scope of this unit to review all this material, if necessity I am being selective and will focus on one version of Freudian theory. My concern will be with a very influential book by Nancy Chodorow. The Reproduction of Mothering (1978), which uses a particular school of Freudian theory, known as ‘object relations’ and identified with Winnicott and Klein, in order to investigate the ways in which little girls grow up to become mothers. She suggests there is a cycle at work in which ‘mothering’ is handed on from generation to generation with an accompanying perpetuation of the traditional patriarchal gender divisions. She is much less concerned with boys and masculinity than with girls and mothering, but I would like to suggest the relevance of her thesis to boys.

Chodorow starts her analysis by criticizing some of the most popular explanations of gender differences—those which stress biology, social learning and role learning. Although such theories may be partially correct, they all fail to deal adequately with the way in which gender differences are organized into the deep psychic structuring of individuals. Masculinity and femininity are rooted in strong emotional structures established very early in life and are very hard to transform. Men in Anglo-Saxon culture tend, on the whole, to become inexpressive and emotionally restricted. They tend to become more ‘external’, more independent, more autonomous, more work- and achievement-oriented. Put negatively, they tend to become ‘emotional cripples’, able to function in the public worlds of sport and work, but lacking the connectedness to relate to loved ones. By contrast, girls tend to develop stronger attachments and reproduce this in ‘mothering’. Of course, these are generalizations, and they are not that dissimilar to Talcott Parsons’s distinctions between expressive and instrumental roles mentioned above, with which serious problems have been noted.
Chodorow argues that in order to understand the development of these strong emotional structures, we have to go back to the earliest moments of life and the intense connections between child and mother in which both baby boy and baby girl are overwhelmingly dependent upon the mother. (Note: this is true of this culture; it is by no means true of all.) For the baby, every departure of the mother comes to feel like abandonment, and one of life’s central dilemmas—of attachment versus autonomy—is thereby established. From the beginning of life there is a process of forming strong attachments and dependencies with the mother, and an accompanying sense of anxiety and fear when she is absent. There is a massive identification of both boy and girl with the ‘mother’—the primary caregiver who suckles, shelters and comforts the baby. The image of the mother is incorporated and internalized by the child.

So far, the description holds for both boys and girls. The task ahead is for the infant to gain a sense of its own separateness and boundaries. Bit by bit, it has to break away from the strong identification with the carer, to test its competence against the outside world. Slowly, a separate autonomous self emerges, although it will harbor throughout life an unconscious anxiety around the ‘attachment and autonomy dilemma.’ Too much attachment (the child can’t break away; the mother won’t let it break away) or too much autonomy (the child feels rejected; the mother abandons the child) provide a delicate ambivalence in the structuring of the child’s psyche.

At this stage, however, Chodorow highlights the gender difference in resolving such dilemmas. For although both the baby girl and baby boy are primarily attached to the mother, the girl remains attached while the boy breaks away. The little girl does not outgrow her dependency; she does not develop a strong sense of separateness and boundaries, and this leads her ultimately to identify with the needs of others more than boys. In later life this asserts itself as the need for mothering. ‘The basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world, the basic masculine sense of self is separate’ (Chodorow, 1978, p. 169).

Now Chodorow does not deal with boys’ development in much detail, but others such as Crab (1987) have suggested what might happen. Basically, while the little girl stays in close identification with the mother and ultimately attains a less separate, more connected sense of identity, the little boy is pushed into a sharper, stronger and earlier separation. This rupture may be experienced as an abandonment and generate life-long anxieties around rejection. For many boys, so the story goes, this leads to a turning to the outer world (especially of hitherto relatively insignificant fathers) and the establishment of a separate, autonomous identity—one fearful of connecting in case of abandonment, and often open to rage against the long-lost love object, the mother. In one swoop male autonomy, male inexpressiveness and male hostility towards women is explained!

Clearly there are problems with such a theory. Some have stressed that the evidence on which the theory is based is wholly inadequate; it depends on a few clinical cases for generalizations. Feminist critics have also accused the theory of ‘blaming the victim’, of ultimately blaming mothers for the reproduction of male power in their sons (see Trebicott, 1984). Many critics also see the theory as presenting a model of development that is too rigid, too unchangeable and too fixed. The psychic structuring of girls for motherhood and boys for powerful, affectionless autonomy is so tight that it cannot be readily changed. This explanation of the reproduction of gender relations can be seen as deeply pessimistic, allowing little scope for transformation. This is not in fact Chodorow’s view at all, however. As she says:

“Psychoanalysis does show that we are formed in crucial ways by the time we are five—but it allows for change either from life experiences or through the analytic process itself. In fact, psychoanalysis was developed not only to explain our early psychic formation but to show us how to overcome its limitations. Psychoanalysis, moreover, argues against a unilateral model of social determination, and for the variation and creativity in what people make of their early childhood experiences and their later experiences.” (Chodorow, 1978, pp. 216–17).
Here Chodorow hints that although gender identity is established in early lives, with boys being relatively autonomous and unemotional, it is only a provisional structure and one that is open to change in later life. But for her psychoanalysis seems the solution to adult change, and this, to me, seems a time-consuming, expensive and limiting basis for change in life! We need an alternative that can build on her insights but not be restricted by them.

**The social construction of masculinities: an emerging perspective**

So far three ways of approaching masculinity have been briefly examined. Each is partial, addresses different questions and has inbuilt limitations. Role theory looks at cultural expectations surrounding men, power theory examines the structural domination of women by men, and socialization theory looks at the ways in which a sense of masculinity is learnt. At this stage you may like to reflect on the relative merits of each. I will make two general comments:

The first is that these approaches may be complementary, since each deals with a different side of the problem. They are not incompatible or mutually exclusive — we need to know about the nature of roles, how they are structured into power relations, and how they are acquired. We may want to give a priority to one question, but all three are surely relevant.

A second point is that each of these approaches can lapse into a crude essentialism if care is not taken. Roles, power and identities can become unified essences rather than historically changing forms. Thus, for example, although power may characterize the relationship between men and women across much of time and space, the precise nature of that power is always problematic and needs to be examined carefully. It is with just such specificity that some newer theories are concerned; they do not reject the prior approaches but aim to build on them.

These theories suggest that gender emerges over the entire life-cycle through a series of ever-changing encounters in which meaning is built up, modified and transformed. In this argument gender is not something fixed at any time, but is a process constantly open to historical changes in the wider world, local changes in situations and biographical shifts over the life-cycle.

However valuable Chodorow’s theory may be, for example, it does need supplementing with an understanding of both wider influences on the child, such as the peer group, the school and the workplace, and transformations that occur over the life-cycle. There is, for instance, a considerable body of research which suggests that childhood worlds are highly segregated by gender, and that this segregation works to structure gender identity. Likewise, there is research on the male life-cycle which suggests that as men become older they often change into more emotionally responsive and less powerfully autonomous people than was evidenced in their youth and childhood. Psychoanalytic theory is notoriously weak at looking at such factors, and a wider approach is needed. Andrew Tolson, for example, in what is regarded as the major English study of masculinity, *The Limits of Masculinity* (1977), has suggested that in addition to early family experiences there are three major sites for boys and men in which gender is formed and structured: the peer group, the school and the workplace. He is particularly keen to emphasize the importance of the workplace in reinforcing male identity. Just as adult female lives often become swamped by thinking about ‘their children’, so male lives become overwhelmed by ‘their work’ — seeking success in it, dealing with boredom from it, finding alternatives to it, being humiliated by lack of it. In many ways this concern with work as a key to male identity simply reflects the earlier experiences of childhood — the quest for power, autonomy and the concomitant anxiety about failure and rejection.

The emerging ‘constructionist’ view merges many prior theoretical traditions and deals with specifics studying and trying to explain how some working-class black boys assemble ‘masculinities’ in their local disco, how some middle-class public school boys assemble ‘masculinities’ in their dormitories, how some men in prisons may engage in homosexual acts to establish their male power, how some socialist men assemble new forms of ‘masculinity’ later in life through unemployment, how
some small capitalists assemble their 'masculinities' through relations with workers, wives, secretaries, and so on. Although the bigger frameworks – of roles, power and socialization – are necessary and valuable, constructionism builds on this with specifics, with details of how conceptions of 'being male' are actually forged by particular people in real situations through the life-cycle.

2.3 Masculinity in action

So far in this section we have looked at some contemporary stereotypes of masculinities, and at some of the theories that have evolved to help think about masculinity. In this sub-section – informed loosely by the constructionist position – I want to look briefly at a few studies of what men and boys actually say and do.

First, if possible, you should watch Television programme 4, in which boys aged 11–13 and 17–18 present their contemporary ideas about boys' gender role. These programmes, made in 1987 in the East Midlands, hint at some changes occurring in what boys say and do when compared to early research. You should compare this with the following brief account of a famous and early study of boys and their socialization in the USA by Ruth Hartley (1959). In this study, she identified the importance of the peer group for boys.

For a boy, contact with and acceptance by his peers is tremendously important because he has to look to them to fill in the gaps in his information about his role as a male and he has to depend on them to give him practice in it. Unfortunately, both the information and the practice he gets are distorted. Since his peers have no better sources of information than he has, all they can do is to pool the impressions and anxieties that derived from their earlier training. Thus the picture they draw is at once oversimplified and overemphasised. It is a picture drawn in black and white, with little or no modulation, and it is incomplete, including only a few of the many elements that go to make up the mature male role. Thus, we find overemphasis on physical strength and athletic skills, with almost a complete omission of tender feelings or acceptance of responsibility towards those who are weaker.

If Chodorow is correct about the earliest stages of male development, then Hartley finds social forces at work in later childhood which lead to similar traits. But she does not stay at an abstract level: instead she asked boys of 8–11 what they thought adults expected of them, and found that:

They believe grown-ups expect them to be noisy, to get dirty, to mess up the house, to be naughty, to be 'outside' more than girls are, not to be cry babies, not to be 'softies', not to be 'behind' like girls are, and to get into trouble more than girls do. Moreover, boys are not allowed to do the kind of things that girls usually do, but girls may do the kind of things that boys do.

She also asked them what they saw as their future as men and found that:

they need to be strong, they have to be ready to make decisions, they must be able to protect women and children in emergencies, they have to have more manual strength than women, they should know how to carry heavy things, they are the ones to do the hard labour, the rough work, the dirty work and the unpleasant work, they must be able to fix things, they must get money to support their families, they need a 'good business head'. In addition to being the adventurers and protectors, the burden bearers, and the labourers, they also need to know how to take good care of children, how to get along with their wives, and how to teach their children right from wrong.

We are also told that, in contrast to women, men are usually in charge of things, they work very hard and they get tired a lot, they mostly do things for other people, they are supposed to be bolder and more restless, and have more courage than women. Like boys, they, too, mess up the house.

On the positive side, men mostly do what they want to do and are very important. In the family, they are the boss, they have authority in relation to the disposal of monies, and they get first choice in the use of the most comfortable chair in the house and the daily paper. They seem to get mad a lot, but are able to make children feel good, they laugh and make jokes more than women do. Compared with mothers, fathers are more fun to be with, they are exciting to have around, they have the best ideas (Hartley, in David and Brannon, 1976, p. 237–9)
This is quite a listing! But it does not come from the theoretical mind of a social scientist, it comes directly from the mouths of 8–11-year-olds. Of course, this is an old study and it may be out of date, but it does suggest cultural expectations which structure masculinity.

A note on sexuality

Gender segregation, whilst not total, is a pervasive feature of children’s lives. Playgrounds, classrooms, clubs and street play are all conspicuous for their spatial divisions into ‘boy worlds’ and ‘girl worlds’. Here, in these segregated worlds, further divisions in gender identity are fashioned, particularly around sexuality. Gagnon and Simon (1973) suggest two strands of different sexuality that emerge in ‘boy worlds’ and ‘girl worlds’ for boys, a commitment to sexual acts precedes any concern with more emotional and intimate concerns, while for girls the sequence is reversed. Already in primary schools clear patterns that prefigure adult relations are emerging.

Several research studies have shown, for instance, that boy worlds, even as early as primary and junior schools, become increasingly ‘dirty’, both literally and metaphorically. Thus the boy world is a tumble world of sports, bonding together in rough play, of testing limits and breaking rules (see Fine, 1986) But it is also a world characterised by increasingly dirty talk and dirty imagery of reading pornography, emerging masturbation, and the growth of what two North American researchers refer to as ‘fag talk’ – homophobic labels which are used as terms of insult for boys who are marginal to the group (Thorne and Lura, 1986).

Julian Wood has described emerging sexuality among adolescent boys in an English ‘sin bin’ (a small unit for disruptives in a London co-educational secondary school). He finds that not only is there a general highly charged ‘sexy’ atmosphere – a point that few commentators on school life seem to have noticed before – but that there is also a massive amount of sexism among the boys (though it was strongly resisted by the girls). Among many things he found were:

(a) a constant ‘looking’ at girls’ and women’s bodies,
(b) the use of slang, much of which catalogues women in types (‘tasty birds’ and ‘night whores’) and parts of their bodies (‘arse’, ‘legs’, ‘tits’),
(c) ‘the sequence’ by which, in initiating sexual contact, the boys operate a sequence from the least ‘sensuous’ regions of the body to the most ‘sensuous’,
(d) rape plans (not practice) as a form of ‘daring’ and ‘bundles’ (piling on top of each other) leading to ‘touching up’
Other researchers of English schools have not found such aggressive and assertive sexual themes but instead a much greater insecurity and vulnerability among boys (Wolpe, forthcoming). Nevertheless, sexual themes seem to be very important in the making of ‘boy worlds’, and they seem to prefigure the centrality given to sexuality by many men in adult life. Indeed, some feminist commentators in particular see male sexuality not only as the key to women’s subordination but also as the key to male identity (see Coveney, 1984, Person, 1980, Metcalf and Humphnes, 1985).

We need not reduce this to an argument about male sex drives and testosterone, for many of the qualities of male sexuality have an affinity to what is meant more generally by masculinity in this culture. Men ‘achieve’ at work — and at sex, they are powerful — and potent, they are autonomous — and objectifying, they are more ‘driven’. Whereas male gender identity and sexuality need not necessarily be linked, in this culture most men equate masculinity with sexuality. From very early ages, boys come to learn that ‘being a man’ is closely linked to being sexual. Ethel Person has put this well:

> in this culture, genital sexual activity is a prominent feature in the maintenance of masculine gender, while it is a variable feature in feminine gender. Thus an impotent man always feels that his masculinity, and not just his sexuality, is threatened. In men gender appears to lean on sexuality (Person, 1980, p. 619).

With this possible connection in mind, I now want to turn from ‘masculinity’ to a closely related phenomenon — homosexuality.
3 HOMOPHOBIA, HOMOSEXUALITY AND GAY YOUTH

In looking at masculinity in contemporary Britain, two contrasting but complementary themes seem to reappear. One highlights the ways in which men tend to be more assertive, achievement-oriented and autonomous, while the other suggests a degree of emotional restrictiveness. Many commentators have remarked on the latter essential weakness of men—\textit{as being 'inexpressive', 'emotionally constipated'—as a general 'injunction against being warm, open, tender, emotional and vulnerable'} (Farrell, 1974, p. 49). This is certainly not true of all men, and some men change across the life-cycle; indeed, it is possible that as men grow older, they become less emotionally restrictive. But in general, these traits are very common among men.

These two traits hang together: being autonomous and powerful makes men avoid intimacy and vulnerability. Another way of summarizing much of the above is to say that masculinity in this culture is built out of a rejection of anything 'feminine'. We have encountered this view at several points previously, and so you should be able to see why the study of homosexuality is important in the study of masculinity. One writer has even gone so far as to see 'masculinity as the avoidance of homosexuality.' Paul Hoch writes:

From a very early age little boys are carefully watched for any and all symptoms of effeminacy. They must play with guns, not dolls, must excel above all in sports, not ballet (even musical instruments are suspect), must play football, not skipping, enjoy fighting, not cooking. They must not be too affectionate ('boys don't kiss') and not too emotional ('boys don't cry'). Boys do not hug one another, they shake hands. (They may roughly slap each other on the back, or happily punch each other in the arm. Only after a goal has been scored may teammates slap the scorer on the bum to do so at any other time would be a 'violation' of his young manhood, calling for an immediate physical fight.) For a young boy perhaps the worst charge his friends can hurl at him is he is a 'girl', almost equally dreaded is that he has a girl as a friend. Boys from five to eleven must not even associate with girls but must energetically pursue them thereafter. Before he even knows the meaning of the words, he understands that he may not do anything to invite labels like 'cissy', 'fag', 'queer', 'nur'd', 'poof', 'bent', 'effete', 'degenerate', 'effeminate'. This list is endless—and the requirements exacting. Men stand up straight, queers go limp. Men walk firmly, poofs just prance about. Men are tough, fags and bleeding heart liberals are soft. Men are cool—particulary under fire—which causes become hysterical. Men get married, homos do not. (The number of men who have married just to prove they were 'normal' must be truly staggering.) The whole social conditioning for masculinity in our society can thus be seen as a kind of aversion therapy against homosexuality. Indeed the male role today is often defined, not so much by its positive attributes as by its non-effectiveness a 'real man' is one who is least open to the charge of homosexuality (Hoch, 1979, pp. 79–80).

Homosexuality, then, will be the focus of this section. By the end of it, you should be able to understand

(a) How masculinity is linked to the fear of homosexuality (or 'homophobia')

(b) The problems that young men face when they think they are gay

3.1 Homosexuality

First, some general comments on homosexuality. Although same-sex erotic experiences exist across cultures and throughout history with varying degrees of acceptability and frequency, it was not until the nineteenth century in Europe and America that homosexuality was invented as an object of scientific investigation. The term itself was introduced by a sympathetic Hungarian doctor, Benkert, in 1869 amidst a flurry of attempts at classifying sexuality (Ulrich's term 'Uranians', indicating a kind of third sex was popular, as was the concept of 'invert'). From this time until the 1970s, the dominant mode of thinking about homosexuality was clinical—it was primarily viewed through a medical framework as a pathology; its causes were located in biological degeneracy or family pathology, and treatments ranging from castration to psychoanalysis were advocated. Although such an approach continues, since 1973 the American Psychiatric Association has officially
removed homosexuality from its clinical listing of pathologies, seeing it as non-
pathological in itself. Ironically, some of the leading clinicians, and notably Freud,
had never viewed it as a pathology. In 1935 Freud could write in a famous letter to
a mother that ‘whilst homosexuality is assuredly no advantage, it is nothing to be
classified as an illness, we consider it to be a variation of the sexual development’

While the nineteenth century saw the ascendancy of the clinical model of
homosexuality, it also saw the growth of writing and campaigning which challenged
the orthodox heterosexual assumptions. Thus Magnus Hirschfeld established the
Scientific Humanitarian Committee and the Institute for Sexual Science in Germany
in 1897 and campaigned through scientific research for the acceptance of
homosexuality up until the 1930s, when the Nazi movement stopped such advocacy
and started a policy of extermination instead. Others, such as Edward Carpenter in
England and André Gide in France, pursued a more literary defence. It was not,
however, until the period after the Second World War that a substantial body of
published research suggested the ubiquity and normality of homosexual experience.
Pivotal to this enterprise was the publication of the Kinsey Report in 1948 and 1953,
which contained the findings of interviews with well over 12,000 American men and
women. Among the men, Kinsey found that 37 per cent had experienced some post-
adolescent homosexual orgasm and 4 per cent had a preponderance of such
experience, among the women, the figures were around 13 per cent and 3 per cent
respectively. When Kinsey added that such responses were to be found among all
social groups and in all walks of life, he created a social bombshell. When he
concluded that homosexual behaviour was neither unnatural nor neurasthenic in itself but
an ‘inherent physiological capacity’, he established an outrageous view that was later
to be turned into something of an orthodoxy in the research of others like Hooker in
America and Schofield in England.

Throughout this period, however, homosexuality was strongly condemned by law in
most European countries and in all American states. It was not until the 1960s, and
a decade or so after proposals for change in the British Wolfenden report and the
American New Model Code, that the legal situation changed. Despite the progressive
growth of organized groups during the 1960s, it is the New York Stonewall Riots of
1969 which are generally taken to symbolize the birth of the modern international
‘Gay Movement’ (Weeks, 1977; D’Emilio, 1983). The scientifically imposed term
‘homosexual’ was shifted to the self-created term ‘gay’, medical rhetoric was
converted to political language, organizations for gays became widespread in most
large cities, and millions of gay men and women started to ‘come out’ and positively
identify with the term ‘gay’. The 1970s therefore demonstrated a real change in gay
experiences — a change well documented in Dennis Altman’s The Homosexual-
ization of America and the Americanization of the Homosexual (1982).

All of this has left its impact upon research. Although there are still those who study
‘causes and cures’, it is noticeable that social scientists have largely left this
question behind and turned to new areas. Thus, the history of homosexuality has
started to be unearthed in many the same ways as women’s history has been
explored by feminist social scientists. This has meant not just the rediscovery of
documents of the recent past — as in Katz’s Gay American History (1976) — but
also excavations into the more distant past such as the Middle Ages (Boswell, 1980)
and the Renaissance (Faderman, 1981). Far from being universally condemned,
homosexual experiences have been reacted to in very different ways throughout
history and, indeed, have had quite distinct meanings in various places and time
periods.

The most significant change brought about by such research has been the
recognition of the diversity of homosexual experience. The noun ‘homosexual’ has
been replaced by the term ‘homosexualities’ to account for such diversity as is
found behind the label ‘heterosexual’ — there are many ways of becoming gay, and
there are many ways of being gay. Among these concerns are such features as the
different age structures (from being a ‘gay child’ to being ‘gay and gray’), the
different relationships (from gay couples and gay parents to elaborate friendship
networks), the different institutions (from gay 'pick-up' places to gay counselling), and the different life-cycles that surround gayness, notably the problems of 'coming out' and choosing a particular lifestyle (Levine, 1979). These studies, perhaps more than any others, have indicated the full range of humanity behind the straitjacketing label of homosexuality. My own research has been influenced by these developments, and has contributed to the change in perspectives on the study of homosexuality which they involve.

1 Attempt your own brief definition of homosexuality, in one sentence.
2 Write down your reaction to the general idea of homosexuality. Is it mainly negative, positive or mixed? Why do you think you have these reactions?

3.2 The heterosexual assumption and the homosexual taboo

Perhaps the single most important issue you need to understand in looking at homosexuality in this culture is that it is profoundly shaped through two contexts.

1. The heterosexual assumption unless there are very good reasons for thinking otherwise, everybody in this culture will be presumed to be heterosexual.

2. The homosexual taboo unless there are very good reasons for thinking otherwise, homosexuality will initially be located in a network of devaluation, hostility, fear, dread – of what I have previously called 'sexual stigma'.

It is true that during the 1970s and 1980s there have been some significant shifts in attitudes, but it is probably the case that many people who encounter homosexuality would still say that heterosexuality is the norm and, at the very least, that there is something 'a little odd' about homosexuality. Indeed, with the arrival of AIDS and its public identification with homosexuality there may be a return towards more hostile attitudes.

Both the heterosexual assumption and the homosexual taboo have been brought into political consciousness, and have been challenged by social movements committed to either a new sexual liberalism or a more radical assertion of ‘gay rights’. For instance, in the autumn of 1985, the now abolished Greater London Council produced A London Charter for Gay and Lesbian Rights in which they clearly define two terms that challenge the orthodoxy: heterosexism and homophobia.

1. The term 'heterosexism' will be unfamiliar to many, because it's fairly new. It has been coined, just as ‘racism’ and ‘sexism’ were coined, to describe an attitude of mind that categorises and then unjustly dismisses as inferior a whole group of fellow citizens. In the case of heterosexism, the oppression appears to assume that no one can naturally be homosexual but must be a failed or corrupted heterosexual.

It is institutionalized in our laws, media, religions, and language, and in all too many family units. Attempts to enforce heterosexuality are as much a violation of human rights as racism and sexism and must be challenged with equal determination.

2. Homophobia is the fear of and resulting contempt for homosexuals. For many people, this involves the fear of being homosexual themselves, or of being thought by others to be. For some individuals their heterosexism is a result of this fear — though for others it can be the result simply of ignorance and conditioning (GLC, 1988).

It is this concept of homophobia that I want to consider briefly in the next part of this unit.
A gay rights march in London, 2 May 1987

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**Homophobia**

The term ‘homophobia’ was coined in the early 1970s by an American psychiatrist George Weinberg (in his book *Society and the Healthy Homosexual*), who defined it as ‘the dread of being in close quarters with homosexuals’ (Weinberg, 1973, p. 4).

Below is a very simple homophobia scale which Weinberg introduces in his book. You may like to try it. I think you’ll agree that it’s fairly obvious which items indicate ‘homophobia’, so on a scale of 1–9 you could rank yourself. I actually think this is a very naive and indeed bad measurement device, but it is beyond the scope of this unit to consider the methodological difficulties involved in scaling attitudes. There is a huge critical literature on this. You might, however, like to ponder what you think is wrong with the scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Homosexuals should be locked up to protect society</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>It would be upsetting for me to find out I was alone with a homosexual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Homosexuals should be allowed to hold government positions</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I would not want to be a member of an organization which had any homosexuals in its membership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I find the thought of homosexual acts disgusting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>If laws against homosexuality were eliminated, the proportion of homosexuals in the population would probably remain about the same</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>A homosexual could be a good President of the United States</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I would be afraid for a child of mine to have a teacher who was homosexual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>If a homosexual sat next to me on the bus I would get nervous</td>
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A number of researchers (reviewed in Morn and Garfinkle, 1978, and De Cecco, 1984) have used scales such as Weinberg’s and suggested that people intolerant of homosexuals are likely to be more authoritarian, more dogmatic, more cognitively rigid, more intolerant of ambiguity, more status conscious, more sexually rigid, more guilty and negative about their sexual impulses, and less accepting of others in general (*Morn and Garfinkle*, p. 32).

Such people are less likely to have had personal contact with lesbians or gay men are less likely to report having engaged in homosexual behaviours are more likely to perceive their peers as manifesting negative attitudes are more likely to live in areas where negative attitudes are the norm are more likely to be religious, to attend church frequently, and to subscribe to a conservative religious ideology.
are more likely to express traditional, restrictive attitudes about sex roles
are less permissive sexually or manifest more guilt or negativity about sexuality
are more likely to manifest high levels of authoritarianism and related characteristics
heterosexuals tend to have more negative attitudes towards homosexuals of their own sex (Harek, in De Cecco, 1984, pp 6–7)

**Homophobia and masculinity**

Homophobia may be viewed as one of the major mechanisms through which patriarchal masculinities are maintained. We have seen in the previous sections that much masculinity has a 'driven-ness' and a 'restrictiveness' about it from the baby boy separating from his mother, through the young boy defending his status in his peer group, to the ambivalence structure created at work – masculinity seems so often to be built out of anxiety and defence. Its narrowness is bound by the fear of anything that could be seen as 'too feminine.' The key taunt, 'what are you, a fag, a queer, gay?', works to keep men in their place. Lehne, in an early classic article, writes

> Homophobia is used as a technique of social control by homophobic individuals to enforce the norms of male sex role behaviour. Homosexuality is not the real threat, the real threat is change in the male sex role. Men devalue homosexuality then use this norm of homophobia to control other men in their male roles. Homophobia is a threat used by homophobic individuals to enforce conformity in the male role and maintain social control. The taunt 'what are you, a fag?' is used in many ways to encourage certain types of male behaviour and to define the limits of acceptable masculinity

(Lehne, 1976, pp 77–8)

Note that Lehne uses the word 'homosexist' where earlier the GLC spoke of 'heterosexist', both are referring to the same thing – a hostility towards homosexuality.

Homosexuality often symbolizes two things that men fear: the possibility of being intimate with another man, and the possibility of experiencing the world as a woman might. To display emotion or empathy, to be affectionate and vulnerable, to cry or even to touch are signs of stepping outside the strictly confined role of male toughness; it is thus to become, however momentarily, effeminate. The male homosexual – whatever he may be in reality – has been used to symbolize this fear, the fear of 'the feminine'.

Of course, in reality, gay men are not necessarily linked to 'the feminine' at all. Indeed, during the 1970s there emerged a major pattern of being a gay man which involved a celebration of masculinity and even (though often with tongue in cheek) a 'macho role'. Male homosexuality can easily be another form of patriarchal masculinity (see Altman, 1982)

### 3.3 Growing up gay in Britain

We have seen in early sections both some of the processes at work in becoming a boy and some of the issues behind homophobia. In this section I now want to examine what is involved in some boys growing up gay in Britain. I will use the term 'gay' hereafter because, as we have seen earlier, this is the term preferred by gay men themselves, and I will be trying to capture this experience rather than that of the outside observer. Looking at several research studies conducted in England between 1979 and 1984 (Burbridge and Walters, 1981, Trenchard and Warren, 1984, Bye, 1984), I will attempt to capture some of the common experiences of a group of young people between 14 and 21 who generally seem to know they are gay quite early in life, who go through various pains and problems in their families, schools and workplaces because of the assumption that all boys are heterosexual and the sexual stigma attached to being gay, and yet who eventually come to terms with their gay desires. (A fuller discussion of all this may be found in Herdt, 1988.) It is virtually impossible to gauge the numbers of young men who feel they must be secretive to adults about their gay desires, but there are some who do now discuss the issues with researchers, teachers, parents and friends.
Before starting this section, make a short list of the main problems you would expect young gay men to face, then read this section of the unit and make a list of the issues raised. At the end of reading this section, ask yourself how far the two lists matched.

The central feature of being gay in Britain in the 1980s, as we have seen earlier, is the existence of both the heterosexuality assumption – unless there are very good reasons for thinking otherwise, everybody in our culture will be presumed to be heterosexual – and homophobia, which leads homosexuality to become enmeshed in a network of devaluation, hostility, fear, dread and even outright loathing.

The most obvious form of these assumptions is legislation. For men, if one of the partners is below 21, then homosexuality is a criminal offence. While it is true that prosecutions for such an offence have to be taken to the Director of Public Prosecutions, who can exercise substantial discretionary powers, and in practice many young people are not prosecuted (cf. Crane, 1982), it nevertheless remains the case that the law hangs ominously and omnipresently over the heads of many gay males. As the Howard League Working Party on Sex Law Reform recently put it:

Because an open admission of sexual activity is effectively an admission of crime, this inhibits youth from confiding in parents, or seeking information or counselling elsewhere, encourages youth organisations to ignore the needs of young homosexuals, or to pretend that they do not exist, and prevent ‘gay’ bars and clubs from welcoming the young who may be seen as ‘jail bait’. The result is that many feel unhappy, socially isolated, guilt ridden and perhaps tempted to look for sex contacts in lavatories or other unsuitable venues (Howard League, 1986, p 37).

The law, however, is only the tip of the iceberg. Much more important, because more pervasive, are the settings of English society through which youth live their lives: families, education, community, media and workplace. Each of these settings works on the experiences of young people to make even the possibility of ‘being gay’ seem untenable. I would like to focus on four major mechanisms at work in these settings, each of which will be strengthened by the 1988 Local Government Bill, which will make it an offence for local authorities to ‘promote homosexuality’. These are:

1. The ‘hidden curriculum’, which ‘transmits’ a message about the centrality of family life, clear gender roles and heterosexuality.
2. The absence of role models who are gay or lesbian.
3. The concrete presence of peer relations organized through and around heterosexuality.
4. The mechanisms of homophobia which serve, in the last resort, to coerce, control and ultimately punish those who step over the line.

There is no space here to develop this fully, but I will give some examples from one setting: the school. Homosexuality may be said to be kept out of schools in a structured way – that is, as a result of powerful values operating upon both teachers and pupils.

The hidden curriculum has been widely discussed in social science, but primarily as a mechanism for reproducing class relations in schools. However, the most cursory look at school curricula in England makes it clear that while standard gender relations are reproduced (Stanworth, 1983), issues around same-gender experience are typically excluded. English studies will ignore the homoerotic influences on Shakespeare or Wilde or Woolf, while historical studies will ignore the new ‘gay history’. It is not a total exclusion, but in one London study only 35 respondents (out of a total of 416) found that homosexuality was talked about at schools in ways they
found helpful. Sixty per cent said it was avoided completely, of the remaining 40 per cent, 80 said that they did not find the mention helpful (Trenchard and Warren, 1964, ch. 4). More recently, however, there have been attempts by more radical local authorities to introduce gay texts into the classroom, such as Susanne Boesche’s *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin*, a tale of a little girl living with her father and his male lover. Such attempts have caused much controversy, even a moral panic about the role and content of sex education, but they do suggest some potential changes in the treatment of gay sexuality.
The second mechanism concerns the absence of gay role models. A National Council for Civil Liberties survey conducted in 1975 of local education authorities did conclude that discrimination in employment against homosexuals was probably more evident in teaching than anywhere else (except perhaps the highest grades of the civil service) (Daly, 1983, p 45). It was not so much that teachers have their jobs terminated for simply being gay; it is rather that authorities objected to teachers being ‘known about’ or openly discussing the issue of being gay. Yet it is precisely the quality of ‘being out’ that is required in schools if gay teenagers are to have the heterosexual assumption at least punctured and, more practically, if they are to have access to adults who may help them discuss their gay feelings. Such role models are also absent in families (hence the debate about fostering), in the youth service (hence the debate about gay youth clubs) and in the media (hence the debate about gay-sponsored television programmes, etc.)

A third mechanism to ‘structure out’ homosexuality is less ideological and more concrete in every setting. The peer groups of which gay adolescents are members come to practise and embody ‘how youth behaves’. One of the key messages of this adolescent culture by the fourth and fifth forms of a school is that ‘one should start to go out with the opposite sex’. It is one of the key ways of validating one’s normality. As one 17-year-old said, ‘No-one knew about me, at first, but I soon got a reputation at school, not because I looked or acted queer but because I never boasted about this girl or that’ (Burbidge and Walters, 1981, p 51).

Such pressures to conform to the heterosexual assumption – of curriculum, of staff, of peers – may lead English gay youth to feel isolated and withdrawn. In the London survey (Trenchard and Warren, 1984), 26 per cent of those at school experienced this. Burbidge and Walters report:

Peter, a 19-year-old, said

‘Between the ages of 13 and 15 I closed myself off from the outside world. I would rarely go out and would never dare to go to places where other people of my own age would be. The only thing I knew was that homosexuality was bad’ (Burbidge and Walters, 1981, p 52).

But there is a fourth and final mechanism that comes into force if all else fails. This entails a direct homophobic response, through the harassment of gay youth by both teachers and ‘friends’. In the London survey, for example, about half of the respondents had been beaten up, teased, verbally abused or ostracized whilst at school.

Peter continues:

‘The biggest shock came when I went to a comprehensive school and discovered words like “queer”, “poul”, etc. etc., and realized that I was one of these “vile, disgusting perverts” and as far as I knew the only one. I was very often physically and mentally...’
bullied at school and several times narrowly escaped violent attacks by some of the ‘tough’ boys. Because of the abuse, I shut myself off from the outside, not only at school but at home as well. I began to question myself and wondered if I was ill or abnormal. The sex education talks at school never mentioned homosexuality and I assumed that it was so uncommon it wasn’t worth mentioning (Burbidge and Walters, 1981, p. 52).

As with each of the other mechanisms for ‘structuring out’ gayness, this sort of direct homophobic response occurs in every setting a young person encounters. From mockery and abuse to physical violence, from being rejected by parents to losing one’s job, from psychiatric treatment to imprisonment— all these remain distinct possibilities for those who dare to breach the heterosexual assumption.

Briefly consider your own ‘school’ experience

1. Did ‘homosexuality’ get mentioned at all?
2. If it was mentioned, was this a negative mention or a positive one?
3. Did you know any gays or lesbians when you were at school?
4. If so, what did you think of them?

Problems of gay youth

Given these contexts and mechanisms in which gay youth grow up, it is clear that their experiences, at least initially, are likely to be enmeshed in problems. I will now examine some of these problems as they appear in research accounts.

At the outset, a key theme to emerge in reading these accounts is the overwhelming sense that many young people know they have a preference for their own sex during their early teenage years or even earlier. This happens in spite of all the socialization they experience which directs them towards heterosexuality. Of the thirty-four accounts provided in the teenage survey (Burbidge and Walters, 1981), there are only seven who do not make comments like the following.

I realized when I was 10 or 11 that I was attracted to men but I couldn’t put a label on it at that time I finally put a label on it when I was 12 or 13 (Alan)

Well, I think I knew I was gay when I was a little boy, but I really knew when I was about 13 (Dermott)

I can remember my first feelings about another boy when I was six or seven in infant school (Peter)

Since about the first year in school I’ve had some suspicion that I was gay (Paul)

Never have I felt any heterosexual feelings towards women my first concrete ‘gay’ experience was when I was eight or nine (Olyn)

(quotes from Burbidge and Walters, 1981, pp. 7–15)

There are, of course, problems with such observations. There may be a ‘retrospective interpretation’, a reconstruction of the past to fit the present and future (cf. Plummer, 1981, pp. 67–72). There may be ‘maturational’, by which homosexual interest may be transformed a little later in life. And there may be sampling bias—people who respond to surveys of these kinds may constitute a selective experience. But all this notwithstanding, such accounts are presented so frequently that I am sure they are valid for a significant portion of homosexual experience. There are certainly many people who grow up in a heterosexual society feeling that they are ‘really’ gay.
Apart from the more obvious problems of direct harassment that confront many homosexuals, many more insidious, indirect problems may be generated. These include a negative self-image, secrecy and isolation, problems of access to like-minded people, and potential suicide.

**The problem of the negative self**

Gay youth have to grow up with all the negative imagery that surrounds homosexuality. The negative label slowly comes to be taken on and the full weight of hostile meanings can lead to major trauma.

I went through such hell. I thought I was going to have a breakdown. Gradually you attach the label gay to yourself because if you don’t you really crack up. I did it gradually after years of torment, but still hated myself for it. Accepting that it could be real was the hardest part of my life. I felt lonely. couldn’t turn to anyone through fear of what would happen to me. I don’t know any gays so how could I know that we are just ordinary people. I felt I could only be alone as I wasn’t straight but also I wasn’t the kind of gay my mates used to laugh and joke about. *(Mike, aged 19, quoted in Bye, 1984, pp 31–2)*

As Bye remarks

In every life history, I was able to discover references to a shared experience of how the young people had grown up viewing gay people. The commonly held view was that homosexuals were ‘perverts’ and people suffering from mental illness. Every respondent held a negative picture of homosexuals. *(Bye, 1984, p 30)*

**The problem of secrecy and isolation**

A second problem was secrecy. So central is this issue that two of the three research reports that I am quoting from here actually play with this theme in their titles. They are called *Breaking the Silence* (Burbidge and Walters, 1981) and *Something to Tell You* (Trenchard and Warren, 1984). Although young people have a strong sense of their gayness quite early, they initially feel that nobody must find out. Gideon (19) in Bye’s sample put this clearly:

Most of my pals and family just don’t ever find out about it. This means no one else can know for fear that it may get back home. I don’t want to be cut off from those I care about. *(Bye, 1984, p 49)*

This leads to what I have previously called the paradox of secrecy. For as long as stigma leads the experience of gay youth to be kept as a secret, so gay youth will remain invisible. Only once the secrecy is broken down can ‘gay youth’ become identifiable and bring about social changes that make homosexuality less stigmatized and more plausible. It is precisely such a process which seems to have been happening since the mid-1970s through the activities of the gay movements.

**The problem of access**

A third problem was access and availability. For many young people, schools, youth clubs and the workplace become key locales for finding boyfriends and girlfriends. In contrast, for gay young people these places are highly alienating, as they constantly reinforce their difference while providing no pathways to partners or relevant experiences. Some of these problems are particularly highlighted in the London study *(Trenchard and Warren, 1984, chs 4–7)*. But they are clearest in Bye’s ‘isolated’ group. Whereas in cities like London a significant network of gay institutions does exist awaiting discovery by the exploring youth, in smaller towns and rural areas there is nothing on offer. When I was working on a gay switchboard which covered a fairly rural area, I would often take calls from young people who lived in villages without any major means of transport — and, of course, without much money. If they had either, they could — practically — get to a gay pub or group in a neighbouring city, but a journey of twenty miles or further is not easy for non-
mobile, poor, under-drinking-age rural youth. Bye’s isolated group found further difficulties even when a youth had the means to get to a gay pub.

Marcus, a car driver and 18, says

‘How could I go to X (a local gay disco)? It takes me 45 minutes to drive there and it goes on to 2 in the morning. My mum makes me be in by 1 when I go out, and you bet she’s up and waiting for me then. I think she sees me as a kid ‘cos I’m at school still. It just isn’t worth it all to go to X as it would mean leaving at about 12 00 – just to be on the safe side! The disco is just about hotting up then’ (Bye, 1984).

Suicide attempts

I have highlighted only a few of the most general problems that face gay youth. There are many others. For instance, the negative self-image and worry may be so extreme as to lead to thoughts of attempting suicide. Indeed, in the London survey, nearly one in five had made a suicide attempt, in Bye’s survey of isolates, it was nearly two in five, and in a survey conducted by Parents Enquiry in 1982, some 55 per cent had made a suicide attempt. These are desperate acts and worrying figures which have been indicated in other researchers’ studies (e.g. Rofes, 1983). They highlight very concretely just how painful it can be to come to identify oneself as gay in a society which has ‘structured out’ the possibility and the plausibility of being so.

Social change and coming out

So far I have indicated how the heterosexual assumption is at work in the everyday settings of youth and how this can generate enormous problems for young people who sense that they may be gay from quite early ages. Yet the story in England cannot be told entirely as a series of ‘problems’, for throughout all the studies there are clear signs that gay youth do not passively accept this suffering and condemnation, but instead make active paths to construct a gay identity, to enter a gay world, to work for acceptance and even challenge the heterosexual assumption. For example, family life is initially painful. But a lot of young people eventually come to tell somebody in their family that they are gay. 284, or 70 per cent, of the London survey (Trenchard and Warren, 1984) had done so. Fifty-one per cent were ‘out’ to all their family, 21 per cent were out to their mother alone, but only 14 per cent had come out to their fathers alone. The initial response can be good and reasonable (for some 42 per cent of these respondents), but it is often bad. Nevertheless, even in cases of negative response there does appear to be a cycle of acceptance by which, after a period of time, parents may gradually come to understand more.

Likewise in schools, it seems to have become increasingly possible for gay youth to let others know about their homosexuality and often to be accepted. In the London survey, for example, the authors comment:

Despite the lack of support and information in schools, the majority of our sample were confident enough about their sexuality to be open about it with at least some of their peers. Fifty-seven per cent said that their school friends knew they were homosexual, and 32 per cent said that their teacher knew (Trenchard and Warren, 1984, p. 62).

One boy, in the teenage survey, captured this alternative view:

I’m still at school, doing A levels. I get on well with people and like keeping in touch with people. A lot of people at school know I’m gay and there’s general gossip. I’ve taken boyfriends to straight discos. The school is a grammar, gone comprehensive. I even put a lambda badge and a ‘Glad to be Gay’ badge on my pencil case. There’s no hostility at school (Chris, aged 18, quoted in Burbidge and Walters, 1981, p. 33).

In some of these accounts, friends and teachers offer support. Indeed, since 1974 there has been an active Gay Teachers Group which campaigns on behalf of such students and teachers.
There are signs, then, that by the early 1980s many young people were finding it easier to ‘come out’ – to themselves, to others and to the organized gay community – than was possible in earlier decades. The growth of gay switchboards played a particularly prominent role in this; by February 1979 as many as one in every 500 males aged 14–20 was contacting a switchboard. That number has probably continued to grow since then, as switchboards have increasingly become part of the national landscape (Trenchard and Warren, 1984, p. 114, report that 63 per cent of the London survey had contacted a switchboard or advisory service at some stage). Nigel captures the importance of this experience:

After phoning (Alec) in London, I felt as though a whole weight had been taken from me. There was hope for me – gays are just ordinary people living normal lives in normal places. I began to feel that I wasn’t so evil after all. I’m just a kid who wants a man not a woman to share life with. The only way I differ (as I see it now) from straights is by my sexual needs. Too big an issue is made out of sex, any young person knows that, straight or gay (Nigel, quoted in Bye, 1984, p. 35)

Another significant development has been the emergence of gay youth organizations – youth switchboards, youth clubs and the Lesbian and Gay Youth Movement. The latter organization is explicitly political and holds meetings and social events, including an annual conference and summer camp. It also publishes a regular magazine. Other groups tend to be more social, providing alternatives to both the commercial gay scene and the heterosexual youth services. In mid-1986, for example, there were fifteen social groups for lesbians and young gays in London and twenty-one groups outside London. Many received funding from their local authorities and there were signs of official support from bodies such as the National Association of Youth Clubs and the National Youth Bureau. This is a wholly new development, allowing gay and lesbian youth to ‘come in from the cold’. Trenchard and Warren have documented the positive responses of young people at these clubs:

I phoned Gay Switchboard and explained how I felt. I was down in the dumps, and they gave me the number for the Gay Teenage Group. I was nervous going, but once I was in I felt entirely at home after 10 minutes I thought ‘This is it – I’m not the only gay 17 year old in the world’. There were other people of my own age and we could talk. I was glad, very glad, that I went because I made friends, really close friends which I’d never had before (Male, aged 18)

At the London Gay Teenage Group I met other gay teenagers for the first time, and it was very helpful to know I wasn’t the only young gay in the world. They knew what problems you go through as they’ve been through them themselves (Male, aged 17, quoted in Trenchard and Warren, 1984, pp. 21–4)

Over the past decade, then, there have been a number of developments to facilitate the ‘coming out’ process of gay youth.

Nevertheless, all the pieces of research described above were conducted before the growth of an AIDS consciousness, and so there is no mention of AIDS at all in any of this research. Certainly, by 1984 gay switchboards were receiving calls from young people who had conflated AIDS with being gay and for whom the problems of coming out had once again become enormous. It is not unreasonable to suggest that there is now a new cohort of young people – an AIDS cohort – who are experiencing their gayness in ways that are significantly different from the experience described above. For some, the symbolic linkage of AIDS to homosexuality may be enough to prevent any ‘coming out’ at all, for others, however, the more explicit talk about ‘safer sex’ may mean a more helpful clarification of sexual possibilities than was previously feasible.
Gay switchboards have played an important role in helping young gay people to ‘come out’
I concluded the last section by raising briefly the issues of AIDS and how it may make an impact on youthful gay identity. As I write this unit, in mid-1987, the lives of many people are being reorganized through AIDS. In Europe, homosexuals, prostitutes, intravenous drug users, young people, millions in the Third World, and many others have all found AIDS shifting their experience. Up till now however, in the Western world, it is in the gay community that the greatest impact has been felt. AIDS has become the key to a new gay consciousness. Especially in the large cities of the Western world which contain relatively large groups of active gay men — New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco in the USA, Berlin, Paris, Amsterdam, London in Europe — it is hard to find a gay man who hasn’t been affected by awareness of AIDS. Indeed, whereas in the 1970s the key to understanding gay life was the politicization flowing from the Gay Liberation Front and from Stonewall, when gay men noted against a police raid on this gay club in New York, now it has become AIDS that shapes the gay community. As one gay journalist put it so clearly, ‘There’s a whole new batch of gay men in their mid-twenties and younger who see the health crisis, not Stonewall, as the decisive historical force shaping their gay identity’. Or, as another gay man put it, ‘AIDS has infected my dreams’.

AIDS has had a dual impact on the gay community, simultaneously decimating it and, ironically, strengthening it. The impact has not been the same everywhere. Nottingham is not New York — but at its worst, gay men liken the arrival of AIDS to the holocaust. Young gay men have found whole friendship networks killed off. Gay culture has been infused with an awareness of death and dying that is probably unique in recent history, especially among young people. Even as early as 1982, one gay commentator could say he had already lost thirty gay friends. It is not just the death of a lover, or the death of the many faces known once across a crowded bar, or even the profound awareness of one’s own potential mortality, it is the sum total of all this grief, an enormous psychological crippling that must be added to actual death. And yet, out of this enormous suffering, gay men have organized themselves into a new culture of resistance. They have fought back through a whole arena of new organizations. The old gay movement hardly survives what has taken its place is a massive proliferation of self-help groups covering every aspect of the health crisis. It is the text-book case study of self-help. From help lines and ‘buddy support’ to advocacy and education, from fund raising and community education to ‘safer sex campaigns’ and nursering facilities, not one aspect of gay life has remained untouched by AIDS. Indeed, the gay community has provided many blueprints for responses in the heterosexual world (Altman, 1986). (Some further implications of AIDS are discussed on Cassette 2, Side B, which you should listen to when you have finished reading this unit.)

Q Why do you think it is important to consider these changes?

It has been a central assumption of this unit that gender and sexuality are culturally constructed rather than biologically given. This means that they are constantly open to change. We have seen how masculinity may be organized in different ways in different cultures, we have seen how there have been attempts to transform the male role, we have seen how homosexuality changed during the 1970s, and how here with AIDS — we are already witnessing profound changes in the social organization of the male gay world. The constructionist position does not say that all these things change speedily — there are weighty historical processes that constrain change — but it does say that change inevitably occurs as a result of political processes. Sexualities and genders can be reformed and refashioned, and it will be interesting to see how far the existence of AIDS will shift these in the future. Already in the gay community, for instance, there are signs that sexual practices are changing, and the government’s AIDS ‘health education’ initiative in early 1987 was certainly encouraging changes towards ‘safer sex’.

However, the implications of AIDS do not only concern the gay community. Although AIDS has been publicly identified with homosexuality, and the gay
community has been at the forefront of responses to AIDS, it also has considerable implications for heterosexuality and the concepts of masculinity located in heterosexuality. Although it is far too early to be sure, initial responses to AIDS suggest that girls and women are finding it easier to change their relationship to sexuality than are men and boys – ranging from a greater selectivity about sexual partners, through taking responsibility for safer sex through the use of condoms, to exploring sources of sexual and erotic pleasure which do not involve the 'high risk' activities of penetration and intercourse.

If this proves to be the case, it might be explained simply by saying that male sexuality is more driven by testosterone or biological 'instinct' and is therefore more resistant to change. But I would hope that in studying this block you will have come...
to appreciate that such 'simple', biological answers are flawed. An alternative explanation might suggest that male (hetero)sexual behaviour is much more bound up with patriarchal masculine identities. The attachment to intercourse and penetration in male sexuality may be a crucial part of what it means to be a 'real man.' This narrowing of sexual or erotic possibilities to one act – the 'real thing' – may be essential to a conception of masculinity which stresses toughness and virility. If this is so, then the changes in sexual behaviour which might follow from the fear of AIDS might also bring changes in traditional and patriarchal conceptions of masculinity.

By itself, AIDS will not cause any particular changes in gender identities or sexualities. The consequences of AIDS will depend on the nature of the social responses to it, on how groups construct (or reconstruct) their sexuality and gender identities in the light of AIDS. Thus one possible reconstruction could mean the return to traditional values: the elevation of chastity and monogamy as the governing principles of sexuality, and 'safe sex with a condom if you must.' In many respects, such a path could mean the re-affirmation of traditional patriarchal masculinities, and a strengthening of their corollary, homophobia. But an alternative path of reconstruction could mean a more open and a more diverse approach to sexuality, which would be less tied to the 'vulne' imperatives of penetration and intercourse. Such a future could open the possibility of masculinities which did not depend on proving oneself through sexual power – ways of 'being a man' which did not limit sexuality to the demonstration of virility and potency.

The main significance of the 'social constructionist' position which this unit has discussed is its ability to help us make sense of such social changes, and such possibilities for change. It does not determine what the outcomes will be, because they will depend on social and political processes. But it does provide a means for thinking about the consequences of such processes for the way our gender identities and sexualities have been, are being, and will be shaped.

4.1 Revision and final review

As a result of reading this unit, you should have become familiar with a number of ideas about the social nature of masculinity, male homosexuality and 'homophobia'. You may now like to review some of the points covered in this unit before proceeding to the next one.

1. How would you define the following:
   
   (a) patriarchal masculinities,
   
   (b) gender identity,
   
   (c) homophobia?

2. What problems do you find with biological explanations for masculinity?

3. Suggest some examples of how male gender roles vary cross-culturally.

4. What are the perspectives on masculinity you have encountered in this unit? Consider their relative strengths and weaknesses.

5. Distinguish briefly between a psychodynamic, behavioural and cognitive theory of gender socialization.

6. What do you understand by the 'heterosexual assumption' and the 'homosexual taboo'? Why are they such important issues in understanding homosexuality?

7. Suggest some characteristics most likely to be associated with homophobia. Why do you think it exists?

8. What mechanisms seem to be at work in schools to make 'being gay' a problem for young men?

9. What are the main problems faced by gay youth, and how might AIDS transform them?

10. Finally, consider what you have learnt generally about masculinity and homosexuality, and consider whether you think it is valuable to study them together.
The ideas in this unit are very compressed and you may, at a later stage, like to read more widely. The following list provides some good starting points.

KESLER, S J and MCKENNA, W (1978) *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach*, New York, Wiley. Although not specifically mentioned in this unit, this is a very valuable study in appreciating just how far sex and gender are socially constructed. It also discusses theories of gender socialization.

FAUSTO-STERNING, A (1985) *Myths of Gender: Biological Theories About Men and Women*, New York, Basic Books. Written by a feminist biologist, this is a valuable review of biological evidence on gender and a broader consideration of their ideological functions.

TOLSON, A (1977) *The Limits of Masculinity*, London, Tavistock. Written by a sociologist involved in the men's movement in England, this is a classic study of masculinity, focusing especially on the problems of the workplace. It also shows how 'masculinity' appears in different ways across social classes.

ALTMAN, D (1986) *AIDS and the New Masculinity*, London, Pluto Press. The literature on AIDS is enormous and growing rapidly. Anything recommended here will be out of date by the time you read this unit. Still, at the time of writing, I think Altman's book - a social and political analysis - is the most valuable around.


ARCANA, J (1983) *Every Mother's Son: The Role of Mothers in the Making of Men*, New York, Anchor Press. A feminist speaks of the problems in raising her son, and interviews other women about their experiences. Based in North America in the early 1980s, it provides many valuable insights.


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1 WORKING WOMEN

1.1 Introduction: aims and objectives

In the card-game 'Happy Families' Mrs Bunn the Baker's Wife is known by the occupation of her husband. This game illustrates a central feature of the patriarchal ideology of the family that men work for wages, while women stay at home to support their husbands by cooking, cleaning and washing and to look after the children. Within the patriarchal ideology of the family, when married women do go out to work their situation is seen as problematic in a way that men's situation as workers is not. No one asks married men *why* they go out to work – what they do is considered normal. At the centre of this unit is the question 'Why is women's waged work a problem?' and its corollary, 'What can be done about this problem?'

Women are not a homogeneous group; upper- and middle-class women have always lived very different lives from working-class women. There is today a substantial stratum of women who depend on nannies and au pairs, whose experience of waged work may carry somewhat different stresses and pressures from that of working-class women. Waged work is very different for professional women than for working-class women in terms of the greater flexibility, better working conditions, and the kind of salary that can buy reliable child care, help with cleaning and laundry, and domestic appliances that make life easier. Class differentiation plays an important part in the patterns of work among different groups of women and is an important theme in this unit. Racial differentiation will also be discussed, for, as many black women have argued, generalizations about women's oppression have often ignored the specific experiences of black women.

By the end of this unit, we hope you will be able to

1. Analyse the main patterns of employment of married women in modern Britain
2. Discuss some of the main social processes which shape these employment patterns
3. Identify some of the main problems associated with waged work for married women which have been revealed by social research
4. Discuss some of the possible solutions which have been suggested for these problems

In other words, you should be able to discuss the problematic nature of waged work for married women, and consider some of the possibilities of social intervention designed to intervene in those problems.

The main focus of the unit will be an examination of the nature of married women's employment in modern Britain. In doing so, we shall be drawing on evidence about women's work of two different sorts — quantitative and qualitative. This is a central distinction about types of evidence in the social sciences. What does it mean?

Quantitative evidence is statistical evidence, that is it deals in 'quantities'. In this case, it will be evidence of how many women work, doing what sorts of work, and so on. Such evidence is usually drawn from official sources of statistical data, or from specially conducted surveys carried out by social scientists to research a particular issue. Qualitative evidence, by contrast, is more concerned with the experience of particular social groups. It is evidence about how people experience social patterns and processes — about how they understand their lives and what their experiences mean to them. In this case, it will be evidence not of how many women work, but of what their work is like, how it fits into their lives and so on. Such evidence is usually drawn from interviews, discussions or from researchers who participate in the process which they are researching — to investigate the experience 'from the inside'.

These are two very different approaches to the question of evidence in the social sciences. The former emphasises the collection of extensive and reliable evidence about social patterns. It has, however, little to say to us about what those patterns mean to the people involved in them. Qualitative research tends to be smaller in scale, collecting information from a particular social group about their experiences.
But because of the limited scale on which it is conducted, it can be difficult to know whether the experiences being reported are general or typical ones. Thus the two types of evidence tend to differ in terms of scale (large-scale versus small-scale) and depth (the surface patterns versus the quality of experience). It is a distinction which you will meet repeatedly in the social sciences, and one which you should keep in mind when you are reading this unit and considering the evidence being presented in it. This unit, in fact, draws on both types of evidence. At some points, we will be looking at quantitative evidence about the general patterns of women’s work; at others, we will be considering research which informs us about women’s experience of work.

In the television programme associated with this unit (TV5 ‘Working Mothers’), this issue of evidence is also important. The programme is based on interviews with three working mothers, women who are doing different kinds of work within the Open University. The programme also includes Angela Coyle, who has undertaken research on women’s work. Her role in the programme is to link the particular experiences of the three women with the evidence about wider patterns of women’s work, by talking about how typical (or not) the experiences of the three women are. You should listen for these points carefully when you are watching the programme, and link them to your own reading of the evidence and arguments in the unit.

The unit also considers some of the social processes which may play a major role in creating both the shape (pattern) and texture (experience) of women’s work in contemporary Britain. Again, it will be important for you as you read through the unit to think about the relationship between the evidence you are given, and the sorts of concepts that are presented as ways of explaining this evidence. These concepts are intended to provide ways of organizing how we view and understand the evidence about women’s work. There are three concepts in particular which you should look for as you read:

- **The sexual division of labour**, that is, the social division of roles and responsibilities between men and women, which refers to two types of work: waged work and unpaid work in the home (sometimes referred to as ‘domestic labour’).

- **The dual labour market**, which raises the issue of whether there are different labour markets for men and women, such that there are distinct types of waged work which are defined as primarily (or exclusively) ‘men’s work’ and ‘women’s work’.

- **The ‘double shift’**, a concept which has been developed as a way of talking about the dual set of responsibilities which married women face when they are both housewives/mothers and waged workers.

Finally, the unit considers some of the forms of social intervention which have been developed to resolve the problems associated with married women’s work. These range from a consideration of what sorts of social policies would be necessary to resolve them in Britain, through an examination of ‘workplace’-based policies by employers, to the social reforms attempted in Cuba to allow married women to participate more fully in waged work. Each of these examples highlights different sorts of problems about women’s work and different ways of responding. They are presented here not as successful solutions but as attempts which illuminate different aspects of these problems. Again, you will need to think carefully about the connections between social problems and attempts to create social interventions which resolve them.

Before you read further into this unit, take a little time for reflection and discussion. This will enable you to use the course material more effectively to develop your own ideas. The activity that follows is designed to help you to pause and take stock of your own experience.
Most of us have mothers or grandmothers whose experience of waged work forms part of our own consciousness. My mother, for example, worked in hospitals and 'in service' before she married, and for as long as I can remember during her marriage she worked as a daily cleaner, so that in addition to cleaning her own house every day she was also maintaining at least one other house in the state of cleanliness and polish she thought proper, and sometimes two or three. Thus her own housework, laundry, cooking, shopping and child care had to be fitted in around her other commitments, which took up several hours of her day, Monday to Friday. She never 'paid a stamp' in thirty years of working and such work would have gone completely unrecorded.

What experiences are there among the women in your family? Have the experiences of your mother and grandmother influenced the way in which you think about women's paid work? You may find it useful now to talk to them about the changes they have witnessed during their lives.

Oral history is an important source of information, and you may find that there are women you know who have valuable stories to tell about their work during the First and Second World Wars, or about the problems they have faced because they worked. Perhaps you have worked yourself throughout your life, either full-time or part-time, or perhaps your wife has worked outside the home.

Consider, in the light of your own experience, why it is thought surprising that married women should work and normal that married men should work. Why do married women undertake waged work?

What effect has social class or ethnic minority status (race) had on your own experience of waged work, or that of women whom you know?

Discussion of these questions and of personal experience could form the basis of tutorial work, or work in self-help groups.
In all societies there exists a division of labour based on sexual difference, although the nature of the work done by men and women respectively differs from one society to another. The care of young children seems automatically to fall on women, as babies in most cultures begin life at the breast and certainly did so before the advent of bottle-feeding, but in many societies men have taken over the care of boys at an early age. Cooking is traditionally a female occupation nearly everywhere but the preparation of ritual food and drink for prestigious people, or on prestigious occasions, has often been taken over by men. Hunting and fishing tend to be male occupations in most societies, but not in all. In many places, women have been responsible for the planting and harvesting of crops, whereas in others men and women have worked together co-operatively in the fields. In some places, women are not allowed to look after cattle and horses, whereas in others they do so quite naturally. Sometimes women weave cloth and make pots, but in some societies this has been men’s work. As a consequence, Ann Oakley (1972) and other sociologists have argued that the sexual division of labour is not ‘natural’, but socially constructed, varying from one society to another, and from one historical period to another. This variation also cuts across classes, so that in the Victorian period upper- and middle-class women were protected and treated as if they were softer and weaker than men while working-class women employed as maids or in factories were expected to be able to carry heavy loads and work long hours. Similarly, black women who were slaves were considered to be as capable of working in the fields as black men, even when they were pregnant.
In England the industrial revolution brought about a separation between the domestic household and the world of productive work for a wage. This separation was spatial and also sexual: on the one hand, men worked in factories, mines and offices while, on the other, women became increasingly confined to the home. Whereas the household had been the unit of production before the advent of industrial capitalism, in both rural and urban areas, where craftsmen, their apprentices and families all lived together, it slowly became the ‘private’ domain of women and children, to which men returned from the world of work. Men became the primary wage-earners and women became responsible for the home and children. This was a gradual process, for initially women and children were employed as well as men, or sometimes in preference to men, as in the textile industry. Many women never entirely stopped working as wage labourers after they were married for, in practice, working-class women continued to be responsible for earning a share of the family income in many households.

Waged work came to be more highly valued than housework and child care. Thus women and men not only came to inhabit two different worlds, but two worlds of varying prestige, the male world being more prestigious than the female world. Women’s work within the home was unwaged and, therefore, became invisible, resulting in a loss of identity for women in a man’s world. Moreover, whereas men at work were able to enjoy the company of other men, women gradually became isolated from each other in the family unit and lacked the collective identity from which men were able to benefit both through the trade union movement and in leisure pursuits in working-men’s clubs and pubs. Upper- and middle-class men similarly had long-established clubs of their own from which women were excluded — and still are. One problem that women experience today as a result of this long-standing separation of men and women is that, in order to succeed in a male world, it is necessary to play the game according to rules invented by men.
2.1 Breadwinners and housewives

The sexual division of labour refers to

the objective differences between what men and women in our society are primarily defined as and are primarily (regarded as) responsible for. It constitutes an actual role and an actual area of responsibility. Despite increasing challenges to the status quo, men are still designated 'breadwinners', while women's place is still first and foremost 'at home' (Porter, 1982, p 118).

Marlyn Porter has argued, as have many other women writing about women's work, that women's experience of paid work is significantly different from that of men and that the difference rests upon the division of labour rooted outside work, in the family. Women play a subordinate role in the division of labour, not merely a different role: men are breadwinners, women are child-rearers and houseworkers. It is because the woman's role is not only different but also subordinate, that the whole family takes its classification in terms of class from the male head of the household. And, in this, social scientists who use the standard social class classification are just as much victims of the ideology of sexism (i.e. what is 'naturally' men's work and women's work) as is the wider society. More recently in social science the issue of how to classify a family's social class has produced a debate between those who support the use of the man's occupation as defining the family's social class position and those who argue for separate classifications based on the wife's as well as the husband's work. (There is insufficient space in this unit to go into the issues involved but if you are interested see, for example, Goldthorpe (1983, 1984), Heath and Britten (1984), Stanworth (1984) and a summary of the issues by Roberts and Barker (1986).)

Porter describes men as entering the world of work as full citizens, whilst women enter as migrants, crossing a boundary into men's territory. In her study of working women, she found that women who were not solely occupied with domestic responsibility regarded themselves as 'deviant', and felt guilty about trespassing on men's territory. She suggests that the sexual division of labour and its associated ideology goes some way towards explaining the sanctions imposed on women when they deviate from their domestic role, sanctions such as low pay, unequal pensions and social security provision, and lack of promotion. Some of the women she interviewed articulated their feeling of trespassing very clearly indeed: 'In one way I don't think women should get equal pay because the man is the breadwinner. I shouldn't go out to work by rights, because my husband is the breadwinner. I just go to work to help out.' (Gladys Hutchings, quoted in Porter, 1982, p 127). One husband phrased it in a different way: 'She wants to be at home with a cup of tea when they come in the door, because that's her job, not being out working, which isn't.' (Nigel Martin, quoted in Porter, 1982, p 121)
Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh agree with Porter, also locating the sexual division of labour within the family.

an institution in which households are assumed to be organized, by and large, on the division of labour between a primary breadwinner (male) and a primary child-rearer (female). Although these are assumptions, they are nonetheless part of the family since they form a crucial element of the conditions on which men and women are employed, the level of their wages and state taxes and benefits. (Barrett and McIntosh, 1982, p. 7)

Barrett and McIntosh point out that the sexual division of labour is an assumption, but that assumptions are real in their consequences. Compare this idea with Porter’s discussion of the gap between assumptions and reality, and the very real power of ideas.

There is, of course, a distinction between the sexual division of labour and sexist ideology. Sexist ideology lays down what should happen, and what is held to happen, even when reality does not tally with ideology. This means that even when the majority of women do work – as indeed they do – they feel they have to justify doing so. It also means that women who have husbands and children feel that these responsibilities must take precedence whether they work or not. So regardless of what the actual division of labour is, the power of sexist ideology is that it imposes its own reality on people. (Porter, 1982, p 118)

Nanneke Redclift also considers the notion of the male breadwinner to be ideological.

It has been an expectation or moral prescription emanating from the social construction of women’s subordinate role and reproductive obligations rather than a reality, since many working-class households have always covered the costs of their reproduction from multiple sources. (Redclift and Mingione, 1985, p 103)

Anna Pollert, interviewing working-class women at a tobacco factory in Bristol, demonstrates clearly the economic necessity of paid work for such women and the inadequacy of the male wage alone.

Anna Why do you work?
Ida You need the money Most men’s wages are not enough
Brenda It’s the same, to decorate this house we’ve got With the children it’s a bit difficult on one man’s wage
Val For the money! What else?
Edy Let’s face it, you can’t live on one man’s wage now A woman’s got to work if you want anything decent
Pearl If you want anything, we have to work for it. (Pollert, 1981, p 82)

Earlier we saw that Porter depicted women as migrants in men’s territory when they entered waged work, but although men may have first claim on the world of work as breadwinners they may become cut off from the families they support. They are oppressors who hold the purse strings over women, but they are also the oppressed at work while in the family they have often been deprived of child-care skills, of domestic enjoyment and skills. Women’s oppression is the other side of this coin, the privatized family becomes their cage, the men their overlords, and when they take on waged work their lives are doubly oppressed.

The duality and intensity of their work, the wage bargain they can strike, their ability to organize, all are subordinate to their role in the family. And it is not just a question of the strain of jobs, of running to keep still. There are ideological conflicts which do not affect men (unless they are unemployed or reverse roles and stay at home) Women workers still feel that they are housewives, even when they are at work. At times they are pushed further into this, at times punished for it. They serve two masters – the employers and the husbands! (Pollert, 1981, p 111)
Thus Pollert returns to the strain imposed upon women by ideological conflicts concerning their double role as both workers and housewives.

Many feminist writers have stressed the way in which the family itself, and the patriarchal relations established there, constitute the major force in the subordination of women, both at home and at work. Michele Barrett, for example, has seen the family as the ‘central focus of women’s oppression’ and argued that feminists have consistently and rightly seen the family as a central site of women’s oppression, and that the assumption of dependence oppresses all women, cutting across the boundaries of class. The reasons for this lie in both the material structure of the household, by which women are by and large financially dependent on men, and in the ideology of the family, through which women are confined to a primary concern with domesticity and motherhood. This situation underwrites the disadvantages women experience at work, and lies at the root of the exploitation of female sexuality endemic in our society. The concept of ‘dependence’ is perhaps the link between the material organization of the household and the ideology of femininity: an assumption of women’s dependence on men structures both these areas.

(Barrett, 1980, p 214)

However, this argument has not gone unchallenged. Redclift has questioned the context of women’s dependence on men.

What exactly does ‘dependent’ mean in terms of percentages? The man who is dependent on a wife to provide one-third of total household costs is rather less dependent than the wife who is dependent on the husband’s contribution of two-thirds of the costs, but her contribution may nevertheless be crucial.

(Redclift and Mingione, 1985, p 103)

This raises important questions about the roles of men and women in the family. Are married women dependent on their husbands? Or can we say that men are partially, if not equally, dependent on their wives? As Redclift observes, one wage is not enough for many families and wives must necessarily be wage-earners as well as housewives. Moreover, men are always dependent on their wives’ domestic labour in the home, which is not remunerated and without which their own paid jobs would be much more burdensome, if not impossible. Finally, financial dependence is not the only kind of dependence: husbands and wives are mutually dependent in terms of emotional, sexual and psychological needs. (These issues were considered in Unit 6.)

Stop for a moment and consider this issue of dependency. You have seen arguments that within households women are ‘dependent’, and, in contrast, that men and women are ‘interdependent’. Which of these seems more accurate from your study of the family so far? Can you say why?
2.2 A question of race

Women’s role is affected not only by class differences but by racial or ethnic differences too. Hazel Carby has also taken issue with Michèle Barrett’s analysis of the family as a central site of women’s oppression and with her use of the term ‘dependence’. First, she points out that the way in which the gender of black women is socially constructed differs from constructions of white femininity, because it is also subject to another dimension, that of racism.

The immediate problem for black feminists is whether this framework can be applied at all to analyse her story of oppression and struggle. We would not wish to deny that the family can be a source of oppression for us but we also wish to examine how the black family has functioned as a prime source of resistance to oppression. We need to recognize that during slavery, periods of colonialism and under the present authoritarian state the black family has been a site of political and cultural resistance to racism (Carby, 1982, p 215).

Secondly, she raises the problematic nature of the concept of dependency.

It has been argued that this concept provides the link between the ‘maternal organization of the household and the ideology of femininity’. How then can we account for situations in which black women may be heads of households, or where, because of an economic system which structures high black male unemployment, they are not financially dependent on a black man? (Carby, 1982, p 215)

As she observes, ‘black men have not held the same patriarchal positions of power that white males have established’, and the difference in history to which Hazel Carby directs our attention is graphically illustrated by this extract which she quotes: The speaker is Sojourner Truth, a black woman abolitionist, addressing a meeting in Ohio, USA, in 1851 about the abolition of slavery and its connection with the struggle for women’s rights.

That man over there says women need to be helped into carriages and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over ditches, or over mud puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain’t I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arms! I have ploughed and planted and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain’t I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man — when I could get it — and bear the lash as well! And ain’t I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried with my mother’s grief none but Jesus heard me. And ain’t I a woman? (Sojourner Truth, quoted in Carby, 1982, p 215)

Use Table 1 to answer the following questions:

- What percentage of men are involved in part-time work?
- What percentage of women are involved in part-time work? And what percentage of women in each of the ethnic groups works part-time?
- What percentage of white, West Indian and Pakistani/Indian/Bangladeshi men are economically active?
- What percentage of men in each ethnic group is out of employment?
- What percentage of women in each ethnic group is out of employment?
- What is the percentage of women in each group that is economically active?
Table 1  Economic status of the population of working age by sex and ethnic origin, Great Britain, 1984
(percentages and thousands)

Source: Based on Department of Employment Labour Force Survey, 1984, in Social Trends, No. 16, 1986, Table 4.6, p.64
Clearly there are differences here between working men and working women, the most obvious being that very few men indeed work part-time, while a high percentage of women are engaged in part-time work. There are also important differences between ethnic groups, both men and women. The number of West Indian men who are unemployed is much higher than that of the other groups, though it is interesting to see that the numbers economically active in each group are very similar (except for the heading 'other' which contains a large proportion of students). The importance of male unemployment for women is not difficult to see, and the fact that a much higher proportion of West Indian women work full-time rather than part-time is clear indication of their need to work for the subsistence of their families. Note that the percentage of West Indian women out of work is also higher than for the other two groups.

Anne Phizacklea has pointed out that the recruitment of women into the labour market during the post-war period is often discussed, but analysis of the simultaneous recruitment of immigrant female labour to fill the worst-paid and most menial jobs is completely neglected. Many of these black women came to Britain with the intention of working and were viewed simultaneously as workers, wives and mothers.

Black women have always expected to work full-time, often as the only breadwinner, and today black women occupy a subordinate position in the labour market and in economic, politico-legal and ideological relations which is in many ways similar to that of indigenous women but is sufficiently dissimilar to warrant the description of a class fraction, because:

1. West Indian women have a higher rate of economic activity than other groups of women.

2. West Indian women are more likely to work full-time than women of British origin.

3. According to the PEP study of racial disadvantage, 29% of all working women are doing semi- and unskilled manual jobs compared with 47% of West Indian women, 48% of African Asians and 58% of Indians (Smith, 1977, quoted in Phizacklea, 1983).

Phizacklea's own study in Harlesden and Stonebridge in north-west London found that the main differences in work patterns were that all the West Indian women worked at least a 35-hour week, with some having two jobs, whereas only five of the English women worked a 35-hour week and seven were not actively seeking work due to domestic and child-care responsibilities. (The interview sample was 20 West Indian women and 17 English women.) Both English and West Indian women were concerned about child care, but whereas the English women stayed at home or only worked part-time, the West Indian women found full-time work that fitted into child-care patterns, even when it meant arranging two jobs instead of one. Three of the West Indian women had husbands who had been made redundant in the six months prior to the interview, another two were single mothers with children, thus, a quarter of the West Indian women were assuming the role of main breadwinner some or all of the time (Phizacklea, 1983, p 108).
All married women carry out unpaid housework and, if they have children, child care at home (unless they pay someone else to do it), but in this section we shall be looking at the lives of married women who also work for wages outside the home, and the relationships these women have with their husbands and children.

Historically, many married women have worked as part of the paid labour force, since the beginning of the industrialization process that took families off the land and into the factories, mines and workshops of early capitalism. In the mines, for example, whole families worked together, men hewing the coal while women and children dragged it to the pit shaft and winched it up to the surface. In nineteenth-century England, the Factory Acts and the Mines and Collieries Act of 1842 brought an end to this particular kind of exploitation in some major industries, but not all – notably not those in which women were the main labour force, as, for example, the clothing industry with its innumerable sweatshops. Nevertheless, during the second half of the nineteenth century there was a steady decline in the number of married women employed in wage labour.

In the nineteenth century this withdrawal of women and children from paid employment coincided with trade union struggles to raise men’s wages on the grounds that these needed to be considered as a ‘family wage’, such that a family could be sustained on the earnings of the sole (male) breadwinner. The trade union demand for the ‘family wage’ has been variously interpreted as a struggle to gain for working-class women the middle-class privilege of staying at home, as an attempt by working-class men to gain the services of their wives in the home, or as an attempt by the working class as a whole to restrict labour supply and raise living standards (Humphries, 1981). However we interpret this shift, by the end of the century married women were ideally expected to stay at home. This did not necessarily mean that they did not undertake any paid work at all, although most did not go out to work after the birth of the first child. Taking in laundry and sewing were common ways of adding to the family income, and so was taking in a lodger, whose meals and laundry would have been added to the wife’s domestic load (Davidoff, 1979). Midwives were based at home and called out only when the neighbours gave birth, and there was seasonal work, such as fruit and hop picking, and daily charring work, ‘obliging’ better off women for a few hours. There are no reliable national figures for women’s employment before 1850 but according to the 1851 Census report married women were then 25% of the workforce. By 1900 they were only 10% and, apart from dramatic increases due to the substitution of women for men during the two World Wars, the proportion of married women who were ‘occupied’ or ‘economically active’ remained quite small until the 1950s.

It is, however, significant that a small proportion of married women continued to work for wages outside the home, in spite of the existence of an ideology that placed them firmly at home. The total figure was probably larger than 10% since the Census figures would not have included casual work of the kind described above. In the 1950s women’s involvement in paid employment began to expand and by 1977 women constituted 50% of the workforce. Married women constituted two-thirds of the total female workforce.

In a 1984 survey carried out by Martin and Roberts, the majority of married women (60%) were working in a paid job at the time they were interviewed – 27% full-time and 33% part-time. A further 5% were classified as ‘unemployed’, making a total of 65% who were ‘economically active’. (Note that ‘economically active’ means available for work and actively seeking work and thus includes the registered unemployed.) Many working mothers were not married, and Martin and Roberts found that such mothers constituted 10% of their sample. 22% of whom were single women who had never been married, and 78% women who had formerly been married but were now widowed (10%), divorced (47%) or separated (21%). Only 39% of these women received financial support from their children’s fathers, and they were found to be under much more financial strain than other mothers.
Married women constitute two-thirds of the total female workforce, mostly in the service sector, stacking shelves (below), as semi-skilled domestics, here (right) as hospital ancillary workers, and as clerical and secretarial workers (far right, top).

Homeworking, too, is a common way of adding to the family income. 'Taking in sewing' (far right, bottom) has a long history.
As we have seen, there has been a rapid rise in the employment of married women outside the home. But what kinds of work do women do? The recent research by Martin and Roberts has shown that the industrial and occupational distribution of working women in our sample showed that women are concentrated in a few occupations, mostly in the service sector. This distribution has remained relatively stable over the last fifteen years' (Martin and Roberts, 1984, p 32).

In Table 2 Martin and Roberts classify women's occupations both according to the industry in which they work and within that industry. Thus, women are employed as clerical workers in every kind of industry, and as semi-skilled factory workers in a variety of industries, under the heading of 'Professional and scientific services'. Women are employed as teachers, nurses, social workers, or as clerical workers and semi-skilled domestics (in catering).

Study Table 2. Where are women workers most highly concentrated in terms of:
(a) the industries in which they work?
(b) the occupations in which they work?

Table 2. Occupation by industry of working women (percentages)

Source: Martin and Roberts, 1984, Table 35
By industry group, the highest concentrations of women workers appear to be in
1 Professional and scientific services (901)
2 Other services (701)
3 Distribution (543)

Nevertheless, this information is not very helpful unless we know the relative overall
size of the different industry groups. For example, if professional and scientific
services is the largest employment sector in the country then its having the highest
number of women workers may not be surprising. More interesting, however, is the
information on the distribution by occupation, where women are shown to be
predominantly concentrated in three types of work

- clerical 30%
- semi-skilled factory 10%
- semi-skilled domestic 11%

\[ \text{\{ - 51\% of working women } \]

Such concentration of female labour has led some writers to speak of sexual
apartheid (Hunt, 1980) or a female ghetto. ‘Women, and married women in
particular, have been drawn into the labour force to provide a cheap, flexible source
of labour and are employed in what is effectively a female ghetto’ (Coyle, 1984)

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At this point it would be a good idea to examine the evidence as to whether
women in the labour force are a ‘cheap’ source of labour.

The best data come from the New Earnings Survey which is carried out
using a sample of firms (of all sizes except the smallest) by the Government
Statistical Service every year. A sample of employers is asked to complete
returns for all their employees by gross earnings (before deductions), by
gender, by full-time or part-time work-status (including the number of hours
worked) and by job. The marital status of the employee is not recorded so
that we cannot check whether or not married women are a cheaper source
of labour than single women.

- Compare women’s and men’s earnings directly, where both sexes work
full-time by examining the first line of figures in Table 3. The average gross
weekly earnings for women are markedly less than for men in both the
manual and non-manual groups, but work out for the manual, non-manual,
and the combined (manual and non-manual) groups what percentage of
average male earnings women receive.

Though the averages for women are less than for men, there may well be
some women who earn more than some men. This is a distributional
problem and averages may be misleading here. To check whether the
inequality of earnings between men and women holds throughout the range
of incomes, use the data on the distribution of earnings in Table 3.

To keep it simple, use only the ‘All’ columns and plot two graphs (one for
men and one for women) with ‘earnings’ on the horizontal axes and ‘per-
cent earning less than’ on the vertical axis. On each graph, draw three lines
corresponding to the 25\%, 50\% and 75\% points. Read off the earnings at
each point. (You might find it easier to put your findings in a simple table
which compares men and women at each of the three points in the
distribution of earnings.) Draw your own conclusions from your analysis.
There are no good data for the earnings of men in part-time employment – almost certainly because there are relatively few men who work part-time – 19% of all economically active men compared with 23.3% of economically active women (in Table 1). Thus it is difficult to compare the earnings of part-time women to part-time men. But we can compare their hourly rates of pay, both to full-time women and to full-time men. These comparisons are important. Do women earn less simply because they work part-time rather than full-time? Or is there something about the structure of their employment which leads to a lower rate of pay, quite apart from the shorter hours which they work?

We can look at the evidence for inequality in Table 4 which covers part-time women workers. The information on average gross weekly earnings and on hours worked is provided for information. It is the data in the last column, on average gross hourly earnings which can be compared to (a) the average gross hourly earnings of full-time women (in Table 3), and (b) the average gross hourly earnings of full-time men (also given in Table 3).

- Compare the average gross hourly earnings figures in Tables 3 and 4, for women and for men. What do you conclude?
- Compare your conclusions with those given at the end of the unit.

Table 3  Gross weekly earnings and average gross hourly earnings for men and women in full-time employment

Source: New Earnings Survey (Government Statistical Service), April 1986. Table A14
Table 4  Earnings of female part-time employees by sector for (i) manual and (ii) non-manual workers and by occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Sector 1</th>
<th>Sector 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manual</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-manual</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: *New Earnings Survey* (Government Statistical Service), April 1986, Tables F78 – 81
Many women's jobs are an extension of the division of labour at home, caring roles, such as teaching, nursing and social work are considered a 'natural' extension of the woman's role as child-rearer, domestic work such as cooking and cleaning is a repetition of chores that women carry out in the home, secretaries give female support and make life comfortable for males in managerial positions, much as wives do at home. As Braverman (1975) and others have pointed out, many of the jobs once carried out in the home are now carried out by women in schools, hospitals, canteens, shops and factories. The state has taken over many functions once attached to the family and now pays women to carry them out in state institutions, as teachers, nurses and cleaners. Other functions have been taken over by private entrepreneurs making fast foods and mass-produced clothes.

However, is this view of women's work entirely satisfactory? Large numbers of women are employed in clerical work, and though secretaries may be 'office wives', clerks and typists are certainly not. Factory work often involves making fast food and clothes, but not always. Women are also employed on assembly lines making components for cars, making tobacco products or in the new microchip technologies.

3.1 Occupational segregation

Catherine Hakim's research in the late 1970s showed that there was both horizontal and vertical segregation of men and women at work, and that this had changed very little over the previous eighty years.

Horizontal occupational segregation exists when men and women are most commonly working in different kinds of occupation. Vertical occupational segregation exists when men are working most commonly in higher grade occupations and women are most commonly working in lower grade occupations, or vice versa (Hakim, 1979, p 19).

From Table 2 it is clear that horizontal segregation occurs in clerical work, for example, and that women are rarely employed in the professional grades of any industry (only 1% overall being classified as professional) — thus indicating that there is also widespread vertical segregation. In many occupations, even those which are traditionally female, such as cooking, women are concentrated at the base of a pyramidal hierarchy. The teaching profession shows this very clearly in universities, polytechnics and colleges; the teaching staff are largely male, with high levels of pay, long holidays and good working conditions, in secondary schools, there is a high proportion of male teachers, particularly concentrated in senior posts, when it comes to primary and nursery schools — lowest in status and with the worst pay — women predominate, though even at this level men can expect to be promoted more rapidly.

In their study Martin and Roberts also looked at the extent of occupational segregation. 'Occupational segregation at the level of the workplace, as measured by the proportion of women working only with women doing the same kind of work as themselves was quite high overall of women working with others doing the same job 63% worked only with other women' (Martin and Roberts, 1984, p 33). However, when Martin and Roberts also looked at the degree of segregation among the husbands interviewed during their survey of married women's work, they found that husbands were markedly more segregated from women than their wives were from men at work, as 81% worked only with other men and almost all (98%) had male supervisors. More men thought of their work as 'men's work' and a much higher proportion of men said women could not do the work rather than would not be prepared to do it. All this shows that the husband's world of work is more peopled by men than their wives' work is peopled by women and it is likely that this experience shapes men's attitudes to women's abilities as workers too (Martin and Roberts, 1984, p 33).

Another researcher, Ruth Cavendish, gives us an interesting account of how this kind of segregation and subordination operated in a factory where she worked on the assembly line, explaining how women were subordinate to men at various levels and had no control over the work process.
The women were all in the same grade, as semi-skilled assemblers, except for Margaret the training woman, one woman chargehand and a few women at the lowest level of quality control. The position of the men was totally different; there were white Englishmen as well as immigrants, though virtually no white Englishwomen, the men were spread through many different grades, from labourer to manager, and were divided from each other by differences of skill and pay, as well as from us. They didn’t form a single group like women. All the men had some training and a career structure of sorts, apart from labourers. They were paid more than us, had better working conditions and received staff status from the beginning. They filled all the grades and different categories of work other than assembler. So they were not a homogeneous group— but from where we were on the line anyone with any skill or training was a man, anyone in authority was a man, and any man had authority. We were wary of them all, even the maintenance electricians, because they were so much higher and could report us to the supervisor if they saw us eating or reading outside the break times.

I knew the sexual division of labour was like that, but it still shook me every day. You could see the differences so clearly on the shop floor. Everyone who was working was a woman, and the men in their white coats were standing around chatting, humping skids or walking about to check the number of components. It was obvious that the only qualification you needed for a better job was to be a man (Cavendish, 1982, p. 79)

One of the women in this factory remembered a time when there had been men on the line, and the way in which the job had deliberately turned into ‘a woman’s job’ to keep the wages down.

The Sex Discrimination Act seemed to have made no inroad into the job structure whatsoever. Arlene said there used to be boys on the line and even a few women supervisors, but a week before the Equal Pay Act became law everyone was shunted around so all the assembly workers would be women and all the supervisors and higher grades would be men and they wouldn’t have to pay higher rates to women (Cavendish, 1982, p. 78)

Thus these women workers were segregated from men at work, forming a separate group at the base of the occupational hierarchy, supervised and dominated by men the impact of their material conditions at work was such as to deepen the problems faced by married women working a ‘double shift’. Cavendish suggests that practical
measures are needed, such as equal opportunities for boys and girls, a shorter working week and better nursery provision if the burden which falls upon many British women is to be lightened.

Some writers have seen occupational segregation in terms of a dual labour market. The central focus of dual labour market theory is on the structure of the labour market and employers' strategies, emphasizing the segmentation of the labour market into primary and secondary sectors, the primary sector composed of better paid workers tied into the career structures of their workplace, with possibilities for promotion, greater security and pension rights, while secondary sector workers lack all such advantages. From the employers' point of view secondary sector workers are very desirable for many jobs which are labelled 'unskilled'. Such workers have a number of characteristics which are attractive to employers: they are dispensable (you can get rid of and replace them easily), they have little interest in acquiring training or experience (that is, they do not actually demand training and experience), they show little interest in monetary rewards (because they are in such weak bargaining position), and they have a relatively low level of trade union or collective strength (again because they have so little job security) (see Barron and Norns, 1976).

If you look back at Cavendish's description of the work situation in the factory where she worked you will see how this explanation of a 'dual labour market' can be used. Although Cavendish studied gender differentiation at work she also looked at racial differentiation: the women in the factory where she worked were almost entirely immigrant women (70% Irish, 20% West Indian and 10% Asian). There are problems of defining 'immigrant', for many so-called immigrants have spent the greater part of their working lives in England and increasing numbers have been born and educated in this country. However, the presence of large numbers of Irish, West Indian and Asian women in the lowest paid work and in the worst conditions demands some explanation too. Dual labour market theory draws attention to the way in which black and immigrant workers often constitute a secondary labour market, especially black and immigrant women.

The question of race is an important one, as we have already seen. Different writers have stressed various aspects of such a dual labour market: some have seen it as the effect of a technological need for certain skills, some have stressed the role of trade unions in creating privileged sectors of employment for men, who have been willing to be 'bought off' (Rubery, 1980). Others have stressed employers' needs to:

- have available a nucleus of a stable workforce in jobs requiring extensive training and investment,
- weaken the unity of the workforce thus reducing potential conflict by creating distinct sections with different interests,
- buy off the most militant, well-organized sections of the workforce.

The concentration of women at the base of occupational hierarchies, in what are termed unskilled or semi-skilled jobs, does suggest that such a dual labour market exists, but dual labour market theory does not explain why women are employed in some jobs, such as nursing, teaching and secretarial work, which all require training and skills of a professional kind.

If there is such a dual labour market which discriminates against women, what is the solution? Legal intervention, such as the Equal Pay Act and the Sexual Discrimination Act, has not been very successful. Indeed, Ruth Cavendish's research suggested that the way employers responded to equal pay legislation (by reclassifying their workers) may, if anything, have strengthened the occupational segregation between men and women. In the second half of this unit we shall consider the question of solutions in more detail.
Consider the organization in which you work, or one in which you have worked in the past. How marked was occupational segregation both vertical and horizontal? You might also ask yourself:

- What proportion of head teachers in your local area is male?
- Does the Open University differ from other organizations in its pyramidal structure? In the interviews with women working for the Open University in TV5 there is some evidence of occupational segregation.
Women who are engaged in paid work outside the home all work a ‘double shift’, whether they are working full-time or part-time, whether they are working-class women, professional women or even running their own businesses. The combination of paid work with responsibility for housework and child care necessitates what Kate Crehan has called ‘the balancing act’, an exhausting daily routine in which most men play little part. In this section we shall look at a cross-section of women workers – factory workers, shop-workers, women managers and entrepreneurs – as well as considering the significance of unemployment for married women workers. The television programme accompanying the unit – TV5 – provides additional material in the form of interviews with three women: an office worker, a lecturer and a cleaner, all working for the Open University.

As you read this section and watch TV5 note the differences between women, as well as the similarities, in the kinds of problems they face and the strategies they are able to use to deal with those problems.

You might bear in mind the following questions in reading this section:

- What are the major differences between professional women and those working on low incomes?
- What ideologies exist that make women’s work problematic – at home, at work and as part of women’s own consciousness?
- The gap between reality and ideology, between what is and what ought to be, is a theme that has already been introduced and to which you should pay special attention.
- Finally you might try to consider how some of the problems that married women face both at home and at work could be eased.

Later on we shall look at some possible solutions, at the way in which social intervention can help married women who wish to work, but the discussion of solutions begins here, in the comments that working women themselves make and in the observations of some of the researchers.

Make notes as you read and check your observations with the discussion notes at the end of this section.

4.1 In the factory

There has been considerable research into the situation of women factory workers we have already discussed Anna Pollert’s interviews with women working in a Bristol tobacco factory and taken a brief look at Ruth Cavendish’s description of occupational segregation. Here we shall consider the findings of research carried out by Shimmun et al. among married women working in three food factories, belonging to three different multi-plant organizations. A pilot study carried out in Factory A and two complementary studies carried out later in Factory B and Factory C. Using a combination of in-depth interviews and questionnaires, the researchers gathered data from several hundred women, exploring the extent to which pressure experienced by married women workers originated from the job itself or from their total situation, and focusing upon mental strain and ill-health among these married women workers.
The heavy burden carried by women with domestic responsibilities and dependent children is stressed.

These women are caught in a constant and unremitting round of activity throughout their waking hours. Their day begins early, about 5 or 6 and finishes late, about 9 or 10 pm, with little or no time for rest or relaxation, leaving them continuously tired and often emotionally exhausted. Many are responsible for the household budget and under financial pressure to make ends meet, which is a major factor in their going out to work. But employment has to be fitted in with household duties and child-care arrangements, which they and their families regard as unquestionably their responsibility. (Shimmin et al., 1981, p 347)

Here, one of the 145 women interviewed talks about her day. Note that she is a West Indian woman working full-time, in spite of the hardship that this entails. We have already noted the disadvantaged situation of black and immigrant workers.

'I go to the bathroom first and have a wash. Get back upstairs, start getting myself ready, and if my husband is out of bed I'll do the bed. And at half past six I start waking up the children for school. By then I'm half-dressed. Do anything that is around the house I still always have to go back and call to them to wake them up again - so I pull the curtains so that they can see that it is daylight. Then it might be smooth sailing - or some of the mornings you have to be there - something that they can't do up. Then getting ready now to leave the house, and they come and ask me for money for this and that. Sometimes it upsets you, sometimes it don't you know. But you say to them, you wait until I'm ready to go and then you come to tell me about it. Sometimes it's all right. You get to work. I do whatever job I'm supposed to do down in the factory there. Then I come up for my tea in the mornings. I have tea. After tea I might have 10 or 15 minutes to spare. Do something - crocheting or knitting a cardigan for the children or something. Go back down and start work again - have my 11 o'clock break. I go to the loo, or if I don't have to, I sit here and do some more knitting. Dinner time I do the same. After dinner I work. I get home in the evening. Nobody thought to do the cooking. Getting in in the evenings the children is always in the sitting room watching television, and I sit with them and say, 'Which one of you go and make me a cup of tea?' Then I get up and go and change my clothes and start the dinner. We generally have dinner about half past six, and if it is anything too hard I start from the night before. Then I'm alone in the kitchen, so I just keep all four of the burners of the cooker going so I can get it over quick. After dinner the younger pair do the cleaning up of the table and if the bigger one is not around I do the dishes. I carry on and do the kitchen. After that I go to my room. I take my knitting up and relax a little and watch the television. Then if I have some ironing I start it. Sometimes I don't bother - I just go back to the bathroom and have a wash and go to my bed. I've had enough.' (West Indian woman, full-time day worker in Factory B quoted in Shimmin et al., 1981, p 348)

Ninety-three per cent of the 394 women interviewed in another factory (Factory C) reported that housework, cooking and child-care took up most of the time when they were not working, and that they received very little help from husbands and older children. Moreover, while husbands felt free to escape in the evenings, women felt tied to their household tasks, as this woman from Factory A explained:

'I think basically it is working full-time and then going home and you see things that haven't been done and have got to be done, and meals to be cooked. It's a bit of a drudgery you know, doing two jobs. You can't sort of say, oh I'm going out for the night I suppose you could you know but, like your husband will say 'my mates asked me to go for a drink', and he's gone. Whereas you think oh I've a pile of ironing to do there, if I don't do it perhaps it won't get done or something like that. I suppose you can make yourself a martyr and you shouldn't do it really, should you, you know. But I think this all builds up inside you till you explode.' (Shimmin et al., 1981, p 348)

The task of combining family commitments with their job was a constant worry for these women. Major problems arose if their finely balanced arrangements were disrupted, the company nurse from Factory B observed that 'all women are under stress, but have to cope.' She spoke of women complaining of amenorrhoea (loss of
menstrual bleeding) and emotional stress caused by worry about the welfare of children during the day, worry about their husbands, or relatives in hospital, as well as stress due to the pressures of the work itself, such as headaches and depression and ‘wanting to get away from the line’

Ruth Cavendish has also spoken of the physical and mental strain imposed by working on an assembly line, where the work calls for considerable speed, precision and concentration

Differences between the jobs were minor in comparison with the speed and discipline which the line imposed on us all. We couldn’t do the things you would normally not think twice about, like blowing your nose or flicking hair out of your eyes, that cost valuable seconds — it wasn’t included in the layout so no time was allowed for it. In any case, your hands were usually full. We all found the repetition hard to take, once you were in command of your job, repeating the same operations over and over thousands of times a day made you even more aware of being controlled by the line. You couldn’t take a break or swap with someone else for a change — you just had to carry on, resisting the light or the speed only made the work harder because the trays kept coming and eventually you would have to work your way through the pile-up. If you really couldn’t keep up with the line, you were out. (Cavendish, 1982, p 41)

We can see that the double burden of being a worker/housewife involves women working in factories in an exhausting daily routine from which there is little respite, the greatest stress falling upon those women with children who work full-time out of necessity. Most married women working in the food factories, especially those with small children, worked part-time, but even those women were under considerable pressure, and little help was forthcoming from husbands. Part-time work also required careful adjustments to the daily routine.

Given financial pressures to take a job — and the questionnaire responses revealed that less than a quarter of the women on any shift felt that they could manage without the earnings, which helped to pay for essential items such as food, rent and fuel — the age of a woman's children largely determined the shift she worked. This did not mean that the available shift hours were regarded positively because each of the part-time shifts had clear drawbacks in relation to the care of children, but that a woman felt that the particular shift she was on was the only possible one in her circumstances. (Shumlin et al., 1981, p 348)

The interview with Anne Goss in TV5 illustrates a similar problem with part-time work although Anne's mother was able to look after her son, John, during the evening shift when Anne worked as a cleaner, it was not pleasant for her to collect a tired child late at night and carry him home.

Angela Coyle points out that although part-time work is often assumed to be organized around women's need for flexibility, to be able to combine paid work with domestic responsibilities, the proliferation of part-time work during a recession is often due to work being reorganized to increase efficiency and cut costs. She found that redundant women looking for work were not accommodated by the labour market, but that women's paid employment had to be fitted in around other commitments. It was women who had to be flexible, not the employers, women who were forced into the working patterns of their employers, not vice versa.

### 4.2 The balancing act

We have already seen the significance of part-time work for married women with domestic responsibilities. Kate Crehan refers to 'the balancing act' by which women manage to fulfil their responsibilities at work and at home, and the women she interviewed working in department stores made it clear that they considered home their primary responsibility, even though they were wage-workers

'I don't know how women work a career with children. I think it's got to be one or the other. I just don't see how you can work the two together'
I think if you get married you have a family, well, that’s your first consideration. If you want to keep a career, I don’t think you should get married. If you get married they come first and your job comes second’ (Epstein et al., 1986, p 31)

The determination to be at home when children returned from school was a recurring theme and the concept of the ‘empty house’ symbolized neglect.

‘I’m a firm believer that when a child comes home from school a parent should be there. I don’t believe in kids coming back to an empty house’ (Epstein et al., 1986, p 32)

Kate Crehan found that the balancing act was often achieved by working part-time rather than full-time, with all the disadvantages that part-time working entailed. The responsibility of being primarily concerned with child care and housework and the relentless cycle of work that this involves has been discussed before and is again clear in this interview.

Kate: ‘It’s still very much your responsibility getting the housework done?
Kay: ‘Yes, I still have to rush home. I left it tidy when I went out this morning but I know when I get in it’s fairly chaotic. Toys all over the place, there’s dirty baby clothes on the one side and my husband’s dirty clothes over here. I like somewhere to look tidy. I am not a housepride mother or housewife, but I like it to look clean and tidy. So I have to rush home and do that and then bath the baby, and then feed the baby and play with the baby for a while and get her ready for bed. Then I usually get dinner ready unless he has got dinner ready for me. Then it is just a matter of washing-up afterwards’ (Epstein et al., 1986, p 40)

Crehan argues that part-time work among married women is an increasingly important segment of the labour market, and that at the same time that full-time jobs are being lost, women are still entering the labour market to take up part-time employment. She argues that what seems to be happening is that there is a ‘radical restructuring of the labour market with part-time work coming to occupy an increasingly central role’ and that the reason for such a growth in part-time work is connected with the ‘underlying notions’ about the nature of such work.

The history of the struggles over working conditions, pay, protection of all kinds for employees, all these have centred on full-time work. Part-timers have benefited from the gains won by full-timers, but in general it remains true that part-timers have fewer rights in terms of such things as sick pay, holidays, and have less protection at work. A state of affairs which is lent support by the general feeling that part-timers are not real breadwinners, but only working for a bit of pin-money, and that they are not really committed to their jobs. To employers, therefore, part-timers can represent a docile, flexible and, in certain regards, cheaper workforce, who can often be fitted in with the needs of the labour process more easily than full-timers. This is one dimension of the reality of part-time work (Epstein et al., 1986, p 80).

Women, she considers, are caught in ‘something of a vicious circle’, because according to the prevailing social norms, which most women broadly accept, it is on women that the primary responsibility for domestic work in the home generally falls – particularly child care.

Paid employment for most women is something which is fitted around the needs of the family, it is the man of the family who is expected to be the breadwinner. Apart from the small minority of women who can aspire to middle-class, professional ‘male’ jobs, the jobs that women can get are for the most part poorly paid with poor promotion prospects. Quite apart from any ideological considerations of who should be the family breadwinner, generally it is a simple fact of life that a husband can command a higher salary than his wife, a fact that makes the traditional division of labour of husband/breadwinner, wife/homemaker and mother, seem no more than logical and sensible (Epstein et al., 1986, p 81).

A woman’s chance of gaining equality with men in terms of pay and status are slim while she still has the main domestic responsibilities which entail not only time off for pregnancy, but also to look after small children and to be there when they are ill, as well as being expected to uproot herself if her husband changes jobs. Only.
'exceptional' women are expected to have careers, by either management or women themselves, and 'enveloping all these practical difficulties is a great fog of guilt that they may be failing their children and their families in some way, and this is something even the most successful and high status working mothers are seldom entirely free from' (Epstein et al., 1986, p 81) However, Kate Crehan finally sounds an optimistic note

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(Crehan et al., 1986, p 83)

Crehan discusses the relationship between structure and ideology. A shift in the structure of work may precipitate a shift in ideology. She suggests that the slow restructuring of the labour force is one of the factors 'that may be eating away at the traditional sexual division of labour.' In other words, as the reality of women's work in paid employment continues, ideas about men's and women's roles may change, liberating both men and women from the breadwinner/housewife stereotypes. But ideology is deeply embedded, as much of the evidence in this unit concerning men's and women's roles makes clear. Is Kate Crehan over-optimistic? Or is there a slow, scarcely perceptible shift? What other factors may be eating away at the traditional sexual division of labour? Is it possible that ideological factors may be creating a shift in women's view of themselves, so that they are not content to stay at home? What influence might feminism and the women's liberation movement have had?

In the final sentence Kate Crehan suggests that ultimately it is not individuals who are responsible for change but society. What does she mean by society? Does she mean the state? In the past fifteen years legislation has not been very successful in lessening women's disadvantage at work, and little encouragement has been given to working women by the state in this country. Job-sharing, flexible hours and paternity leave are all solutions in the hands of employers at the moment, but few employers give any support to female employees with children and household commitments, nor are they obliged to by government legislation.
4.3 Redundant women

Angela Coyle argues that paid work has been a ‘route out of the domestic arena’ for women in spite of the subordination of women in the family which allows for a specific kind of exploitation of women at work, and in spite of the development and exploitation of gender division by employers. Paid work has transformed women’s lives, giving them formal equality with men, some financial independence and the knowledge that domesticity is no longer expected to be women’s sole, life-long state.

However, although women are now increasingly sharing with men the responsibility of wage-earning there is no indication that men are significantly sharing domestic responsibility with women, who still have to combine their paid employment with the unpaid employment of the household.

Women now make up a large proportion of the workforce and are in employment for most of their adult lives, with only a short break for childbirth and child care. Yet the increased participation of women in the labour force has occurred without apparently eroding the ideology of domesticity which squarely constructs a woman’s role and femininity within the home and family. Women go out to work but they remain tethered to the family, ideologically and in practice through their unpaid domestic labour. It is still women’s work and it has neither been diminished nor been shared with men (Coyle, 1984, p 92).

Moreover, rising levels of unemployment now threaten the gains that women have made, as a process of restructuring and re-organizing rationalizes the kind of labour-intensive work in which so many women are engaged. There is now substantial unemployment among women as well as among men, and women’s unemployment is probably higher than the official figures suggest, because many women do not register as unemployed beyond the period when they receive the ‘dole’ (if any), especially if the job prospects are poor. Yet women’s unemployment has not been seen as a social problem, in spite of the seriousness of such unemployment for many families where the male wage is inadequate and the female wage indispensable if the family is to attain a standard of living above the poverty line.

There is a common assumption that women do not suffer in unemployment, both because the loss of their wage will not have such ramifications for the family, and because their femininity is not so tied into work. Simply, it is held that in unemployment women are economically supported by their men and occupied by domestic activities. If anything, unemployment might resolve the implicit tension of their double life. As in employment so it is in unemployment that familial ideology comes to the forefront in interpreting women’s job loss. Here it is the nexus of the family and work which so crucially influences women’s experiences in unemployment (Coyle, 1984, p 95).

Coyle investigated the ‘quiescence’ concerning women’s unemployment, focusing on the closing down of two Yorkshire clothing factories which made 380 people redundant. The centrality of paid work in women’s lives was made clear, for out of the total of 76 women only two (one pregnant and one nearly sixty) took the opportunity to stop working, although for nearly all the change of job meant a change for the worse from skilled work to unskilled work, from good working conditions to poor working conditions, from well paid work to poorly paid work.

Five women interviewed in depth all talked about the inadequacy of the male wage as a sole source of income, especially when their men were now likely to be out of work themselves, and they also spoke of how the loss of their own wage affected them in terms of lost independence as well as in terms of lost income. Redundancy did not provide an opportunity to return to the home, for paid work was central to women’s lives and redundancy was simply seen as an interruption of women’s working lives.
4.4 **High pressure: working lives of women managers**

The dedications at the beginning of Cary Cooper and Manlyn Davidson's study of women managers are interesting

> To the career woman in my life, Rachel Davies, for her love, support and honesty
> To Howard – a career woman’s ideal husband

The importance of the marital relationship for women managers is clearly underlined here and emerges as an important strand in the book. Some successful women managers speak enthusiastically about their husbands, like this senior executive in her middle fifties speaking of her third husband

> ‘He gives me support. I earn much more than him, he knew I was head of a firm when we married, although I don’t think he really knows what I do. He’s much younger than me and he thinks it’s lovely that I earn more than him. It didn’t bother the husband before either. I travel a lot all over the world and he usually comes with me.’ (Cooper and Davidson, 1982, p 149)

Another woman found her husband supported her but in the face of teasing from friends and family

> ‘He is extremely sympathetic and supportive of my career but our friends and family don’t always understand what is going on. The fact that he gets home a lot earlier than I do, he gets a lot of teasing about that. Also if I’m planning to go away on business our friends don’t understand and tease him about it.’ (Cooper and Davidson, 1982, p 150)

Ideology about women’s traditional role can still be a problem for such professional women, and even more so when husbands are not supportive

> ‘A potential source of stress which I’ve been able to keep at bay so far, is at the end of the day having to deal with the two children and playing fair by them and managing to switch modes, rather than putting my feet up and having a drink I get little help from my husband.’ (Cooper and Davidson, 1982, p 144)

Forty-seven per cent of the married women managers interviewed by Cooper and Davidson maintained that being married had proved a disadvantage to them in terms of career development and advancement, isolating the following disadvantages: role conflict between running a home and raising children and a career, not being geographically mobile, not having enough time to run a home and a career, feelings of guilt about not being a good wife and mother, lack of emotional and domestic support from husbands, and having to take work home with them (Cooper and Davidson, 1982, p 143). The difference between male managers and female managers has been summed up by Pleck (1985) as follows: for men, the work role is allowed to intrude into the family, so that dinner may be delayed because of a meeting, whereas for women the family role is not allowed to intrude on the work role – leaving work early to take care of a sick child for example

Thus, the double shift can be a problem for these women managers, just as it is for women working in factories on the line. However, their guilt feelings and role conflict can be eased by the knowledge that they have paid for reliable child care

I have found that people aren’t usually shocked that I am a career woman but they are shocked that I have a young baby. Many people seemed shocked and a little disgusted when I said that I was returning to work after I had my first baby. Their reaction did affect me and got me down somewhat. It was OK with close friends as they knew that the woman I had employed to look after my child was fine but sometimes people said cruel things as if I was going to do something awful to it, or leave it in a terrible nursery all day. They didn’t mean it, but it hurt. Thus time they just assume I will be returning to work. The strange thing is, I’m not sure what to do when this baby is born. I’m in great conflict. (Cooper and Davidson, 1982, p 145)

Women with higher incomes can afford child-care services and labour-saving devices denied to those with lower incomes, but this still leaves them with problems, both practical and ideological. Moreover, women who want to be successful at work have
additional problems for, as we noted in the discussion of the sexual division of labour they must compete in a man’s world, and have to be scrupulously careful not to allow family matters to intrude on work, as this thirty-five year old executive woman who had secured a senior managerial post, having returned to industry after having her children, pointed out

‘Your record has got to be spotless, you can’t afford to take a day off because of sick children, whereas a man possibly can, because no one would ask him or for that matter blame him’ (Cooper and Davidson, 1982, p 146)

Thus, Cooper and Davidson emphasize strategies for women managers to help themselves, devoting several pages to a discussion of how women can learn to be more assertive, as well as discussing what organizations can do to help the executive woman by means of providing training, flexible working arrangements for men and women, maternity and paternity leave, and workplace crèches. They also stress the importance of strategies for changing the consciousness of male management, to adjust to the new reality of women working in the managerial ranks of organizations.

4.5 Women in control

Women who run their own businesses still have to deal with husbands who consider that a woman’s place is in the home

‘His attitude at the beginning was, “Well, as long as you’re here and I have my dinner and the house runs, I don’t mind.” That to me was the most frightening aspect of the whole thing.’ (Coffee and Scase, 1986, p 48)

In addition, whereas wives’ unpaid work is often essential in male-owned enterprises, women don’t get comparable help when they set up in business. Husbands do not see that they have an obligation to make their wives’ business a success. Tension and role conflict are part of the experience of these women too: ‘I think we’re mad. We’ve dug this enormous hole for ourselves. I’m a wife, lover, mother and business woman. It’s just impossible! Something has to go – so much of your emotion is taken up in running your business you’ve just got nothing left over.’ (Coffee and Scase, 1986, p 49) Coffee and Scase summarize their findings as follows:

There are two points to emphasize. First, although women share a number of common problems with men in business start-up and management, they do experience quite distinctive gender-related problems. Second, there are sharp contrasts among these women which policy makers and small business advisors need to recognize. (Coffee and Scase, 1986, p 140)

Female entrepreneurs are not an homogeneous group. Coffee and Scase divide them according to a typology based on women’s perception both of gender roles and entrepreneurial ideals

1 Conventional women business-owners, who are highly committed to both entrepreneurial ideals and to conventional notions about gender roles. For these women, most of whom are married, work is often for ‘pin money’, not a necessity, as it is for many working-class women. It provides a source of income to supplement the husband’s earnings and provides an extra ‘interest’ in life.

2 Innovative proprietors who are highly committed to entrepreneurial ideals but reject prevailing notions of the female role. Few such women are married

3 Domestic traders, whose primary interest is their traditional female role. Again, many of these women are married, and their work is secondary to their role as wife and mother. Their work provides a source of supplementing income, and an interesting activity that does not interfere with domestic roles.
4 Radical proprietors with a low commitment to entrepreneurial ideals and to traditional female roles, often working in enterprises associated with the women’s movement. These women tend not to be married. They may be single mothers. They place a great emphasis upon overcoming the traditional subordination of women rather than on profit-making.

4.6 Summary

The ghettoization of women’s work emerges very clearly from an examination of the research studies mentioned in this unit so far. In fact, even managers and entrepreneurs operate with a narrow band of businesses and occupations—catering, retailing, service work, office work. However, some other features of women’s work also emerge very clearly, underlining the oppressive nature of the ‘double shift’.

1. Most women work out of necessity, not for ‘pin money’, though there are differences between working-class women in factories and professional women. The latter stress personal independence and personal development to a greater extent. The male breadwinner and the ‘family wage’ are not realities for most families, though the state, employers and individual men and women still retain an ideology of the family which assumes that men bring home money wages to their wives who should stay in the home.

2. The significance of part-time work for women is important, especially for women with children. Managerial work is difficult for women because it is rarely part-time, and women who run their own businesses often have to fit in their work around family commitments.

3. Although many women with young children opt for part-time work, there are also many women who work full-time, including lone mothers. Professional women who do so must pay for nannies and au pairs, but for working-class women, who work out of economic necessity and bear the full weight of domestic responsibility, there is reliance on help from other family members or neighbours. The lack of cheap nursery facilities in Britain makes work, especially full-time work, problematic for such women.
4 Class and racial differentiation play a part in the patterns of work among different groups of women. In the interviews in TV5 Lesley Smart worked full-time, but as a professional woman she had more options than Anne Goss, the cleaner who worked part-time. A professional woman may be able to work at home when her child is sick without loss of pay, she can to some extent arrange her working hours to suit herself, her salary enables her to pay for cleaning, to buy household equipment to make life easier and to shop in bulk, she owns a car and can pay for use of a crèche.

In the factory where the researcher Ruth Cavendish worked, the assembly-line workforce at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy was not only entirely female but also entirely immigrant, the largest proportion being Irish, the rest of Caribbean or Asian origin. The situation among black and Asian workers and other immigrant groups is very much worse than that for the white English women, as we have already seen.

5 Finally, although women are working a double shift there is evidence that husbands do not support their wives by sharing domestic duties. You will have noted frequent comments in the research material discussed above about men not sharing housework, although Kate Crehan does suggest that slow changes are taking place.

In the next section we shall examine this question of housework in some detail. It is an important question, for, if women are to take their place as wage workers on terms of equality with men, then men need to reconsider their work within the household. If the male wage is inadequate for the family’s needs and women must work then how should men’s relationship to household duties change?
It has been argued by some social scientists that, although there are still differences between men’s and women’s work in the household, the family is becoming ‘symmetrical’. Young and Willmott (1973) maintain that men and women are now sharing child care, making joint decisions in many matters and working together on domestic chores such as shopping, cooking and cleaning. Thus it is argued that conjugal roles are no longer so clearly demarcated, because so many married women are now working, especially working-class women, that husbands are more willing to help out in the house. Some men find their paid jobs unsatisfying, and there has been a consequent shift among men to ‘home-centredness’. Moreover, some researchers have suggested that the sharing of domestic responsibility puts both husbands and wives under stress in a new kind of way, as this young female married manager, without children, explained:

‘I think that the strain is on the couple when there is a dual career, not necessarily the woman, as my husband also works full-time but comes home and shares all the housework and cooking. You are sharing the work that one person would do full-time by doing it part-time at night. Thus it’s a stress for the husband as well’ (Bartol, 1980, p 216)

Here the suggestion is that it is not only the working-class family that is developing symmetrical roles, though whether this professional couple would continue to share household tasks after the arrival of children is debatable and other evidence suggests that they would not.

Now look at Tables 5 and 6. Does the statistical evidence here support the idea of the ‘symmetrical family’ in terms of household duties?

Table 5 ‘Wives’ and husbands’ views about how the housework is shared between them by wife’s work status (percentages)

Source: Based on Martin and Roberts, 1984, Table 8.7, p 101
Table 6 How wives and husbands feel about the amount of housework done by husbands, by wife’s work status (percentages)

Looking at Table 5, only 26% of the wives and 27% of the sample of husbands considered that they shared the housework equally, whereas 73% of wives and 72% of husbands said that the wife does most or all of the housework. The proportion of equally shared housework rises to 43/44% where the wife is working full-time. Even here, though, the majority of the survey report that the wife continues to do most or all of the housework (54/55%). Where the wife is working part-time, only 23/24% report equal sharing of household duties, and more married women work part-time than full-time.

Pollert considers that many sociological studies of the 1950s and ’60s, such as that of Young and Willmott, which concluded that women’s role in the family had been lightened by a more democratic division of labour with husbands, were over-optimistic. Her own research with ‘factory wives’ from Bristol paints a less rosy picture. She notes, for example, the significance of the contrast between male and female opinion, which was often sharp. Stan, a chargehand, declares ‘All this women’s lib stuff is stupid, because I help my wife at home and most men do. Women don’t have anything to complain about. All these things in the newspapers about women – they’re just trying to stir up trouble’ (Pollert, 1981, p 114).

Superficially the women concurred, says Anna Pollert, and liked to boast proudly about how they shared their work with their husbands, but the most egalitarian picture looked like this:

Anna: What about the home? Who does what?
Stella: What, the work? We share it. Well, my husband always does the kitchen. I never touch the kitchen at all.
Anna: Cooking?
Stella: Oh, I do the cooking.
Anna: Always?
Stella No, sometimes he does it. He can’t do very much
Anna Washing-up?
Stella Oh, we share that
Anna Cleaning the house?
Stella I do most of the house, but he does the windows, you know, on the outside, and he looks after the car and the garden (Pollert, 1981, p. 114)

As Pollert comments

A closer look showed that Stella still did most of the daily drudgery of cooking and housework and with most of the women it became apparent that ‘sharing’ meant a limited delegation of specific tasks to their husbands, while they bore the responsibility for the endless, undefined, nagging work (Pollert, 1981, p. 198)

In another interview the way even women working full-time still regarded themselves primarily as ‘housewives’ and their husbands as ‘workers’ was shown to produce ambivalence. On the one hand they did not expect help and on the other they resented its absence, feeling guilty for not doing enough and resignation at doing too much

Anna Can’t you leave him to fend for himself?
Pearl Ah! It’s the dishes! Dishes!
Anna Come on! It’s just excuses
Pearl Ah! – you can’t expect him to – not when you’ve a husband on shift work. You’ve got to be there for him to come home to meals. Can’t expect him to do it. Oh! He’s ever so good
Anna But you work all day
Pearl Yes, I know
Anna Well, you don’t have anyone to cook when you get in
Pearl Oh, if he’s home like when he’s on 6 till 2 he does. He’s good. As long as I do it the night before, he’ll put it on
Anna You have to do it the night before?
Pearl Oh yes! Prepare it! (Uproarious laughter) He couldn’t do that!
Anna Couldn’t he?
Pearl No!
Vera Men take women for granted, see
Pearl Yes
Vera They do!
Pearl You wait till you marry! It’s surprising!
Vera Men rely on you
Pearl Too much
Anna And what do you do?
Vera Go a bit mad. (Laugh)
Pearl We all go mad
Vera We all go mad, you’ll find that. They just take us for granted
(Pollert, 1981, pp. 115–116)

Other researchers agree with Anna Pollert and Angela Coyle. Sue Sharpe (1984) talked to 120 working mothers, mainly working-class, from major British cities – London, Leeds, Sheffield, Leicester, Manchester, Newcastle and Glasgow – of whom 60% worked part-time and 40% full-time. She found that almost half the mothers in two-parent families appeared to receive little or no domestic help from their partners and that men’s participation at home is increasing only very slowly, mainly in the area of child care.

Audrey Hunt, talking to managers in 1975, found that husbands did not give very much help at home, and Cooper and Davidson found that 58% of the women managers they interviewed maintained that they spent more time on home and child-care duties, compared with their husbands, and 42% said that this imbalance worried them. Kate Crehan notes that

There is a difference in the kind of domestic tasks that women and men are responsible for. Male tasks tend to be one-off, periodic tasks, redecorating a room, for instance,
which can be fitted in when and as time off work is available. The characteristically female tasks of cleaning, cooking, shopping and so on, in contrast, tend to be those repetitive, essential tasks which have to be fitted into some sort of daily or near daily routine (Epstein et al., 1986, p. 41).

Table 7 gives further evidence, showing clearly that certain tasks are still allocated almost entirely to women—washing and ironing, for example—and that men give assistance in specific areas, such as doing the dishes, and only have the primary responsibility for one thing—repairing household equipment. Note also that we have evidence here to suggest that there is a gap between what people think 'should' happen and what really happens. The strength of ideology about gender roles in determining our lives and the difficulties of putting into practice our own ideas about equality are shown here very clearly.

Table 7 Household division of labour by marital status, 1984, Great Britain (percentages)

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Source: British Social Attitudes Survey, 1984, Social and Community Planning Research, in Social Trends, No. 16, 1986, Table 2.12, p. 36

In the last two sections we have seen how women of all classes are forced to cope with the 'double shift' when they take on paid work outside the home, without significant sharing of housework and child care with husbands. Many women rely on their own mothers and other relatives for child care when they cannot afford a private nursery.

Clearly, the provision of cheap nursery facilities where women could safely leave their children would ease the difficulties that married women face in juggling work and child-care arrangements. In the next section we shall examine the role of the state in Britain in recent years in providing child care for working mothers.
Responsibility for the under-fives is divided between two separate government departments, the Department of Health and Social Security (DHSS), in charge of day nurseries maintained by local authorities or voluntary bodies, and the Department of Education and Science (DES), in charge of nursery education, and also in receipt of the largest amount of funding. The assumption seems to be that day nurseries are not responsible for education, and indeed they are staffed by nursery nurses, with NNAB qualifications, and not by teachers. Moreover, it is clear that day nurseries and nursery schools are not intended for working mothers, as we shall see.

During the Second World War there were 1300 full-time day nurseries, but at the end of the war the Ministry of Health declared that the proper place for children under two was at home with mother, and a circular declared ‘Under normal peacetime conditions, the right policy to pursue would be positively to discourage mothers of children under two from going out to work.’ This has been the effective policy ever since, in spite of the introduction of paid maternity leave.

Day nurseries rapidly expanded in the Second World War, now available to very few.

Day nurseries have instead been seen as places for ‘problem families’ to put their children into day care, and in 1967 the Plowden Report recommended that ‘Mothers who cannot satisfy the authorities that they have exceptionally good reasons for working should have low priority for full-time nurseries for their children’ (Department of Education and Science, 1967, p 128). Since the publication of his influential book, *Maternal Care and Mental Health* in 1951, John Bowlby’s theory of maternal deprivation has been used to underpin state policies on child care mothers should stay at home to look after their small children. Even though Bowlby’s work has been called into question, and even though the fact is that mothers must and do work, the official policies remain unchanged.Indeed, the Conservative government of the early 1980s reiterated that the mother’s place is in the home and that with prevailing levels of unemployment women should make way for men, who as breadwinners stand in greater need of the available jobs.
Table 8 indicates the provision of nursery care from 1975 to 1985. Look at it carefully. As you can see, the number of full-time nurseries open in 1985 was 662, not many more than half the number available in the war years. Look at how many full-time places were available in 1985. And how many were available in part-time nursery groups? These two figures together tell us the amount of state provision by the DHSS. Note that part-time places are of limited use to working mothers.

Now look at the number of places provided in private nurseries. Full-time day care gives another 24,000 places, but part-time places in private day-care amount to a staggering 398,559 places. Moreover, registered childminders provide another 126,613 places in full-time care. It is clear that responsibility for the under-fives and the problems of working mothers are not among the state's priorities.

Source: Department of Health and Social Security and Department of Education and Science, in Health and Personal Social Service Statistics for England, Table 75, p. 111. HMSO
A report from the EEC in 1984 indicated that all the European states wished to increase nursery provision and the United Kingdom declared its wish to increase the amount of provision and to provide free nursery care. However, the United Kingdom, like all the other states, expressed pessimism about the real possibility of putting such policies into practice in the current economic climate. And this pessimism has been justified. The state has other priorities, and the provision of day nurseries has been shelved.

One of the women interviewed by Kate Crehan spoke spontaneously about the value of crèches at workplaces:

> there're lots of women who want to work who can't afford to put their kids into playschool or find someone to look after them. I think they should have some kind of crèche, you know, where you go to work. If they had a crèche, I mean if you paid 50p a day for somebody just to be in there and look after them. If you had the right sort of set-up it could be someone who works there anyway and if you take a week off looking after the children I think it would be a good idea.‘ (Epstein et al., 1986, p. 46)

There is quite a lot of evidence that family members are responsible for the care of most children belonging to working mothers. In 1966 Audrey Hunt found that fathers and relatives looked after pre-school children in half the sample of women managers she interviewed. Sue Sharpe (1984) also found that about a quarter of mothers in two-parent families left their pre-school children in the care of their husbands, and that this was the largest single category of child care used. Fathers looked after their children whilst wives went out cleaning (evenings or mornings), shelf-stacking in local supermarkets, packing biscuits in the local factory on the evening shift, night nursing or weekend waitressing. Mothers and mothers-in-law also looked after children.
This dependence on family members for child care is a significant reminder that the family is expected to solve problems of child care and care of other family members, such as the sick and elderly. It is possible that for mothers this is the preferred method, but the state does not offer any cheap and easy alternative. Private day nurseries are expensive and so are chilmdinders (though paradoxically chilmdinders are at the same time grossly underpaid).

One of the contrasts between England and Germany is in the provision of state nursery care and it has been suggested that this is the result of greater political pressure in West Germany from the 'Work and Family' lobby. However, both nurseries and schools in West Germany finish at lunch-time so that working mothers still have problems with child care and more problems with school-age children than those in England. Thus, as we shall see in section 7.2, the women working for the West German Beck department store relied on relatives for afternoon child care, where possible, and were pleased to take advantage of the flexible working arrangements introduced by the Beck store.

At this point let us turn from problems to solutions. Write down a list of ways in which problems faced by working mothers could be dealt with, drawing on the ideas suggested earlier in the unit by various writers, as well as other ideas of your own. Consider as you do so the level at which you think social intervention can or should be made. Are solutions to be found at the political level, at the level of the economy or must they be ideological? In other words, do changes necessitate legislation by the government (the political level)? Should employers take the initiative (the economic level)? Or do men and women need to rethink their ideas about men's and women's roles (the ideological level)? Can changes at one level precipitate changes at another level, as Kate Crehan argues?

When you have made your list check your ideas with those of Barbara Toner (below), and consider the following questions:

1. To which of Toner's proposals would you give priority? Or is there some other proposal that you would wish to see implemented?

2. Where does responsibility for social intervention on behalf of working women lie? How much responsibility should the state take, and what measures could they take? What action can employers take to improve the working lives of their female employees?

3. How far must responsibility lie with individual men and women, negotiating changes within the family? In what ways does the interdependence of family and work need to be taken into account by both employers and employees, men and women?

At the end of a book intended as a practical guide for working mothers, written in 1975, Barbara Toner felt impelled to put forward eight proposals:

It may be extraordinarily arrogant of me to list my proposals. The need of working mothers actually could not be clearer yet the following points are not covered by any proposed legislation:

1. The immediate appointment of one Ministry, existing or otherwise, to deal with the needs of working mothers.

2. An urgent programme for the expansion of childcare facilities - a rapid increase in day-nursery places, both private and local authority, a greater recognition of the services of childcare in the way of financial incentive and formal instructions, further use of school and play areas for supervision of children after school and in the holidays, institution of a state network of holiday camps for school-children.
3. Better prospects for part-time workers for training and promotion
4. Statutory unpaid leave for mothers to be taken in school holidays or in the event of a child’s illness
5. Supplementary Benefit for mothers for loss of wages due to a child’s illness
6. Tax allowances for child care expenses
7. More concerted effort from trade unions on behalf of working mothers
8. More concerted effort from husbands on behalf of working mothers

(Toner, 1975, p 98)

Barbara Toner’s proposals identify different areas of change that are needed, together with different social groups or institutions who would have to act to bring about more changes. We could, for example, distinguish between

(a) social policy – through government actions,
(b) working conditions – employers and trade unions, and
(c) the family – husbands

These proposals all raise issues about the ideology of the sexual division of labour, as it affects the assumptions of social policies, the segregation of occupations, and the division of domestic responsibilities.

Changes will be necessary both at work and in the home if the disadvantaged situation of women who work for a wage and carry family responsibility is to be changed. In the next section we shall be looking at one employer’s attempt to give women workers support and flexibility, but first let us consider the role which the state can play. We have already considered the role of the British state in the provision of nurseries, and Barbara Toner suggests some other ways in which the state could give support to working mothers – providing for loss of wages due to children’s illness, giving statutory unpaid leave for child care, and providing tax allowances for child care expenses. In many countries the state does not penalize working mothers in the way that they are penalized here. In both Canada and the United States, for example, child-care expenses can be offset against taxable income.
In this section we are going to look at two case-studies from other countries

- Cuba, where state intervention has tried to provide support for working mothers, at both a practical and an ideological level, and
- West Germany, where there have been innovations in time-management, coupled with schemes for training and promotion of female shopworkers.

These are very different examples, where one deals with national policies introduced by a government, the other deals with particular employment practices introduced by one employer. As you read through the two examples, you will discover other differences.

The purpose of having these two examples here is not to construct a detailed comparison of women's employment in Britain, Cuba and West Germany. To do that would require at least another unit. Rather, they are intended to highlight some of the issues about change raised by Barbara Toner's proposals discussed above. The two cases should illuminate how change can be brought about in relation to women's work, and raise some questions in your mind about the difficulties and limitations of policies intended to bring about change.

7.1 Social policy and social change: women and the state in Cuba

After the 1958 revolution in Cuba, many women who had previously been compelled to work out of economic necessity dropped out of the labour market, considering that release from the treadmill of paid work was their idea of liberation. This decline in the number of women in paid employment resulted in severe labour shortages. As a consequence, in 1969 there was a government campaign to mobilize women into the labour force, followed by a rapid increase in the range and scope of communal facilities designed to alleviate the domestic burden of Cuban women. Communal dining halls, laundry facilities and crèches were established at places of work and Plan Jaba (the shopping-bag scheme) was set up, whereby women could leave a shopping-list in the morning and pick up the ready-packed shopping in the evening. (Interminable queueing for shopping was at that time a feature of everyday life for Cuban women.) Later a new Maternity Law was passed, giving mothers generous paid maternity leave and time off work for post-natal visits and visits to baby clinics.

However, the problems of women's double shift were not solved by these provisions, as the responsibility for children and housework still rested on women alone, and women continued to drop out of the labour force. So, in 1974 a systematic, nationwide campaign was launched to educate both men and women about shared responsibility in the home. This campaign was reinforced legally by the Family Code which came into force in 1975. Articles 24-28 of the Family Code are now read out at all marriage ceremonies; these articles are reproduced below.

As you read the articles, make a note of what they indicate about Cuban conceptions of the family and marriage.

24 Marriage is constituted on the basis of equal rights and duties of both spouses.

25 The spouses must live together, be faithful to one another, consider and respect each other and each mutually help the other.

The rights and duties established by the Code will subsist in their entirety as long as the marriage has not been legally terminated, in spite of the fact that for justifiable reasons a common household has not been maintained.
backward, antiquated concepts still persist' (Thesis Three, quoted by Randall, 1981, p. 137). Such concepts as Cuban views of masculinity (and the idea of 'machismo') present a powerful distinction between 'men's work' and 'women's work' both in the workplace and in the home, and thus the Family Code — and the 'fundamental battle in the sphere of consciousness' — have only been partly successful in the attempt to change the sexual division of labour in Cuba. Women's paid employment has increased, and the number of women doing what was seen as 'men's work' has increased, but it has, so far, been less successful in undermining ideas of 'women's work', so that most jobs previously done by women, such as working in nurseries and canteens, remain their province.

The example of Cuban social policy is significant for two different reasons. It shows us that governments can make social interventions to facilitate women's greater participation in the labour force. On the other hand, it also illuminates the difficulties which such interventions can face, by showing how complex and interlocking the various supports of the sexual division of labour can be.

It is also worth noting how different the problems and solutions were in Cuba from those which we have been considering in Britain. The Cuban state intervened because not enough married women were in paid employment. It improved and socialized facilities to help ease the domestic duties of married women. When this failed to bring about the desired increase, it also intervened legally to equalize domestic responsibilities within the family. In Britain, the opposite has been the case. In spite of the absence of state facilities (or legal interventions to equalize family responsibilities), the number of working mothers has increased through the post-war period.

Cuban poster
'your work is necessary'
26. Both spouses are obligated to care for the family they have created and co-operate with each other in the education, formation, and guidance of their children in line with the principles of socialist morality. As well, each to the extent of his or her capabilities, must participate in governing the home and co-operate toward its best possible care.

27. The spouses are obliged to contribute toward satisfying the needs of the family they have created in their marriage, each according to his or her faculties and economic capabilities. Nevertheless, if one of the spouses contributes only through his or her work in the home and child care, the other spouse must provide full economic support without this meaning that he or she be relieved of the obligations of co-operating with the housework and child care.

28. Both spouses have the right to exercise their professions or crafts and must lend each other reciprocal co-operation and aid to this effect, as well as in order to carry out studies or perfect their training, but in all cases they will take care to organize their home life so that such activities be co-ordinated with the fulfilment of the obligations imposed by this Code (reproduced in Randall, 1981, p. 38-9).

These articles of the Family Code present a view of marriage and the family which stresses two main points:

- that marriage is a contract between individuals who are seen as having equal rights (for example, to pursue their own crafts and studies), and
- that marriage involves equal responsibilities or duties, which explicitly states an 'obligation of co-operating with the housework and child-care' (Article 27).

The Cuban example is interesting because it is a case where the state has deliberately intervened to change the conditions for women's work, both in terms of providing socialized facilities for what were seen as 'private' responsibilities (the 'domestic duties' for women), and of changing the legal definition of family roles.

Make a note of the two ways in which the Cuban state intervened. Can you think of any factors which might have limited the success of these measures to improve women's participation in paid work?

In the first stage, the state provided child-care facilities and socialized tasks which were usually carried out at home, such as the preparation of meals and laundry, as well as providing paid maternity leave. Such socialized facilities certainly eased the burden of domestic work for Cuban women, but they did not change the sexual division of labour within the family which determines who is responsible for these tasks. Although better facilities were created, the expectation remained that it would be women who performed these duties.

The Family Code can be seen as a response to these problems, in its attempt to establish equal rights and responsibilities within the family. Although this Code establishes a legally enforceable idea of equality between spouses, this has some limitations, too. For this equality to be enforced, it means that wives would have to be willing to take their husbands to court over family matters. There is a clear tension between the use of the law in such disputes, and ideas about the 'privacy' of family matters, and the idea that marriage should be a harmonious relationship.

Further, to establish equality as a legal right is, as we have seen elsewhere, a different matter from establishing it as a social practice. For equality to move from being a formal proposition to a substantive reality means that ideas, habits and patterns of behaviour have to change. The ideology of a sexual division of labour was recognized by the Cuban state in the Family Code, and also in the commitment that 'a fundamental battle must be waged in the sphere of consciousness where
7.2 Working patterns in West Germany: the Beck department store

A recent study of women, work and the family has tried to move beyond the collection of statistics, and at the same time to make cross-cultural comparisons, involving retail stores in West Germany and England. This study depends heavily on qualitative rather than quantitative data, particularly using in-depth interviews with both workers and management, and the researchers stress the way in which such interviews bring "an impersonal statistic to life."

Some of the findings of this study have already been discussed, in relation to the "balancing act" that women must perform when they combine part-time work and domestic responsibilities, and the significance of part-time work for the successful juggling of child care and paid work. The study concluded that the distinction between part-time work and full-time work needed to be re-thought, and that a whole range of more flexible working arrangements were required.

Here we shall look at such flexible working arrangements in operation at a department store in West Germany, the Beck department store. In the West German situation, there is good state provision of nurseries (although only until lunch-time) and a very different approach to training for such jobs as sales assistant from that in England where such work is considered to be unskilled.

Jurgen Sass (in chapter 4 of Epstein et al., 1986), commenting on the research in the Beck department store, argues that in West Germany the issue of how to combine work and family life has become increasingly important in recent decades. As in England, there has been a sharp rise in the proportion of married women in employment; approximately 60% of women in employment in West Germany today are married. Moreover, there has also been a sharp increase in the number of women in part-time employment from 6% in 1960 to 30% in 1982. At the same time there has been concern both at the rise of unemployment among women, which is higher than for men, and for the relatively poorer working conditions of part-time workers, together with the curtailment of rights associated with full-time work. In Germany, as in England, Conservative politicians have been calling for the strengthening of the family and arguing that the family can ease the strain on public spending by taking greater responsibility for the young, the sick and the elderly. On the other hand the trade unions, the Social Democratic Party and the feminist movement have called for an increased integration of women into the labour force, for systems of flexible working and a reduction of the working week from 40 to 35 hours.

Sass points out that part-time working has been a significant aspect of the way women combine their family responsibilities with paid employment, and argues that a solution to the problems of women's work cannot be found by women becoming full-time workers.

Paid employment as it currently exists is organized predominantly on the basis of male logic so that the demand that all women should have full-time employment amounts to saying that women should become like men, but without ever achieving the position of men. It would mean women giving up part of their own female identity without receiving any adequate recompense at the workplace (Epstein et al., 1986, p 115).

Thus, the study of the Beck department store deals with problems faced by women who want to work but at the same time want to have a full family life.

The purpose of this study is to highlight gaps in the debate about future forms of employment. We have deliberately chosen to look at the nature of the labour market in order to avoid any misunderstanding it should be stressed that we are not saying that paid employment for women is not important, undoubtedly, if women did not participate in the workforce their chances of emancipation would certainly be smaller and much of what has already been achieved by women would not have been. The reality lived by most women calls for solutions that enable women to live as they themselves want and need to live (Epstein et al., 1986, p 115).
The Beck department store in Munich is an old-established firm, selling to the upper and middle classes, which deliberately re-thought and restructured its organization to appeal to modern consumers with money to spend. The Managing Director formulated the new company philosophy as follows:

- The company must be more than a shop. It must express an attitude to life.
- The most important company principle is

  - The customer is our guest, we want to play the role of host and not only sell, but also create an enjoyable and tempting atmosphere.

The old retailing slogan of 'The customer is always right' has been discarded, and the new slogan, 'The customer is our guest', has had wide-ranging implications for the saleswomen who work there. The saleswomen have been encouraged to think of themselves as 'mirror images' of the clientele the company was aiming at. The new company slogan has given the saleswomen a more positive image of themselves than usual in shopwork, seeing themselves as the customers' equals, not subordinates. 'I am confident that my bosses will support me if I open my mouth when customers are being stupid. Now I am also not afraid of telling customers the truth and I don't just have to grin and bear it.' (Epstein et al., 1986, p. 123) 

The Managing Director stresses the inappropriateness of the old image of quiet, subservient sales staff, and the company offers comprehensive training on the basis of two-day seminars to give the saleswomen confidence and to encourage them to improve their existing educational qualifications. 'We want to support our people here and put into practice the motto "the customer is our guest", stressing that the host is on a par with her guest.' (Epstein et al., 1986, p. 125)

Enjoying meeting people and having some specialist knowledge were the two qualities needed by the Beck saleswomen. Eighty-six per cent of those questioned had finished an apprenticeship, either in the retail trade or an associated profession. This is one difference between England and West Germany: young school-leavers in West Germany can expect to take up an apprenticeship in a much greater variety of occupations, many of which, such as retailing, are considered unskilled in England.

The company atmosphere at Beck is caring, sympathetic, appreciative, in a paternalistic, patriarchal style. Most of the employees are female and the company is generous and concerned about their family problems. One indication of this is the flexible working scheme, designed to allow the saleswomen to negotiate their working hours to suit their own needs.

Every employee is able to decide in advance how many hours per month she wants her average worktime to be. The lower limit is 60 and the upper, which constitutes full-time, is 173 hours per month. Between these two limits any number of hours can be selected in steps of ten hours, with anything less than 173 hours being classified as part-time. The department in which the employee works must be consulted as to how the agreed number of hours is to be distributed over the month. The particular needs of the department or the employee may mean that in certain months an employee works less than her agreed average, but this does not affect her monthly salary. These hours can be made up during the next few months, for example during the Christmas period. Overtimes worked, so-called 'time credit', can also be used to advantage in less busy periods by taking free time. (Epstein et al., 1986, p. 120)

Thus, the Beck department store promotes a positive self-image among the female employees, and enables them to juggle work and family commitments more successfully.
Company policies have been successful on two counts

- Sales figures have gone up substantially
- The saleswomen expressed satisfaction with their work, which attracted well-educated young women, as well as the more traditionally minded mature women

I am going to stay with this job. I like it a lot and don’t take any stick. The older saleswomen thought something else to play a subservient role and serve above all else. Of course I also realize that the overall image of women has changed, yet that’s what I like so much about Beck they give me a strong, positive female image (Epstein et al., 1986, p 130)

Thus, the women at Beck had two advantages over their counterparts in England, interviewed by Crehan

- They were given a positive self-image of themselves and received training which increased their self-confidence
- They were able to adjust their working hours to suit their own needs

In addition, the West German state had implemented policies that gave women more support and confidence in themselves as workers

- There is a network of state-run nurseries – though they do not operate all day long, but then neither do the schools
- There are apprenticeships and training in occupations such as retailing and catering, which are not available on the same scale in England

These policies do not resolve all the problems we have discussed in this unit. For example, there are still problems with child care, in spite of the flexible working hours and many of the women still had to fall back on relatives for child care. Shorter school hours meant that women were disadvantaged over a longer period of years, in which arrangements had to be made for children in the afternoons. In some ways the flexible working hours suited employers rather than the women, in that the needs of the department and the store took precedence. Managerial positions were still not available to women who worked part-time because of the degree of personal commitment needed for managerial work.

In addition the Beck case-study also raises some important questions. The whole ethos of the company was clearly paternalist and patriarchal, and their company philosophy carried assumptions about the female role and about class. The kind of saleswomen employed at Beck would have to present a particular image and recruitment was from the middle-class rather than from the working-class. It might have been interesting to know what kind of policies and arrangements Beck had for the women cleaners who arrived to clean the store when the guests had gone.

There is no mention in this study of the role that husbands play in the lives of these West German women. Do these policies, therefore, do anything more than make the ‘double shift’ a little easier? Finally, it is worth noting that these policies operate in an occupation which is already seen as ‘women’s work’. Could similar policies of shorter and more flexible working hours change the pattern of occupational segregation between men and women if applied to all occupations?
8 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this unit we have looked at the problems which married women face when they take on waged work. There are pressures on married men, too, problems that men face as husbands and as waged workers who must earn the wage that keeps the family going, who must be breadwinners. The pressures on men and the difficulties they face in bringing home the wage should not be underestimated. However, in this unit we have chosen to concentrate on the problems faced specifically by women, at a time when the majority of women are both housewives and waged workers, and when many women are in fact the only breadwinner, either as lone mothers or in families where the husband is unemployed – and when women’s changing role is not acknowledged in terms of the provision of child care or in other support services to ease the ‘double shift’.

As we have seen, women feel a tension between their roles as workers and as housewife/mothers. Moreover, women with children face practical problems about child care and must fit in their work around commitments to their children. Various solutions to the problems faced by married women who work have been considered:

1. Action taken by the state in facilitating work through the provision of child-care facilities and other systems of support, such as those developed in Cuba.

2. State legislation aimed at changing consciousness and shifting the accepted ideology about men’s and women’s roles. Again, the Cuban example gives us food for thought.

3. Flexible working hours as put into operation in the Beck store in West Germany and in some businesses in this country. The initiative rests with the employers in this example.

4. Encouragement given by management to married women, promoting positive images in women employees, encouraging participation in training schemes and making promotion possible. Again the Beck store has been taken as an example.

5. Changing consciousness among men and women about their roles, and greater co-operation from men in taking responsibility for both household tasks and child care.
Women manual workers earn, on average, 62% of the earnings of manual male workers, non-manual women earn 59% of non-manual male workers, all women (manual and non-manual combined) earn 66% of the average earnings of all men. There thus seems to be much the same sort of gender inequality in both manual and non-manual occupations.

Comparing the inequality of men and women across the range of incomes gives the following graphs from which we can read the results in Table 9.

I draw the conclusion that women's lower fraction of men's earnings is much the same across the range of incomes. This disposes of the possibility that a comparison of averages might be misleading as sometimes happens. If, for example, there were a large group of very low earning women then the average for all women would be pulled down even if earnings were much the same for the sexes in the middle and upper earnings levels. That is why it is essential for a true comparison to look across the distribution as a whole and not just to rely on single averages.

Table 4 contains data on part-time women workers - the majority of married women who work (and 65% do) do so part-time. Their earnings are not high, as you can see from column 1 where the highest-earning manual women in 1986 received just under £59 per week, and the highest non-manual women earned £91 per week. However this might be because they do not work as many hours. Hourly rates of pay allow us to make a better comparison between women and men.

The best rate of pay in Table 4 for manual women is £2.60 per hour against an average for manual men of £3.81 in Table 3. This gives a ratio for manual women to manual men of 68% which is no better than for full-time women workers. The position for non-manual part-time women workers is no better either. The best rate is for nurses (£4.32) and that is 69% of the average for full-time non-manual men (£6.26). The majority of sectors with non-manual part-time women show a rate of pay well below that for nurses, in banking, finance and insurance the ratio is only 51% and it is even lower in other sectors.
The evidence strongly supports the argument that women are a source of cheaper labour than men, as Angela Coyle said. Why and how women are paid less, even allowing for the majority of them being part-time, is a question of *explanation* and the unit offers a number of related arguments about the ideological ambivalence of married women working outside the home, about the ghettoization of 'women’s' jobs, and about the weak impact of legislation on equal pay for equal work.

The facts about women’s pay are compatible with the explanations which the unit gives but they could also be consistent with other sorts of explanations. Women as a group, for example, might have poorer skills and qualifications than men and this could explain their lower rates of pay. This question is beyond the scope of the unit but you might like to think of the sort of evidence you would need to test this possible explanation.
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Text

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