

Gendering, Courtship and Pay Equality

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Abstract

One of the most intractable problems of the last 40 years has been the difficulty in closing the pay inequality gap. Conventional wisdom has been that the pay gap exists because of men's power to control the workplace, and men's dominant position in society generally. This paper examines a range of literature on courtship and 'progressive' men's equality arguments to understand an alternative perspective that pay inequality exists both because of men's power to control the workplace and women's power to control courtship and family life. Tackling pay inequality by focussing on power sharing in the workplace, therefore, represents only a partial policy solution. Further solutions rest on power-sharing in the arena of parental rights through recognition and political action to tackle inequalities faced by men during romantic courtship, conception, birth and divorce. Tackling these will equalise financial pressures on men and women, and release men from social pressures to prioritise wealth creation. Whether this will close the pay gap is unclear, but it would create confidence that lifestyle choices rather than the institutional inequalities are perpetuating remaining income differences.

Working Paper

Introduction

This paper has been prepared to help academic colleagues understand the way that courtship research, and its interpretation by the ‘progressive’ part of the men’s equality movement, affects the debate about pay equality / inequality. The result is a paper that critically reflects on one of the intractable and pressing questions in public policy: “why has progress towards pay equality stalled?”

This paper does not review past research into the pay inequality gap. The starting point is an acceptance that, as of 2008, there is still (statistically speaking) a pay gap of approximately 17% in the UK (TUC, 2008). Nevertheless, the approach here offers a fresh perspective: women’s power to condition and screen men as sexual partners plays a role in perpetuating inequalities in pay. The frame of reference, therefore, constitutes a challenge to the view that pay inequality is solely an outcome of men’s power. Instead, the paper outlines emergent arguments that progress towards equal pay depends on the simultaneous recognition and dismantling of women’s power bases as well as those of men and the promotion of power-sharing at both home and work. Given this perspective, it is first necessary to establish that women have sources of power that affect equal pay. In short, is there a matriarchy as well as a patriarchy? If so, where is it located?

The Emergence of an Alternative Discourse

The most commonly articulated argument over equal pay is that inequalities are a product of cultural and institutional discrimination against women that are buttressed by direct and indirect, conscious and unconscious, opposition to equal pay amongst groups of men (Friedan, 1963; Segal, 1990; Cockburn, 1991, 2001). An alternative discourse on gender relations draws on liberal feminist arguments in the 1970s/1980s that sexism is a two-way street with *both* sexes experiencing different forms of discrimination. The way men and women experience discrimination is linked to the roles that they expect *each other* to fulfil and their willingness to accommodate ‘the other’ (see Friedan, 1980; Farrell, 1988, 1994; Hoff-Sommers, 1995, 2000; Goldberg, 2000; Ridley-Duff, 2005, 2007).

Warren Farrell has been pivotal in developing a gender consciousness amongst men. In the mid 1980s, he started to question his previous assumptions about gender relations and conducted primary research into the values implicit in women’s spending priorities (Farrell, 1988). This suggested a wholly different perspective on the purpose of men’s high status and income. Changing the frame of reference – and therefore the criteria as to what is, and is not, an expression of power - opened a new debate about gender relations that feeds directly into pay equality debates.

Farrell argues that power is the ability to control life choices rather than the ability to earn high pay and achieve public status. This perspective arose after listening to “successful” people (usually men) talk about their sense of powerlessness, and a realisation that many successful people, in terms of career success, are frequently lonely and at considerable risk in other ways:

By reconceptualising power as control over our own lives, we can ask questions that illustrate the limitations of our traditional view of power – as status, income and control over others. Does a company president who has never known how to be intimate have power? Does a thirteen-year-old Olympic gymnast who has never known whether she is loved for herself or for how she performs have power? Does a boy who must register for the draft at eighteen and is shot through the face in Vietnam

have power? Does a beautiful woman who marries a doctor have power, when she never discovers her own talents? Which of these people have power over his or her own life?

Farrell, 1988:10

Power is constructed as the capacity of a person to *access* five things *on a level equal to their expectations and desires*:

- **External rewards** (e.g. income, possessions, status)
- **Internal rewards** (e.g. emotional release, positive self-image)
- **Interpersonal contact** (attention, affection, love and recognition)
- **Physical health** (well-being, attractiveness and intelligence)
- **Sexual fulfilment** (satisfaction of desire and enjoyment of sensual pleasures)

This conceptualisation, therefore, puts ‘internal rewards’, ‘interpersonal contact’ and ‘sexual fulfilment’ on a par with ‘external rewards’ in understanding the landscape of power. It also makes it possible to theorise that a person socialised to earn income, possessions and status that they do not need or desire (to fulfil the desires of another) is *disempowered* rather than empowered.

Farrell’s position drew (and continues to draw) on the feminist tradition by embracing the goal of emancipation from sex roles combined with greater sexual freedom. His findings from interviews and focus group sessions, however, reveal a growing anxiety amongst men about work and women (much as Betty Friedan found amongst women in 1963 when she published *The Feminine Mystique*). His suggestion that men sacrifice their personal wishes for higher pay, and are often disempowered by the health problems associated with their position in society, ended a period during which he was three times a director of the National Organization of Women (NOW).

He argued that men, in much the same way as women, enjoy advantages and disadvantages linked to the expectations and obligations that spring from both personal and workplace relationships. To understand women’s desires, he analysed the circulation and content of women’s magazines and discovered that men are cast as “success objects” who are pursued by women: this was conceived as a counter-point to the way men pursue women as “sex objects” (Farrell, 1988). The criteria may change, but the behaviour and goal is essentially the same. He also theorised that ‘successful’ men adapt to attract women in much the same way that ‘successful’ women adapt to attract men. Men’s ‘macho’ style, therefore, is cast as a conditioned (and ambivalent) response to satisfy women’s desires in much the same way that women have a complex and ambiguous relationship with the ‘glamour’ industry.

The Courtship Process

Formal research programmes into courtship started in the 1980s. In light of study findings, it is appropriate to question some of the assumptions in feminist theory regarding the nature of male/female interactions. In Walby (1991), male domination of the courtship process is not only assumed, it is also believed to emanate from men’s potential for violence. This has been supported by many studies in the feminist tradition that draw attention to the level of physical and verbal harassment of women in the workplace (see Connell, 1995; Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999).

Courtship research, however, casts doubt over the robustness of these assumptions. Firstly, there is greater consideration of non-verbal behaviour in courtship research than feminist

studies that frequently use Foucauldian discourse analysis to deconstruct language games and texts (see Foucault, 1972, 1980, 1985; Barrett, 1993; Muehlenhard & Kimes, 1999).

Courtship research suggests that women are far more proactive in the courtship process than is generally assumed by feminist studies. Moore (1985) found that women, not men, initiate most relationships through non-verbal cuing. The most popular cues are repeated smiling and eye contact (see also Lowndes, 1996; Pease and Pease, 2004). Perper (1985) increased awareness of body language messaging as people establish interest in each other. He found that as relationships develop, there is a consistent stream of subliminal non-verbal messages that are communicated by “successful” couples as they become more intimate (non-verbal signal, talk¹, turning, touching, synchronization²).

Hearn and Parkin (1987) opened the door to research in organisation settings. They report levels of relationship formation at work approaching 40%, but largely rely on surveys designed for, and published in, women’s magazines. Farrell (2000) found that about two-thirds of women met their long-term partners in an organisation setting. Despite a claimed sample of 3,000, there are issues regarding the robustness of the claim as data is drawn from seminars and training workshops over a 3-year period where people will have self-selected.

Molloy (2003), however, provides corroborative evidence that has been controlled, cross-checked and re-checked. He found that 40% of women who eventually marry use the workplace as a *principle* means of finding a partner³. Another cultural indicator comes from romance novels for which demand has grown exponentially to reach 40% of all US paperbacks sales. Storylines that involve successful men at work overcoming the resistance of women is now the most popular Harlequin “formula” and is credited with transforming the financial health of its publisher⁴.

In Ridley-Duff (2007), there is a brief review of research on the propensity of men and women to pursue each other for sex. Surprisingly, it has been found that 94% of men and 98% of women report “unwanted sexual attention”; 63% of men and 46% of women report “unwanted sexual intercourse” (Muehlenhard and Cook, 1988)⁵. Later studies investigate the meaning behind these findings and suggest the emotional impact on women from ‘unwanted’ sexual activity is more severe (Muehlenhard and Kimes, 1999). Overall, men show more

¹ Lowndes (1996) contends that it matters less what a person says than that they make the effort to talk – it is the *act* of talking that is significant.

² The “couple” generally stay engaged until some external circumstance intervenes. Lowndes (1996) calls this stage “echoing”. However, in the light of Berne’s analysis of games (Berne, 1964), such behaviour may be a sexual game of “Kiss off” or “Indignation” driven by a malicious intent.

³ Conducted over a decade, the study interviewed 2,500 recently married couples and tested findings in focus groups - 40% of women said they had changed jobs to find a marriage partner.

⁴ Farrell (2000:194-195). Harlequin changed its romance formula after discovering that 70% of readers had jobs. The result? A 20,000% increase in profitability over 10 years with nett revenues up from \$110,000 to \$21m and an 80% market share. Sources are provided.

⁵ The study was conducted to compare men’s self-reports with those of women found in an earlier study. The original report based on women’s responses prompted the radical feminist claim that “all men are rapists, or potential rapists”. By the same standard, 94% of women would also be regarded as rapists!

interest in 'short-term' mating and women more interesting in 'long-term' mating (Buss, 2002). The differences, however, are much smaller than is generally supposed. Kakabadse and Kakabadse's more recent survey of intimacy at work suggests that 60% of people have consensual 'intimate' relationships with colleagues at their own workplace at some point in their working life, and that two-thirds of these involve sexual intercourse.

Similar surprises have been uncovered in recent research programmes reviewing sexual harassment studies (see Dutton and Winstead, 2006) and domestic violence research (see Carney et al, 2007). In studies using student or general populations women are marginally more likely to perpetrate and both men and women report victimisation equally. These findings differ from studies based on clinical and forensic data that find women are victims more often. Studies based on institutional data collected from the police or health services are thought to be affected by political and publicity campaigns (i.e. awareness raising for rape, sexual assault and domestic violence which typically target female victims). Studies based on primary data and cross-reports of both sexes consistently suggest that men and women both perpetrate and are victims in roughly equal measure at all levels of severity. The problem of institutional bias, therefore, reinforces *a priori* prejudices about male-female relationships. Academic debate, however, is starting to switch to the *a priori* prejudices embedded in radical feminist discourses that have the potential to distort understanding of male violence and the nature of consensual sexual behaviour (Farrell, 1994; Hoff-Sommers, 1995; Muehlenhard and Kimes, 1999; Williams et al. 1999; Carney et al, 2007; Ridley-Duff, 2007).

The Impacts on Men and Work

Goldberg argued in the mid-1970s that equality discourses have played a major role in helping women create more varied roles and options in their lives. At the same time, cultural values regarding men's role were becoming more restrictive and were also being enforced with greater vigour:

[Men] lack the fluidity of the female who can readily move between the traditional definitions of male or female behaviour and roles...the male is rigidly caught in his masculine pose and, in many subtle and direct ways, he is severely punished when he steps out of it...It is a myth that the male is culturally favoured – a notion that is clung to despite the fact that every critical statistic in the area of longevity, disease, suicide, crime, accidents, childhood emotional disorders, alcoholism and drug addiction shows a disproportionately higher male rate.

Goldberg, 2000: 16-17

The stories behind the above statistics have taken two decades to unravel and are still proactively excluded from most mainstream media. They have, however, become a major concern as men attempt to establish their own agenda for equality. They are theorised not simply as a product of patriarchy, but also as a product of matriarchal power, linked to courtship processes and childraising. These remain unacknowledged and wilfully misunderstood and have a direct bearing on the risks involved in different lifestyle choices (Farrell, 1994, 2000).

A generation of feminist scholars (and many policy advisers) have regarded statistics on the low number of female managers and directors as evidence of discrimination and a 'glass ceiling'. Farrell (2005) turns this on its head to ask whether this can *also* be viewed as evidence of discrimination against men. From the 'maternity' ward onward, men are marginalized in the process of childraising. Men are invited to ante-natal classes as a women's partner, not in their own right. Even in the 'advanced' counties, they do not have any right to attend the birth of their own child, or any legal right to have or prevent abortion.

It took until 2004 (in the UK) for men to have any paternity leave rights at all. In many countries parental rights in employment favour the woman, conferring men only a small entitlement to paid time off (if any) to care for children, or making such an entitlement the gift of the female party to the relationship. There are signs, however, that the EU is encouraging an end such inequalities (Rubery et al, 2005).

Broaching the issue of courtship, and women's power to bring about the changes that are desired (at least at the level of public testimony and policy), is fraught with controversy. Molloy (2003) found that 40% of married women *change* their job to increase their chances of finding a husband. Farrell (1994) found a market for books advising women which occupations to choose to maximise their chances of meeting a rich man (no similar book market exists for men). Smith (2005) found that over 90% of 15-year old girls would not consider marrying a man who earns less than themselves. To suggest, however, that these actions derive from women's understanding of their own power typically leads to a reaction that these behaviours are products of patriarchy (rather than matriarchy).

It can be argued that these findings represent a failure to raise young women's aspirations, but there are problems with this. Even in the case of young women desiring a university education, often the goal is to establish a relationship that will lead to marriage. While educational aspirations have risen, career aspirations do not automatically follow (Smith, 2005). Farrell's analysis of women's magazines suggests that the issue is deeply embedded in both contemporary culture and the process of women's psychological development. Even today, men are seen *as a means* of achieving women's financial and lifestyle goals. This assertion comes from adverts in magazines such as *Ms* and *Working Woman* that continue to suggest that women value investment in their appearance more than investment in their careers, and continue to expect expensive gift as symbols of love and commitment (adverts on health and beauty, and expensive gifts, dominate even in magazines for working women).

Concurrently, men are excluded from professions like midwifery⁶ and primary school teaching with much the same vigour as women are excluded from front-line service in the army. Men seeking work with young children, or showing them affection, are regularly suspected of being paedophiles (Farrell, 2001). In case of divorce, particularly those involving custody battles, men are regularly (and often falsely) accused of child abuse or domestic violence (Wakefield & Underwager, 1990). Some legal firms proactively recommend sexual and child abuse accusations as a strategy for winning custody battles: the accusation alone ends contact with the father and courts are generally unwilling to restore sole or joint custody when trust between the father and mother has been destroyed (Farrell, 2001). In the wake of these accusations, men are typically removed from the family or workplace setting immediately, and cannot resume their role even in cases where convictions are overturned. The process of divorce as well as divorce settlements, are now complicated by state involvement through child support agencies which increases the work and financial commitments of fathers (Wilkinson, 1998, 1999; Ridley-Duff and Leinonen, 2005).

The direction of change in western cultures, therefore, has simultaneously increased pressure on men to work and earn more than women (by advancing women's rights as parents and divorcees), while also placing higher expectations on men to engage in childcare (by

⁶ Personal correspondence with the editor of Men's Movement Magazine during 2003. He reported a case in which a male midwife won compensation for unfair dismissal. It came to light in the case that there are now only 60 male midwives in a profession containing 57,000 people.

encouraging women into work). It should come as little surprise, therefore, that UK suicide statistics reveal the growing anxiety that afflicts many men's lives (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Increase in Male to Female Suicides (1974-2000)

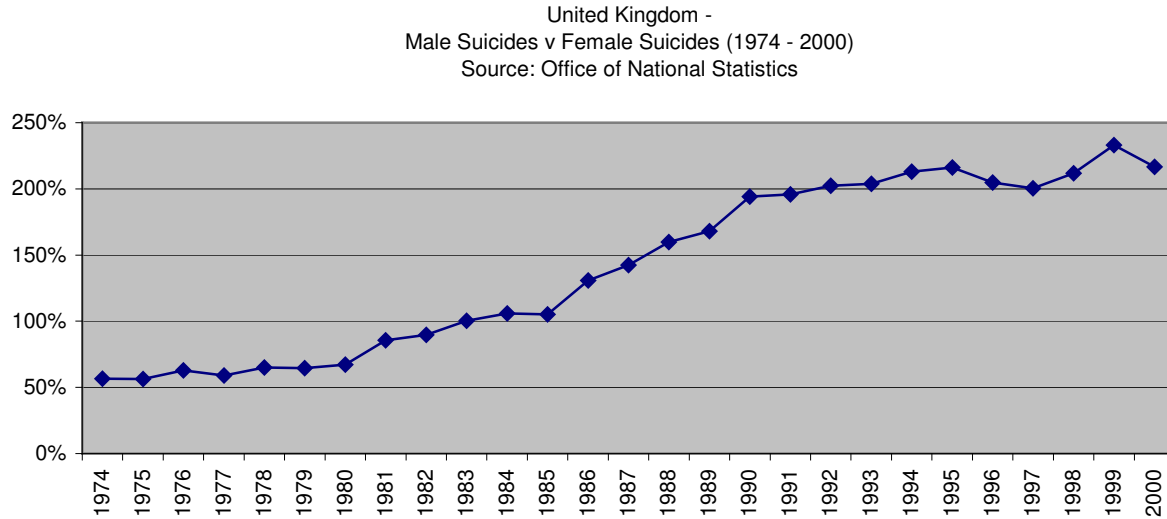
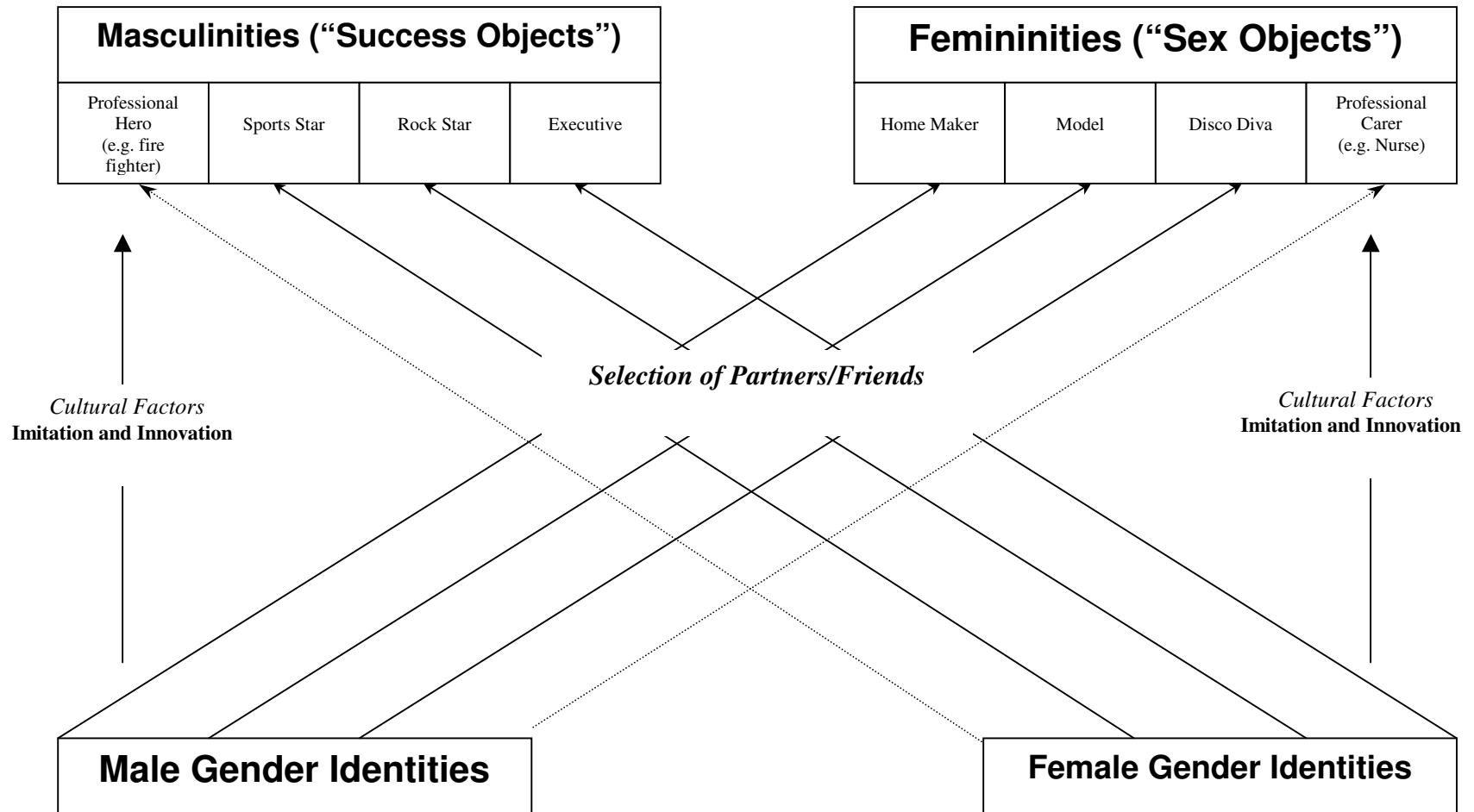


Figure 1 shows the trend in male suicides compared to women since the introduction of sexual equality legislation. While suicides as a whole are down, suicides for men rose until 2004 and remains stubbornly between 3:1 and 4:1 across the UK and Republic of Ireland as a whole (Samaritans, 2007:17)⁷.

In Ridley-Duff (2005), these underlying theoretical assumptions are represented diagrammatically (see Figure 2). Masculine and feminine stereotypes are not viewed solely as the product of patriarchy, but as an outcome of mate-selection strategies that are linked to wealth creation/protection (in the case of masculinity) and caring/nurturing (in the case of femininity). Nor is sexual identity regarded as ‘private’ matter. It directly influences occupational choices and behaviour at work (compare Hearn and Parkin, 1987). Occupations are chosen for the identities they project and the value they have for future *sexual* success. Put simply, our range of skills and occupational identities are amongst the most potent to attract a sexual partner. Ridley-Duff (2005) suggests that identities that are successful in attracting a mate are maintained and developed. Men and women watch and mimic the identities that help them enter the social networks to which they want to belong. Masculine and feminine identities, therefore, are not regarded as cultural constructs to maintain male power and domination: they are regarded as behaviour choices and socialisation processes that prepare men and women for the demands of courtship. Masculinities and femininities are reproduced if perceived by actors as successful for establishing and maintaining sexual relationships and families.

⁷ Table, "Ratio of Male to Female Suicides in All UK Countries and the Republic of Ireland". The text of the article contradicts the data in the table. In the table, the gap widened substantially in Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland (> 0.5), Scotland showed a 0.1 decrease while England was unchanged at 2.8:1. Despite this, the text claims that male suicides dropped, while female suicides increased. Either the text or table must be wrong.

Figure 2 – An Interpretation of Farrell (1988, 1994)



While feminist scholars continue to give consideration to the impact of men's interest in women at work (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Collinson and Hearn, 2001; Wilson, 2003), fewer studies consider the impacts *on men* from women seeking partners at work. What are the impacts of these intentions, not to mention the impact on the equal pay agenda? And how should these impacts be theorised?

Figure 2 goes some way to assisting an understanding of the social dynamics amongst both heterosexual and homosexual couples. Lesbian and gay couples also evolve gender norms of 'male' and 'female' within same sex relationships (see Levy, 2005). It is, therefore, worth summarising the argument that Farrell makes after 30 years of researching this field:

- 1) The selection of sexual-partners reveals our *deepest* aspirations and value commitments.
- 2) Most partner selection takes place in a work setting (if not our own, then someone else's).
- 3) Our observable behaviours create the identities through which others evaluate us.
- 4) The informal, and theoretically (rhetorically) desexualised, workplace makes it a particularly good 'hunting ground' as close working relationships between colleagues are allowed.
- 5) Over the long-term, identities (jobs) that assist men and women in finding a partner and supporting children will attract the most applicants.
- 6) Over the long-term, identities (jobs) that do not assist men and women in finding a partner and supporting children will attract fewer applicants.

To illustrate the impact on pay equality, he tells the story of Karla and Chuck (two sociology students) who fall in love and want to get married. Karla becomes pregnant but worries that Chuck will not develop his career fast enough to support a child. As a consequence she decides to have an abortion and the relationship breaks up. A year later Karla marries an attorney, has a child, but within 5 years they divorce.

The rejection of Chuck, on account of his career prospects, sends a message (to both Chuck and any other men in his circle) that this is not an occupation they should consider if they want to attract a woman like Karla. The 'best' option considered by Karla – whatever we think of her choice – is that she adapts the selection criteria for *her partner's* career rather than her own. As a result, she plays a (hidden) role in re-creating statistics that suggest pay discrimination against women.

Courtship, therefore, is one of the most powerful drivers of occupational segregation and pay differentials. Men seek occupations that will make them 'worthy' of women's attention and this inclines them toward higher paying occupations that involve greater risks. Women choose occupations in which they can meet and observe men who are likely to be 'success objects' and which tolerate expressions of femininity desirable to these men (hence the high demand for modelling, office work at every level, and occupations in media and advertising).

The durability and cross-cultural application of this theoretical perspective is supported by the work of Buss et al. (1990). Research conducted in 37 different countries over 10 years provides support for Farrell's theoretical propositions (see Buss, 2002). Women are roughly twice as interested in men's income as a criteria for sexual relationships in all 37 cultures studied (in both advanced and developing economies). Men, on the other hand, were roughly twice as interested in the woman's youth and beauty (i.e. fertility). Only these two, out of 32 variables, were consistent across all cultures and showed marked differences between the sexes. Both are most readily understandable (theoretically speaking) when the goal is assumed to be a sexual relationship that maximises the chances of supporting children.

By drawing attention to the impact of deeply ingrained courtship processes on men's attitude to work and money, Farrell (2005:137) articulates the impact of courtship as a socialisation process, and its longer term impact on decisions about careers:

*...our sons are **still** expected to pay for...dinners, drinks, dates, dances, diamonds and driving expenses [while] our daughters are still internalising that the more desirable they are, the more boys will pay for them...All of this is to say that men's and women's **work** choices are rooted far more deeply than in mere rational work decisions. Understanding the power of these roots helps us understand where our freedom to choose may be undermined not by the other sex but by our own biology and socialization [emphasis added].*

Until now, the scholarly research into masculinity has tended to argue that careerism, authoritarianism and entrepreneurialism are masculine behaviours that *subordinate* women at work (see Whitehead, 2001; Collinson and Hearn, 2001) rather than a strategy to win respect and find love. Within the alternative gender discourse, statistics are reinterpreted from the perspective that behaviours derive not from men's desire to dominate women, but to maintain their attractiveness to women.

Conclusions

Men are sandwiched between the interests of two competing groups of women: those who desire to work and those who desire to raise children (sometimes the same people). The resistance highlighted by Cockburn (2001) to equal opportunity policies needs to be seen in this light. If woman A argues for policies that man A believes will decrease woman B's income, then his resistance to "equality" is gendered in ways that have not previously been theorised in the literature. Resistance may stem from the perception that one group of women (with career aspirations) seeks to advantage itself through equality discourses at the expense of another group of women (with child raising aspirations). Whether this constitutes resistance to "equality" in the broadest sense remains a vibrant debate within the men's equality movement. In short, who earns most money needs to be set against the issue of who controls and spends it (see Friedan, 1963), as well as who receives most long-term benefit from it (Farrell, 1994).

A focus on equal parenting rights (at conception, birth and divorce) may do more to promote equal pay at work than a policy agenda focussed primarily on employers. While men are selected for their potential as earners and protectors, the pressure to take more risky jobs with higher pay will remain (Goldberg, 2000; Krantz, 2002). While social institutions (and society generally) are unwilling to recognise and provide equal financial and legal support to men as fathers, there will always be a social dynamic that *generates* pay inequality and a division of labour on the basis of sex (Smith, 2005; Farrell, 2005). While men are denied equal rights to paid parental leave (at rates that are the same as women's, and with legal protections that are the same as women's), *couples* will continue to believe it is 'common sense' for the man to intensify work commitments while the woman takes the primary caring role. While men are denied equal rights not to raise a child (they can neither abort an unwanted child, or unilaterally give up an unwanted child to an adoption service), they will be pursued by child support agencies to provide financially, even where they have not consented to having a child (Farrell, 2001). Lastly, until there is a presumption of joint-custody for all children in family court proceedings, fathers will continue to have higher spending obligations after divorce.

This paper, therefore, concludes that attempts to create equality in one sphere (the workplace) without reference to the other (the home) *generates* inequality for one or both sexes. In the past, workplace conflicts have variously been understood as conflicts between class, gender

and race but have rarely been couched as a conflict between the lifestyles developed to meet family and corporate commitments (but see Miller and Rice, 1967; Ridley-Duff, 2005). “Family” has been seen as a female discourse and “business” as a male discourse, rather than two discourses in which parents and workers engage in two social and economic debates about the division of labour and responsibility for household and workplace obligations.

An alternative to increasing state or private provision of childcare is for women (and institutions within government) to recognise fathers as equal parents, and consider providing positive action programmes to support men as fathers in much the same way as women have been supported as *workers*. Such an approach supports family life and acknowledges both parents right to be active in the process of raising their children whatever the state of their relationship with their sexual partner.

It remains unclear, however, how employers (as well as private citizens) will react when economic goals can be achieved by persuading men and women to accept fixed and differentiated roles. There is a continuing case, however, for legislation promoting diversity and freedom of choice in lifestyles, and which discourage normative expectations regarding gendered behaviour and sexuality. This will create spaces for multiple masculinities and femininities to be legitimised for both heterosexual and homosexual couples in shaping the ways they want to love and live both at work and home.

The argument here is not for quotas or corporate policies enforcing equality, rather the reverse, that equality policies be framed so that institutional energies divert from enforcement (of rules, behaviours, ideologies) towards mediation and dialogue. Through this process, critical reflection will gradually replace blame and judgement, and people will be encouraged to communicate and reach choices free from corporate, governmental or institutional interference. The result could be substantial and continuing differences in the lifestyles of men and women that may not please politicians or thought-leaders, or we may find that free from institutional interference women and men choose lifestyles that become more equitable. Whichever, behind any apparent discrimination will be choices emanating from an equitable fusion and tension between value systems that are born out of a diverse range of social experiences and expectations. The more social rationality that can be exercised, the better the prospects for social democracy, with economic life based on the aspirations and goals of the many rather than the few.

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