Rethinking Gender Inequalities in Organizations

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Penny Dick

Professor of Organizational Psychology, Sheffield University Management School, UK

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Edward Elgar PUBLISHING

Cheltenham, UK • Northampton, MA, USA

Published by
Edward Elgar Publishing Limited
The Lypiatts
15 Lansdown Road
Cheltenham
Glos GL50 2JA
UK

Edward Elgar Publishing, Inc.
William Pratt House
9 Dewey Court
Northampton
Massachusetts 01060
USA

A catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Control Number: 2023949650

This book is available electronically in the Elgaronline
Business subject collection
http://dx.doi.org/10.4337/9781802207385

ISBN 978 1 80220 737 8 (cased)
ISBN 978 1 80220 738 5 (eBook)

In memory of Jane and Arthur Dick
Dedicated to Paul and the Peak District – the loves of my life

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About the author

Penny Dick is a Professor of Organizational Psychology at Sheffield University Management School. She has a longstanding research interest in gender inequality and the role of power and politics in producing taken-for-granted ideas about social reality. This book reflects those interests and the products of her own research projects which have accumulated over the last 30 years in her academic roles.

Preface

This book has been a long time coming. When I first became interested in gender inequalities as an academic field of study at the beginning of the 1990s, I remember feeling somewhat overwhelmed and alienated by some of the academic work on this topic. As a woman from a working-class background (I started my occupational life as a nurse before attending university at the grand old age of 21) I felt as if academia was above and beyond me. But as I became socialized as an academic and learned to read and make sense of what had, at first, been impenetrable texts I became fascinated by the whole field. I was particularly inspired by the work of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, whose influence can be read throughout this text.

However, from the very beginning of my research career, I have been troubled by the fact that much of what is written about women's lives comes from white, middle-class academic feminists whose views and experiences of the world do not always resonate with my own or with those of my non-academic friends. I particularly remember (as I discuss in this text) when I conducted the fieldwork for my PhD which concerned the idea of a 'gendered culture' in police work. Talk to any lay person or academic about this and they immediately assume that the police service is a bastion of sexist and inappropriate practices and, indeed, recent news would tend to support this view. On the other hand, the very many policewomen and policemen I have spoken to during various projects on policing I have conducted over the last 30 or so years, reveals a more nuanced and complicated picture. Many of the policewomen I spoke to in my PhD research and my project into part-time working, for instance, had not experienced much (if any) sexism and those that had were very robust in their responses to it. And indeed, many other women I have met as research participants and/or in social situations that I know either a little or well have been very critical of gender research as a field, seeing it as 'out of touch' with the lives of contemporary women.

What are we to make of this? One of the most inspiring books I have read in the last ten years is Mel Pollner's (1987) *Mundane Reason* in which he puts forward the idea that as Western individuals, we are trapped by a form of reasoning developed from the Enlightenment: that there is always an objective reality, the nature of which can be ascertained with enough 'evidence'. This book coupled with my developing (and still ongoing) understanding of social constructionism inspired initially by Berger and Luckmann (1967) and then

reinforced by Viv Burr's (2015) seminal texts and, as already mentioned, Foucault and Bourdieu, led me to my current position on social reality – there is no definitive or objective version of this. Yes, there are material 'things' in the world (like people, buildings, books, technology, and so forth) that can be identified, used and interacted with, and such activities can be observed and charted to a degree (e.g. the nurse placed a thermometer in the patient's mouth). But what these actions mean – what their significance might be for the patient, the nurse, the hospital, the medical profession – and what the population understands as healthcare are not easily discernible or reducible to definite 'facts', and this is because all human action is a product of history which takes place in social and material conditions that are not of the individual's making. Meaning making is, of course, highly individual but is also inextricably social and political which means that how we make meaning can never be divorced from the social and material conditions within which power, ideas and 'knowledge' are embedded.

All of this means, for me, that we should be sceptical of claims to the 'truth' about women in organizations and workplaces: that they are privileged, subordinated, marginalized, queen bees, victims of sexism, advantaged or disadvantaged relative to men. They are all of these things and none of these things depending on the situation, context, the individual's own biography and history and the perspective/position of the observer. In writing this text, therefore, I have tried (and perhaps failed – who knows?) to wrestle with these deeply philosophical and complex issues. My core claim in this text is that gender inequality is something of a red herring because it encourages us to look for 'facts' about women which tend to evaporate when we start talking to individual women (and men) in workplaces. Yes, some women do experience sexism at work but some women do not and we cannot simply ignore the latter group or claim they are simply lucky or, as some would have it, deluded or colluding with men. For me, the problem for many people, but particularly for women, is that the work they do (at home and in paid workplaces) lacks social value and status – it is seen to be easy, not terribly demanding and not very important. And this, as I see it, is the problem. Of course, in making this claim, I too am stating 'facts' about women and I make other claims of this sort throughout the text. I have attempted to engage with the inherent problematicity of this position throughout the text but no doubt there will be some readers who accuse me of 'wanting to have my cake and eat it'. I would say, in my defence, that I am open to the challenges that may come from what I present in this work because it is only from challenge that we can develop and expand our understandings of and perspectives on the world and that is something that I personally feel strongly about. I must also point out that this text is written from the cultural perspective of the UK and other countries in the Global North and therefore strongly reflects the social conditions, ideas and knowledge that

are peculiar to this region. I also write it from the perspective of a white, older woman with a working-class background which has strongly influenced how I have interacted and engaged with the literature on gender in organizations.

There are many people I should thank for enabling this book to be written, not least Beatrice McCartney and Fran O'Sullivan at Edward Elgar Publishing for believing in this project and commissioning the book. I need to thank Jenny Pollock and Emma Shute from 'Women to Work' with whom I have worked for several years and whose encouragement and input have enabled this book to be written. I would also like to acknowledge Rosie Houston who helped with the data collection for the project into part-time working and to thank her for her great sense of fun and humour which lightened the load of the project work we were doing. More formally, I owe a debt of thanks to the Leverhulme/British Academy for the grant (SRG\170671) which enabled me to conduct the project on women's careers and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) for the grant (000–22–0336) which funded the project into part-time work in the police service.

There are also many academic friends and colleagues who have directly or indirectly contributed to my thinking about gender which include Albert Mills, Ann Cunliffe, Yvonne Benschop, Viv Burr, Christine Coupland, David Collings, Donald Hislop, John and Helen Arnold, Dermot Breslin, Jon Burchell, the late Tom Redman, Cathy Cassell, Gillian Symon and many others, including the Organization Studies research group at Sheffield University Management School. I must also thank members of my family, particularly all the feisty women in it including my nieces Katherine Brown, Laura Bell, Sophie Buchan and Susanne Blievernitz, my niece-in-law, Chloe Graham, and my sisters, Jennifer Konig, Liz Graham, Sue George and Maureen Dick. I also have some fantastic nephews (James Graham, Rob George and the late Alexander Konig) as well as three wonderful nephews-in-law (Drew Bell, James Buchan and Tom Bottomley) and brothers-in-law (Manfred Konig and Jim George) who have offered me a male perspective (not always intentionally) on many issues related to gender over the years. I also want to acknowledge my brother, John Alston Dick, who died in February 2023 and who was an intellectual inspiration my entire life.

I must also acknowledge a number of friends who have directly and sometimes inadvertently contributed to my academic development who include Frances Storr, Vicky Davidson-Boyd, Suzanne McGregor, Jan Harwood, Ian Chowcat, Ian Fullarton, Phil Shepherd, Hazel Wright, Anna Buehring, Jo Tatton, Olwyn Hazleton, Jackie Carbro, Kate McGimpsey and Alison Lockwood. Finally, I need to acknowledge my wonderful husband Paul West who has had to put up with me living in the same house but occupying a different and sometimes isolated mental space for the last 18 months as I have

wrestled with thinking about and writing this book. Thank you for the support Paul – you are the best person I know.

1. Introduction: rethinking gender inequalities in organizations

The study of gender in organizations and management is, relatively speaking, a recent domain of academic interest. As Jeanes et al. (2011) point out, much of this work has at its core a concern with social injustice, focusing on how women as a group are disadvantaged in organizations and in society more generally. Such disadvantages, it is argued, include a general lack of recognition for performing the critically important roles of unpaid domestic labour and bearing and raising children (Beechey, 1978; Laslett and Brenner, 1989); their over-representation in low-paid, low-status occupations (Dickens, 1994; Kalev and Deutsch, 2018; Rees, 1992); and their historical and ongoing lack of access to particular occupations and roles (e.g. Avolio et al., 2020; Gregg and Machin, 1993; Varma, 2018). The scope of the study of gender and organizations is very wide, and it is beyond the remit of the current text to say much about this scope, other than to point out that the debates covered range from work–life balance through to sexuality. My concern in this text is with *gender inequality in the workplace* which, as I will explain shortly, is a difficult and problematic issue to define and understand.

Before detailing the main task of this text, I want to clarify my understanding of the term 'gender'. Along with many other social constructionists (see Chapter 3), I do not see gender as an essential and inherent characteristic of individuals in the way that biological sex can be considered, but as a culturally specific pattern of behaviour which may be attached to the sexes (Mills, 1988). This means that our understandings of men and women as culturally significant categories of existence vary across times and places and provide us with discourses or meaning systems[1] which we use to make sense of our own and others' appearance, behaviour and characteristics. Like all discourses, gender discourses are products of particular relations of power which furnish some understandings with the 'stamp of truth' (Foucault, 1980) and which marginalize and even pathologize others. Hence, for example, as Hollway (1989) points out, a dominant idea in many societies is that men are more sexually driven (due to hormones) than are women, and this idea has been used, historically, to justify many behaviours which in today's society (at least in some parts of the world), are considered unacceptable, for example sexual harassment (see Chapter 3 for more details of Hollway's work). In short, many discourses

which provide us with the language to differentiate between men and women were developed in contexts of male dominance and therefore tend, on the whole, to work to advantage men as a group, whilst disadvantaging women.

In this introductory chapter, I intend to lay the foundations for the chapters which follow. First, I unpack and interrogate what we actually mean when we talk about gender inequality in workplaces, drawing attention to some critical and often overlooked issues. I then go on to discuss some of the problems that proceed from an unproblematic and prima facie acceptance of the 'fact' of gender inequality before providing a brief review and critique of some of the core forms of gender inequalities in organizations, that have been identified in the literature. I conclude the chapter by drawing together some of the main issues that will inform the remainder of this text.

GENDER INEQUALITY IN WORKPLACES

The idea that women are disadvantaged relative to men is embedded in notions of workplace inequality. Acker (2006: 443), for instance, defines inequality as 'systematic disparities between participants in power and control over goals, resources, and outcomes; workplace decisions such as how to organize work; opportunities for promotion and interesting work; security in employment and benefits; pay and other monetary rewards; respect; and pleasures in work and work relations'. At this point, it is important to note that the idea of disadvantage represents a frame through which various specified differences in experiences or material conditions are understood as incompatible with some normative standard (Branscombe, 1998). For instance, the idea that women earn less than men, assumes that men's salaries are the appropriate norm. However, another way of framing this issue is that women's pay is the norm and that therefore men are advantaged relative to women (Phillips et al., 2022). Addressing inequalities requires looking at the processes that confer both disadvantage *and* advantage and this text attempts to look at both sides of this equation.

Gender inequality in the workplace has attracted a massive and increasing amount of scholarly attention over the last four decades. Despite progress with respect to women's access to particular occupations and roles, and their value as employees and managers (Profeta, 2021), commentators have noted that not only does this progress appear to be stalling (England et al., 2020; Padavic et al., 2019) but that overall, it is insufficient (Woods et al., 2021). In addition, as noted by Ford et al. (2021) gender inequalities are remarkably persistent, despite legislation aimed at reducing them, and despite increased awareness of them. Women's work (which refers in particular to jobs and roles that are stereotyped as female, such as those involving care or relationships) when compared to work stereotyped as male (involving physical or technical skills),

continues to be less valued, less rewarded and less likely to be recognized (Grimshaw and Rubery, 2007; Sandberg et al., 2018). The Covid-19 pandemic appears to have undermined the progress women have made in workplaces by hitting them harder both socially and economically (Foley and Cooper, 2021). Globally, 26% of women compared to 20% of men reported loss of work due to the pandemic, and women and girls were more likely to drop out of education and to report an increase in gender-based violence than men and boys (Gregory, 2022).

The reasons for continuing gender inequalities have been explored in many streams of the academic literature. In management and organization studies, this literature has been characterized by Fotaki and Harding (2017) as blaming women themselves (for making choices to prioritize their families above their work); blaming organizations (for being inherently gendered male); or blaming cultural influences (for steering women into roles which apparently mirror their natural propensities for care and nurturance). Fotaki and Harding persuasively argue that while these arguments have their merits, the problem lies more in the fact that women lack the language to speak about themselves and their experiences positively and outside of the dominant trope that they are subordinated and oppressed. All of these explanations offer lenses for exploring the position of women in contemporary societies across the world and I will review some of these explanations in Chapter 2. However, what I want to argue in this text is that these dominant explanations are underpinned by a number of questionable assumptions that need to be fundamentally interrogated and rethought.

RETHINKING DOMINANT ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT GENDER INEQUALITIES

What Do We Mean by 'Inequality'?

To surface some of the assumptions that I believe we need to think about more carefully, I want to begin by unpacking what we actually mean when we talk about inequality in general terms and gender inequality in particular. As already outlined above, inequality is generally taken to mean systematic disadvantage, often associated with the experience of discrimination, marginalization or oppression. When applied to gender, inequality refers to the idea that women are seen to be less valuable workers than men (as outlined above) and may not experience the same level and type of positive workplace experiences as their male counterparts, being more likely to suffer sexual harassment (Heymann et al., 2022), lack of career progression (Hartman and Barber, 2020), less pay (Musick et al., 2020) and lack of inclusion (Mills, 1988; Poorhosseinzadeh and Strachan, 2021). Nonetheless, quantifying the extent of

such inequalities is difficult and complex, and in most organizations there is a reliance on indicators such as pay transparency policies (Bennedsen et al., 2022); equal opportunities monitoring with respect to hiring and promotion (in the UK); or examination of the gender balance within particular roles and jobs. Such indicators provide organizations, in theory, with pointers to where there might be a gender equality problem which can then prompt efforts to address this via such initiatives as mentoring, career development initiatives, diversity training (including unconscious bias training), the use of gender quotas to ensure that women are recruited into particular roles, or formalization of hiring and promotion systems so as to encourage a focus on achievement and merit. The effectiveness of such measures appears, however, to be negligible (e.g. Correll, 2017).

Overall, efforts within organizations to address gender inequalities appear to be aimed at improving outcomes for women, such as access to senior roles or improved pay relative to men, rather than focusing on organizational processes that might be generating the problems indicators point to. For instance, formalization of hiring and promotion procedures so as to focus on competence and achievement rather than irrelevant biographical characteristics such as gender, does not address the fact that the criteria against which candidates are evaluated often reflect competencies that are more often representative of men as a group (Van den Brink and Benschop, 2012). A further issue is that in stratified, liberal democratic and capitalist economies, unequal outcomes are actually seen to be important for encouraging individuals to strive to 'better' themselves (Henretta, 1977); an aspiration based on the notion of merit which I will say more about shortly. Due to this latter issue, we tend to see inequality of outcomes as socially just in many respects, inasmuch as we accept that people who work hard to gain qualifications, set up their own businesses and make them succeed, devote many hours to working and improving their skills in order to climb career ladders, and work in jobs and occupations that we see as critically important for the health, wellbeing, and economic and social progression of society such as medicine, law, or science, deserve higher pay and rewards than people working in less socially meaningful jobs and occupations. However, this also means that it is simply not possible for everyone to achieve these outcomes not only because they are, by definition, limited, but also because we tend to believe that there is considerable individual variation in aptitudes, intelligence, motivation and ambition.

What is of concern in contemporary society, therefore, is not that the distribution of resources such as power, wealth and status is unequal, but rather that all individuals and groups have equal rights to access *opportunities* that enable them to 'make the most of their lives and talents' (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2018) and hence the capacity to acquire these resources. Equal *treatment* is therefore at the core of equal opportunities as a philosophy

and a legislative target (Eaton, 1989), indicating that nobody should be advantaged or disadvantaged in their access to power, wealth or status because of apparently *irrelevant* characteristics, such as religion, gender, colour or social background, to name but a few examples of irrelevant characteristics.

Nonetheless, there are a number of serious problems embedded in these ideas. First, if we accept that certain individual differences (such as qualifications, working hard, being intelligent, being talented, and so forth) *do* matter for attaining access to resources, then we have to also assume that these differences are themselves equally distributed across individuals no matter their background, colour, gender, race and so on. This means that we therefore have to believe that these individual differences are not related to the social categories individuals occupy. We also have to assume that those individual differences that matter for the attainment of particular valued outcomes are objective facts that have a reality independent of the observer (e.g. that being good at maths, for instance, manifests itself in the same way for everyone – in our society this often means being able to pass exams and tests).

These issues are in fact closely related and challengeable. For instance, the qualifications needed to study, say, medicine, are much less likely to be attainable by children from working-class backgrounds (Mathers and Parry, 2009) and in some countries, by Black children (Talamantes et al., 2019). In turn, this is because children from these backgrounds may not attend proficient or well-equipped schools (Nieuwenhuis et al., 2021), or receive the type of input from parents or teachers (such as encouragement; help with homework; a quiet place to study, etc.) that are necessary for this attainment (Sewell and Shah, 1968). Moreover, the qualifications needed for the attainment of particular valued positions are determined by the people who already occupy these positions, most often, white middle-class individuals (Carter, 2003). These groups stipulate, for instance, the educational requirements for entry to particular professions and occupations. A further complication is that individuals and groups who occupy the most valued positions in society also determine how attributes such as intelligence, hard work or talent should be understood and identified, and such evaluations are not independent of the individuals apparently demonstrating these attributes (Burr, 2015). For instance, middle-class individuals are generally evaluated as possessing more of the characteristics important for entry to higher-status professions than individuals from the working classes (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). If we add to this the point that what we see as the most valuable 'positions' in society are those that are mainly occupied by certain groups – particularly white middle-class groups, then it means that the positions which have the most value in society are those most likely to be attained by the groups already occupying them.

All of this raises attention to what will be one of the core analytical concepts used in this text: power. I am going to go into detail about my understanding

of power in Chapter 3, but to briefly preview my argument I take the view that power is not only about being in a powerful position or being able to get people to do what you want them to do, but is embedded in things we believe, things we 'know' and in routine and mundane everyday activities in organizations such as hiring practices and job descriptions. It is this latter manifestation of power that, I will argue, leads us to develop common-sense views about social reality so that we accept at face value and without question some ideas and not others. For instance, it is commonly believed that some people are naturally more intelligent, hard-working, ambitious and motivated than others; a 'fact' which we use to explain why, despite equality of opportunity, there is inequality of outcomes. The problem is, as outlined above, that the means for achieving equality (opportunities) and the ends that signify equality (valued outcomes) are not independent of each other, and this means that some groups and individuals are perpetually disadvantaged relative to others. In much of the literature on gender in organizations, it is assumed that high-status roles and occupations are valued outcomes that women and men should be able to access irrespective of their gender. However, because these outcomes are seen to be contingent on the employee's willingness to work very long hours and to acquire particular experiences and qualifications, and because these contingencies are more likely to be achievable by men as a group, women (on aggregate) are always going to struggle to access these positions.

The idea, therefore, that in order to achieve greater gender equality, that is the attainment of valued outcomes, women need to have access to the resources (be that language, positional power, flexible working practices, mentors, networks, opportunities, and so forth) that enable this attainment, overlooks the fact that the problem is less about the attainment of these valued positions and more with the fact that these positions are seen to be so valuable in the first place. To properly interrogate what we mean by inequality, therefore, we need to understand the processes that result in the valorization of some ways of being and acting and overlook or even stigmatize others. Why, in short, are some outcomes perceived to have so much value and others so little (see Lee, 1956)? Until we start questioning and disrupting these processes, the situation for women and, I will argue, for a lot of men as well, is unlikely to change.

This takes me to a second issue I want to tackle in this text, which is that much of the literature assumes that the value attaching to particular outcomes is a fixed property of those outcomes rather than being situated and dynamic (Weick, 2012); an issue which not only deflects attention from how certain positions come to be seen as valuable in the first instance, but also why and how this is maintained or changes. What we see as valuable conditions of existence are not only historically but also individually variable. Not everybody wants power, wealth or status, for instance, and even if we want these things at some points in our lives, we don't necessarily want them consistently.

Furthermore, the value of these resources cannot be understood independently of the meaning systems (or discourses) from which this value derives. Even health and longevity, which are two outcomes that attract a lot of attention from a social justice perspective because of how these are unequally distributed across and within nations, make sense as socially desirable outcomes only in a world where we see health and longevity as human rights (Gaffney, 2017) and where their unequal distribution is seen to be the consequence of human action or inaction. In previous eras, early death and ill health were understood as inevitabilities or God's will (Cahill, 1999) rather than consequential differences between the 'haves' and 'have nots'.

Similarly, a lot of women, as we will see in Chapter 7, do not aspire to the roles that are ascribed high value by society. As I will argue, this is not because they are being duped in some way, but because, as reflexive and intelligent human beings, they prefer to invest their time in roles and activities that enable them to live their lives in ways that they find comfortable, peaceful and engaging. That these roles lack societal value certainly impacts on their sense of self-worth (and, more materially, their income), as we shall see, but is an issue that women can and do engage with fulsomely. They challenge and resist the idea that their roles and activities lack value and refuse to be pushed into following 'careers' or other prescribed pathways to 'success' by carving out the meaning of their lives and their work in their own terms. This, I will argue, is an issue that has been paid scant attention in the literature and is perhaps more reflective of social scientific views of how society should be rather than how it actually is. Theoretically, this issue is reflective of a point made by Henretta (1977) which is that a valid social analysis needs to take account of individuals and groups attempting to make their own history, though not in circumstances and conditions of their own choosing.

A third issue that I want to wrestle with in this text relates to the tendency to reify inequality and its associated experiences such as subordination and domination. While, as I will argue in Chapter 2, there is little doubt that, in comparison to men, women are disproportionally represented in low-status, low-paid occupations, we have to remember that this is a product of historical processes, some of which have been intensified by capitalist modes of production, but these latter conditions are not the sole sources of this situation. As I will argue in Chapter 4, the low-status and low-paid occupations predominantly occupied by women reflect social values in society and how we place a premium on those jobs, roles and occupations which visibly generate wealth or which are seen to require the acquisition of particular 'difficult to achieve' personal inputs such as certain educational qualifications or skills. Women's work in general terms is undervalued because it is invisible but, as I shall argue, it is an invisibility that is the hallmark of all undervalued work and this is not the sole province of women but also of men, of people of colour and of working-class

people. If we reify inequality, the problem is that we see the cause of this outcome as inhering within particular groups rather than in the social processes of valuation which actually produce these outcomes. As O'Connor (2019) points out in her excellent discussion of studies of Black youths, this reproduces a 'deficit narrative' for the group of concern, locating the 'problem' within, in this case, women rather than in the socio-economic and cultural conditions which render individuals within all social categories vulnerable to being perceived as lacking value. In the process, the 'texture, complexity and variation' within particular groups (including men and women) is masked. This is a major problem which extant theory has yet to satisfactorily resolve. And as already pointed out, these processes are dynamic as well as historically and culturally contingent.

A final assumption related to the notion of gender inequalities which I want to address, is whether it is possible to think about women in terms of relatively homogeneous groups, whether this be as managers, professionals, working-class women, middle-class women, women of colour, differently abled women, trans women, mothers, wives or partners. While of course some of the claims made about the characteristics and experiences of these groups have validity on an aggregate level, for example that women managers are generally found in people-facing as opposed to more technical roles (Reskin and Ross, 1992), as individuals, women often elude these classifications. And, as research has shown very clearly, women classified in these ways may reject, resist and disrupt claims made about their attributes and experiences which apparently attach to these classifications (Hunter, 2002). For instance, there is evidence that some women in organizations are sceptical of the idea of gender inequalities and do not believe they are as 'real' a problem as is often implied (Lombardo and Mergaert, 2013), while others actively oppose the idea of feminism or feminist agendas (Christiansen and Hoyer, 2015). There is also the fact, as already mentioned above, that many women do not want to have access to career ladders or related structures considered to be less available to women as a group. While I agree that individual motivations and ambitions are shaped by the cultural context in which we live, this is not the whole picture – individuals do possess their own unique backgrounds and characteristics which also play a role in how they live and what they do. In some of the literature, there is even a tendency to claim that women who do not believe that they are disadvantaged or discriminated against are suffering from 'false consciousness' or are 'in denial' (e.g. Broido et al., 2015; Sheppard, 1989). But such claims appear to suggest that there are correct and incorrect views of social reality – claims which, for me, are as oppressive as the issues these authors are seeking to address.

In this text, I want to set out an alternative theorization of how to make sense of the position of women in management and organizations. My core argument

is that the reason for women's aggregate positions in organizations (relative to men) in terms of their social value and status is attributable to a 'bottom-line' ideology which is pervasive in contemporary life. Derived from a broader imperative for economic growth and material acquisition, this ideology ranks the pursuit of profit and visible markers of corporate or organizational reputation above all other organizational concerns. In turn, this translates into a preoccupation with appearances over substance (Alvesson, 2013; Flyverbom and Reinecke, 2017); seeing merit chiefly in the achievement of quantifiable or visible outputs; and the valorization of material rather than socio-emotional workplace rewards. This situation, I will argue, is characterized by a contemporary moral order (Snyder, 2016) which generates sets of work-related obligations whose fulfilment is seen to be a signifier of an individual's occupational and social worth. My argument is that because as a group women are less likely to be able to fulfil these obligations (due to the exigencies of childbearing and care, as well as a disproportionate (relative to men) responsibility for domestic or non-work issues) this explains their aggregate positions in organizations relative to men as a group. The problem therefore resides not in improving women's capacity to fulfil these obligations but in disrupting and challenging the processes of social valuation which diminish the worth of the contributions that women make to society generally, and within the home and workplaces in particular.

This thesis is developed in stages over the following eight chapters of this text. In this first chapter, I lay the foundation for the arguments which follow, with a discussion of some of the dominant forms of gender inequality in contemporary workplaces and what is currently claimed about them. In Chapter 2, I review some of the core theoretical ideas that are used to explain these inequalities and provide a critique of these ideas. Chapter 3 details the theoretical ideas that will inform the arguments I develop in this text; ideas which are broadly social constructionist but also critically informed, concerned, therefore, with how our understandings of the world are not only socially but also politically produced and reproduced. Chapter 4 moves into this latter territory by problematizing the idea that jobs have a nature which produces *inevitable* job requirements such as full-time working hours. This issue is explored by interrogating the notions of productivity and efficiency and their presumed relationship with time. To theorize these issues, I introduce the notions of and relationships between bottom-line ideology, moral order, and visible and invisible work. The ideas developed here are taken forward into the three empirical chapters which follow. Chapter 5 explores how part-time working constitutes invisible work and how its overall lack of value is related to both its invisibility and its apparent transgression of moral order. Chapter 6 explores how women who work part-time can contest the idea that temporal contributions are the only valuable contributions that can be made in

workplaces, disrupting taken-for-granted ideas about the relationship between temporal availability and the achievement of organizational goals. The chapter also looks at how women working in low-value roles and occupations unintentionally challenge the idea that work centrality is a valuable work orientation, producing alternative versions of what a fulfilling and worthwhile relationship to work can look like. The implications of these processes for moral order are explored. Chapter 7 explores some of the tensions women experience in trying to fulfil the various temporal and behavioural obligations that moral order produces, examining how these tensions are resolved and what they reveal about how women make career- and job-related decisions. The potential dialectic between such processes and the social conditions that produce them are identified and explicated. This chapter concludes with an exploration of workplaces which have found ways to value the contributions of all staff, whether visible or invisible. Chapter 8 pulls together the various threads developed in the text to produce an overall theoretical synthesis which attempts to provide an overarching framework that can be used to explore and make sense of women's positions in workplaces. Finally, Chapter 9 provides a brief review of the theoretical, methodological and practical implications of the text.

FORMS OF GENDER INEQUALITY IN CONTEMPORARY ORGANIZATIONS

Women's labour market position has been transformed since the end of the Second World War (Dale, 1997), and their workforce participation has increased steadily since this time. Of particular influence has been the legislation on sex discrimination introduced in the late 1960s and early 1970s in Europe, the US and the UK, enabling women to enter domains of work hitherto closed to them (Whitehouse, 1992). In the UK, 15.66 million women aged 16 and over (nearly 73% of the adult female population) were in employment from October to December 2022, according to the ONS UK labour market bulletin, a figure that is aligned with the situation across Europe (Eurostat, 2023a) though with a slightly smaller percentage of women in the labour force in Southern and Eastern Europe (Eros et al., 2022). Nevertheless, gender inequalities persist across the globe in terms of occupational segregation, working hours, pay and access to so-called 'top' roles, each of which are conative of women's overall value. Women in OECD countries, for instance, remain concentrated in particular occupational streams and are underrepresented in leadership positions. The public sector gender wage gap stands at a global average of 14% (Mukhtarova et al., 2021).

Gender and Occupational Segregation

Gendered occupational segregation refers to the fact that 'occupations tend to comprise disproportionately large numbers of women or of men' (Blackburn and Jarman, 2006: 289). This situation is particularly prevalent for working-class women where this group tends to occupy stereotypical female roles, such as caring, cleaning or cooking, but also roles which are frequently labelled as low-skill and carry low wages. In white-collar occupations, in contrast, there has been a decline in gender segregation in managerial, professional and non-retail jobs, though this has stalled somewhat since the 2000s (Kalev and Deutsch, 2018). Nonetheless, there is evidence that as the numbers of women increase in particular professional occupations, the wages in those professions tend to decrease (Harris, 2022). Women also tend to be filtered into particular roles within professions, producing gendered hierarchies (Bolton and Muzio, 2008). Gender segregation can therefore be thought of as being both horizontal (women and men occupying substantively different occupations) and vertical (women and men occupying different types of role within specific occupations) (Hakim, 1992).

Gendered occupational segregation has been a pervasive feature of work for many hundreds of years (Steinberg, 1990). Prior to the Industrial Revolution, men and women's work was undertaken primarily at home and was steeped in the demands of a largely agricultural existence. Although there was a gendered division of labour (Middleton, 1988), by and large gendered differences in roles and tasks were considered natural and appropriate and would certainly not have been considered a 'social problem' in the way that such segregation is understood today. Women received little or no pay for their work prior to the Industrial Revolution, though those working in industry in the 18th century received pay via their husbands who were awarded a wage seen as sufficient for a family. Women often undertook heavy labour, although this was considered to be supplementary to that performed by men. Following the Industrial Revolution, women's capacity to earn wages at home or via the family wage was gradually diminished, and they began entering the industrial labour market. Nonetheless, the common assumption that 'women's work' evolved as a consequence of the Industrial Revolution is not supported by evidence (Pinchbeck, 2013). What did happen during this period is that both men and women began working away from their homes and this actually benefitted women who acquired more leisure time, were relieved of the drudgery that was a feature of women's work in the period before the Industrial Revolution, and gained access to a greater number of occupational opportunities which improved their status as workers (Pinchbeck, 2013). Interestingly, while administrative and clerical duties have long been seen as 'women's work', up until the early decades of the 20th century this was considered men's work.

The increase in the amount of clerical and administrative work required in organizations opened this occupation to women who could also be paid rather less for doing it (England and Boyer, 2009).

State policies are also implicated in gender segregation. Welfare state policies for families in the early part of the 20th century were based on a male breadwinner model and an assumption of family stability. This meant that it was economically sensible for women to work in ways that enabled them to care for the home and children, such as part-time work which was often available only in those occupations classed as low-skilled and low-paid. Of course, following the world wars, this situation changed radically and women started entering the workforce in huge numbers as dual incomes became necessary for individuals to fulfil their consumption aspirations (Lewis, 2006).

Gendered occupational segregation is a pervasive feature of many so-called economically developed nations and this tendency continues in societies across the world, even in those which are seen to be especially progressive in terms of gender policies, such as parts of Scandinavia (Ellingsæter, 2013). Common explanations for gendered occupational segregation are covered in Chapter 2 and vary between theories that are focused on women making particular choices that, it is claimed, match their essential attributes as women, albeit within a given set of socio-economic conditions (e.g. Hakim's preference theory); on the nature of those conditions themselves and how they influence employer and employee preferences (e.g. Human Capital Theory); or on how gender as an ideological category infuses organizations located within these conditions (e.g. theories of gendered organizational cultures). These theories have in common the idea that women's relationship to work is different from that of men, but differ in where they locate the causes of segregation. Individual preference and economic theories see segregation to be a consequence of the deliberate choices made by employees and employers. On the other hand, cultural theories see it as an outcome of how gender operates as a largely unconscious structuring process which permeates both the identities of individual men and women via cultural assumptions about the type of work that each is most suited for, and beliefs about job requirements and skills, which operate to filter men into higher-status, higher-value work.

Nonetheless, a number of studies suggest that gender segregation is a more nuanced phenomenon than is sometimes suggested in the literature. For instance, Guinea-Martin et al. (2018), using data from the UK's Labour Force Survey over the period 1993–2013, argue that there is a difference between occupational segregation (where women and men are found in distinctly different types of jobs) and time-related segregation (where the distribution of men and women working standard (i.e. full-time) versus non-standard hours differs). They found that life stage influences the extent of occupational segregation such that this is less apparent for younger workers (those under 35) and

more apparent for older workers (over the age of 35). Time-related segregation, on the other hand is more apparent for younger women of childbearing age who, while more likely to work part-time, are less likely to be segregated into particular occupations. For women with school-age children (those aged over 35) time-related segregation continues and, over time, occupational segregation increases slightly but becomes much more apparent post-retirement (those over 60 years of age) where men and women both tend to work part-time but in 'heavily gender-typical organizations'. Overall, the authors argue, gender segregation reflects the homogeneity of men's working lives, which are characterized by full-time employment and upward mobility; and the heterogeneity of women's lives, which is related to how they respond to the various demands and pressures they face both inside and outside of employment.

Blackburn and Jarman (2006) argue that in many accounts of gendered occupational segregation, there is a lack of attention to the difference between concentration (the numbers of women or men prevalent in specific occupations) and segregation (the tendency for women and men to be separated from each other across the spectrum of occupations). In an analysis of two international data sets providing information about gendered occupational segregation, the authors found that while women are, overall, behind men with respect to standard international measures of disadvantage or inequality (specifically, seats in parliament, earned income share, percentage of administrators and professionals, and percentage of professional and technical workers) the level of disadvantage is much smaller and decreasing in those countries, particularly Scandinavia, which are highly gender segregated. They argue that where women are highly concentrated in particular occupations they are, at the national level, less disadvantaged with respect to pay and status. They also note that changes in the industrial landscape mean that greater numbers of men than previously are located in very low-value, low-status work. These findings challenge the idea that it is mainly women who are disadvantaged by segregation. Similarly, Estevez-Abe (2005) found that in countries characterized by a form of capitalism known as CME (co-ordinated market economies), whose focus is on long-term sustainable growth through investment in population skills (which include many Scandinavian nations), women tended not to be located in firms which offered high levels of training for the acquisition of firm-specific skills (typically, technical-related apprenticeships). Instead, they were more likely to be employed by firms emphasizing the importance of general or portable skills such as education or other credentialized forms of knowledge. This difference arises, they argue, because women are unwilling to invest in the acquisition of skills that are not portable, given the likelihood that they will opt out of employment at some stage in order to have children. Interestingly, countries characterized as LMEs (liberal market economies), such as the UK, which emphasize short-term growth via few market controls,

showed less gendered occupational segregation, seemingly because women are less tied into occupations that offer little in the way of opportunity for firm-specific upward mobility.

Overall, therefore, these studies suggest that gendered occupational segregation is a highly situated phenomenon reflecting cultural approaches to and ideologies associated with economic production at the macro level, and the related though changing nature of the demands and responsibilities that characterize women's lives at the micro level. We also need to remember, however, that studies which take occupation type as an indicator of gender segregation do not necessarily detect the fact that women may be deployed to different roles to men within occupations (e.g. Anteby et al., 2016; Bastida et al., 2021; Williams and Dempsey, 2014). Moreover, as outlined below, even where women and men occupy ostensibly identical roles within the same occupation, they may enact these roles differently. In police work, for instance, it has been found that women enact both leadership and operational policing in different ways from men (Brown and Woolfenden, 2011; Silvestri, 2003, 2007).

In sum, while gendered occupational segregation persists across the world, its causes and manifestations are complex, though a central issue is that the role of work in the lives and men and women is, on aggregate, different. Women, because they are the bearers of children and, in many societies, continue to assume primary responsibility for raising and caring for children and many other aspects of domestic life, experience the various opportunities and challenges produced in capitalist societies in different ways to men. However, this is a massive generalization and there are many men who do assume primary responsibility for raising children and who face similar dilemmas and choices to women in similar positions. In Chapter 2, theories of gendered occupational segregation will be reviewed.

Working Hours

In OECD countries, women are much more likely than men to work part-time, with an average of three out of ten women working part-time, compared to one out of ten men (Harding et al., 2022). Part-time work is, however, very variable with commentators differentiating between 'good' and 'bad' part-time jobs (Tilly, 1992). Good part-time jobs tend to be those located in professional or white-collar jobs, often chosen deliberately by individuals (particularly women) who wish to retain their roles but reduce their hours. Bad part-time jobs, in contrast, refer to jobs whose schedules are designed by organizations to maximize productivity and workforce flexibility. Recent evidence suggests that 'good' or 'retention' part-time jobs are both established and well protected across European countries (Westhoff, 2022) and are more likely to be occupied by women. Bad part-time jobs are those characterized by low wages and

low security and are likely to be occupied by both men and women, though recent evidence suggests that the duality between 'good' and 'bad' part-time jobs may mask important differences between types of part-time work. Specifically, as well as good and bad part-time jobs there are 'transition' and 'student' part-time jobs, in which individuals are in part-time work while they complete their education or seek jobs which better match their qualifications and experience (Haines et al., 2018).

Part-time working is not the only way in which individuals attempt to manage the competing demands of home and work. Flexible working arrangements (FWA) refer to a broad category of work practices related to flexibility in the timing and location of work and include telecommuting, compressed workweek and job sharing (Bear, 2021). The key issue around many of these practices, particularly in professional domains, is not only that they involve changes in hours but also an increase in the control that individuals have over when and how those hours are worked. However, even when flexible working arrangements are made use of in 'good' jobs, there is evidence that these employees experience stigma as a consequence of this choice, often judged to lack commitment to their roles and careers and to be making less of an overall contribution to the organization (Chung, 2020). The career paths of professional women making use of FWAs have been noted as different to those of men, characterized by the term 'mommy track', connoting a pathway that enables the successful combination of family and work demands via fewer working hours and lower ambitions for upward progression (Schwartz, 1989). This pathway appears to be based more on myth than reality however, with a recent study by Bear (2021) finding that the availability of temporal flexibility policies was associated with higher career aspirations amongst women than when such policies were less available.

Working less than full-time hours is strongly associated with the lower value of work. As Clair et al. (2008) point out, cultural understandings of 'real' work, that is work that matters in society, is generally considered to be formal, paid and *full-time*. Part-time work, therefore, no matter where it is carried out, is seen as less valuable and important than full-time work. I am going to deal with part-time work in depth in Chapter 6, but for the moment want to note that working hours are, in my view, the central driver of gender inequality, and therefore any adequate theorization of this situation must account for the role of working hours and, more importantly, explain their extraordinary influence on how we understand and define what counts as 'real' work.

Gender Pay Gap

Alongside gendered segregation in terms of roles and hours, there are also inequalities in the pay that men and women receive; a situation summed up

by the term 'the gender pay gap'. The financial value of the gender pay gap is often calculated by looking at differences in the hourly pay of women and men or by comparing the wages of women and men working full-time. This is due to the fact that there are, as already outlined, gender differences with respect to the quantity of hours worked in a given time period. Although considerable variation in the size of the gender pay gap has been found across countries and industries, some consistent findings have emerged. The gender pay gap, for example, widens with age, and is wider in the private compared to the public sector and for married as opposed to single employees (Plantenga and Remery, 2006). Women professionals are more likely to be employed in the public than the private sector (due to generally more favourable employment conditions for maternity leave and childcare responsibilities) and high pay opportunities are less frequent in the public sector (Rubery and Grimshaw, 2015).

Historical legacies and, more pragmatically, caring responsibilities, particularly for children, appear to underpin these differences and as Bear (2021) notes, unsurprisingly translate into career (and therefore pay) penalties in the top echelons of management. With respect to historical legacies, women's role in society has been understood across many cultures to be centred on the home and on children and family (Vickers et al., 1993). One consequence of this has been the historical tendency, noted above, for women to be paid not as if they were primary breadwinners with dependents but as subsidizers of the family wage (Pinchbeck, 2013); a legacy that seems to have carried over into the economic evaluation of women's work in more general terms and certainly in terms of the evaluation of the skills needed for particular jobs. The lower value of women workers in a cultural sense became embedded in job evaluation schemes such that women's work was assumed to be less skilled, complex and difficult than men's work (Steinberg, 1992), and therefore deserving of its lower status and lower pay when compared to men's work.

A dominant theme running through efforts to resolve the gender pay gap, irrespective of the reasons for it, is the principle of equal value. This principle is based on the notion that jobs can be compared with each other along such dimensions as skills required and level of responsibility such that jobs in entirely different domains can be treated as equivalent with respect to pay, for example hospital porter versus hospital cook. This principle of equal value was expressed in the ILO (International Labour Organization) Equal Remuneration Convention (No.100) and is central to many of the gender equality regulations that exist in many countries (Whitehouse and Smith, 2020). Although unequal value is not the only contributor to the gender pay gap, it does represent a critical focus for efforts to address this issue.

However, the principle of equal value is extremely problematic due to decades of research showing how estimates of value are not objective and are based on gendered conceptions of skills, knowledge and levels of responsibil-

ity. For example, job complexity is a dimension frequently used to classify jobs with respect to their economic value in an organization. However, as Steinberg (1992) argues, complexity is not some neutral or objective characteristic of work, it is a social construction and in job evaluation schemes, which are often utilized to set wage and pay scales, is often assumed to be an unquestioned feature of roles that are positioned at higher levels of a given occupational hierarchy. This issue will be revisited in Chapter 4 where I provide an in-depth critique of job requirements and how these are differentially valued, both economically and socially.

Rubery and Grimshaw (2015) note that explanations for the gender pay gap offered in the literature can be categorized as reflecting particular academic approaches, namely, economic, sociological, institutional and organizational. They argue that each approach offers a different lens on the causes of the pay gap but that none on its own is able to address the complexity of the issues involved. For instance, pay itself cannot be viewed simply as a price for labour (as in economic explanations) but neither can it be viewed as something that reflects the ongoing push from individuals and institutions for a wage that accounts for the cost of living. After reviewing the various explanations, Rubery and Grimshaw (2015) conclude that the gender pay gap is illustrative of how pay is an essentially political process, involving a complex interplay between the interests of the various actors involved, including men, women, trades unions, organizations and the state. More critically, such interests are constantly evolving along with the social and economic conditions in which pay and pay systems are located. There is no straightforward explanation for the continuing gender pay gap, and therefore no straightforward answer to how it might be resolved. In subsequent chapters in this text I will return to this complexity as we consider other elements of gender inequality in the workplace and women's positions within it.

Senior-Level Jobs

Finally, women's representation at the most senior levels in organizations, including executive and corporate boards, continues to be seen as extremely problematic. For example, although, as already mentioned, women are successfully entering occupations that were once virtually closed to them and are increasingly present in middle management, their occupation of very senior positions continues to be very low. Sheridan (2002), for instance, reports that in 2000 in the USA women occupied only 12.5% of board positions of Fortune 500 companies in Canada. In the UK, during a similar time period, this percentage was even lower at 4%. This situation has been mirrored across the globe. There have been sustained efforts by national governments to intervene through the implementation of both voluntary and compulsory

regulations such as gender quotas, which have had definite and positive effects on board representation, though not necessarily on gender equality more generally (Biswas et al., 2021). Despite various attempts to resolve the problem of women's representation at very senior levels, it seems that this situation is highly variable – some organizations have excellent female representation on corporate boards, for instance, whilst in others women are notable by their absence. High levels of female representation have been shown to be related to company size and the need for legitimacy; the dependence of the organization on female labour; and the extent to which a board is linked with other boards that include a good proportion of women (Hillman et al., 2007). In sum, the low representation of women on corporate or executive boards continues, though is improving, but it is important to note that the picture is heterogeneous with representation differing across nations (Grosvold and Brammer, 2011), industries and specific organizations.

The Feminization of Work

Despite the trends and findings outlined above, some commentators have argued that we are seeing progress with respect to gender inequality, though those in the UK and US argue that progress has been diminished as political regimes have, over the last few decades, become more conservative (Dalingwater, 2018; Kalev and Deutsch, 2018). With respect to progress, for instance, although women continue to take the primary role as carer for children and other domestic commitments, these commitments are no longer incommensurable barriers to working, with women remaining in the labour force for longer periods (England et al., 2020). There have also been successful legal challenges brought to bear on the gender pay gap with apparent differences in the economic value of jobs contested and changed (Dawson, 2011).

One important trend that has characterized the economic landscape of many Western nations is the shift from manufacturing to service work which accelerated from the 1970s (Wölfl, 2005). This shift, it was argued, could potentially transform gendered inequalities mainly due to how it would involve a fundamental redefinition of the primary skills needed in a service economy – the ability to communicate with and relate to others (Brown, 1997). During the same time period it was argued that management in organizations required skills and attributes more often associated with women than men, including co-operation, caring and visionary leadership which might lead to an increase in female managers (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1993). Despite these trends, and as is clear from the points I have already made, gender inequalities (at least as understood in terms of women's position in the labour market, relative to men) are a persistent, albeit evolving, feature of contemporary life.

The reasons for the apparent failure of this 'feminization thesis' to produce the positive effects that might have been expected have been examined in various streams of literature (e.g. Tomlinson et al., 1997). One explanation is that while the service economy does indeed require the use of more relational and communicative abilities than were required in more traditionally masculine occupations in heavy industry, this requirement is less reflective of women's communicative style and focus. As Illouz (1997: 43) argues, contemporary requirements for communicative competence derive from 'expert knowledge' whereas those associated with femininity derive from values of the 'private sphere [such as] nurturing, abnegation and self-sacrifice'. In short, the communicative requirements of the contemporary service sector are concerned with instrumental not affective transactions, an issue that is dealt with in Chapter 4.

A second explanation derives from studies of gendered performance, a process that will be covered in depth in the next chapter. However, in brief, West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that gender should not be considered an essential attribute that individuals possess but is instead a social and interactive accomplishment, and should therefore be considered as something that individuals *do*. A study looking into service provision in a fast food retailer and an insurance company noted that despite the apparently 'feminine' requirements of the work in both organizations, male employees talked about their work in ways which emphasized masculine qualities of 'control and self-direction' and reinterpreted some of the more feminine requirements in ways that were less degrading. For example, customer interactions were reinterpreted so as to de-emphasize the servile implications of the role and brought to the fore the idea that such interactions were 'contests of will' (Leidner, 1991).

It is processes like these which make it very difficult to read off from gender-segregated roles and occupations any straightforward link to gender itself. Women performing roles typically understood as masculine and men performing roles typically understood as feminine bring their own individual as well as cultural understandings to these performances, which influence the meaning and value of these roles.

CONCLUSION

In this introductory chapter, aimed at presenting the core purpose of this text, I began by interrogating the meaning of gender inequality and how dominant understandings of it have influenced what we see as the main problems for women in the workplace and what are seen as the solutions to these problems. Here I argued that the whole notion of workplace inequality is itself a problematic and contentious issue. This is because, in general, inequalities in outcomes (such as pay differentials) are somewhat inevitable consequences

of a society where competition is celebrated and where there are strong beliefs in individual differences and the notion of merit. What does seem to concern many individuals and groups is differences in opportunities and providing the means for individuals to access such opportunities by enabling all individuals to acquire the credentials needed for such access. I argued that in fact the means for achieving such credentials are not independent of the credentials themselves, or of those powerful groups who actually determine what these credentials should be and what they mean in practice. I argued that the problem for women in workplaces inheres less in their lack of representation in valued roles and occupations and more in processes of valuation themselves.

I went on to outline some of the problems that are generated from focusing on equality of outcomes which include the homogenization of women as a group and the inevitable reification of female subordination. This results in a situation whereby we see inequality as a characteristic of particular groups rather than as a product of the social processes which generate the differential value attaching to some jobs, roles, behaviours and credentials. This latter process will be central to the theoretical approach and development in this text and will be based on the argument that gender and other forms of inequality are closely related to the ideology of economic growth and material acquisition that is dominant throughout the world and which is reproduced and enhanced by the capitalist mode of production and consumption.

Having outlined my core thesis, I then went on to briefly review some of the key inequalities that are understood as more likely to be experienced by women in the workplace. In general, inequalities are seen to stem from the fact of occupational segregation whereby women as a group are more likely to be employed in jobs, roles and occupations that are classed as low skill and with low pay. In turn, this segregation is a product of women's relationship to paid work which, once they have children, tends to be different to the 'standard' relationship men have with work which is characterized by full-time hours and a focus on upward career mobility. Because women with young and school-age children tend to want to work either fewer hours or more flexible hours, they struggle to acquire the 'credentials' seen to be important for access to 'better' or more senior jobs. I critiqued some of the assumptions underpinning these ideas, arguing that occupational segregation is a more complex issue than is often presented in the literature and deflects attention from the societal-level issues, such as forms of capitalism, that are heavily implicated in the production of gender and other inequalities.

Finally, I briefly examined the so-called 'feminization thesis' which proposes that as the nature of work evolves to encompass relational rather than technical or manual skills, the position of women may improve. Here, I argued that despite this hope, work has not become more feminized, though it has transformed what is seen as most valuable with respect to skills and abilities.

I also argued that even where work does apparently require 'feminine' skills such as serving or helping others, cultural conceptions of masculinity and femininity infuse how workers themselves make sense of, interpret and enact these skills, rendering the classification of jobs as feminine or masculine very difficult to achieve in practice. In the next chapter, I am going to develop some of the arguments that I have outlined here by examining some of the dominant theoretical approaches to the study of gender inequalities.

NOTE

1. See Sunderland (2004) and Chapter 3.

2. Theoretical approaches to the study of gender inequalities

In the last chapter, I briefly reviewed some of the inequalities that exist between men and women in the labour market generally and organizations more specifically. As I argued in this chapter, the core problem underpinning these inequalities is the differential economic and social value that attaches to women's work, a differential that is historically and culturally contingent. Women's work was not always seen to lack such value, though gender segregation has existed for many centuries (Vickers et al., 1993). If the capitalist mode of production is implicated in any of the gender inequality problems that are the focus of research attention today, it is in generating and perpetuating this notion of value – a notion that cannot exist unless we view humans and their attributes as commodities that can be bought, sold and traded in some kind of market. Alongside and intertwined with the differential value attaching to women and men's work is how work signifies to individuals in the contemporary world and how this shifts and changes with socio-economic trends. Traditionally, for instance, individuals expected to remain in the same occupation or type of occupation for life and this not only shaped their self-understandings (as, say, a builder or a nurse) but also anchored these understandings in a sense of certainty and predictability. Contemporary changes to economies, occupations and work have loosened and disrupted these certainties and securities (Snyder, 2016) with individuals now expecting that they may not only change jobs regularly (Metcalfe et al., 2003) but also occupations and careers (Ahn et al., 2017). These developments have given rise to new forms of 'portable identities' (Petriglieri et al., 2018) from which individuals gain a sense of meaning – a meaning derived not from being a permanent member of some or other organization or occupation but from developing a sense of self that is commodified; a personal brand likely to be of interest to any number of potential employers. Of course, such meanings are not available to everybody. Only those who possess valued educational qualifications or the time and capacity to acquire such qualifications are those able to develop such portable identities. For others, the chronic turbulence and insecurity that is characteristic of contemporary workplaces, whilst experienced as positive and meaningful in some ways, are also a source of stress and

anxiety for those whose educational status does not guarantee that new jobs will become available or accessible if the current one is lost (Snyder, 2016).

Work and workplaces are sites of significant symbolic as well as economic value; the type of occupation you are in and the type of work you do can be read as a marker of your social status and social worth (Snyder, 2016); markers which carry definite material consequences, particularly pay. Work also has a more personal or individual meaning attaching to it. As Marx observed, it is through work that individuals experience a sense of connection to the world and their place within it. Work, even in jobs that are considered low status and low skill, is experienced by individuals as meaningful even if the wider society or community within which that work is embedded does not rate it or would not want to do it (e.g. Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990). The quest to derive meaning from all of our life experiences seems to be a pretty fundamental human universal and, given the centrality that work occupies in our lives, we should not be surprised to learn that it plays a significant role in how we make sense of who we are and what our lives mean in the broadest sense.

To fully understand gender inequalities, therefore, we require approaches that can say something about these various critical influences on how work is understood and valued by societies, groups and individuals. In this chapter, I am going to review the literatures which have sought to explain why gender inequalities are prevalent in organizations and, in doing so, am going to extend and deepen the critique of contemporary understandings of gender inequalities which I outlined in the previous chapter; a critique which centres around three core and closely related issues: the neglect of how processes of valuation occur and are reproduced or disrupted; the reification of subordination and the tendency to locate its causes within groups rather than in broader socio-economic conditions and processes; and the homogenization of women as a group or collective.

It is typical in reviews of explanations for gender inequalities to consider these at three different analytical levels, such as the individual, the organization and society or culture. However, to draw attention to what I see as some of the fundamental problems with extant theorizing, I am going to organize this review according to the extent to which agency or structure[1] is positioned as the primary explanation for this situation. In the next chapter, where I elaborate on the theoretical concepts that I am going to use in this text, I will argue for a strong process ontology which means that we dissolve the agency/structure dichotomy or dualism in favour of an understanding of human action as always/already inhering within and transforming, no matter how minutely, the socio-material conditions in which that action takes place.

CATHERINE HAKIM'S PREFERENCE THEORY

Hakim's (2000) controversial preference theory starts from the premise that the invention of the contraceptive pill in the 1960s produced a profound transformation in the lives of women. Not only could they choose whether to have children, when and how many, but also to make decisions about the place they wanted work to occupy in their lives. For Hakim, any truly contemporary theory that seeks to understand why women's position in the labour market is different from that of men (on aggregate) must engage with the issue that individuals are confronted with far more choices about how to live and work than when the overall driver of human behaviour was basically survival and making ends meet. Hakim (1998) recognizes that social structures and practices play a role in shaping the choices that individuals make in any society, but she argues that a focus on those choices themselves has been neglected in the literature seeking to explain gender segregation. She points out that across the world, two particular elements of female employment predominate. First, a tendency for far more women than men to seek and engage in part-time work, no matter whether that work is well or badly paid; and second, that gender segregation is universal, occurring, as I have already outlined in Chapter 1, even in those countries that have deliberately and actively developed policy interventions and initiatives aimed at encouraging men to take a greater share of the responsibility for childcare (e.g. parts of Scandinavia).

Hakim argues that these two basic facts can be explained with reference to women's work–life preferences and the extent to which women position work or home as central to their lives. She argues that using this idea, it is possible to identify three distinct preference patterns: 20% of women are what she refers to as home-centred; 20% are work-centred; and 60% are adaptives – women who want to combine careers or work with home, without prioritizing either. It is these preferences, Hakim argues, that can explain both the gender pay gap and gendered occupational segregation. With respect to pay, for instance, given that many more men than women will be work-centred, by definition they will seek to occupy senior and well-paid roles in greater numbers and this explains why men's earnings on average are higher than women's. Likewise, given that 60% of women fall into the adaptive category, this means that they are purposefully seeking work which is not too demanding with respect to hours and effort and hence are actively choosing work which meets these criteria and which is therefore, and inevitably, less well paid. Finally, given that less demanding jobs tend to be those most naturally suited to women's skills and propensities, such as domestic or care work, this explains the gender segregation that is widespread across the world.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Hakim's work has been the focus of intense criticism. A major concern expressed in these critiques is Hakim's idea that women's choices, although shaped by social and economic conditions, are not unduly constrained by them. In her theory, choices are shaped more by individual-level factors such as values or personality. Critics have pointed to the fact that because the burden of caring for the home and the family continues to be borne primarily by women, this means that those of them with these responsibilities inevitably opt to leave the labour market at different times in their lives so as to focus on them. Hence, women's preferences are never made in any unconstrained way but are always shaped by what is realistically available to them given that women are the primary bearers and carers of children (Crompton and Harris, 1998).

A second issue that is discussed in critiques, relates to Hakim's views of the stability of personal preferences and the idea that it is possible to relatively unproblematically assign women to the three categories of home-centred, adaptive and work-centred. Critics have pointed out that preferences change over time for women as they encounter different phases and demands in their lives (see McCrae, 2003). Related to this is the apparent source of preferences which Hakim implicitly attributes to dispositional factors and therefore as preceding the work–life choices women make. Critics make the point that preferences also emerge as a consequence of experiences and hence are not the causes of the situations reflected in the three 'types' Hakim identifies, but are rather adaptive attitudinal and behavioural responses to the social conditions they encounter (Cartwright, 2004; Leahy and Doughney, 2006).

Also of concern, are Hakim's claims that the types of work that women are attracted to can be considered 'less demanding'. This is a highly gendered claim in itself, since what is meant by demanding is not only subjective but also based on assumptions about, for example, the superiority of intellectual to emotional or physical demands (England et al., 1994; Steinberg, 1992). Equally, we need to think about what is meant by 'intellectual' demands, as this is not some neutral or objective fact about work but is in itself a value judgement, often based on assumptions that equate hierarchical position with task complexity, an assumption that is highly questionable (Steinberg, 1992). I return to these issues below and in Chapter 4.

Critics do also acknowledge that preference theory has strengths, particularly with respect to its refusal to homogenize women as a group (Crompton and Harris, 1998). Most critics recognize that women's work experience cannot be understood to be the same or even similar and that structural constraints and opportunities are experienced differently by different women at different times (Gerson, 1986). This recognition has spawned further attempts to explain such differences. One such, which has been positively received in the careers' literature is the kaleidoscope model of women's careers.

KALEIDOSCOPE MODEL OF WOMEN'S CAREERS

Sullivan and Mainiero (2008) developed the kaleidoscope model of women's careers (KCM) in response to reports in the press in the US claiming that women were engaged in an 'opt out' revolution, choosing to leave well-paid jobs and high-status careers in order to prioritize their family responsibilities. Arguing that this explanation was overly simplistic and failed to recognize the multiple influences on women's career choices, Sullivan and Mainiero argue that women's career paths are different from those of men – more likely to be marked, for example, by interruptions and changes in direction. But this, they argue, is a consequence of how women make career decisions. They suggest that what differentiates women's from men's career decision making is the role that relationality plays in such decisions. Women, they argue, when considering their career decisions, factor in 'the needs of their children, spouses, aging parents, friends, and even coworkers and clients – as part of the total gestalt of their careers. Men, on the other hand, tended to examine career decisions from the perspective of goal orientation and independent action – acting first for the benefit of career' (p. 36). In this way, women are making career decisions which optimize the fit between the various elements of their lives, enabling them to better manage these elements.

A further component of the kaleidoscope career model is the idea that women's career decisions reflect the relative importance, at any one time, given to one of three issues – authenticity, balance and challenge. Authenticity refers to women's desires to be themselves or to find ways to express their individuality; balance refers to the need to ensure that the various demands faced do not compete to the extent that one wins out over other, equally important ones; and challenge to the notion that women are seeking to be stretched and pushed in their lives and careers. The model therefore recognizes that women's priorities regarding what they want from their lives and careers shift and change over time and across contexts. The kaleidoscope model, Sullivan and Mainiero argue, is as applicable to men as to women, though they argue that the importance of relationships and relationality, which are central to women's concerns throughout their careers and working lives, tend to emerge later in men's careers, often after they have made some initial vertical advances.

There has generally been a positive response to the KCM, with academics and practitioners commenting on its practical applicability and on its recognition both that women's careers do differ substantively to those of men and that women's career decisions cannot be understood as attributable to single factors like family responsibilities. One important contribution of this work is the recognition, absent from Hakim's theory, that work and life do not represent independent domains of existence but are inextricably linked and intertwined.

A decision made in one domain (work) will inevitably influence and impact on what happens in all the others and hence such decisions cannot be considered to be in any sense context-free as is implied by Hakim's theory. Like Hakim's theory, the KCM also recognizes that women are a heterogenous group and attempts to account for this heterogeneity by thinking about the role of life stage and context. Nonetheless, the KCM also has some limitations. It has little to say, for example, about the role of social structures such as social class or race which we know from research have a profound influence on women's experiences of work and organizations (Acker, 2006). Working-class women, for example, tend to be disproportionately found in jobs which lack social value and which are poorly paid (Kirton and Greene, 2022). Women of colour struggle for recognition even when they occupy high-status roles (Smith et al., 2019). Such experiences surely impact on the capacity and motivation of women to seek authenticity, balance and challenge, yet the model does not account for such influences.

Moreover, we need to question why the issues of authenticity, balance and challenge are central to the model and to understand how these are being theorized? Are they needs? Are they derived from the personal or social context? And what is their ontological status – are these seen to be dispositional in some way or are they understood to be emergent consequences of career decisions? We must also ask whether it is feasible to suggest that the three issues which are central to the KCM (authenticity, balance and challenge) can truly capture the range of issues which confront women at various times in their lives and which impact on their career decisions. For example, the economic context plays a major role in shaping expectations about what jobs can actually deliver in terms of challenge or balance (Mouratidou et al., 2017), as do shifting ideas about what women should and should not be doing with their lives. Alongside such considerations is the fact that women's career decisions are not shaped only by their needs but by practical exigencies; an issue I explore in Chapters 6 and 7.

Thus far, I have reviewed two explanations for why women's careers appear to be different from men's and which attempt to accommodate the heterogeneity of the category 'woman'. Both theories put the agency of women front and centre in explaining the career and job choices which people make, and while this can be considered a strength of these approaches, it can also be considered a limitation. As I have already indicated, the emphasis on agency in these theories leads us to neglect the role of socio-economic and historical conditions from which women's choices emerge and are enacted, and within which they are embedded and shaped. Additionally, these approaches do not help us understand the possible dialectics involved, and do not adequately consider that the specific organizations to which women are recruited and in which they forge their working lives are fundamental to whether women's career choices

can be realized and actualized. In the next two sections, I turn my attention to theories that have attempted to better understand why it is that women tend to be found in particular types of role, job and occupation, and why they may be seen to lack value as employees.

HUMAN CAPITAL THEORY

Human capital theory, which has developed from neo-classical economics, explains the position of women in the labour market as attributable to the economic value of the skills and knowledge they possess and the price that employers are willing to pay for them. The argument is that because women prioritize domestic above work interests, they do not acquire (by choice) the skills and competencies that are most valued in sectors of the labour market more likely to offer high pay. One argument with respect to this is that women make particular job choices which capitalize on the knowledge and skills they do possess and that align with their skill and educational levels but, more importantly, with their domestic commitments (Polachek, 1981) and with their willingness to invest energy at work, given what is needed to cope at home (Becker, 1985). Note the similarity here with Hakim's preference theory – the idea that women make work-related choices which are based on various personal attributes, such as skills, and which can be considered as relatively stable and, critically, as having some sort of fixed meaning.

Rubery and Grimshaw (2015) note that human capital theory is based on the assumption that technical skills (typically skills possessed by men) are more important for productivity than social skills (more typical for women); it is also assumed that skills acquired in education or workplaces become obsolete if not utilized for periods of time (which is assumed to be the case for women who take time out of work to bear and raise children) and it is also assumed that, in general, women show less commitment to work due to competing domestic responsibilities. All of these assumptions are questionable and challengeable. There is little evidence, for instance, that women lack commitment to their work relative to men. Understandably, when women have young children they may report lower work commitment (Moen and Smith, 1986). Nonetheless, survey-based evidence (from which the assumptions outlined above are derived) does not capture the precise nature of the issues feeding into this situation. Women with young children who return to professional work part-time, for instance, may find they are treated differently by colleagues and managers (Lawrence and Corwin, 2003) which may be one of the reasons why part-time women may express less commitment to work than full-time employees (though this in itself is a challengeable claim). Regarding the notion of skill obsolescence, while it may be the case that some skills do require updating due to changes in technology and systems, individuals with plenty of work experi-

ence often have other skills that are equally as important such as adaptability, and the capacity to make the most of training and development experiences. Butrica and Mudrazija (2022), for instance, argue that too much emphasis on obsolescent skills leads employers to emphasize short-term gains rather than the longer-term benefits that can come through employing individuals who do need some training but are likely to offer high levels of engagement. Moreover, given that more women than ever before have acquired technical skills over the last couple of decades (Elias and Purcell, 2009), human capital theory would predict a reduction in gendered occupational segregation. But in fact, this situation has not improved substantively. Rubery and Grimshaw (2015) also present evidence that the reasons for the gender pay gap are located less in the attributes and preferences of women and more in the profile of those occupations and organizations in which they are mainly employed. They point out that this is indicative of the possibility that it is organizational characteristics, such as their propensity to exploit workers and limit opportunities for collective bargaining processes, which are the more likely candidates for explaining the pay gap (see also the work of Blackburn and Jarman (2006) and Estevez-Abe (2005) outlined in Chapter 1).

Given the evidence that organizations themselves may be playing a significant role in producing and reproducing gender inequality in workplaces, in the next section, I will turn to theories that have addressed this directly by examining the discrimination that women face in many workplaces and how this has been explained in the literature.

DIRECT AND INDIRECT SEX DISCRIMINATION

A dominant explanation for the differential treatment of men and women in the workplace, and one that is now enshrined in law in parts of the world (for example, the Sex Discrimination Act, 1975 in the UK: https:// www .legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1975/65/enacted), is that women are either deliberately excluded from particular workplace activities and roles and treated differently to men when in those roles (direct discrimination); or that the criteria used to judge who is and is not suitable for particular activities and roles are defined in ways that disproportionately disadvantage women as a group (indirect discrimination). For example, height requirements for entry to occupations such as policing may indirectly discriminate against women.

Direct discrimination was much more common many decades ago than it is now. At one time, it was considered normal to see women as fit only for particular types of job such as secretaries or nurses, for example, and it was also considered to be unremarkable for men to make sexual comments to or about women in workplaces or to treat them as if they were inferior to them by, for instance, asking the woman in a work group to make the tea or coffee.

Such behaviours now are against the law and are far less common in workplaces than they once were. Nonetheless, direct discrimination continues to take place. For instance, Hackett et al. (2019) in a survey of 3000 women in the UK, found that nearly 20% reported the experience of sex discrimination in the workplace.

One explanation for discrimination draws on the notion of homophily. Homophily can be defined simply as 'the tendency to associate with similar others' where similarity is referring to shared biographical characteristics such as gender, age, or profession (Liu, 2021). One obvious effect of homophily with respect to gender, relates to how men tend to numerically dominate particular roles and occupations and find it easier and more comfortable to network and communicate with other, similar men. One consequence of this is that women may not be seen as appropriate for particular jobs and roles (Liu, 2021). This may be especially the case when organizations recruit staff via networking (Breaugh, 2014), that is where incumbent employees encourage their external contacts to apply for particular, especially high-level, jobs and roles.

Despite the intuitive appeal of this explanation for the underrepresentation of women in particular jobs and occupations, the evidence supporting this idea is equivocal (Rivera and Owens, 2021). A recent study examining network recruitment in two pharmaceutical firms in the US found that the issue is less about homophily per se, and more connected to the fact that women in lower-level jobs were much more likely than men to use their same sex networks to refer individuals (i.e. women) to job openings at this level. At the higher levels in the organizations examined, men *and* women more often referred women in their networks to job openings at both lower and higher levels in the organization. Because women were more underrepresented at the higher level, however, this tendency had no significant effect on the numbers of women ultimately recruited into these roles (Fernandez and Rubineau, 2019). The apparent role of homophily, then, in producing gender inequality via discrimination might not be as straightforward as is often thought. Nonetheless, homophily and its role in the production and perpetuation of an 'old boys network' has been found to influence women's career progression within organizations via the generation of 'masculinized' modes of behaviour and performance (Ginalski, 2022), an issue I return to below.

Another dominant explanation for discrimination is that individuals engage in what is known as 'categorization' processes whereby they ascribe characteristics to individuals on the basis of their assumed group membership. Women as a group, for example, are often stereotyped as being gentle, submissive, soft and relational, and such 'information' is used to make judgements about individual women when they are encountered by others of the same or different gender. This process, which is theorized under the broad rubric of social identity theory, is more likely to occur when individual members of particular

groups (like women or people of colour) are numerically underrepresented in workplaces or workspaces. In such circumstances, the argument goes, individual members of these groups become highly visible and members of the numerically dominant group will therefore tend to fall back on stereotypes to explain or make sense of the behaviour of particular non-typical individuals. Such judgements are invoked either by individuals who are seen to be transgressing their expected behaviours or positions in an organization (for example, a female manager in a male-dominated occupation), or by the threats posed to the dominant group if the numbers of such individuals start to increase. Stainback et al. (2011) found support for the idea that women are most likely to report the experience of discrimination when they are both more visible in a workplace and when, as a group, women's numbers are increasing to a point that encroaches on the numerical dominance of men (i.e. moving towards 50% of a given work group). They found, however, that men also reported experiences of discrimination when they were in the minority in a female-dominated work group. This latter finding undermines other research which has indicated that when men are highly visible minority employees (or tokens) they may actually benefit in terms of status, pay and other markers of social value (Budig, 2002; Simpson, 2004). However, one limitation of the Stainback et al. (2011) study is that discrimination was not operationalized in the survey used to measure it – it simply asked participants to indicate whether they believed they had experienced discrimination – so we do not know what individuals are referring to when they report discrimination. It may be, as the authors comment, that being a token in itself makes it more likely that you will interpret particular situations as reflecting discrimination.

Exclusionary Practices

The idea that token status or numerical encroachment can generate sex discrimination is a very persuasive argument. The latter explanation has been developed by a number of feminist academics via the ideas of gendered 'closure' in jobs and occupations, which refers to the ways that men actively ensure that women are confined to specific jobs and roles in order to maintain and improve their own positions of status and economic worth and hence their feelings of superiority over women (Cockburn, 1988). To do this, Cockburn (1988) argues, they need to act in ways that ensure that they gain or maintain relatively high levels of workplace bargaining power so that they can choose activities and roles which enable them to be seen as separate and different from as well as better than women. There is, for instance, evidence that as women begin to populate different professions in higher numbers, men tend to be found in higher-paid and higher-status roles within those occupations, often those that, it is claimed, demand the use of technical or intellectual

skills. A study of engineering, for instance, carried out in the 1990s, showed that women engineers were found in roles that were considered less central to the organization's core purpose, such as administrative roles, most especially where engineers as a group occupied powerful positions in the organization's structure. Conversely, where engineers had less power, typically in highly bureaucratic organizations which took discrimination seriously, women were more often found in central and powerful roles (Robinson and McIlwee, 1991). This process of closure also means that jobs and roles become gendered, with certain tasks and responsibilities considered to be more naturally aligned with men's physical strength or ability to perform technical tasks, and others to be more naturally associated with women's propensity for building and developing relationships or providing support to others.

Witz (1990) has argued that processes of gendered closure have become ever more prevalent due to the increasing professionalization of jobs. Professionalization is itself a process of closure which seeks to delimit who is and is not qualified and authorized to deliver particular services (such as medical advice, for instance), based on the possession of relevant and legitimate knowledge and experience. In this way, professionalization can be viewed as the acquisition of a legal monopoly over particular activities and ways of intervening in the world, demonstrated via the possession of appropriate educational credentials. She also argues that processes of professionalization are gendered because the practices that are used to secure closure are enabled by patriarchal structures – the institutionalization of male power and privilege. This means that men have access to power resources, to which women lack access, and which enable them to leverage these resources to further their own interests and professional projects.

Similar to Cockburn (1988), Witz argues that men, as the dominant group in many professions, engage in two different forms of occupational closure: exclusionary and demarcationary strategies. Exclusionary strategies are aimed at maintaining dominant positions within particular professions by securing control over who is allowed access to these positions. Demarcationary strategies are aimed at securing definite boundaries between different professional groups who share similar jurisdictions (e.g. doctors versus nurses). Women, on the other hand, as the subordinate group engage in efforts to improve their positions in professions via inclusionary usurpation or dual-closure strategies, which are countervailing responses to exclusionary and demarcation strategies respectively. Inclusionary usurpation strategies involve challenging the rules for membership of particular dominant groups by focusing on non-gendered criteria such as, for example, emphasizing the importance of particular qualifications or skills. Dual-closure strategies are so called because whilst they are aimed at improving the status and position of the subordinate group, to achieve this, the subordinate group uses exclusionary strategies. Witz, for

instance, explains how in the 19th century, midwifery was not only a profession regulated and controlled by male doctors but also had jurisdiction only over 'normal' births. To improve the status of midwives, women within this occupation called for a system of national registration and qualification which enabled them to enhance their status and become self-governed, but which also meant that the profession reflected the credentials of the mainly white, middle-class women who worked in it. This strategy therefore effectively excluded other groups of women such as working-class women who did not possess the resources to gain the necessary educational credentials. For Witz, the tactics used by men to exclude women from particular professions and professional jurisdictions are not a one-way street but are responded to by women who have their own sets of interests to defend and promote. Hence, as she argues, gendered relations are contested and dynamic and should not be understood as pregiven and static.

Theories of discrimination and of exclusionary cultures and practices are positioned in this text more towards the agency than the structural end of the spectrum, as they emphasize the role of deliberate and intentional human action in the production and maintenance of gendered inequality. While, of course, individual men and women can and do operate in ways that work to exclude other groups, as suggested by Witz (1990), a problem with this approach is trying to identify who is doing these things, as the risk is that we effectively accuse all men of initiating and perpetuating discriminatory behaviours. Indeed there is evidence of men working to further and support the interests of subordinated women (Smith and Johnson, 2021) which reinforces the idea that we need to better accommodate the heterogenous nature of social categories like men and women.

A further concern raised by the idea of exclusionary behaviours is that it encourages us to think about them as essentially *motivated* behaviours that are products of individual psychology or interests, leading to a neglect of the social conditions and relations of power that generate particular gendered interests in the first instance. For instance, direct discrimination and the relations of power that enable this process are products of particular historical and socio-cultural conditions, characterized by the prevalence of certain ideologies or discourses through which our understandings of ourselves and others are constructed (see Chapter 3). The power relations that are generated by these understandings shift and change over time, as do the understandings with which they are reciprocally entangled. Middleton (1988: 72), for instance, in a critique of the concept of patriarchy points out that in pre-capitalist life in England, men's interests were not simply concerned with maintaining their own positions within the family or their role in the execution of particular types of labour, but in 'carving out their futures … under constraints imposed by a particular mode of production'. For Middleton, then, patriarchy cannot explain cross-cultural

and historical variations in male dominance because it implies that men are always motivated to act as men, rather than as particular types of worker or within particular organizational and societal relations of power.

None of the approaches reviewed above deals adequately with these issues. Approaches which have de-centred agency to focus on the social production of the values and beliefs that lead to discrimination are, therefore, more useful for the task in this text.

Gender as Social Structure and/or Cultural Rules

A longstanding idea in organization and social theory is that gender is an essential attribute of human beings, materialized in observable physical differences between the sexes such as the presence or absence of a penis, as well as in other less easily circumscribed differences such as physical strength. Social constructionism challenges this essentialist view of gender, seeing it as socially produced and enacted, inhering not in any set of biological givens but in the intersubjective realm of interpretation and negotiation. West and Zimmerman (1987), whose work was briefly introduced in Chapter 1, argue that gender should be understood as a routine accomplishment – a performance that is brought off within the context of situated social encounters. They conceive of gender as 'an emergent feature of social situations: both as an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements and as a means of legitimating one of the most fundamental divisions of society' (p. 126). This radical take on gender revolutionizes thinking about inequalities because it disrupts and troubles the idea that inequalities are a consequence of natural (e.g. biological) differences between men and women, and therefore not terribly amenable to change. Instead, the view of gender as an accomplishment draws attention to how social norms and prescriptions regarding how women and men should look and act bear down on individuals to shape their understandings of themselves and others. More importantly for my purposes in this text, this view directs attention to how these norms and prescriptions are embedded in everyday routines and practices that are encountered by everyone, from how housework is understood and carried out to how criteria for particular jobs are developed and applied in recruitment or hiring processes, such as interviews.

The idea of gender as an accomplishment that is shaped by socio-cultural processes as opposed to personal attributes has had a profound influence on the study of inequalities in organizations and remains one of the most compelling and persuasive accounts of the causes of gender inequalities and the means through which they are reproduced. In this next section, I am going to review two approaches that have been central to driving and developing this more critical approach to gender – gendered organizational cultures and inequality regimes.

Gendered Organizational Cultures

The idea of gendered organizational culture is based on the idea that a major element of any social structure, including organizational structure, is sets of rules and norms (Mills, 1988) which are implicit and embedded in everyday routines and activities, and which reflect the preferences and behaviours of men as a group, thus working to subordinate women as a group (Gherardi, 1995). The starkest example of such rules or norms, is the full-time work norm through which individuals are expected to be available for and usually physically present in the workplace for set and lengthy periods of time, for example seven hours a day, five days a week. This norm reflects the fact that, since industrialization, men have occupied the more powerful roles in organizations and women have been those most likely to work in ways that enable them to manage the home/household and caring responsibilities. As a consequence, men have had more time to devote to the workplace than women, and the power to determine what should constitute an appropriate level of temporal availability. Full-time working reflects this societal-level division of labour and power. As this example illustrates, norms are not only implicit but also material – that is they are manifested in particular observable arrangements of time and space (e.g. timetables, work schedules, handover routines for shift workers; or overtime regulations).

Norms are not developed by particular individuals in any intentional sense, but they evolve over long periods of time, reflecting the interests and preferences of powerful groups who not only influence which rules in organizations individuals are expected to follow, but also have the capacity to change those rules if they so desire. Even so, research suggests that the power of dominant groups is not only a product of their numerical dominance or their position in organizational hierarchies but also of how historically generated ideas have become taken for granted and have acquired the appearance of common sense (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982). The full-time work norm is one example of this process (which is something I also deal with in depth in Chapters 5 and 6). Many organizations do not question why working full-time is considered a necessity, often simply attributing this requirement to the 'nature of the job', though, if pressed, will frequently justify this requirement with reference to issues such as productivity or efficiency. However, as we will see in Chapters 5 and 6, once we start to interrogate these claims in depth, their apparently rational basis is shown to be flawed.

The idea that implicit rules which strongly influence organizational behaviour are gendered has been the focus of a huge amount of research over the last 30 years. Among the issues discussed are the gendered nature of part-time work (e.g. Dick and Hyde, 2006; Epstein et al., 1999); gendered language which operates to exclude women from everyday interactions (e.g. Riley,

1983); gendered criteria for recruitment, selection and promotion (e.g. Van den Brink and Benschop, 2012); and the gendered nature of human capital – that is the types of knowledge, skills and behaviours that are generally considered to be most important and central to organizational success, itself generally understood in financial terms (e.g. Steinberg, 1990, 1992).

Part-time work, for instance, is undertaken mainly by women across many organizations and cultures and, as outlined in Chapter 1, lacks value compared to full-time work. This lack of value is reflected both in everyday language – for example 'I just work part-time' – and in how part-time workers are treated in organizations. In general, part-time hours are more often available in work which is classed as unskilled or low-skilled and is poorly paid (Hirsch, 2005; Rubery, 2004). Part-time working also lacks status and recognition in many organizations (Lane, 2000). Part-time *professional* women, despite occupying relatively high-status roles and enjoying higher pay than accompanies many other part-time jobs, frequently report feeling under-appreciated and unrecognized (Lawrence and Corwin, 2003; Dick and Hyde, 2006). They report experiencing marginalization and exclusion from development opportunities, leading some researchers to claim that part-time professionals are stigmatized (Epstein et al., 1999; Williams et al., 2013). There is certainly evidence that part-time working in professional occupations carries career penalties because of assumptions that higher-level jobs require full-time commitment (Gascoigne and Kelliher, 2018). This issue is discussed in depth in Chapters 5 and 6.

Gendered language in organizations refers to how particular ways of talking reflect men's understandings and preferences (Mills, 1988). For instance Riley (1983) noted how the language used in two subsidiary organizations of a multinational company, located in the US, reflected the masculine culture. The use of sporting and competitive metaphors routinely worked to bolster male dominance in the organizations studied, and to effectively exclude women from the political culture; that is, the everyday processes through which individuals compete for power and resources. Gendered language also refers to how different adjectives can be used to describe ostensibly similar behaviours displayed by men and women. A study of written performance reviews conducted in a Fortune 500 technology firm illustrated how appraisers tended to more negatively evaluate women who were considered to be 'too aggressive' in their communication style whilst men were called out for being 'too soft'. The authors also note that the language used to convey the exceptionality of appraisees was more effusive when applied to men than to women, involving words such as 'genius and visionary' (Correll et al., 2020).

The criteria used to evaluate individuals during recruitment and selection or for promotion may be based on gendered ideas of what constitutes effective performance. Van den Brink and Benschop (2012), for example, in a study of professorial appointments in a Dutch university, argue that despite the claim

that academic recruitment is based on neutral requirements for academic excellence, the criteria utilized, such as lengthy publication track records, disadvantaged many women. Due to the exigencies of childbirth and childcare, many female academics are not able to demonstrate such track records. Research in professional accountancy firms has illustrated how women tend to be channelled into roles that require less 'public' engagement (e.g. networking dinners to attract new clients). Again, women with domestic commitments may not be able to attend such events which are frequently held 'out of hours' (Khalifa, 2013).

Such findings, on the face of it, support the stream of human capital theory (outlined above) which argues that the gender pay gap is attributable to 'unmeasured productivity gaps' (Blau and Kahn, 2004) created by women's lower levels of organizational commitment. As I will explore in depth in Chapter 4, this assumption is extremely problematic not least because of how commitment and productivity are understood, but also because 'unmeasured' productivity is a value-laden term which connotes that productivity is generally something that can and should be measured; an idea that is questionable and challengeable (Foster, 2016). These findings also have implications for the apparently gender-neutral status of formal job requirements which, in the case of professional accountancy, will often specify the need to build client relationships and corporate socializing (Anderson-Gough et al., 2005). Such requirements, as already mentioned above, are frequently justified by claiming they are necessitated by the 'nature of the job' (Gascoigne et al., 2015). As I will argue in depth in Chapter 4, however, jobs do not have a nature. These requirements, therefore, should not be viewed as neutral and apolitical matters of fact, but as design choices made by powerful groups which become institutionalized and taken for granted as inevitable and unremarkable features of jobs.

In addition to exploring how rules are gendered, further streams of literature in this theoretical domain have focused on the capacity of individuals to transform these rules so as to enable them to exercise choice and agency within the constraints that these rules might otherwise impose (Merilainen et al., 2004; Nentwich and Hoyer, 2013). For instance, with respect to part-time work, my previous work (Dick, 2015a) has examined how women challenge and contest the idea that they are less valuable employees and are prepared to push for opportunities or for ways of working that enable them to retain their sense of professional status and standing. For example, I found that women in the police service working part-time would sometimes refuse to be deployed out of their preferred operational roles and would use the power resources embedded in equal opportunity legislation to insist on being allowed to work a temporal pattern that ran counter to that traditionally used and preferred within operational police departments (Dick, 2015b).

Inequality Regimes

One notable contribution to this stream of literature is Joan Acker's (2006: 443) notion of inequality regimes, which I briefly introduced in Chapter 1, which she defines as 'loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions, and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities within particular organizations'. Acker includes class and race in her definition of inequality regimes because, she argues, inequality is far more complex than it is typically presented in mainstream gender inequality research. To fully understand inequalities, we need to examine the interrelationships between gender and other biographical characteristics like race or class and how these lead to different forms and experiences of inequality. Another key argument Acker develops is that the extent of inequalities varies in organizations due to differences in inequality regimes. For example, she points out that class-based inequalities tend to be more frequent and legitimate in bureaucratic organizations with tall hierarchies in which it is seen as natural for some individuals to monitor and control the work of others. As she argues, in such organizations it is white, middle-class men who tend to occupy positions at the top of the hierarchy with working-class women and individuals of colour mainly found towards the bottom. Acker's position is very similar to the work reviewed above on the gendered nature of organizational culture. As outlined, it is more sensitive to the effects of a broader range of biographical characteristics than gender, and also enables an analysis of why inequalities are so variable within and across organizations (for a recent review of the theoretical application of the inequality regime concept, see Woods et al., 2021).

Altogether, this stream of research has greatly broadened our understanding of how gender inequalities are produced and perpetuated. The strengths of this approach lie in how it has de-centred intentional human (largely male) behaviours as the cause of gender inequality, focusing instead on the everyday processes and practices which we all take for granted and seldom question. It also acknowledges the role of agency in producing variation in responses to the rules and resources that individuals encounter in their lives, enabling a more nuanced and analytically sophisticated approach to understanding the processes involved in generating gender inequality (Risman, 2004).

One limitation of these approaches is the assumption that organizational rules or norms can be said to reflect masculinity. Just as I have argued for seeing women as a heterogeneous group who cannot be characterized as possessing or enacting some sort of essential feminine attributes, the same argument must be extended to men. Indeed, there is now a rich stream of literature that has explicitly addressed how masculinity can take multiple forms and has shown how these are products of very different discourses (Messerschmidt, 2018). From the perspective I am developing in this text, understanding the

origins of the rules that lead to the valorization of particular behaviours above others is vital if we are to understand their effects. As I outlined in Chapter 1 and will further expand in Chapter 4, I see the origins of such rules and norms in what I have termed the 'bottom-line ideology', a dominant, overarching approach to organizing that puts the pursuit of profit and the enhancement of corporate reputation above any others. While such rules and norms do seem to reflect behaviours and preferences that are more typical of men as a group than of women as a group, this should not be viewed as universal and, as I will argue in subsequent chapters, these rules and norms are enacted as purposefully and enthusiastically by some women as by some men.

Also critical here is that the rules and norms that have been identified in the literature as implicated in the production of gender inequalities do not float free of the material and discursive structures in which they are embedded. Thus, for instance, working full-time or long hours which, as already discussed, is the norm which disproportionately affects the career progression of women when compared to men is, as mentioned above, a product of how jobs are designed and understood. The full-time requirement in many if not most jobs is not an inevitable or natural feature of work but, for reasons that will be fully explored and excavated in Chapters 3 and 4, has come to acquire a taken-for-granted quality which means that the reasons for needing to work full-time hours are seldom surfaced and interrogated. Full-time working, I will argue, is a ubiquitous and material norm which is more reflective of cultural conceptions of what working means and how it should be enacted than what working full-time actually achieves. In short, we need to better understand how certain rules and norms acquire and maintain their taken-for-granted status and whether or how this status can be disrupted.

Understanding this latter process is, I will argue, critical to an adequate understanding of the persistence of gender inequalities and how these seem relatively impervious to change despite the efforts of individuals, groups and organizations to address them, and despite the existence of regulative processes (Blagoev and Schreyogg, 2019; Padavic et al., 2019). The literature provides many examples of situations where individuals disrupt, challenge and resist gendered rules and norms, and yet gender inequalities, particularly with respect to the gender pay gap and women's representation within higher-status occupations and roles persist. Hence, despite the theoretical claim in many of the studies above to be utilizing epistemological and ontological approaches which are dialectic – that is, which see the relationship between social structures (like gendered rules) and individual action as recursive – we do not seem able to explain the remarkable persistence of gender inequalities using the conceptual tools currently available.

A further limitation of these approaches to gender inequality is the lack of analytical granularity in some of the empirical research, by which I mean that

some methodologies are not sensitive enough to the fact that gendered rules and norms may not influence individuals in the patterned and rather predictable ways that are sometimes implied in this literature. There is a stream of research, for instance, that has examined how men and women enact gendered cultural rules, for example rules that could be interpreted as reflecting masculine modes of behaviour such as authority or work centrality, and assumes that such enactment is motivated by the gendered identity of the individual. This research suggests that women are more likely to enact stereotypical female behaviours and men more stereotypically masculine behaviours, irrespective of the gender orientation of the norms and rules prevalent in any given context. Leidner (1991) for instance, whose work I introduced in Chapter 1, notes that in occupations where role demands might be considered 'feminine', for example insurance sales, male agents were able to define their work as masculine, by emphasizing those aspects of the work that required 'manly' traits. Leidner accounts for this by arguing that the male identity is, compared to the female identity, one that is more likely to be achieved through paid work. However, there is research to suggest that the motivation to enact particular gendered rules is more occasioned than Leidner implies – that is, it depends on the specific interactional demands faced in particular contexts (Al Wahaibi, 2012; Speer, 2007). Al Wahabi (2012), in a study of gender in the highly gender-segregated Omani context which utilized video recordings of meetings in a university as data, found that women would enact a gendered identity only in response to particular interactional demands. For example, one woman used 'feminine' arguments (such as appeals to emotion and feelings) to level criticisms at her male manager about the treatment of colleagues in a meeting convened to discuss how to improve the working environment. At other times, particularly when siding with her male colleagues, this woman used more 'masculine' language, using interactional 'control features' to police the agenda; an interactional feature usually associated with masculinity. Hence even in a context where gendered rules are ubiquitous and relatively unambiguous with respect to how women in particular should act and speak, these rules were not uniformly influential. This means that we cannot easily read off the effects of apparently gendered rules on individuals without using methods that are sensitive to how these rules shape and are shaped by the moment-to-moment behaviours of individuals in particular settings and what this might imply for experiences of subordination or oppression.

This brings me to a final limitation of these approaches, which is their tendency to reify subordination and domination, treating them as definite outcomes. This tendency leads to the idea that the causes of subordination and domination inhere in the categories of women and men respectively rather than in broader cultural and economic conditions that produce social stratification more generally (O'Connor, 2019), an issue I have outlined in Chapter 1. This

problem, which has not been adequately addressed in the extant literature, is fundamental to understanding the persistence of gender inequalities, not least because it forces us to be much more explicit about what we mean by gender inequalities and how we are making claims about their existence – this is a critically important issue which I will return to in future chapters.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I have reviewed some of the dominant explanations for gendered inequalities, organizing these explanations with respect to the extent to which they emphasize the role of agency (on the part of women or of relevant organizational actors) or structure. As my review has shown, whilst theories which emphasize women's agency – that is personal job and career choices – as the cause of inequalities very usefully draw our attention to the heterogeneity of women as a group and to the diversity of their workplace experiences, they have very little to say about, and sometimes seriously overlook, the role that societal-level structures and conditions (such as social class, economic conditions and organizational hierarchies) play in shaping, enabling and constraining the choices that women make as well as the role they play in the production of gendered subjectivity and identity. These approaches also take for granted the idea that human capital is something that is apolitical – an evaluation of human attributes that is apparently gender neutral and derived from the economic realities in which organizations exist. This means that answers to gender inequalities are often seen to lie in 'fixing women' so as to enable them to acquire the credentials needed for particular roles and occupations, rather than in questioning and challenging the structural conditions that generate dominant ideas about and understandings of credentials in the first place (Burkinshaw and White, 2017).

I then moved on to look at theories which see the problem of gender inequalities as inhering in deliberate and exclusionary practices by men in specific organizations and occupations that are designed to keep women out of particular roles and organizations. Such work is premised on the notion of patriarchy or the institutionalized domination and power of men, and includes theories of occupational closure. This line of research has shed much light on how particular professions have evolved over time and how gendered demarcations of roles and responsibilities have developed (Witz, 1990). Nonetheless, with its focus on patriarchal processes, this stream of research risks homogenizing the experiences and interests of both women and men, failing to capture how closure actually emerges from everyday mundane interactions. Without understanding the micro-behaviours responsible for demarcation and occupational closure, there is a danger that we read too much intention into the actions of individuals and miss the opportunity for exploring how and when

micro-behaviours reflect or demonstrate the influence of broader social conditions and processes (O'Connor, 2019).

Finally, I examined the stream of research which sees gender inequalities as generated from historically and culturally contingent social processes which have given rise to gendered rules that operate to disadvantage women in organizations and workplaces. This stream of research de-centres agency, arguing that the rules which act to disadvantage women are embedded in everyday mundane and taken-for-granted practices, including: everyday political talk; recruitment and promotion criteria and how these are applied to evaluate women's contributions; and invisible assumptions which enable the skills and abilities that tend to characterize men's work to be seen as more important and valuable in organizations than those skills and abilities that characterize women's work. This research is very useful for enabling us to appreciate that gender inequalities are not always the product of deliberate and intentionally biased actions by men, and for acknowledging the role of agency in producing the heterogeneous responses to the gendered assumptions characterizing many workplaces. This stream of work also recognizes that the power relations which generate gendered rules evolve, accounting for why these rules have changed over time and for why resistance to these rules can vary in their form and effects.

Despite these strengths, a number of troubling issues persist. First is the remarkable resilience of gender inequalities – although there has clearly been progress in the last 60 years as equal opportunities legislation has become more embedded in some societies – such progress is argued to be both limited and 'glacially slow' (Burke and Vinnicombe, 2013). How do we account for this lack of progress given the massive changes and efforts that have occurred in many organizations to try to address the problems identified in the literature? A second and related issue is that the whole notion of inequality is seldom unpacked and interrogated such that when we talk about inequalities residing in a lack of access to highly paid or high-status jobs, we are not explaining how and why these outcomes have so much value attached to them in the first place, and whether these values are shared by those apparently experiencing disadvantages with respect to them. This then exposes a further and more fundamental problem, which is the assumption that subordination or domination can be assumed to exist on the basis of such differences without properly understanding how individuals themselves feel about the situation. Consequentially, the causes of subordination and domination come to be seen as located within particular groups (women versus men) and particular outcomes, rather than in the processes that produce social stratification more generally. In the next chapter, I present the various theoretical approaches and tools that will be used to interrogate and illustrate the core issues that I have identified as problematic with respect to the study of gender inequalities.

NOTE

1. See Chapter 3 for a review of the agency structure debate.

3. Theoretical approach and conceptual tools

In this chapter, I want to move on from the review and critiques of extant theory presented in the previous chapter and to develop a theoretical scaffold from which I will develop the arguments and ideas that will be featured in subsequent chapters. In Chapter 2, I argued that approaches to gender inequality that have focused on the role of organizational rules and norms are those that I see as having most explanatory potential. The strengths of these approaches reside in how they downplay the role of intentionality in the production of gender inequality, emphasizing instead the role of apparently rational activities and social and organizational practices. The advantage of this position is that it leads us away from attributing undifferentiated power to men as a group and towards examining power as embedded in mundane social realities such as full-time work norms.

Despite these advantages, I also argued that these approaches have a number of limitations which, I believe, are important to address if we are to understand inequalities without reifying them and locating them within specific groups such as women. Doing so leads us to 'deficit narratives' (O'Connor, 2019) about some groups (like women) and what we could term 'privilege narratives' about others (like men) which narrow our explanatory focus. As already outlined in the last chapter, for instance, current approaches to gender inequalities that draw on the idea of cultural rules and norms, tend to see these norms and rules as reflecting attributes more typically possessed by men than by women. However, this assumption means that we fall into the trap of homogenizing men as a group, seeing them as possessing sets of fixed and essential attributes whose meaning is invariable and whose origin is locatable in the psychology or interests of the privileged group. For example, the idea that many rules in organizations reflect a masculine preference for work centrality overlooks the historical origin of this norm and how it is related to the 'capitalist tendency to totally subsume life to work' (Hanlon, 2017: 169). In short, we need to understand the rules and norms that configure workplaces as products of broader ideological meanings derived from dominant modes of governmentality (Foucault, 1980), the processes through which populations are regulated. This enables us to broaden our scope, to take as O'Connor (2019) puts it, 'a wide

angled view' better able to capture the complexity and nuance of issues such as inequality.

A further and critical task related to the issues outlined above is to understand why certain rules and norms acquire and maintain a taken-for-granted status, seen to be common-sense and unremarkable aspects of life at work. Working full-time, as I have already argued, is a ubiquitous workplace norm in all organizations and is the norm that many women cannot or will not conform to once they have children. Despite the introduction and availability of flexible working arrangements (FWAs) in the vast majority of organizations (at least in the UK, North America and Europe), which are designed to enable women to combine the demands of family and home with those of work, women's career progression has not been notably improved by such developments (Lau et al., 2023). As I will argue in Chapter 6, this is because the full-time work norm as a taken-for-granted feature of contemporary working life carries significant economic and symbolic advantages for those who conform to it and is one of the signifiers of highly valued work. One persuasive argument about this situation is Blair-Loy's (2004) notion of the work devotion schema (or what I would call a work devotion discourse) which conveys the cultural idea that work should occupy a central place in the lives of workers, most especially professional workers. While of course this makes sense and certainly resonates for many people, like other apparently gendered rules or norms, on its own it cannot explain why the full-time work norm is so deeply institutionalized. Why do jobs have to be enacted on a full-time basis and why do individuals see this as inevitable and uncontestable? To understand this issue we need theoretical tools which will enable us to excavate taken-for-grantedness, to actually prize apart and interrogate what it means to take something for granted and to show that this status is not permanent nor immutable.

Finally, we need also to understand why certain ways of being and acting in organizations are seen as more valuable in social and economic terms than are others. Working full-time is just one example here. The vast research literature on the gendered nature of organizational rules and norms has also shown that behaviour that is more typical of women on the whole than of men on the whole, is often not seen as important or valuable. For example, in the context of higher education, spending time with students to support and listen to them is unlikely to be rewarded in the way that investing time in writing publications or applying for grants is (Westoby et al., 2021). Certainly we can view these as gendered processes but this does not explain why these precise *activities* are so valued – after all, as much of the research into gender enactment has shown, whatever the activity it can be enacted in putatively masculine or feminine ways (e.g. Leidner, 1991).

To enable me to address these critical issues, I am now going to present the theoretical approach and associated conceptual tools that will be used in the

remainder of this text: social constructionism. The version of social constructionism that I use in this text and explore in the section below borrows heavily from the French philosopher Michel Foucault and is oriented to a critical understanding of social reality. That is, its concern is with disrupting and problematizing the idea that how we understand the world is simply a reflection of how it is. I am also indebted to the work of Vivien Burr, whose seminal texts in this area are invaluable reading for anyone interested in understanding social constructionism, especially from a critical perspective. Within the section on social constructionism, I introduce and unpack several concepts that will be used in the chapters that follow: discourse, power and subjectivity. Each of these interrelated concepts can be used for the critical purposes already outlined.

Having reviewed some of the core concepts to be used in the theory development of this text, I then briefly review the agency structure debate which I have already alluded to several times in the first two chapters before going into some detail about taken-for-grantedness and how this might be explored theoretically. As I have already pointed out, for me, the persistence of gender inequality is related almost entirely to the taken-for-grantedness of particular ideas and norms and, therefore, if anything is to change, it is this taken-for-grantedness which needs to be disrupted.

I complete the chapter by presenting my ontological position (how I understand the nature of social realities including people's behaviours, attributes, social structures and norms) which is that we need to rethink how we understand agency and structure, and to see these not as separate domains of social reality but as inextricably entangled. This is not to say that there is no material reality to the world, but rather than even material things that we encounter every day evolve and change all of the time (see Figure 3.1) and hence we need concepts that capture the essential dynamism and evolution of all the various parts (both social and physical) of the world we live in.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

To begin to address some of the problems and issues outlined above and to develop the theoretical approach that I am going to use in the remainder of this book, I want to turn now to the theory of social constructionism. Social constructionism is a theoretical approach which positions language as central to how understandings of the world are developed. The dominant idea within social constructionism is that the language we use to talk about the world (including ourselves, our experiences and the various material and non-material objects we encounter or hear about in our lives) does not necessarily represent but actively *produces* our understandings of the world. The argument is that language provides us with various perceptual frames or ideas

The path has been there for many decades and shows the grooves and dents left by the many walkers who have made their way up to the Edge. Even the hardest materials evolve as they come into contact with human beings.

Figure 3.1 *A photograph of the path up to Stanage Edge in the Peak District, UK*

that we can use to both make sense of the world and to develop the various categories and classifications that are part and parcel of this sense-making. Critically, however, a lot of these frames, ideas, categories and classifications, especially when applied to the social world, are not neutral or descriptive of some objective reality, but reflect the views and ideas of powerful groups in society. Take, for example, the notion of intelligence. This is a dominant frame in psychology which we use to make sense of such things as differential educational attainment or differences in particular abilities with respect to reading, writing or arithmetic, or to understand why individuals occupying top jobs in particular occupations are in those jobs and deserve the pay that they earn. For social constructionists, however, intelligence is not some definite attribute that is differentially distributed across any given population of people, but is a social construction, a human invention, that both produces our understandings of why some people are good at particular things (like maths and/or English) but also promotes the idea that it is more socially valuable to be good at some things, like maths and English, than at others (for example to be empathetic or sensitive to the feelings of others).

Social constructionists therefore ask questions about the various ideas and concepts that we routinely use as sense-making resources, that might give us pause for thought. For instance, they ask, why is being good at maths and English considered to be particularly valuable? The common-sense reply to this question is that being good at maths and English is what has enabled technological progress in the world and the ability to communicate about it, providing us with the goods and products that we use every day including our smartphones, laptops, TVs and so forth. This is undoubtedly true. However, life is not simply about the possession of particular goods and electronic products but is also about forging and maintaining meaningful relationships; about living a life that is psychologically fulfilling and which enables ourselves and others to live with dignity; and about living in harmony with other life on earth including plants and animals. Of course, some individuals will maintain that being good at maths and English nevertheless trumps other types of attribute such as sensitivity or empathy, but for social constructionists such views are matters of perspective, not truth. Thus, we ask how it is that some attributes are able to attain and maintain their status as highly valuable ways of being in the world and what explains the persistence of or changes in these evaluations? To enable such questions to be addressed, social constructionists make use of a number of conceptual tools that will be central to the approach I am going to develop in this chapter, particularly, discourse, power and subjectivity.

Discourse, Power and Subjectivity

Discourse is a term that is used a lot in the social sciences and it has many meanings and definitions. For my purposes, I am going to define discourse as 'cultural-level meaning systems' – a definition that draws attention to three critical features of language use. First, that the ideas we generally use to make sense of the world already exist in society and are best thought of as 'resources'. They do not emerge primarily from our own individual thought processes (though of course thought processes are clearly involved in their origins), but rather from intersubjective processes or more simply, social interaction. Second, this definition draws attention to the fact that the meaning of any object or event is not fixed but is rather variable and dynamic. For example a clock can be used to tell the time; to decorate your home; to make calculations about how much time you have to do a particular task; or to signal that time should be conceived of as linear and quantifiable. Third, that meaning is often patterned and coherent – for a meaning system to work as a discourse, it has to make sense to people otherwise it will not produce social coherence and enable us to talk and interact with others satisfactorily. Discourses are not necessarily articulable but nevertheless inform much of our interaction. For instance, take the following conversational extract:

Person A: What do you want for dinner tonight?
Person B: I don't know – what have you got in mind?
Person A: Well we've got eggs and cheese in the house so I suppose I could make an omelette.

I suspect this extract makes sense to most people reading it. Yet, there are a number of unstated ideas in here that we might understand as reflecting a *discourse of domesticity*. First, for example, is the notion that dinner is something we have at a particular time of day. The extract might have jarred somewhat if the first question had been 'What do you want for dinner in the morning?'. Second, is the idea that someone is taking responsibility for providing the dinner; an idea that is derived from the notion that domestic responsibilities tend to be shared in households with specific tasks allocated to particular people, which is why the extract as a whole makes sense to most people. Next is the idea that certain foods are appropriate for some meals and not others. In many households if Person A had said, 'Well we've got co-co pops and milk in the house', there might have been laughter or an expression of disappointment. The discourse of domesticity as illustrated here is also culturally and historically specific in that it might not have made sense to aristocrats living in Europe in earlier time periods who had servants who made decisions about what should be prepared for dinner. If I had specified that person A was a man,

this might not have made as much sense to people 60 or 70 years ago when it was, in the main, women who did the cooking in households. Nor would it make sense in cultures outside of Western Europe, where people may not eat omelettes at any time of day or even know what an omelette is.

Discourse and Governmentality

One of the reasons that social constructionists use the term discourse to describe cultural meaning systems is to draw attention to the fact that social reality is always 'up for grabs' in the sense that no matter how much we take certain ideas for granted, they will and do evolve and change over time. What we take to be common-sense matters of fact in our current epoch would seem alien to our ancestors and will undoubtedly seem so to our future generations. For instance, prior to the activities of female reformists in the early 20th century in the UK, it was considered 'common sense' that women were not allowed to vote in general elections. A further feature of discourses is that they are capable of producing what social constructionists refer to as 'power effects', captured in the French philosopher Michel Foucault's widely utilized definition of discourse as being 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972). For Foucault, discourse is a major feature of processes of governmentality by which he means the social processes that regulate the behaviour of populations. For example, mental illness for Foucault is not a definite thing that can be isolated and identified in the way that an atom of hydrogen could be, but is a socially constructed 'object' produced by all the things that have been said and written about individuals who do not conform to what, in any given epoch, is considered 'normal' with respect to feelings and behaviours (Foucault, 1977). Additionally, discourse is not simply what is said or written, but is also embedded in things that we do every day or in systems, methods and protocols we use to achieve our goals (Fairclough, 2005). For instance, hiring someone for a job which typically involves an interview is a practice in which various discourses are embedded including 'person–job fit' discourse, which assumes that people are suitable for some jobs and not others. A more fundamental power effect of discourse is its influence on our self-understandings or our subjectivity, an issue I deal with in depth below.

While many discourses appear to be pretty mundane inasmuch as they simply help us make sense of what we ourselves and others are doing every day, the vast majority of discourses that social constructionists take as their focus not only have definite power effects but are the products of particular relations of power which sanctify some ways of knowing ourselves and the world as more credible and legitimate than others. I will refer to discourses which have pronounced power effects which clearly advantage particular

groups whilst disadvantaging others, as *ideologies*. Wendy Hollway (1989), for example, explored how discourses of gender as applied to sexual relationships differ for heterosexual men and women. For women, Hollway argues, sexual relationships often signify some sort of emotional commitment between the couple and, in general terms, this means that, compared to men, women are seen to have very different attitudes and understandings of sexual relationships. Hollway refers to this as the 'have/hold' discourse to draw attention to how, culturally, heterosexual women are generally positioned as individuals who want emotional commitment from men. The 'male sexual drive' discourse, on the other hand, suggests that men need sex due to the biological imperative of testosterone. Sex for men then is generally seen to be something that they more naturally require rather than something they might engage in for other reasons (such as building intimacy with a potential partner). These discourses, Hollway argues, are more than just patterned language use, they have discernible and concrete effects on how men and women make sense of themselves, each other and their relationships as well as on how the same behaviours are interpreted differently dependent upon the gender of the actor. For instance, in Hollway's era, women who had more than one sexual partner were considered to be lacking morals, and might be referred to as 'loose' or as 'sluts'. Promiscuity in men, on the other hand, was seen to be a product of the male sexual drive discourse, a natural and normal response to their hormones and attendant sexual needs. Men with multiple partners were often understood to be 'sowing their wild oats' or similar and were generally not treated with disapprobation. This, for me, is an example of an ideological discourse because its power effects are, in general terms, more restrictive for women than for men.

Disciplinary Power, Naturalization and Resistance

The idea that discourses have definite effects on how we understand ourselves and on how we act is derived from Foucault's ideas about governmentality (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982) which I referred to above. Disciplinary power according to Foucault (1977) is a form of power which works on individuals' subjectivity or sense of self, by encouraging them to conform to the norms generated by the various discourses of personhood that characterize any given domain and epoch. The ideological discourses of sexual relations discussed by Hollway (1989) and outlined in the paragraphs above reflect one such domain, sanctioning and condoning men's promiscuity whilst disapproving women's. In our current epoch, this discourse is much more contested. According to Foucault, discourses of personhood are generated in institutions such as schools, medical clinics and prisons, where surveillance systems can be set up to monitor and scrutinize the behaviours of individuals and to make judgements about what constitutes average or normal behaviour. Such observations

can then be used to rank order individuals with respect to their proximity to any given norm, which then has the effect of encouraging individuals and those who observe them to develop an awareness of how they compare to others, generating conformity to behaviour considered 'normal' in any given domain, where 'normal' often reflects the interests of those doing the evaluating. Thus, in schools, it is considered normal for children to defer to authority, enabling teachers to control and regulate the behaviour of pupils.

The important thing to remember about discourses is that they are multiple. That is, and particularly so for social reality, there are many different possible interpretations of what particular events, situations and actions mean. For example, the act of exploding a bomb in a particular place by a particular person can be read by one group as an act of terrorism and by another as an act of freedom fighting. The interpretation that becomes dominant or taken to be the 'truth' is not necessarily because it has any more external validity than the other interpretation, but because that is the one that is sanctioned and approved by groups with the authority to perform this sanctioning and approval, such as governments or politicians. This issue is becoming extremely political in the context of 'post truth'. This idea, which has received much recent attention in some parts of the press and from some politicians, suggests that individuals are influenced less by 'facts' and more by emotions or what feels right, rendering claims that certain facts are not facts (e.g. the actual numbers of people at a political rally) as believable.

Disciplinary power is generally most readily observed in situations where the regulation of the population has become an issue of concern and therefore the target of governmentality. For example, Foucault (1979) charts the efforts of European governments in the 19th century to confine sexual activity to heterosexual couples. This was done in an attempt to render reproductive sex more legitimate than other forms; an aim tied to a number of interests including the necessity for protecting the future of the economy through the production of children who would grow up and work in industry. These efforts did not have the effect intended, however, but instead resulted in a proliferation of knowledge and ideas about sex, its meanings, its forms and its enactment. Foucault (1982) argues that this illustrates the uneven and non-centralized nature of power. Power is not only a resource possessed by some groups and not others, but is also dispersed throughout the social body, visible only in its effects on what people do and what they claim to know. Where there is power, Foucault argues, there will also always be resistance because power is relational – it not only exists between individuals but also between knowledge systems and individuals' experiences of them. For instance, homosexuality, which was once understood both as a medical condition and an abnormal social deviance (see e.g. Han and O'Mahoney, 2014), is now understood (in many parts of the world, but not all) as a normal element of existence. This

reflects not only how power relations have shifted and changed as homosexual individuals and groups, as well as their supporters, have challenged and contested the homosexuality as deviance discourse, but how individuals have experienced gaps or problems between the discourse of heterosexuality and their own self-understandings and experiences.

Disciplinary power is not just a feature of the institutions listed above, that is prisons, schools and hospitals. As populations grow and make more demands on the resources of those in power in the various domains of our existence, be these at the level of the nation, the organization or the family, techniques develop to enable individuals to be observed, measured, ranked and compared: essentially surveillance techniques. Schools, for instance, use a variety of techniques to classify children, often according to intellectual or educational ability; families are compared to each other in terms of the types of job done or life led by parents and how they are raising their children, a process that is both informal (between neighbours for instance) and formal – through the observations and evaluations of experts such as health visitors or social workers, for example. Employees are compared to each other via recruitment and selection methods, performance management systems, and so forth (see Townley, 1994). All these techniques produce knowledge about individuals which is then used, both intentionally and unintentionally, to regulate the behaviour of the population (Mills, 2003), be that in terms of prescribing what counts as acceptable and unacceptable behaviour for schoolchildren or what is considered to be appropriate or inappropriate behaviour for women managers.

Disciplinary power is a very different form of power to that which is implicated in processes such as occupational closure, outlined in the previous chapter. Power that is intentionally wielded by specific groups or individuals can be characterized as an attribute or skill, whose origin is located either in the formal position occupied by the individual or group or in the make-up or disposition of the individual or individuals comprising a given group. Disciplinary power, in contrast, is power which works through ideas and knowledge, operating to naturalize some understandings of the world so that they appear as common sense. It is this naturalizing form of power that will be central to the arguments I develop in the following chapters.

This issue brings me to a further important element of social-constructionist thinking – the relationship between power relations and disciplinary power. Power relations refer to the differences between groups and individuals with respect to their social positions, a process that from a critical social-constructionist perspective is more usefully understood to occur at the societal rather than the individual level. Powerful groups are, on the whole, able to access more resources (symbolic and material) than the less powerful. For instance, managers in organizations generally have more authority than lower-level staff; higher wages; and access to particular resources, like budgets

or top-level managers. Also, as already mentioned, powerful groups are able to sanction particular discourses as more or less valid than others, giving some versions of social reality the 'stamp of truth'. We tend, for example, to believe a doctor's view of a rash on our skin over that of our friend. Doctors, in short, have legitimate access to medical discourse and this is very powerful in our society as a way of understanding many physical and psychological experiences we have. But the very authority that particular groups possess illustrates the point that 'truth' is not something that can be ascertained with, say, enough evidence, but is itself a product of social, institutional and historical conditions that have enabled particular categories of person and ideas to be more believable than others. For Foucault, it is who is authorized to speak about a particular object or idea that matters more than what they say or do.

Any discourse, no matter how powerful it might be, will be subject to resistance, be that a patient refusing to accept a particular medical diagnosis through to a young woman refusing to conform to contemporary norms of female appearance. As resistance to particular discourses grows and more and more individuals find that resistance liberates them from particular norms and furnishes them with the means to think about themselves differently and, often, more positively, so the power relations that enabled the original discourse to exert its disciplinary effects are disrupted. In the case of the homosexuality as deviance discourse referred to above, for instance, as more and more people resisted the idea that homosexuality was abnormal and argued instead that it was a natural and legitimate form of sexuality, so the power of the heterosexual groups promoting the opposite idea diminished and changed. Disciplinary power and power relations are therefore inextricably related – as discourses evolve, so do power relations, and as power relations evolve, so do discourses.

A final and critically important note about resistance is that this should not be understood as something that opposes power but is rather a power effect itself. When individuals resist norms in any given domain, they are not liberating themselves from relations of domination but are rather reproducing the very object they are apparently opposing. For instance, sexuality is not some pregiven and natural property of individuals, it is a product of all the ideas, practices, writings, observations, treatments and discussions that have produced sexuality as an object of concern in society. Thus the normalization of homosexuality does not liberate us from the essentially objectifying effects of discourses of sexuality; rather it simply proliferates the discourses available to us for thinking about our own and others' sexuality – it produces sexuality as a normal or natural object that is seen to be a real 'thing' possessed by human beings and perhaps all sentient creatures (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982).

Subjectivity

The idea that power works in the ways outlined above, brings me to a final conceptual tool that derives from Foucault's work – the notion of the self or subjectivity. Foucault was not a psychologist and he was not interested (at least in his early work) in the minutiae of how individuals think or what their cognitive capabilities might or might not be. What interested him is why we see such shifts in our understandings of personhood over long tracts of time. Why, for example, was homosexuality seen to be abnormal by so many people for so long in certain cultures (and still is in some parts of the world)? Why is it that in a period of around 50 years, the population in Europe began to see the torture and killing of individuals who had committed crimes not as a public spectacle to be watched and perhaps sometimes even enjoyed, but as barbaric and unacceptable? For Foucault, the answer to these questions lies in how disciplinary power works by targeting the subjectivity of individuals, operating to encourage them to think about themselves in relation to the various norms of personhood that develop in any surveillance-based society.

Foucault's later work (e.g. Foucault, 1990) demonstrates that he did develop some interest in understanding the more micro or individual-level effects of discourse and Foucauldian scholars have considerably developed his ideas around the effects of discourse on the subjectivity of individuals with the notion of 'subject positions' (Henriques et al., 1984). Taking on board Foucault's claim that individuals can recognize themselves only within the parameters of available discourses of 'being', for example what it means to be, say, a man or a woman, the notion of subject positions draws our attention to how discourses offer but do not determine ideas about who we are as individuals and, critically, what these ideas mean about us. Hence, from this perspective, the gender-differentiated discourses of heterosexuality researched by Hollway (1989) and outlined above offer men and women ideas about themselves which they can use to make sense of their actions and behaviours, but such ideas can also be resisted and disrupted if individuals do not recognize themselves within their terms, or if they are experienced as discomfiting.

It is thus very important to understand that the relationship between discourse and subjectivity is inherently dialectical. That is, discourse shapes our behaviour but discourse is itself shaped by our own behaviours and how these seldom perfectly correspond to the norms targeted at us. Our relationship to the norms generated by discourses is both iterative (Butler, 1990) and ambivalent (e.g. Wetherell, 2003); we both repeatedly try to enact particular norms and, as we do so, run up against situations in which these enactments do not work for us. It is iteration and ambivalence that are responsible for the generation of resistance to the norms constructed within discourses. A particularly good example of this process is a study by Amina Mama (1995) who examined

the experiences of Black British women with discourses of female beauty. Discourses of female beauty in Western European contexts contain the notion that being white, blonde and blue-eyed are the ideal physical attributes of female beauty – norms that are clearly impossible for Black women to meet. Mama's research participants, who were all Black British women, discussed how these norms had affected them as children and young adults, shaping their self-understandings and sometimes generating dissatisfaction and even dislike of their own physical attributes. Women in this latter group described efforts they made to whiten their skin or straighten their hair in efforts to conform to these norms. As they got older and met other Black British women and shared their experiences, they became increasingly dissatisfied with this dominant discourse, refusing to recognize themselves within its terms. Instead, they celebrated their own physical attributes, which worked to disrupt the dominant discourse, in the process resisting its norms and the relations of power that had generated it in the first instance. But again, we must remember that this resistance does not escape the relations of domination that have produced and continue to reproduce female beauty as an object of concern. While some of us might feel it is very satisfying that Black women have resisted the imposition of white norms of beauty, the broader object, 'female beauty', continues to shape women's experience and confront us as a natural, common-sense idea which strongly influences how women are evaluated, affecting all groups of women in one way or another. This leads me to a further concept that I draw upon in relation to subject positions, Bourdieu's (1991) notion of symbolic profit – the process through which certain attributes or ways of being in the world furnish individuals with high levels of social status or value. For instance, Mama's (1995) study illustrates the symbolic profit that can accrue from being considered a beautiful woman and we will examine the role of symbolic profit in the production and reproduction of gender inequality in future chapters.

Agency and Structure

As discussed in previous chapters, attempts to understand gender inequality draw on theories which tend either to privilege agency as the cause of inequality (e.g. Hakim's preference theory) or structure (such as patriarchy). To overcome the problems that each side of this argument produces, which I discussed in the previous chapters (e.g. can we understand choices as being independent of the social conditions in which they are made or how do we explain individual variation in responses to the same or similar structural constraints?), some literature has used structuration theory drawn from the work of the British sociologist Anthony Giddens (1984). Structuration theory posits that agency and structure are not two separate domains of social reality but are basically two sides of the same coin. For Giddens, structure exists only as it is

manifested in particular rules and resources – for instance, that managers have the right to make decisions in organizations (rules) and that they are often able to use their legitimate authority, their networks, or their knowledge of organizational systems (resources) to do so. Because individuals will respond to rules and use their resources in variable ways, this accounts for why structure may not have the same effect on everyone. Structuration theory has been fruitfully applied to the study of gender inequality in organizations (e.g. Riley, 1983; Risman, 2004) and certainly provides one way of thinking about the issues that are generated if we stick to approaches which give primacy to either agency or structure. Nonetheless, as many commentators have noted, structuration theory does not so much resolve the agency structure problem as sidesteps it by claiming that structure and agency are ontologically similar – human action and structure are essentially the same thing (Layder, 1994). Defenders of Giddens would argue against this caricature of his approach by pointing out that the rules and resources that are central concepts in structuration theory are understood to be products of historical and cultural periods. They are therefore seen as different to human action (McPhee et al., 2014). Nevertheless, the materiality (such as skin colour, for instance) and durability of rules and resources and their impact on what people think and do is not easily accommodated in Giddens's theory.

Social-constructionist theory, and particularly those approaches which draw on Foucault's ideas about disciplinary power, surveillance and subjectivity, have become central explanatory tools in the study of gender inequalities and offer us a different way of thinking about the relationship between agency and structure though this, too, as I will go on to show, is not without its problems. As outlined in Chapter 2, there is an increasing number of feminist scholars who subscribe to the view that gender inequalities are consequences of taken-for-granted practices and sets of implicit rules that are gendered male, inasmuch as they reflect the preferences and values of men as a group. From a Foucauldian perspective, such practices and rules can be thought of as discourses, which exist both as ideas that we can potentially identify and articulate, and as definite material practices in which these ideas are embedded. In Chapter 2, for instance, I outlined the literature that has examined how particular cultural rules in organizations can operate to deter women from seeing themselves or being seen as suitable for particular jobs and roles. Williams (2000) drew attention to how in many organizations these rules reflect what she refers to as 'ideal worker norms': typically referring to a man who is available to work very long hours; able to put work before family; and who is prepared to travel or relocate as the job demands. Blair-Loy (2004), as already mentioned, has referred to this phenomenon as the 'work devotion schema'. For Foucauldian scholars, like myself, such rules and schemas can also be understood as discourses – patterned and cultural-level systems of

meaning which not only influence how we understand ourselves and others, but which are operationalized in definite material practices such as long hours or relocating to obtain more pay and status.

The advantage of seeing ideal worker norms or the work devotion schema as discourses in the Foucauldian sense rather than rules in Giddens' sense, is that a critical focus for analysis is the power relations that have generated these discourses and the processes that might be involved in their transformation. From a Foucauldian perspective, for instance, and as already outlined, discourses offer individuals 'subject positions' that need to be performatively iterated for them to retain their disciplinary effects. But as individuals encounter situations in which such performances are either impossible or which are experienced as troublesome for the individual's sense of self, discourses are regularly disrupted and resisted.

As yet, however, within the literature examining gender inequality that has utilized Foucauldian ideas, the origins of the rules that shape and influence behaviour in organizations and appear to work to the disadvantage of women have not been adequately theorized and neither has the remarkable resilience of gender inequality been adequately explained. After all, given that it is now widely recognized and accepted that women are just as capable of men in terms of the skills and attributes that are needed for access to particular jobs and occupations, and given that research has shown that women regularly resist discourses in workplaces which position them as in some way inferior to men (e.g. Merilainen et al., 2004), why has this not translated into a bigger shift in the relations of power that enable gender inequalities to persist?

Summary

In this chapter, I have thus far set out the case for using a social-constructionist approach to the study of gender inequality and have outlined the core theoretical tools that such an approach involves, namely, discourse, power and subjectivity. This approach, I believe, enables us to avoid the problems of homogenizing the experiences of women as a group whilst recognizing that, at the cultural level, there are ideas and ways of being and acting that have definite gendered effects on an aggregate level, such as, for example, the types of jobs and occupations that are differentially occupied by men and women. A further advantage of this approach is that it need not involve reifying ideas such as subordination or oppression, which means that we can also start to think differently about what we mean by inequality given that this is also a reification. While we can see inequalities when we look at statistics, charts and graphs showing, say, differences in pay between men and women; differences in the representation of women in top jobs and particular occupations; and in how jobs done by men and women are differentially classified

with respect to skill and status, such data does not tell us the whole story and we cannot read off from these data apparent facts about the subordination or oppression of women. If we do this, we are in danger of universalizing the interpretations of these data offered mainly by white middle-class feminists. Finally, the Foucauldian position on social constructionism I am advancing here encourages us to examine power not (only) as something that is in the possession of some groups relative to others, but as dispersed and inherent in all relationships. From a Foucauldian perspective power is manifested chiefly in how individuals' sense of self is produced through the various discourses of being that are culturally available and which have differential effects due to the uneven and contingent relationship between individual subjectivity and discourse. This means that if we want to understand why, for instance, men are more likely to be in powerful positions in organizations relative to women, we need to understand the discourses that have generated this positionality as well how these are resisted and disrupted. What, in short, is the 'object' of regulation that has led organizational power holders to a concern with particular behaviours more than others? We need also to understand the historical origins of these discourses, how they have evolved over time and how and whether the continual resistances and disruptions to these discourses are in any sense challenging the historical relations of power that have generated these discourses in the first instance. In the next section of this chapter, I want to introduce a further set of conceptual tools which, I believe, in combination with a Foucauldian approach to social constructionism can help us better address the issues that are of central concern to this text.

INTERROGATING THE 'NATURAL' BASIS OF GENDER INEQUALITIES: TAKEN-FOR-GRANTEDNESS AS AN ANALYTIC FOCUS

A dominant idea justifying gender inequalities in organizations is that men and women are naturally different, a common-sense discourse that is very dominant in many societies across the world. This difference, it is argued, explains why women and men are attracted to and cut out for particular roles and not others, which leads us to view such difference as somewhat inevitable. My own position on gender differences at the individual level (which I outlined on page 1) is that they do exist in very general terms, but that there is also a lot of overlap between so-called male and female attributes and that, in any case, such attributes should not be understood as fixed and essential *properties* of men and women but as context-dependent and occasioned *behaviours*. That is, while, in my experience, women do seem, for example, to be generally more interested in the intricacies of their various relationships than are men, this is

not a universal attribute of all the women (and men) I know and this interest varies depending on the place, time and nature of the situation invoking this interest. We must also always bear in mind that attributes such as 'a concern with relationships' are highly context-dependent and occasioned – that is their meaning is not locatable outside of the context and particular point in time, in which such attributes are enacted.

The idea of natural differences between men and women, whilst certainly problematic and debatable, is made possible only because there is such a strong belief in society that individuals do possess stable and essential attributes that have a somewhat fixed meaning (Burr, 2015). To some extent, this is borne out by our lived experiences, because we can come to 'know' people and love (or hate) them for their attributes (or, more accurately, the attributes we believe they possess on the basis of the behaviours we observe). However, we can never know exactly how someone will react or respond to the various situations they find themselves in and we cannot know whether someone we think of as very intelligent will be evaluated similarly by others. In other words, while it may be the case that there are definite stabilities in how people behave on the whole, the exact nature of these behaviours will vary dependent on the situation and their meaning will vary dependent on the observer. These contingencies are, however, completely overlooked when it comes to thinking about jobs, roles, and the personal requirements that are claimed to be needed for these roles. Take, for example, the following job description which I found on a Google search:

> An exciting job opportunity has become available for a Band 3 Healthcare Assistant on the Acute Surgical Unit. The ideal candidates should be motivated, enthusiastic, possess excellent communication skills, be a team player and wish to develop their skills and knowledge.
>
> The Acute Surgical Unit is a busy unit which sees a variety of different types of admissions from UECC and GP referrals. ASU can see a whole range of specialities including surgical patients, urology patients and orthopaedic patients.
>
> ASU incorporates its own streaming service from UECC. As a Band 3 Healthcare Assistant, you will be supporting with the streaming service whilst giving high quality patient care.
>
> If you enjoy working in a fast-paced environment and pride yourself in ensuring patients have the best experience then this is the job for you. In return the Trust offers a supportive, challenging environment with opportunities for continuous professional development.

Various attributes are listed here as job requirements – motivation, communication skills, enthusiasm and team orientation – all of which carry the assumptions that these behaviours can be understood independently of the context in which they are manifested; that attributes like motivation have the same meaning no matter who is observing the person; and that jobs are inde-

pendent of the person doing them. All these assumptions are challengeable. For instance, with respect to the relationship between behaviour and context, feminist researchers have provided a thoroughgoing critique and problematization of how job requirements are gendered which has been critically important in developing our understandings of gender inequality, as discussed in Chapter 2 and discussed further in the next chapter.

One issue that has not attracted much scrutiny, however, is that it is assumed that jobs do have some kind of 'nature' which explains why particular behaviours are required for their enactment. As a consequence, the focus of attention has tended to be on these behaviours, rather than on why the job is understood as it is in the first instance. For example, in the job description provided above, what is emphasized is the variety of medical admissions and the fast pace of the work. While the behavioural criteria listed as requirements for performing this work do not seem to be particularly gendered, in that they do not seem to reflect behaviours more closely associated with men than women (or vice versa), the attributes of the hospital unit itself (varied medical conditions and fast pace) are not inherent to this unit, they are the products of how hospitals are designed and what their overall purpose is understood to be (Zerubavel, 1979). This, I am going to argue, is the most fundamental issue underpinning gender inequality in organizations – the idea that jobs have a nature. To interrogate this idea and to adequately problematize it, we need to understand how certain ideas become so taken for granted that we no longer question their apparently factual status.

Taken-for-Grantedness and Moral Order

Taken-for-grantedness refers to our sense of the world as being 'unproblematic until further notice' (Schutz and Luckmann, 1973: 4), produced through *shared interpretations* which enable individuals to respond to the world in a similar fashion (Scott, 1987). Taken-for-grantedness thus describes a situation where shared definitions of social reality are not (generally) questioned, challenged or contested but are seen as 'the way things are'. How taken-for-grantedness is achieved has not, surprisingly, been the focus of much scholarship, but the little that has been done has drawn attention to the centrality of language and how this can be used to generate understandings of the world that make sense to people and which then become accepted as unremarkable social facts (Steele, 2021). For instance, in our current era, the idea of 'the economy' does not need to be explained to people for them to understand it. We therefore accept statements like 'the economy is in recession' or 'the economy is booming', without needing to be provided with a detailed account of what this actually means. But the idea of 'the economy' is a relatively recent historical development (see Foster, 2016). A further example is provided by Persson (2012) who

points out that individuals (at least until recently) would rarely declare 'I am a heterosexual', because heterosexuality is (was) a taken-for-granted norm that in many societies 'goes without saying'.

These examples illustrate two critically important features of taken-for-grantedness. First, that as the prima facie acceptance of particular social facts solidifies, the need to provide explanations of what these facts mean and the logic from which this meaning is derived disappears (Green, 2004; Green et al., 2009; Harmon, 2019), though can potentially always be surfaced. Second, some social facts are so taken for granted that they do not even need to be stated – they work as background assumptions about how the world is or should be, which is why they can 'go without saying'. It is this process of prima facie acceptance that furnishes some versions of social reality with their apparently natural appearance. Nonetheless, a further and, for the purposes in this text, critically important element of the production of taken-for-grantedness is the role of power. As already outlined above, Foucault (1977) argues that groups who occupy positions of power in society are those most able to sanctify particular ideas (as well as practices and modes of conduct) as normal or appropriate. This alerts us to the fact that we need to interrogate and problematize the notions of 'shared understandings' or 'background presumptions' because the casual use of these terms in defining taken-for-grantedness masks some important power-related issues that will be central to the arguments which follow.

First, for example, the term '*shared understandings*' masks the fact that many background presumptions are *not* shared by particular groups or individuals and that these presumptions may operate to marginalize and inferiorize certain groups and individuals. For example, the once background presumption that heterosexuality was the norm marginalized other forms of sexuality because the presumption that something is 'normal' and therefore the most 'correct' standard of behaviour generates sets of 'rights, responsibilities, duties and obligations' (Bielby, 2006: 393) which, if unmet, carry moral implications. In the case of heterosexuality, for instance, it was once not only considered wrong to have a relationship with a person of the same sex but, in the case of men, to be so wrong as to qualify as a medical condition and legal matter. And in some male-dominated occupations it was considered to be irresponsible for homosexual men to be knowingly recruited (Levy, 2007). Relatedly, many background presumptions are products of historical relations of power that have resulted in the widespread acceptance of certain ideas as 'true'. For instance, a longstanding 'fact' in many societies is that women are more naturally suited to the home than to the workplace, primarily because it is women who bear and are often responsible for raising children, but this 'fact' has been challenged by women for centuries. Women who choose not to place their families or homes first in their lives can attract much disapproba-

tion, seen to be acting inappropriately or selfishly (Blair-Loy, 2001). In short, taken-for-grantedness is generative of *moral order* which, by specifying rights, responsibilities, duties and obligations, pathologizes and marginalizes ways of behaving that run counter to these mores. This issue forms a major axis of the arguments I develop in the following chapters.

Second, we do not all take the same things for granted. Children brought up in middle-class families may well be able to disrupt the norms of middle-class parent–child interaction as illustrated in Garfinkel's classic experiments,[1] but these norms make little sense to a child whose parents don't seem to care whether or not they eat or are present or absent at home. Such a child instead takes for granted the fact that they need to look after themselves. Hence the taken-for-grantedness of many apparently institutionalized features of our lives can be considered gendered, classed and raced in that these features reflect the background presumptions of certain groups and not others. Related to this point is that what some people take for granted, such as, for instance, a clean and tidy workplace or home, disguises the fact that someone else is doing the invisible work that enables this to be so (Lengermann and Niebrugge, 1995; Wylie, 2013). The fact that many men work full-time, which they take for granted as 'normal', hides the issue that this is enabled only by women at home looking after the family and enabling this to happen. If women were not doing this, the taken-for-grantedness of full-time work would soon be disrupted.

If we apply this thinking to the taken-for-granted idea that jobs have a 'nature', which means they have to be done in particular ways, we can make a number of observations which I will carry forwards into the next chapter. The idea of job requirements needs to be understood as a product of power relationships whereby powerful groups in organizations who have determined what the organization's goals and purposes should be have also determined the methods for the achievement of these goals. As women have challenged the presumption that their place is in the home, they have entered the workplace in greater numbers and, consequentially, we have seen challenges to preferred methods of achieving workplace goals including the idea that all workers should be available full-time. Nonetheless, the presumption that jobs require a full-time commitment remains unchallenged, largely because of the idea that it is their nature that produces this requirement. Hence while women have succeeded in challenging the idea that *everybody* needs to work full-time, the presumptions underpinning the requirement for full-time work per se remain intact.

Second, job requirements are based on particular presumptions about the purposes of jobs which may not be accepted by certain individuals and groups. For instance, under Taylorism, it was assumed that the purpose of any job was for it to be done as efficiently and quickly as possible with a manager making decisions about what this would involve. However this was challenged by

workers and other observers who pointed out that the purpose of a job is also to enable the expression of creativity and autonomy and to engage in meaningful social relationships, purposes which, if ignored, may lead to severe workplace problems such as resignations or mental ill health (see Hollway, 1991). This constitutes a major challenge to the notion that jobs have a nature as it calls attention to the fact that jobs can be *designed* in ways that produce different meanings for those who perform them.

Third, many elite and senior jobs which are highly paid and carry high levels of social status and social value, and which are taken for granted as career goals by many professionals, are enabled by the fact that it is groups of lesser-paid and largely invisible workers carrying out the work at the coal face of the organization which enables these individuals to take their positions and privileges for granted (Wadel, 1979). If such individuals cannot be retained and recruited, it will inevitably call into question the taken-for-granted position of elites as they will be held to account for the breakdown in the provision of the services or goods their organizations were designed to provide. The likelihood of this happening is, as I will argue in the next chapter, probably remote, but there are other ways in which the invisibility of the work that enables some members of organizations to profit at the expense of others can be called to attention.

Returning to Structure and Agency: Ingold's Process Ontology

Having now set out the core epistemological basis for the text which involves seeing knowledge as constructed rather than pregiven; as the product of evolving and dynamic power relations; as dialectically related to the identities and activities of individuals through its power effects; and as carrying the potential to become taken for granted and unquestioned, I want to return to the issue of structure and agency which, as I have discussed at various times in this chapter, haunts and troubles efforts to understand whether issues like gender inequalities are caused largely by the actions of humans, by the influence of historical social conditions and structures, or some mix of the two. For me, this argument is unresolvable and, as Ingold (2011) argues, is largely a product of how social scientists and people more generally have been influenced by Western European language practices, particularly the separation between object (what is perceived as external to us) and subject (i.e. us as observers). This separation means that we are encouraged to think about objects (including people) and actions as belonging to separate ontological realms when in fact they are inseparable. For instance we say things like 'the wind is blowing', but Ingold points out that this statement assumes that there is an object (the wind) doing something that causes blowing (something that is independent of the wind). But the blowing *is* the wind and the wind *is* the blowing. We do

not need to invent a force (like agency) to account for this. Instead, as Ingold argues, we should see agency as inhering in and inseparable from action. I think this is a very important idea and one that I intend to take forwards in subsequent chapters, but we do also need to understand how various material and symbolic features of our social world, such as gender, class, education and the distribution of wealth, are implicated in human action, and we cannot simply sidestep these issues by referring to them as rules rather than structures or by reifying them to the extent that they come to be seen as having an agency of their own.

I therefore want to propose that action and activity should be our primary analytical focus but that we recognize that both take place in a constantly evolving landscape of events and circumstances that have both material and symbolic properties which themselves are constantly evolving. This constant flux and movement furnishes all of our activities with shifting and dynamic meanings, as well as producing a variety of material and symbolic outcomes which themselves evolve and change as we take them forwards into our next set of activities. The key issue that I feel we need to focus on, is that our engagement with the world is *purposeful*, often in very mundane ways – for example to put the kettle on in order to make a cup of tea – but sometimes with very particular intentions in mind – for example to act in certain ways in a job interview in order to create what we hope is a particular impression of ourselves. The problem we have, of course, is that our purposes may or may not be met – the kettle might have fused; our actions in an interview are stymied by the reciprocal actions of the interviewers, and hence our intentions (to make the tea or create a good impression) are not achieved. But ultimately, all of this means that something always changes – be that the kettle (whose plug gets a new fuse) or our understanding of how interviews can evolve for good or ill (to name but two possible changes).

This approach, I believe, enables us to understand how 'structures' such as gender or social class actually influence our lives. Rather than seeing these as reified structures (which connotes stability more than change), we need to see them as *continually evolving material and symbolic patterns of activity*. Such patterns of activity vary in terms of their historical durability and are general features of the landscapes we inhabit (inasmuch as they transcend any given individual) but are themselves continually evolving as individuals become involved in these activities during their interactions with and engagement in these activities. An example of this is the family. The family represents an historically durable set of patterned activities that is one of the most fundamental organizing principles (social structures) of society. Yet, what a family is cannot be easily understood in the abstract (is it a man and woman who are married, with one, two or more children? Is it a heterosexual married couple without children? Is it a heterosexual couple who are not married but live with

pets? Is it a homosexual couple with children or without children? Or can it be a person living alone?). We can understand the family as a discourse and even at times an ideology (for example, various governments over the years have tried to push the idea of the sanctity of marriage and childbearing between heterosexual couples), inasmuch as there are norms about what should constitute a family and how families should behave (they should have good, supportive relationships which enable children and their parents to flourish, for example). The family as a patterned social arrangement has meaning for all of us inasmuch as we know what the term refers to and inasmuch as some of us can take for granted that we belong to one. But, the key point is that if we view the family as essentially a set of patterned activities, we can account for both the various compositions that might be interpreted as a family; for how some compositions (married heterosexual couple with one or more children) have more social legitimacy than others (due to power effects and power relations); how norms develop and influence our understandings of our own families (through the effects of discourses on ourselves and our behaviours); and critically, how families and our understandings of them continually evolve and change both at the micro level of particular families and at the macro or aggregate level of culture.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I have presented a detailed account of the theoretical ideas that I am going to use in the remainder of the book to help us rethink gender inequalities in organizations. Fundamentally, I am taking a social-constructionist perspective which means that I see knowledge, most especially our knowledge of human behaviours and social reality, as culturally and historically contingent. This does not mean that I do not believe that there are definite facts in the world, such as, for example, the principles of mathematics, chemistry or Newtonian physics. Rather, I see social constructionism as very useful for exploring and providing insights into some phenomena but not others. Just as maths, chemistry and Newtonian physics are indispensable for identifying and understanding some of the causal laws underpinning some important phenomena in our part of the universe, such as speed, acceleration, photosynthesis, or how chemicals can be combined to create other substances (to name but a few), so social constructionism is indispensable for understanding what Mel Pollner (1987) refers to as 'reality disjunctions' – situations where different people produce different interpretations of ostensibly the same situation, person or activity, and there is no feasible way to resolve the dispute other than resorting to unhelpful and, at times, polarizing explanations such as perception, interests or values.

Many of the situations that I am tackling in this book fall into this broad domain. As I mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 1, for example, we tend to treat issues like gender inequality as if they have a real, tangible and definite existence that is independent of any observer. But this is questionable because some individuals do not believe that there is such a thing as gender inequality and we cannot simply dismiss their views by insisting that they are not looking properly at the facts. From the perspective I am developing here, gender inequality is a discourse which can be used to explain some of the material and symbolic differences that exist between men and women in terms of the jobs they do and the social and economic value of the physical and psychological attributes that they are understood to possess. Like any discourse, the idea of gender inequality is the product of dynamic relations of power, in this instance the power that women have acquired to make sense of their own experiences and the meanings that attach to these experiences. Nonetheless, while gender inequality is currently a powerful discourse inasmuch as it has definite power effects (the idea is enshrined in laws, for instance, and in how people in organizations behave and how they understand and make sense of their behaviours) it also encourages us to see inequality as something that is caused by belonging to the social category 'woman' (as well as other groups) rather than as something that is produced through particular social processes and conditions and which can therefore be experienced by anyone, from any social category. It also encourages us to see inequality as a definite 'thing' which can be identified and measured, rather than as an emergent, ephemeral and potentially shifting interpretation of particular situations and activities.

I am completely in agreement with O'Connor (2019) on this point, who, in a paper regarding racial inequality in education, discusses the propensity in both culture and academic research to assume that it is Black students in particular who are susceptible to negative peer pressure with respect to educational performance. She notes that 'This discourse situates such susceptibility as a Black cultural trait rather than as a developmental vulnerability with which children of all races contend' (p. 477). What this means is that we need to understand that what we currently define as inequality which can, in all its forms, be boiled down to relative social and economic disadvantage, is something that can be experienced by any individual, irrespective of their gender, race, or background. This in no sense denies that on aggregate we can see that women and men occupy different and differently valued roles, jobs and occupations, or that women continue to bear the brunt of the domestic labour in the home without any formal state recognition of the criticality of this function for the continuation of capitalism. But, what it does mean is that we have to start recognizing that disadvantage is a social and relativistic process not a group characteristic. To properly understand these processes we need, in my view, to shift out of the straitjacket of seeing it as the latter.

By setting out the various conceptual tools I am going to deploy in the remainder of this text, I have furnished myself with a theoretical scaffold from which to interrogate the issues I have covered in previous chapters in the depth and with the nuance I believe are required. In the chapters which follow, I want to develop the ideas presented in this chapter by exploring particular issues that are central to explaining the relatively different (and often culturally inferior) position that women in workplaces occupy relative to men: job requirements and their naturalization; careers, specifically upward progression; and the meaning of work in the lives of women. These chapters will be based on extant ideas and theories from the gender inequality literature (Chapter 4) and from empirical material drawn from my own research into the police service (Chapters 5 and 6) and into women's careers (Chapters 6 and 7). In the final chapters of the text, I am going to try to bring together the various ideas and concepts presented and utilized into an overall theoretical synthesis and overview (Chapters 8 and 9).

NOTE

1. Harold Garfinkel who studied practical consciousness – the mundane everyday behaviours that furnish society with its predictability and stability – used his students to perform 'breaching experiments' where they would violate some tacit and taken-for-granted rule of living by, for instance, acting as if they were a lodger whilst at home with their parents (see Garfinkel, 1963).

4. The social construction of job requirements

In the first three chapters, I have reviewed some of the theories that have been used to explain gender inequalities in organizations and set out the theoretical tools that I intend to use in the remainder of this text. I have argued that there is now a broad consensus in the Organization and Management Studies (OMS) literature that gender inequalities are related to how the rules and norms governing workplace behaviour are gendered, such that those attaching to more prestigious and well-paid work tend to reflect the behaviours and skills more typical of men as a group than of women as a group. As I have pointed out, this idea has enabled a far deeper and nuanced understanding of gender inequality than theories which see the issue as a product of either personal choices or undifferentiated male power or patriarchy. I nevertheless outlined a number of problems with this approach, including the tendency to assume that masculinity is comprised of essential and fixed attributes which inhere in particular norms and rules; the lack of attention to the historical and cultural origins of these rules and norms and how their taken-for-granted status is maintained; the lack of analytical granularity in some of the empirical work examining these rules and norms, glossing over the highly situated and occasioned nature of their influence as well as the heterogeneity of their effects on women as a group; the tendency to reify subordination, domination and inequality with the consequence that the causes of these outcomes are seen to inhere within women (and other groups) rather than being products of social processes at the cultural level; and finally, the failure of these approaches to adequately theorize and understand the remarkable persistence of gender inequalities. Despite the widespread consensus that the problem of gender inequality resides in gendered rules and norms, for instance, little seems to have changed in organizations.

In this chapter (prior to exploring the persistence of gender inequality theoretically and empirically in Chapter 5), I want to focus in particular on job requirements (in which organizational rules and norms are embedded) with the aim of problematizing and subverting the idea that job requirements are necessary and inevitable consequences of the 'nature' of jobs or occupations. Occupations and jobs, I suggest, do not have a nature. They are designed to meet particular goals and to be enacted in ways that are aligned with the inter-

ests and preferences of powerful groups in organizations. Yet the idea that job requirements are determined by the 'nature' of jobs persists, and meeting such requirements strongly influences how we evaluate the occupational worth of ourselves and others. I utilize the notions of visibility and invisibility to interrogate how such evaluations are made in organizations and show how these relate to the broader economic and ideological context.

My overall argument in this chapter is that the differential value which attaches to particular jobs, roles and occupations is closely related to the extent to which the requirements deemed necessary for their enactment are seen to be aligned with capitalist ideology and its emphasis on productivity, efficiency (Amis et al., 2020) and growth (Foster, 2016). I argue that those roles and occupations that are constructed as central to these ideals carry higher value than those which are constructed as less central. Differential value is additionally the product of historical processes of occupational closure (see Chapter 2); the process through which powerful groups protect their jurisdictional interests by limiting access to occupations and roles through the stipulation of entry requirements that most closely align with the credentials they themselves possess. Higher-value roles, I argue, tend to be those that are seen as more difficult to access, though this difficulty is assumed to stem from individual differences in natural aptitudes and abilities rather than from the political processes that, I will argue, are its actual source.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, I want to further explore the idea, dominant in the feminist literature, that the rules and norms embedded in job requirements are gendered. While recognizing the force and appeal of this argument (see Chapters 2 and 3) I want to develop this idea by suggesting that in fact rules and norms are products of socio-political rather than simply gendered processes. In other words, the assumptions that underpin job requirements are not neutral (as feminist researchers have pointed out for decades) and reflect the interests and preferences of powerful groups, but (different from the feminists) I suggest that these are not comprised only of men. This means that a variety of groups and individuals, and not just women, are likely to be disadvantaged by these assumptions, though women are on aggregate more likely to experience this disadvantage. Having explored the political nature of job requirements, I then move on to examine in some depth *which* job requirements tend to be seen as most significant with respect to demonstrating competence/skills for particular roles and here I make use of the ideology of the 'bottom line': the increasing tendency for organizations to place the pursuit of financial and symbolic profit (see Chapter 3) as central to their *raison d'être*. I show how this pursuit is reflected not only in job requirements but in how performance in organizations is evaluated, resulting in the differential value of various role enactments. Work that is seen as central to the bottom line is seen as more important and as more socially and economically valuable than

work which is not seen in this way. To enable a more rounded understanding of this process of valuation, I turn to ideas about the visibility and invisibility of work and how we might use these ideas to make sense of the differential value attaching to certain modes of being at work – ideas which work to advantage some groups and individuals relative to others.

THE GENDERED NATURE OF JOB REQUIREMENTS

There is now a vast research literature that has explored the precise way that job requirements are gendered in an array of jobs and occupations, some of which I reviewed in Chapter 2. Most of this work has focused on professional work such as academia (e.g. Van den Brink and Benschop, 2012), accountancy (e.g. Anderson-Gough et al., 2005), law (e.g. Walsh, 2012), architecture (e.g. Sang et al., 2014) and financial work (e.g. McDowell and Court, 2016), but there is also research looking at lower-status work including factory work (e.g. Kondo, 1990). Authors writing within this stream of literature have argued that many of the criteria used to judge the value and worth of employee performance reflect masculine attributes or preferences.

While this is a persuasive argument, it is also clear that such attributes tend to be those that are highly visible, often quantifiable and seen by organizational elites to be directly contributing to the organization's core goals (Chan and Anteby, 2016). In other words, while these attributes may indeed be more likely to reflect the behaviours and attributes of men as a group, they also reflect a hegemonic discourse of organizational success in which success is seen to inhere almost completely in growth and symbolic and financial profit (Schmelzer, 2016). In academic work, for instance, it is often the number of publications, preferably in highly ranked scholarly journals, which are seen to be the most important criteria for appointment to senior academic positions; a criterion which reflects the now ubiquitous concern with the ability of the university to attract new students, to expand and to improve its reputation (Alvesson, 2013). For a variety of reasons, including access to networks, men are more likely than women to be able to meet this criterion but it also works against those male academics who do not operate in this way. Likewise, accountancy and legal work are often characterized by the need to prioritize the client (Anderson-Gough et al., 2005; Santos, 2020) so as to be available to deal with client needs as and when deemed necessary – a practice that is clearly very difficult for a working mother, anyone with extensive domestic requirements, or those who simply have other priorities in their lives, to meet.

In lower-status jobs, women are often segregated into part-time roles usually because such roles are more likely to appeal to women with domestic responsibilities. As already pointed out, the work women provide within these roles is often classified as low skill. This is largely because it is seen as commensurate

with women's natural propensity for caregiving (Cockburn, 1991) rather than requiring any 'real' skills women may have acquired, justifying the low pay and often insecure status of these jobs. Nonetheless, as discussed in Chapter 2, while gender is clearly central to this situation, it is not simply due to male dominance in the labour market per se. Rather, because men have historically numerically dominated many workplaces they have also been able to use collective male power to fight for improvements in their status and conditions of employment (Rubery and Grimshaw, 2015). In short, the relatively low status of women at the lower levels of the labour market, that is in those sectors mainly populated by more economically disadvantaged individuals, is reflective more of their historically and relatively low capacity for mobilizing power to contest their status which, in itself, is a complex political issue.

Hence, although extant research in this area has shown *how* various dimensions of work can be considered gendered and affect women's access to particular roles and occupations, the exploration of *why* this is the case remains fairly limited and one-dimensional. As already discussed and outlined above, one explanation is simply that the criteria developed for entry to particular jobs, and the requirements that are stated for job holders, reflect male characteristics because this group has not only historically and numerically dominated particular jobs and occupations but is also able to maintain its relative power base as a consequence of this process. While this may well be the case, it nevertheless raises the question of why the considerable increase in the numbers of women in male-dominated occupations has not had any substantive impact on such criteria – they are not, for instance, changing to reflect more female ways of behaving. Moreover, and as already pointed out in Chapter 2, despite the transformation of many contemporary European economies from manufacturing to service industries, there is little evidence that this has resulted in the feminization of the labour market that was predicted by some.

An alternative explanation which will be central to the arguments developed in this chapter, focuses on how the broader socio-economic and institutional context in which organizations are located influences the requirements of jobs. For instance, Gascoigne et al. (2015) note that the intensification of competition associated with globalization has created pressures for organizations to increase efficiency and cut costs, often by expecting more of existing employees, especially with respect to their workloads and meeting ever-tighter deadlines. This intensification of work has been part and parcel of the push by organizations to pass the costs of employment onto employees as much as possible; a tendency referred to by Snyder (2016) as 'flexible capitalism'. In short, the features of highly paid and prestigious jobs and roles that operate in practice to deter women from applying for or remaining in them, are not only the consequence of historical contexts of numerical male domination, power

and interests, but also of capitalist ideology and the imperative for organizations to grow, generate profit and maximize returns to shareholders.

CAPITALISM AND THE 'BOTTOM-LINE' IDEOLOGY

The growth and profit imperative is embedded in the dominant organizational pursuit of efficiency and productivity which, in most organizations, whatever their size and wherever in the economy they are located (i.e. private, public and, increasingly, third sector), is seen to be self-evidently rational. Organizations which are there to provide social or public goods, be these education, health, welfare or citizen safety, are generally seen to be inferior to for-profit organizations (Cardini, 2006), though often offer employees more job security. It is probably fair to say that, especially for right-leaning governments and some private sector firms, the public sector represents a necessary evil. It does not make money but is economically 'greedy' relying, it is argued by some commentators, on the wealth generated by the private sector to survive. Despite its inferior status in many political discourses (e.g. Cardini, 2006), however, the public sector is itself dominated by the ideology of growth and places a premium on activities that are seen to be contributing to such growth – for example activities which are believed to have a positive influence on organizational reputation or on enabling the organization to show that it is offering 'value for money' (Ferlie and Steane, 2002).

Over the last decades across Europe and North America there has been a concerted effort by governments of all political leanings to retract the state and encourage free-market enterprise to discourage populations from becoming dependent on the state for meeting their financial needs (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). This neo-liberal ideology is now, according to many commentators, a dominant feature of the whole occupational landscape (Vaara et al., 2006). It is beyond the scope of this text to review the various debates about the issues I have outlined above, but what does seem to be clear from both the evidence and from the lived experience of many people in a wide variety of workplaces is that one consequence of these trends is that many contemporary organizations are dominated by what is termed a 'bottom-line' mentality (Greenbaum et al., 2020). I will argue in alignment with the theoretical ideas discussed in the previous chapter, that this mentality is better thought of as an ideology.

The bottom-line mentality refers to a process through which senior members of organizations position the pursuit of profit (which can be both symbolic (i.e. status or prestige) and financial), growth and efficiency above any other outcomes (Wolfe, 1988). While of course this is a caricature of how many organizations operate, it is nevertheless an idea that has much contemporary resonance for employees of all levels and across many organizational types and

domains. For instance, Dick and Coule (2020) chart the ambivalence of staff working for a third-sector charity whose ostensible purpose was the provision of social goods but which was increasingly looking to improve its bottom line. Relevant to this issue is Michels' (1915) argument that all organizations inevitably become governed by elites who have little if anything in common with the rest of the organization's members and that these elites identify more with other elites than with the members of their own organization. This means that the pursuit of the bottom line by organizational elites is reinforced by the fact that they are supported by other elites, both within and outside of their own organizations, who share similar views of what organizations in their domain should be doing. This produces a situation in which those employees likely to be seen as most valuable, as making the most important contributions and therefore worthy of promotion to senior roles (i.e. to join the ranks of the elite), are those that are understood to be *directly* influencing the achievement of the bottom line. The key word in this last sentence is 'seen', because what tends to be most valued in organizations is outputs that are visible, quantifiable and measurable (Wadel, 1979). I also use the word 'seen' to draw attention to the fact that who is seen to be contributing to the bottom line from one perspective may not be seen to be doing so from another; an issue I will unpack in detail in the next chapter. This bottom-line mentality has, I suggest, become an ideology because it is effectively a mode of governance in contemporary organizations which operates to produce domination and subordination. It is taken for granted as a common-sense approach to designing and performing work by appeals to ideas such as efficiency and productivity; ideas which are highly problematic (for reasons I will explore below) and, like all ideologies, offers valorized subject positions which confer much symbolic profit to those perceived to be acting in line with its norms and prescriptions.

The bottom-line ideology means that, in many organizations, individuals doing work which is not perceived as central to the bottom line are also less likely to be perceived as making an important contribution to the organization as a whole. This provides one explanation for why, on aggregate, men are seen to be more (economically) valuable than women in workplaces because they are more likely to engage in behaviours and possess skills seen as central to the achievement of the bottom line, including working full-time; working long hours; and performing technical or leadership roles such as front-line operations or, if in senior or executive roles, financial, strategic or operational management (see section on Human Capital in Chapter 2). It is notable, for example, that human resource managers (HRM) tend to be the least well compensated of all executives; human resource departments have historically had and retain a low-status image; and HRM is an occupation dominated by women (Guest and King, 2004). We therefore see how the bottom-line ideology produces subject positions that vary in their social worth, and material

practices, such as long working hours and full-time work schedules which have become taken-for-granted elements of working life, at least in parts of the Western world, particularly the UK, the USA and Canada.

If the bottom-line ideology and its effects on processes of valuation in organizations holds true, and if we add to this Henretta's (1977) claim that inequalities are a product of the unequal occupation of the highest-value positions in any given society or domain, then vertical gender segregation (see Chapter 1) can be viewed somewhat differently. Rather than being a consequence of patriarchy, and therefore of some universal and undifferentiated male power, it is more usefully considered to be a product of how historical and culturally dominant processes of valuation have produced an occupational hierarchy in which jobs that are seen as less central to the ability of an organization to generate symbolic and material profits are likely to carry least status and least pay. That men as a group have been able to collectively mobilize to challenge this situation in occupations at the bottom of the value hierarchy is reflective of how men's interests as workers have been realized more effectively than those of women due to their historical involvement in the development and membership of trades unions (see Middleton, 1988). We must also remember that many men work in very low-value, low-paid occupations as the traditional industrial basis of many Western economies has transformed (Blackburn and Jarman, 2006). Effectively, therefore, and especially under capitalist modes of production, a rather one-dimensional view of work has developed in which the only work that is seen to be of real value is that which is constructed by organizational elites as most important for the achievement of efficiency, productivity and occupational prestige and status. This view offers subject positions which vary in their social and psychological worth and, as I will show in Chapter 6, represent sites at which the bottom-line ideology can be disrupted and challenged. Before moving on to detail one of my central claims in this text, that the bottom-line ideology leads to the valorization of visibility at both individual and organizational levels, I want to spend some time interrogating and problematizing the drivers of the bottom-line ideology – taken-for-granted ideas about productivity and efficiency.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF PRODUCTIVITY AND EFFICIENCY

Productivity is an economic construct which refers to how many things, such as goods (e.g. smartphones) or services (e.g. sales of life insurance), are produced by employees per hour or per day (labour productivity) or how many things are produced per unit of financial investment in the organization; that is, the amount of money that has had to be put into the organization to enable it to do its basic job. As feminists and other critical scholars have argued for several

decades, these basic measures are not value free but reflect the interests of powerful groups in society. For every input to an organization, for instance labour (argued to be the greatest cost input), there are many hidden (invisible) inputs that enable the production process to happen. If someone (often a woman) was not at home looking after children, managing the day-to-day household finances and generally ensuring the family can eat, sleep and rest, then industrial labour input would be severely restricted. These domestic inputs are free inasmuch as no one is paying for them other than via what is provided by the wage earner to pay for food, heating, clothing and accommodation (Weeks, 2007). Likewise outputs of the production process are not just visible goods or services but include less visible and longer-term outcomes such as social relations and social skills (Wadel, 1979), employee health and wellbeing; products that are critical for the functioning of the organization and society more generally, but which are not easily quantifiable, measurable or identifiable. There are also environmental consequences of the production process such as pollution or waste (as individuals discard more and more goods to free up space to acquire more up-to-date goods), yet the costs of these outcomes are seldom factored into calculations of productivity (Perkins, 2002). Productivity measures are, therefore, short-term and partial. They examine only the visible costs of producing something and ignore the hidden costs of the production process in both the shorter but especially the longer term.

Efficiency is an equally problematic construct. It is calculated by examining the costs of labour against the profits that are gained when the goods and services have been sold and taxes and other associated expenses paid. The efficiency imperative is used to justify wage levels and the level of effort demanded to produce the goods and services with the general goal of power holders being to keep wages at a low enough level and effort at a high enough level to enable the optimal return on investment for the goods or services on offer. The problem with this basic idea is, however, that efficiency calculations do not easily accommodate considerations of the quality of the goods or services produced nor of their societal effects. An organization may be highly efficient in the terms just described, but if it is producing goods that are damaging the environment or services which are below par from the perspective of those buying them, or which are creating dissatisfaction and ill health for workers, can this be called efficient? It is certainly efficient for those who immediately benefit from the profits generated, but many critical commentators have argued that for the sake of the planet and the wellbeing of the population, we need to have concerns that stretch beyond shareholders' pockets (Foster, 2016).

Productivity and efficiency are, therefore, political as well as economic concepts (Foster, 2016; Perkins, 2002) reflecting the interests of powerful groups often to the detriment of those who lack power, which include both

workers and external communities. For example, the Big Four accountancy service providers in the UK, whilst lauded for the quality and prestige of their services and their apparent commitment to social justice and equality, have been involved in various privatization projects over the last 20 or so years which have resulted in deskilling and job losses for employees working in these newly privatized industries (Ingram and Gamsu, 2022). What is sauce for the goose is not always sauce for the gander.

A further issue with respect to measures of productivity and efficiency is that labour or work effort is very difficult to calculate and quantify. Individuals, for example, vary in how they do their jobs with some individuals able to do a lot of work in a short period of time and others taking longer. In the past, this problem was often dealt with in male-dominated and manual occupations by 'rate fixing' which enabled all workers to apply similar amounts of time and effort to production activities so that outputs were comparable across a complete group (Baldamus, 1961). Such activities are far less frequent in the contemporary era due to organizational efforts to individualize and intensify work in order to maximize the financial returns on employee efforts. How, therefore, do we operationalize effort in order to assess how much of it is needed? All of these issues are further complicated and befuddled by the nature of work in the current industrial era which, in many professional roles within the so-called 'knowledge economy', is characterized by 'immaterial labour' (Lazzarato, 1996). Such labour does not produce tangible, durable or material goods but rather relational outputs, such as information, advice or knowledge, which is intangible, nebulous and difficult to evaluate with respect to its properties, effects or value (Mörike, 2017). It is perhaps this shift in the nature of employment that explains the continuing and intensifying relationship between work and clock time.

Within the industrial realm, clock time – whereby time is conceptualized as an independent, context-free, linear and quantifiable element of social reality – has, since the 17th century, provided the means through which labour has been rendered calculable. This commodification of time means that it is now understood as a resource to be spent, saved or wasted (Adam, 1990). Time reckoning, the process through which time is divided and calibrated, facilitated by the invention of the mechanical clock, has strongly influenced this process by enabling time to be measured with great accuracy in terms of the seconds, minutes and hours that serve to divide and mark time (Adam, 1990; Orlikwoski and Yates, 2002). The accurate quantification of time enables the provision of labour costs to be accurately calculated, paid for, and regulated relative to the generation of profit. Using time as a proxy for effort is, however, a highly problematic idea illustrated by the effects of Taylorism – a process designed by an industrialist Frederick Taylor (and outlined in Chapter 3) which involved breaking every job down into a set of distinct tasks with managers determining

the most appropriate method and length of time for their completion. Designed to radically improve economic efficiency, Taylorism ultimately failed because it could not accommodate the uneven and complex relationship between effort, experience, skill, engagement and the meaning that work has for those doing it (see Hollway, 1991). Ultimately, however, organizational interests in enabling workers to develop meaning within their work should be viewed with some scepticism, as this was not done for altruistic reasons but to try to prevent the possibility of industrial unrest generated by inhumane management practices (Hanlon, 2017).

Nevertheless, the ubiquitous idea that time equals money facilitated by the calculability of clock time means that time spent working has become the dominant proxy for evaluating an individual's contribution to productivity in organizations; a proxy whose relevance, I suggest, has increased along with the precedence of immaterial labour. Our everyday lived experience, however, tells us that this proxy is not an accurate gauge of the relationship between productivity and the bottom line. For instance, we probably can all think of individuals we have worked with who are very good at looking extremely busy but who do not deliver what they should be delivering. Most of us also know, if we are being honest, that in any given eight-hour day, we are not productive for all of those hours (at least those of us lucky enough not to be constantly monitored). Moreover, the assumption of the link between time and productivity has been challenged: the more time spent at work does not mean that more work is performed in that time (Bailyn, 2002). And there are very real human costs associated with attempts to intensify effort by increasing the amount of work that employees are expected to complete within organizationally determined timescales, such as burnout, suicide, staff turnover, low morale and lack of engagement (Peticca-Harris et al., 2015).

BOTTOM-LINE IDEOLOGY AND THE VISIBILITY OF WORK

As this exploration of the origins of organizational goals has hopefully illustrated, jobs are not independent of these goals but are designed as apparently rational approaches to enable their achievement. Many of the processes, activities and procedures that comprise job requirements are, therefore, reflective of the imperatives of the bottom-line ideology, designed to meet power-holder views of what efficiency and productivity should look like within a role. The discourses of productivity and efficiency, therefore, whilst taken for granted as common-sense organizational requirements (Baldamus, 1961), offer only partial and interested versions of social reality; versions which meet the needs and serve the interests of those who benefit from them, whilst masking how they may oppress and disadvantage other, less-powerful groups.

As already discussed, job requirements also reflect historical and political processes of occupational stratification and closure, whereby groups make efforts to protect their status and the jurisdictions they see as their legitimate territory by stipulating the educational and skill credentials that enable entry to and membership of these occupations. Job requirements, therefore, typically reflect the interests of powerful groups and some of these requirements, especially those that are the products of occupational closure, may not, on close scrutiny, be obviously connected to the organization's core purpose. For instance, the requirement for a minimum upper second class honours degree for many graduate jobs does not seem to be clearly related to what graduates are expected to do in these jobs (Collins, 2019).

Job requirements are also signals of a job's status and social value. Jobs requiring higher levels of education and/or training are generally higher status than jobs that do not stipulate such requirements. Jobs that involve technical or intellectual work, including immaterial work such as law and some branches of medicine, and more material work such as the use of machinery, equipment or software applications such as spreadsheets, are also likely to be classified as skilled or semi-skilled and are also of higher value than roles involving more immaterial communicative skills or administration, or material relational work such as care work or service work (Grimshaw and Rubery, 2007). Work involving the 'intellect' is, on the whole, seen as more valuable than work involving the 'body' (Fotaki and Harding, 2017).

But all job requirements, whether they involve material or immaterial inputs, are actually products of political processes that have, over time, furnished such requirements with a taken-for-granted appearance whose necessity is justified by claims they are demanded by the 'nature' of the job (Gascoigne et al., 2015). What seems to characterize work of higher value in general terms is either its historical prestige (which is culturally variable) or its apparently *direct* relationship to the bottom line. As the industrial landscape has evolved towards a service-based economy, for instance, and a greater concern with 'selling' communicative outputs, so we have seen a rise in status for work that involves communication and what employers term a 'good attitude' (Callaghan and Thompson, 2002). But this shift has mainly benefitted the middle classes rather than women as a group. As Warhurst et al. (2017) point out, the behaviours seen to be critical to the types of communication and attitude that have value for employers, which include particular ways of talking and interacting as well as appearance, mean that 'just being middle class is now regarded as being better skilled' (p. 83). Moreover, as pointed out in Chapter 1, the enactment of communication that is most valued in many organizations is that which has exchange value (Illouz, 1997; Dick and Nadin, 2011), that is, that can be traded for something in return; rather than use value, which refers to forms of

communication aimed at building or nurturing relationships or relationality for their own sake.

In sum, work that has a direct relationship with the bottom line is that whose effects can be calculated in monetary terms or which is commonly understood to make a definite and visible contribution to either the financial status of an organization or its external reputation. For instance, as already mentioned, the work of an operations manager is more likely to be seen as directly contributing to such outcomes than is the work of a human resources manager. To conclude this chapter, therefore, I want to thrash out in some detail the role of *visibility* in the differential valuation of work before moving on to show how this process is implicated in the production of a moral order that, as we shall see in Chapter 5, can help us understand the apparent persistence of gender inequalities.

VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE WORK

There has been a growing interest in the link between the visibility of work and its social and cultural value for some time now. Daniels (1987) first coined the term 'invisible work' to draw attention to how work that is not recognized as being explicitly productive in economic terms tends to be invisible and she argued that this type of work is typically unpaid and carried out in the domestic sphere by women. Invisible work, especially when such work involves routine domestic tasks in the home, may not even be counted as work by the men and (mainly) women who do it. Invisible work can also be paid work. This work, again, often carried out by women, is considered to be consistent with women's natural propensity for relational, emotional and domestic tasks such as cooking, cleaning and caring, and is therefore classed as unskilled and is not generally seen as economically productive unless it involves the exclusive provision of such work for other people, as is the case with domestic cleaners, childcare providers and private care workers. Work that involves the regulation and management of one's own or others' emotion has also been classed as invisible work (Daniels, 1987). For example, aircraft cabin crew who routinely act in a nurturing and pleasant manner to customers and provide them with hospitality services perform this type of invisible work; invisible because it is seen to be natural (Hochschild, 1983). Invisible work can also be considered as work that is literally unseen because of where it takes place. Home working is a form of invisible work by this criterion, as are some forms of digital platform work, such as online chat assistants (Hatton, 2017). More recently Whiting and Symon (2020) have coined the phrase 'digital housework' to refer to the huge amount of invisible work that goes on to enable technology use in organizations, such as dealing with Wi-Fi issues; clearing out email clutter; and sorting and organizing our digital outputs and inputs. In Chapter 7, I identify

a ubiquitous form of invisible work that is performed chiefly by women but carried into workplaces – thinking about the needs, wants and requirements of life outside of work.

There have been some recent attempts to explicate precisely how invisible work is rendered 'economically valueless' through various social and organizational processes (Hatton, 2017). This literature suggests that the valuelessness of invisible work is attributable to various dominant assumptions about skill, including the idea that 'real' skills have to be *achieved* through formal training and education (which is closely related to the prestige of particular professions and to the types of communicative and attitudinal skills deemed important for higher prestige service work – an idea already reviewed in earlier chapters). Skills seen to be *ascribed* – that is, products of an individual's natural disposition, for example women's propensity for caring (Armstrong, 2013) – have less social value. This means that those skills which are acquired through work experience, personal experience, the home and relationships, or which are seen to be a universal and natural set of traits, are not recognized as skills. This is the case even though these may be critical for maintaining group relationships or facilitating the smooth running of various workplace operations, such as, for example, ensuring that meeting rooms are booked and catered for. It is notable here that intellect, which could be argued to be as 'natural' an attribute as caring, *is* deemed a valued and rewardable skill. There are additionally assumptions about the types of context that can be considered legitimate arenas for the display of skill, with designated workplaces seen as one such arena, and home spaces not (Hatton, 2017).

Another way of thinking about the differential valuation of work, I want to suggest, resides not only in the extent to which work is seen to be directly related to productive activity (Chan and Anteby, 2016) or to what are seen as legitimate methods for the acquisition of skills, but also in the *relationship* between invisible and visible work. Lengermann and Niebrugge (1995) argue that in relationships of domination and subordination which, I would argue, subsist between those providing higher- versus lower-value work, the dominant are concerned with the 'instrumental invisibility' of subordinates, whereas the latter are concerned with 'instrumental intimacy' with the dominant (see also Wylie, 2013). Instrumental invisibility means that it is in the interests of the dominant that the subordinate's contribution to production is rendered invisible because this enables the dominant to take credit for the work done by the invisible and to treat this contribution as unremarkable (even though a lot of the 'leg work' in any job is done by subordinates). Conversely, instrumental intimacy refers to how subordinates need to ensure that their labour is not made use of in ways that would greatly increase the time and energy needed to perform it. To enable an adequate prediction of how such a situation might evolve, therefore, subordinates need to know the dominant and anticipate what

his or her needs might be and how these might impact on the subordinate's own work. This is why, in many organizations, people become very attuned to the 'mood' the boss is in. Instrumental intimacy also encourages dominant groups and individuals to exploit their relationships with subordinates because they are aware of the subordinate's vigilance with respect to their needs, emotions and whims. For example, Dick and Nadin (2011) show how owners of micro businesses in the care sector were able to persuade poorly paid staff to perform duties more consonant with higher-value (and higher-paid) work by drawing on their 'friendship' bonds.

Instrumental invisibility also relies on the work of subordinates becoming taken for granted, so that it is performed in ways that do not draw attention to it. The converse is true for high-value work performed by dominants. The management consultant, for instance, with his or her smart business suit, briefcase, air of confidence and overall demeanour calls attention to his or her work and persona (see Sinclair, 2005) in a way that a cleaner or caretaker does not. These latter categories of worker become taken-for-granted background features in workplaces precisely because their work is invisible – it calls no attention to itself or the workers performing it. Furthermore, these workers are expected to maintain their invisibility to the extent that to call attention to themselves or what they do would be considered transgressive. It is invisible work, in short, which enables those in more powerful positions to be visible, because they do not have to be preoccupied with the mundane details of productive activity which are actually critical to its operation.

I suggest, in an extension to Lengermann and Niebrugge's argument, that another reason why invisible work lacks value is because its recognition would call attention to the essential fragility of visible work, especially immaterial work (Dick and Collings, 2014). There are, I suggest, two elements to this. First, as Lengermann and Niebrugge (1995: 32) argue, 'The calling of attention makes the world less taken-for-granted, more subject to intrusions of the problematic, because the very statement of what is done implies the possibility that things could be otherwise'. From the perspective I am developing, the value of visible work derives from its apparent direct link to the bottom line, which means that individuals need to be seen to be doing something that can be quantified and evidenced. In an era where skills in the sense of 'craft' are no longer as relevant, quantifying and evidencing this visibility becomes difficult and precarious. The visible worker relies on proxies of quantification and evidence, such as working full-time and long hours; behaving in line with corporate objectives; achieving the outcomes that are highly valorized in the organization; and, critically, catching and courting the attention of those able to make favourable decisions about the visible employee. This visible work relies on so-called 'soft skills' – the ability to project the requisite personality and the communicative style that is seen to be the signifier of the 'good' employee

(Warhurst et al., 2017). In this sense, then, the worker lacks protection: unlike the traditional craft worker whose skills were his or her own and whose quality could easily be judged, the visible workers' skills can be easily replaced with those of another. In this context 'personality' becomes the defining feature of the valuable worker (Hanlon, 2017).

This is what 'calls attention' to visible work and furnishes it with a higher value than invisible work. But this process by its nature renders this type of work precarious because its outputs cannot be guaranteed. If I argue that the work I have done to build a relationship with a particular client is what has enabled my law firm to net a prestigious account, for example, then I have to be able to do this repeatedly if my reputation and value are to be maintained – but I might not always be successful at doing this even when I put lots of effort into such relationship building. While the financial and symbolic profits of the type illustrated in this example are highly valorized outcomes in many types of high-status and particularly immaterial work, they are also transient and unstable, rendering the individual pursuing them vulnerable. Second, therefore, is the proposition that the visibility of high-value work is inherently risky because it exposes the visible individual as the potential cause of any failure as well as success. Those who enjoy very high status are also increasingly accountable, especially to shareholders or others with financial interests in an organization (see Dick and Collings, 2014). To maintain a sense of invulnerability and organizational centrality, therefore, more powerful individuals and groups need to maintain the sense that their work is important and attributable to their skills and abilities by maintaining the invisibility of the background work supporting this achievement (e.g. the office cleaners, the administrative assistants or technicians).

Visibility is, therefore, the hallmark of the contemporary concern with the bottom line, and is not only obtained by doing things which bring financial gains, prestige and honour to the person or the organization, but also by acting in ways that call attention to the person's centrality to and importance within the organization which include working full-time or ideally long hours; being seen to act in ways that make the organization look good to outsiders; and being good at showcasing achievements in meetings and other interactions in which performance is being evaluated by powerful others. Highly valued communicative behaviours, as I have outlined above, are more likely to be possessed by the middle classes and are interpreted as achieved skills. But visibility also produces vulnerability and insecurity for those individuals who seek it, and this perhaps explains why many powerful individuals seem to be addicted to working long hours (see Padavic et al., 2019) and to keeping work as the central element of their *raison d'être*. Vulnerability compels the need to demonstrate centrality to the achievement of the bottom line.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I have presented a series of arguments that seek to subvert the idea that job requirements, the core carriers of *political* assumptions about how work should be enacted, are determined by the nature of particular jobs. Instead, I have argued that job requirements are the products of how jobs are designed by powerful groups to enable them to meet their goals and objectives. Job requirements are also products of historical processes of occupational or professional closure whereby members of such groups have sought to protect their jurisdictions and interests by insisting that entrance to such occupations or professions is limited to those who possess certain educational or experiential credentials. From this perspective, the problem is not simply that job requirements are gendered, but that they reflect the imperatives of the capitalist mode of production, specifically, the need to make a *visible* contribution to the organization's capacity for growth, via the acquisition of financial and symbolic profit.

I completed the chapter by examining and theorizing the role of visibility in the social production of occupational value, arguing that the value attaching to particular roles is a consequence of their visibility, but a visibility that relies on the work of supporting roles remaining invisible. Visibility is an outcome that enables individuals to acquire significant symbolic profit but is also part of an ongoing dynamic whereby it has to be constantly re-achieved to sustain its power, thus rendering the visible individual highly vulnerable. As the visible work to maintain their visibility they become trapped by the compulsion to continually prove their centrality to the workplace – a situation which, as I will show in the next chapter, is strongly related to the production and maintenance of a moral order (see Chapter 3) which underpins the persistence of the differential value attaching to particular roles and occupations.

5. Power, visible work and moral order

In the last chapter, I laid the foundations for the empirical chapters that now follow by unpacking some of the processes that, I have argued, underpin the differential valuation of occupations, jobs and roles in contemporary society. In doing so, I challenged the idea that job requirements, the carriers, producers and reproducers of gender and other inequalities, are neutral and inevitable requirements of work determined by the 'nature' of jobs. Job requirements are not neutral – they are the outcomes of political processes and reflect not only the interests of men as a group but also, more critically, the imperatives of capitalism and the effects of historical and ongoing occupational and professional closure. Job requirements furnish particular jobs and the occupations and professions within which they are located with value, and I argued that this value is closely related to the visibility of the work done within these jobs and its apparent centrality to the generation of financial, symbolic and reputational profit. I then spent some time theorizing visibility and how its relationship with invisible work is what enables it to maintain its value whilst, at one and the same time, rendering visible workers highly vulnerable (in a psychological sense). This vulnerability, I argued, is perhaps one explanation for the remarkable persistence of the idea that jobs have a nature which demands certain attributes and requirements of employees, particularly the need to work full-time. This is because it compels the vulnerable individual to continually prove their centrality to the organization by remaining visible, a compulsion that is exacerbated by the increasing immateriality of work in the contemporary era. In this chapter, I now want to extend this theorization by developing and empirically exploring how work centrality as a dominant feature of life in contemporary workplaces is generative of a moral order that both underpins the persistence of the idea that jobs have a nature which determines their requirements but which also potentially provides the basis for the potential disruption and transformation of this idea.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, I develop the argument, previewed in Chapter 4, that work in itself is a major and significant dimension of moral order in the contemporary world. Exploring this issue using Snyder's (2016) concept of thin moral order, I focus particularly on the symbolic value that attaches to full-time working and how this is seen to be a sign that an individual is a 'real' worker or professional. Having set this broad scene, I move on to present some data from a research project I conducted in 2005, examining

the implementation and management of part-time working in operational policing. In this part of the chapter, I excavate how part-time working is seen to breach the moral order of policing through its transgression of some deeply taken-for-granted ideas about time use in policing, including that officers lower in the organizational hierarchy should not be able to 'choose' when to work; that police managers have the right to control the time of subordinate officers; and that individuals should be willing to remain at work for as long as is necessary to complete the tasks assigned to them during the course of their duty. The role that these ideas play in the development of beliefs about what constitutes appropriate moral conduct in the context of police work is identified and discussed along with their influence on the subject positions they offer to individual police officers.

WORK AND MORAL ORDER

Working carries its own moral force in society and has done for centuries, but its current cultural significance is unique to the contemporary era (Snyder, 2016; Wadel, 1979). Work for most individuals in the Western world signifies something that *has to be done* to enable individuals to earn a living (Clair et al., 2008). We see work as distinct from home and from leisure activities which, in contrast, represent spaces where we do things we actually want to do (though this is itself a debatable and contested idea). Most pertinently, what we generally classify as 'work' is activities that we are paid to do. Because work is seen to be something that we *have* to do in order to earn money, and because if we are paid for doing something then we are legally contracted to do it, paid work is considered a moral obligation for individuals occupying the contemporary world. This moral dimension of work stems not only from the contractual status of paid labour but also from the notion that we should work because we need to make a direct contribution to the society we live in or, to use Wadel's (1979), phrase, to be members of the 'moral community'. The moral force of paid work is illustrated in how individuals who do not work and are in receipt of welfare benefits are often represented by certain factions of the media and by society more generally as 'scroungers' or 'shirkers', connoting the idea that worklessness, when associated with support from the state, represents an active choice not to make such a contribution and, from a moral perspective, an inappropriate or faulty choice. It is also illustrated in how we respond to co-workers who we feel are not 'pulling their weight'. Working in itself is, therefore, a signifier of one's importance in society; as a dominant site of moral evaluation it provides individuals with a sense of self-worth and identity or a positive subject position (Snyder, 2016).

Not all paid work confers social value and worth however. Work that is classed as 'dirty' along one or more dimensions is often stigmatized, and

the stigma carries over to individual employees (Dick, 2005; Hughes, 1958). For instance, work which can be considered intractably dirty inasmuch as individuals have no choice but to do such work, for example rag pickers in Mumbai, India, who have to engage in physically dirty work (such as picking waste from open drains) in order to make a living, are stigmatized by the taint attaching to this work, and recognize that they are seen as being at the bottom of the social order (Shepherd et al., 2021). Some paid work is seen as shameful and degrading such as sex work or drug trafficking (Askew and Salinas, 2019; Benoit et al., 2018) and individuals performing such work often do so covertly, out of sight and mind of society. In the contemporary world, work which has no obvious social or financial benefit to society also lacks value and is therefore seen to be morally dubious. Public relations, for instance, may be seen to possess criteria that prevent it from being categorized as a 'real' job, perceived as easy, enjoyable and not requiring much in the way of trust from either clients or employers (Tsetsura, 2010). Such perceptions influence the identities of individuals in such occupations who often feel undervalued and stigmatized.

Many types of women's work are, interestingly, seen as highly morally commendable (such as care work) yet nonetheless lack value (with respect to the status and the pay associated with the work). Hence, the relationship between the morality of work and the value of that work is not straightforward. One reason why occupations such as care work lack status and economic value, yet are seen as highly commendable from a moral perspective, is that such work is seen to be something one should be willing to provide without remuneration, understood more as a calling than as a job. It would be considered morally dubious if, for instance, we wanted to be paid for helping or caring for a friend or relative in need. It seems, therefore, that one of the parameters we use for evaluating the moral worth of work in general terms is whether it is considered to be something that we would not be obligated to do were it not for the fact that we are paid to do it.

We can therefore understand work in its broadest sense as a major dimension of moral order in contemporary societies, where moral order refers to how societies self-regulate through implicit and tacit (i.e. taken for granted) understandings of what constitutes proper and improper behaviour, communicated to us through discourses of work. Work is seen to be one element of 'proper' conduct – it is what people *should* do but, as outlined above, only particular types of work are considered to be morally worthy.

Snyder (2016) differentiates between thin and thick aspects of moral ordering, where thin moral ordering refers to the extent to which we attach meaning to what we do as workers, making global judgements about whether our work might be considered good or bad. For instance 'real work' is often defined as work that occurs within organizations, is paid and is directly connected to economic productivity (Clair et al., 2008). He contrasts this with a thicker

moral ordering whereby the workplace actually shapes our identities by conferring social and moral status to us on the basis of the actual work we perform and, therefore, specific workplaces and occupations possess their own unique moral orders. Both thin and thick aspects of moral ordering are important for understanding the value attaching to particular roles, jobs and occupations. Some jobs for instance, as we have seen in previous chapters, are not culturally considered 'good' or 'ideal' jobs if they are part-time, based in the secondary labour market or involve working for yourself as a sole trader. This does not mean that individuals automatically internalize such cultural mores but nevertheless, individuals performing this type of work are often aware of the moral judgements attaching to their work and they can struggle to make sense of this in ways that are not damaging to their self-worth and self-esteem. With respect to the thicker aspects of moral ordering, as I will show in this chapter, working part-time in a context where full-time work is the norm, and particularly in professional contexts, can confer much disapprobation to the employee because she is seen to be breaching various moral codes which are used to make evaluations of whether someone should be considered a 'good' employee.

Because of the assumed relationship between time and productivity discussed in Chapter 4, the full-time work schedule as a ubiquitous signifier of this relationship, is a dominant parameter of thick moral order in most organizations. As mentioned in previous chapters, Blair-Loy (2001) refers to the expectation that individuals should be willing to work long hours as a material manifestation of a 'work devotion schema' that has its origins both in 17th-century Protestant ideals of work as a 'calling' and religious duty, the so-called Protestant work ethic (Weber, 1905) and in more historically recent secular ideas linking work devotion to a sense of duty and responsibility. That it is powerful groups who are more likely to willingly enact such behaviour (i.e. working long hours) also explains why it acquires a moral force in organizations – it is seen to be critically important for the overall functioning of that organization and the society in which it is located (Cross et al., 2017). Paid work, and especially visible paid work, is widely understood as making a direct contribution to those indicators of a healthy and thriving economy such as GDP (gross domestic product) whereas the financial contribution of invisible work is much more difficult to ascertain (Carter, 2017). Nonetheless, even in low-status jobs, where working full-time does not carry the moral value that it confers to members of higher-status occupations, the full-time schedule carries its own particular moral force which goes beyond the social and economic value attaching to any particular role or occupation. Full-time work is culturally understood as 'real' work – a consequence of our organizationally driven society in which it is assumed that working for an organization is more socially valuable than working for oneself. Such beliefs derive from contemporary influences on the meaning of work based on the views of think-

ers such as Adam Smith. They were not dominant beliefs about work for the Ancient Greeks who believed that working for others was degrading (Clair et al., 2008). We have to remember, therefore, as outlined in Chapter 3, that nothing is forever: cultural norms (or discourses) and the power relations from which they are derived shift and change over time, sometimes very quickly.

The high social value attaching to full-time working perhaps explains why part-time work in both low- and high-status occupations is often stigmatized (see Epstein et al., 1999). Working part-time disrupts the idea that long hours and work centrality are essential elements of economic growth and prosperity. It threatens the symbolic order in which paid and full-time work are seen to be signifiers of a person's moral worth and overall social value and transgresses the boundary that separates work from private life, polluting the former with the taint of irrelevant domestic demands and concerns. The bottom-line ideology, therefore, relies for its reproduction and resonance on the willingness of individuals to accept work centrality as inevitable and natural, as a morally appropriate standard of conduct that is essential for the wellbeing and prosperity of everyone, not just the individual worker. Of course, the seductive appeal of this bottom-line ideology also depends on the symbolic and material profit that it brings to individuals who conform with the norms and the subjectivities offered through it. For individuals in high-status, highly paid jobs, the appeal of this ideology is understandable. However, for other individuals including those individuals (mainly women) working part-time in high-status occupations, and those for whom work centrality offers little other than degradation and relentless demands for time and energy, this ideology is likely to generate considerable ambivalence if not resistance. In the next section, I want to explore in some depth how full-time working, as one of the dominant parameters of thick moral order, has become infused with moral status through an empirical study of part-time working in policing. Prior to outlining the study and detailing some of the relevant findings, I first present a brief review of research into part-time working in general and, in particular, in the context of professional work.

PART-TIME WORKING

Working part-time[1] is generally undertaken mainly by women to enable them to manage the competing financial and care needs of a family. Part-time work lacks status and value in general terms, with many part-time jobs located in secondary labour markets (i.e. markets characterized by high turnover, low pay and low skill[2]) to enable employers to benefit from flexible scheduling and lower compensation costs. Over the last four decades, we have seen an increasing tendency for part-time work to be located in the primary labour market, dubbed as 'retention' part-time work by Tilly (1992). Here, organi-

zations unwilling for both practical and legal reasons to lose skilled, trained and experienced professionals and semi-professionals due to the exigencies of childbearing and child rearing, or longstanding health issues, offer part-time work as an alternative to resignation.

The numbers of individuals working part-time has increased steadily over time though with some recent decreases apparent across the European Union where the numbers of part-time workers have decreased from 18.7% in 2018 to 17% in 2022 (Eurostat, 2023b). In the UK in all sectors of the labour market, part-time work accounts for just over 27% of all employment. The numbers of individuals working part-time in different parts of the world is highly variable. For instance in Europe, in the Netherlands, 48% of employees work part-time compared to just over 10% in many Eastern European countries (Gascoigne and Kelliher, 2021). Part-time working can be considered to be voluntary (where a person actively chooses to work part-time) and involuntary (where labour market conditions provide no opportunities for full-time work). With respect to voluntary part-time work, the majority of part-time work in professional contexts is voluntary.

PART-TIME WORK IN THE PROFESSIONS

There has been a steady increase in the number of female professionals opting to work part-time at some stage in their careers. According to ONS data (2021) 22% of the UK population working in professional occupations now works part-time (Gascoigne and Kelliher, 2021). Research on the impact of professional part-time working in organizations has produced mixed findings. While there is evidence that some women experience higher levels of life and job satisfaction after reducing their working hours (Ginn and Sandall, 1997; Hall et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2002), other women experience considerable marginalization and career stasis (Durbin and Tomlinson, 2010; Lawrence and Corwin, 2003). Moreover, despite the fact that organizations often introduce part-time working apparently on the basis that this will improve female retention, there is very little research that has examined whether female retention is improved (Friede et al., 2008), although some studies have explored this issue indirectly by looking at whether access to family-friendly policies like part-time working can predict intention to quit (Grover and Crocker, 1995). However, there is evidence that some organizations do see part-time working as important in retaining top talent and, in some occupational contexts, are prepared to negotiate i-deals (idiosyncratic employment arrangements: Rousseau et al., 2006) to enable such staff to work reduced hours even in the absence of formal policy (Litrico and Lee, 2008).

Nonetheless, what is clear from research is that part-time working in some professional and semi-professional occupations can be difficult to manage,

with managers and co-workers complaining that the presence of part-time staff increases workloads and places burdens on managers who have to more carefully plan and organize work so that part-time workers may be satisfactorily deployed (Friede et al., 2008). This is suggestive that despite the official rhetoric propounding part-time working as an important tool for skills retention, this is not an outcome that is foremost in the minds of managers who have to accommodate such employees (Dick, 2015b). This is underlined by research which suggests that part-time working is suitable mainly for particular types of job, such as project work or support work, largely because these roles are temporally bounded and do not require much in the way of interdependencies with other staff (Friede et al., 2008).

In addition to these problems, part-time professionals themselves can experience significant marginalization and stigmatization (Cech and Blair-Loy, 2014; Epstein et al., 1999), often perceived to lack commitment and seriousness with respect to their roles. This perception translates into more material disadvantages, whereby part-time professionals may miss out on what Lawrence and Corwin (2003: 929) refer to as 'interaction rituals', which are defined as 'any routine (as opposed to extraordinary) interaction between two or more people that is vested with some symbolic significance'. Such routines could be meetings, briefings, team events or interviews through which professional identities are confirmed and reproduced. Because part-time employees do not work full-time hours, they may find that they are excluded from such rituals simply because these are scheduled during the part-timer's absence. For instance in police work, the focus for the empirical sections below, team briefings usually occur when officers arrive at work for a scheduled tour of duty, such as a shift from 6am to 2pm. Part-time officers often work hours which involve arriving later in the day and hence they cannot attend such briefings. Research into the responses of part-time professionals suggests that they deal with their marginalization and stigmatization in a number of ways, from attempting to disguise their part-time status referred to by Epstein et al. (1999) as 'passing', through to not disclosing their part-time status to clients or colleagues with whom they do not work directly.

The empirical data upon which the sections below draws was obtained from a funded study into part-time working in policing in three metropolitan police forces in the UK, conducted in 2002. Although the data from this study is therefore quite old, the situations it captures continue to characterize part-time working in professional contexts and I would therefore argue that the theoretical arguments drawn from them are valid for today as well as for the time period in which the data were collected.

Part-time working was introduced into policing in 1992, and prior to this time was not allowed in operational police work. Its introduction followed a successful legal challenge from a policewoman who had been refused the

option to work part-time after the birth of a child which prevented her from continuing as a full-time officer. Since that time, part-time working has enjoyed a steady take-up in police forces with 9% of officers now working part-time, the vast majority of which are women (Hargreaves et al., 2018).

Data for the study were collected from interviews with triads of officers at 17 operational police units and seven specialist police units within three participating forces (eight units per force). Each triad consisted of a part-time officer; a colleague of that officer and the part-timer's manager. This design was chosen in order to capture the multiple perspectives on the enactment of part-time work that have been identified in extant scholarship and to enable a better understanding of how these perspectives might be influenced by the specific context in which part-time working is enacted.

The data were analysed using a variety of techniques and from a variety of perspectives, including an examination of managerial perspectives on part-time working (Dick, 2004); the effects of part-time working on the identities of part-time professionals (Dick, 2015a); and the effects of part-time working on organizational efforts to maintain the credibility of the idea that part-time working is a critical tool for female retention rather than, as seems to be the case in some professions, a means of avoiding legal challenges under the sex discrimination act (Dick, 2015b).

Over the years of reviewing and revisiting the data, however, it struck me more and more that the 'problems' with part-time working that were enumerated by research participants in the study, most of which mirrored findings in the extant literature outlined above, were actually consequences of historically designed structures and work processes that were seen as necessary, unassailable and, critically, morally obligated. They are seen, in other words, to be necessitated by the 'nature' of policing. To illustrate these claims I am going to focus on complaints about part-time working that were made by many participants to the study, but prior to this I will outline the temporal and material organization of policing in operational units.

THE ORGANIZATION OF POLICE WORK IN OPERATIONAL UNITS

In common with all other police forces in England and Wales and with others across the world, operational policing is characterized by reactive, demand-led work. Calls to the police from the public are taken via staff in specialist control rooms who then contact officers in relevant geographical units to answer the calls. In addition to responsive operational police units which deal directly with publicly generated demands, there is a large number of specialist operational departments dealing with such issues as serious crime, child and family protection, firearms, surveillance and, increasingly, crime prevention. Such

departments receive calls for service via referral systems. In the three police organizations that participated in the current study (which I will subsequently refer to as Forces 1, 2 and 3), each operational policing unit and some of the specialist units studied were staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week and 52 weeks of the year, by up to five groups of officers (known colloquially as 'shifts', 'reliefs' or 'blocks') working a rotating shift system, thus ensuring continuous or near continuous cover. Officers within each group work the same temporal pattern, which is illustrated in Figure 5.1. In specialist units, there is much less requirement for shift work, with many departments operating with standard 9am–5pm schedules with evening or weekend work required in some units.

Standard work practices that characterize operational units include:

The shift briefing which occurs when officers arrive on duty. This is usually conducted by the officer in charge of the shift (typically a police sergeant) and involves the whole shift and the allocation of specific tasks to individuals or pairs of individuals within the shift.

Individualized workloads: while officers might work together with particular partners, any work generated by their activities, for example writing reports about crimes or arrests, interviewing a potential offender or a victim and associated bureaucracy, will generally be undertaken by individuals and any paperwork completed will often be submitted for checking to the sergeant.

No handovers: work that is not completed by the end of a particular shift is not handed over to the incoming shift – it is expected that individuals will remain on duty to complete their work before leaving for home.

While, of course, there are numerous and varied tasks that are undertaken in the course of an operational shift, the processes outlined above provide the temporal and obligatory framework within which all of these activities are completed. And, as I will now go on to show, it is this framework that constitutes the moral barometer through which the conduct of self and others is calibrated and evaluated.

COMPLAINTS ABOUT PART-TIME WORKING AND THE NATURE OF THE MORAL ORDER IN OPERATIONAL POLICING

In order to excavate the moral basis of the full-time work norm in this context, I explored the data for 'complaints' about part-time working, whereby actors oriented to this mode of working were seen as lacking legitimacy. Complaints were identified by examining places in the interview whereby actors oriented

Shift 1							
Week	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
1	E	E	L	L	N	X	X
2	X	X	E	E	L	N	N
3	L	L	X	X	E	E	N
4	N	X	L	L	E	E	X
5	X	N	N	L	L	E	X
Shift 2							
Week	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
1	X	L	N	X	N	E	E
2	E	E	L	L	N	X	X
3	N	N	E	E	X	X	L
4	L	L	E	E	X	X	N
5	N	X	X	L	L	E	E
Shift 3							
Week	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
1	N	X	X	L	L	E	L
2	L	L	N	N	X	X	E
3	E	E	L	L	N	X	X
4	E	E	N	X	L	L	X
5	L	L	E	X	X	N	N

KEY: E = Early Shift (6am to 2pm) L = Late Shift (2pm to 10pm) N = Night Shift (10pm to 6am)

X = Rest Day

Figure 5.1 Example of the five week rotating shift system in an operational unit

to events and activities as problems that were created by part-time working. Specifically, I closely examined the transcripts for instances where part-time working was seen as breaching temporal and organizational norms and obli-

gations, which I inferred from how participants provided explanations for why they believed part-time work was not appropriate for policing work.

From an analysis of the various complaints made about part-time working, I identified three sets of moral concerns that underpinned these complaints: temporal equity; the sanctity of managerial authority; and commitment to a public service ethos.

Temporal Equity: Working a 'Fair' Share of Unsocial Shifts

Complaints related to temporal equity were based on the idea that part-time working disrupts intra-group equity. Such complaints were justified on the basis that in a context where working unsocial hours and not always being able to take annual leave when desired are standard conditions, no individual should be on the receiving end of preferential treatment with respect to them. Yet part-time work was perceived as breaching this principle because part-time officers have some say in how they will work their scheduled hours. This differs from the command-and-control approach to management where full-time officers are allocated to shifts by managers based on estimates of how many officers are required for that particular shift:

> The biggest problem I perceive in relation to part-time working is that there's probably a little bit of selfishness in it on the part of some of the individuals in that they want to choose when they want to work. That's the big problem that we have to overcome. There is this 'Well, I can come in on this day', but it might not necessarily suit the organization. And from my experience people, you know, seem to think that they're being discriminated against if they can't do just what they want. At the end of the day we've got to manage and meet demand. It would be nice to have a part-time worker and say to them that you'll never have to work a shift or late turn. (Manager, Force 1)

In this second extract, a manager alludes to the issue of unfairness with respect to part-time working:

> Quite often, when people come to me about working part-time, they'll be very personally based requests. Their [preferred] shift system will have been designed around the family. And I have to drag them into the middle ground and say, well, how will your colleagues feel if they see you doing all these day shifts and they're in, in the middle of night, working in the town centre? So I've had to sort of negotiate with them to find that middle ground. (Manager, Force 2)

Thus, as Zerubavel (1979) argues, fairness is a critical dimension of the moral order in organizations in which employees routinely work unsocial hours; a dimension tied to our cultural conceptions of the qualitative difference between different portions of the day, week and year (Durkheim, 1915). Even

though all officers are expected to work some portion of the 24-hour day, this is not a requirement that is understood in any uniform sense. Rather, having to work the less preferred portions of the days and weeks involved is considered especially morally worthy. While the notion that all staff should work unsocial hours is prevalent in organizations operating continuous coverage, it is also acknowledged that certain categories of staff are more likely to welcome working such hours (such as younger men) and hence how particular individuals are evaluated with respect to this temporal requirement often depends both on the social category occupied and the extent to which this category is seen to be central to the individual's identity. For example, a woman with children who does not work her fair share of unsocial hours may be judged less harshly for this than a single man would be (see, for example, Kondo, 1990). This issue does not, however, appear to have influenced how the manager above views part-time working, as he emphasizes that every individual should be willing to work unsocial hours. His response here also draws on the idea that minority groups should not have more 'rights' than majority groups, which has been identified in studies of backlash against social movements such as feminism (Prasad and Mills, 1997). Thus in the context of police work, from a manager's point of view, all officers should receive equal treatment no matter what their individual circumstances might be.

The data also suggest that the equity issue with part-time work in the policing context is not simply about working a fair share of unsocial hours. What seems to be the issue is that part-time working in policing involves a *negotiation* between the manager and the part-timer regarding the number and scheduling of the hours to be worked. Hence the equity issue appears to be related more to the autonomy individuals have with respect to their working hours with the full-time schedule generally a non-negotiable requirement in policing as it is in many other occupations. Hence it seems that for some full-time staff, part-time working represents a perk that is not available to all, though this is not an accurate view as part-time work is available to all staff and carries with it a reduction in wages and pension contributions. Nonetheless, this issue is nuanced, inasmuch as the idea of part-time working as a perk is likely to be significant largely in occupations, like policing, where choice about how many hours to work is generally unavailable and applies particularly to working *less* than standard hours. In fact in many professional organizations, and certainly in senior roles within the police service, working *more* hours than standard is a signifier of professional autonomy and is something many senior officers choose to do despite not receiving any additional remuneration for doing so. Hence it seems that the moral significance of working hours relates less to how many hours are worked, and more to whether this number is understood to be determined by personal choice rather than by organizational diktat.

All of this is suggestive that the value that attaches to particular roles and occupations is predicated at least partly on the extent to which the worker is perceived to have autonomy over when and how much time to devote to work. The greater the autonomy the individual is perceived to have in this respect, the higher the value of the work. From a moral perspective, autonomy with respect to working hours is seen to be acceptable when individuals choose to put more effort into their roles by working long hours, but less so if this is used to negotiate working fewer hours than standard. This evaluation is of course dependent upon the individual's location in the organization's hierarchy, with disapproval of working fewer hours than normal more likely to attach to lower-ranking than higher-ranking members of staff. With rank comes an acceptance of rights and privileges with respect to time spent at work. The fact that many senior individuals in many organizations choose to work more hours than scheduled is, for me, related to the visibility that working long hours affords, though this is not to deny that senior employees may be extremely busy or that working long hours is often necessitated by high workloads. Even so, as a friend who is a senior manager in an organization commented to me recently, 'you feel as if you're a layabout if you say you haven't worked loads of hours', illustrating perhaps that long working hours also furnish individuals with symbolic profit and moral status – a badge of honour.

The Sanctity of Managerial Authority

Within policing, relationships between managers and subordinates are highly formalized and, for the lower ranks, it is accepted that managers have the right to dictate many elements of the employee's work, most especially with respect to the control of the employee's time. It is, for example, within a police manager's rights under formal and legal police regulations, to command officers to remain on duty or return to duty should this be deemed necessary, for example in the event of a public disturbance or a major incident of some kind. These managerial rights are woven firmly into what we might call the 'interaction order' (Goffman, 1983) of policing, where the interaction order refers to routinized and patterned modes of interacting with others. In the police service, for instance, the interaction order reflects the hierarchical structure and culture of policing with individuals expected to defer to managerial authority on all matters connected to the performance of the role. For some officers who participated in this study, the move to allow part-time working in the police service represented a further erosion of this order that has been developing for some time, as illustrated in the following extract:

> Police managers now have to manage [not just command] operational police officers: it's part of their role to try and develop them [operational officers] to take

> on a responsibility for their welfare and to actually relate to their staff. But I think that you've got 170 years of militaristic kind of [command] structure overseeing that. It's only in the last 10 to 15 years we've changed the way in which we manage in the police service. You don't get rid of that baggage overnight. (Focus group member, Force 3)

Some participants claimed that because of this cultural shift, police managers no longer felt able to make logical and sensible operational decisions relating to, for instance, the numbers of officers required to staff a particular shift as they were frightened of falling foul of the Sex Discrimination Act if they did not allow a part-time officer to work the pattern of hours they preferred. All of this created a great deal of frustration and anger within the participant groups involved in this research, and some participants felt that part-time staff now had too much power and were able to push the organization into submitting to their personal and individual requirements, rather than to the requirements of the job.

What these issues reveal is that managerial power, no matter how much disliked or resisted by subordinate staff in organizations, is taken for granted as a natural prerogative for managerial staff in many organizations. Part-time working, therefore, when requested to enable a member of staff to meet their personal requirements, can be seen to be a breach of both the moral and interaction order in many organizations as it passes power (in the form of control over time) to individuals lower in the hierarchy.

This offers us some insights into the role that the control of time plays in the production and reproduction of thick moral order in the workplace as well in the differential valuation of jobs and occupations. Where individuals have much autonomy with respect to the use of their own time at work, this can be considered a marker of status, but only if the individual is able to do this within the context of a corporation or organization that employs and pays individuals to work there. Individuals who organize their own time through self-employment may acquire status through the nature of the work that they do, but not automatically from the control of their own time. A key process in all of this is power (in its sense as a personal attribute) and its symbolic meaning as well as material effects. Powerful individuals are expected and are seen as entitled to be able to make decisions that suit them, including how to use their own time as well as that of others, but less-powerful individuals are not expected to be able to do this and are not seen as entitled to do so. Hence, one of the reasons why part-time working appears to attract so much stigma may be related to the fact that it breaches a moral code in which individuals who are perceived to lack power are also perceived to be acting illegitimately if they are allowed to have control over elements of their work (particularly time) that are seen to be the rightful domain of the more powerful. It is illustrative of

how the social (and moral) order is often highly legitimate even when groups that are in the lower reaches of that order do not enjoy the privileges and advantages of those who are higher (Bourdieu, 1984).

Commitment to a Public Service Ethos

Thus far, the complaints about part-time working in the policing context discussed above centre on issues around the equity of working time, particularly related to working unsocial hours and on the sanctity of managerial authority with respect to perceived rights for controlling the time of others. Another set of complaints about part-time working, however, was focused on how part-time work disrupts some of the standard processes characterizing operational policing, specifically related to the lack of handover procedures or protocols. As mentioned above, it is expected that if an officer is 'on a job' at the close of their shift, they will remain on duty to complete that job no matter how long that might take. One of the interesting issues about this process in the policing context is how the quantity of additional hours an officer might have to put into finishing a job is often taken as a signifier of their occupational commitment rather than as incentivized by a generous overtime payment scheme; a practice that is typical in male-dominated and particularly manual occupations (Walby, 2010). Because part-time officers work schedules that are specifically tailored to enable them to meet their domestic commitments, working overtime is not something that part-time officers want to do, though they will often do it if they are commanded to do so. Nonetheless, the perception of many colleagues of part-timers interviewed for this study was that part-time staff could not be relied upon to complete their jobs and, in fact, they believed that the temporally bounded nature of part-time work in an operational shift was a major problem:

> [With] this job, you could come on duty at 2 o'clock and get a job and you could still be dealing with that job at 12 o'clock [at night], eleven hours later. I don't think with part-timers, you … They can't afford to stay on the streets to do a job … it's getting passed onto other people, who aren't happy because they're dealing with somebody else's work. Plus the continuity of the actual job itself is lost and the quality of the job is lost. (Colleague, Force 1)

> We have to have shifts that are there obviously for the public. What are our major demand times? We need to have more officers on during those times. So [part-time officers] will probably want to work Monday to Friday days, or not work weekends, yet weekends are the busiest. Thursday to Sunday are our busiest times, or certainly Friday and Saturday. So if you're getting a lot of officers who don't want to work those times, you can't then meet the demand that the public require. So it isn't going to work. (Manager, Force 1)

The idea that part-time working is detrimental to enabling a job to be done 'properly' is a consistent finding in the literature on part-time working in the professions and semi-professions (e.g. Lee et al., 2002; Nentwich and Hoyer, 2013). As the extracts above illustrate, it is taken for granted that if officers are not available to complete their own individual work tasks, they are considered to be breaching the ethos of public service – they are simply not providing the level of service that is required by an organization such as the police service.

Yet, what we find if we drill down into this 'problem' of part-time working is that this is a product of the ubiquitous practice of individualized workloads; a practice that has evolved historically from times when most if not all employees worked the same amount of scheduled hours and therefore carried an equal amount of work. The problem with individualized workloads is exacerbated in occupations like policing which are service-centred and where employees are expected to respond to demands for service as and when these emerge, an often unpredictable feature of such work (Briscoe, 2007). Such work also often means that individual employees are given responsibility for particular 'clients' or 'services' on the basis that this will enable continuity of response – someone who knows either the client or the client's needs (or, in the case of the police, the particularities of specific demands that require a response, e.g. a burglary in someone's home).

Briscoe (2007) identifies three features of service work which explain why individualized caseloads emerge and persist. First, is the fact that service work is inherently interactive and therefore involves building a relationship with the service receiver. For instance, if your house is burgled and you talk to a police officer about this issue, you will inevitably build some sort of relationship with that officer, ideally one that involves trust and a belief in her or his reliability and skill with handling this type of offence. If multiple officers are involved in this process, this relationship-building process becomes more difficult. Second, is the fact that service providers are not homogeneous in their approaches to delivering services and different service providers form different types of relationships with different service receivers. Each service provider will have a unique modus operandi and this strongly influences the service receiver's expectations of how *all* members of the organization might be expected to act. Finally, when a relationship develops between a service provider and a specific receiver, the provider will inevitably acquire lots of knowledge, often complex and tacit, of that receiver, including the receiver's interaction style; their demeanour; their mode of expression; and, ideally, what the receiver needs from the service interaction. All three features account for why, in many organizations, including the police, handovers or handoffs between service providers are actively discouraged and seen as difficult and potentially harmful.

Many of the participants interviewed for this project believed that handovers were not possible due to the complexity of the information that would have to be conveyed to another officer and the length of time that it would take to properly convey this information. As a consequence, most of the operational part-time staff interviewed did tend to stay on duty to complete any jobs they were dealing with when their shift ended, but some resigned from operational units to take up less temporally demanding roles, precisely because of this issue. Obviously, however, if a part-time officer working in an operational unit has to be home to collect a child from a child-minder, working an indefinite number of extra hours in order to complete a specific task is not possible, and hence some colleagues of part-timers, as illustrated in the extract above, experienced situations where they did have to pick up work that was not completed and, as illustrated in the comments made in the extract above, found this frustrating.

Despite the complications associated with handovers, however, it is possible to design work so that handovers are facilitated (Briscoe, 2007). For instance, interactions between service providers and receivers can be routinized and standardized so that each party knows what to expect in advance. An example here might be what happens when you seek medical advice from a general practitioner (in the UK) which will generally involve making an appointment, talking to the medical practitioner about your issue and then referral on to a practitioner nurse or a specialist doctor elsewhere. Of course, standardization is neither possible nor feasible for every type of service encounter, especially those that relate to critical outcomes as is the case for medical work, but there are flexible ways of standardizing such work through the use of organizational-level procedures. For instance, medics in the units studied by Briscoe (2007) were expected to follow set procedures for examining and treating patients, but they could deviate from these procedures if they saw fit. However, such deviations were overseen by an organizational-level committee who reviewed the particular case and made evaluations of the necessity for and outcomes of such deviations, enabling the organization to learn from these situations. Finally, codifying knowledge with the use of technology can enable complex information to be passed from one service provider to another through, for instance, online portals which require the service provider to furnish details about particular clients or service encounters (Choudhury et al., 2020).

Inevitably, such processes take a lot of time to set up and they demand a lot of input from service providers if they are to work. Given that work demands are continually increasing across all types of industrial and public sector domains, it is obvious why such efforts lack popularity in many organizations. Indeed, if work demands are not managed to enable such procedures to be developed, all they will do is add to the work intensification that is now

endemic to organizations of all types across the world. Nonetheless, the fact that handovers *could* be done draws our attention to the point I have made repeatedly in previous chapters: jobs do not have a nature. They are designed to be performed in specific ways to meet the interests of powerful groups and it is these groups who ultimately determine whether changes that might facilitate the sharing and handover of work will be made.

Redesigning work to enable a move away from individualized workloads is also perceived by some employees as reducing their discretion and autonomy, and therefore impacting directly on their sense of professional identity (Briscoe, 2007). Such processes are also unlikely to appeal to individuals who value working on their own rather than in teams. Nonetheless, I would argue that what individuals value about their work emerges from rather than precedes their experiences with it (see Chapter 7), and hence if work was more often designed to incorporate shared workloads, it is highly likely that a lot of people would come to enjoy and value this way of working.

Finally, we must remember that not every full-time employee working in service organizations puts in the effort and time necessary to deliver these services to a high standard. In a project I did some years after my part-time working study, I conducted research focused on identifying the core competencies of operational police officers. The competency that was seen by nearly every participant as critical for the delivery of good service by police officers was level of engagement, defined as a rather intangible quality through which individuals demonstrated that they cared about what they were doing as well as about those receiving police services, and put effort into 'doing a good job'. Not every full-time police officer demonstrates high levels of engagement and, indeed, managers and colleagues who participated in my study into part-time work often commented about the high levels of engagement shown by part-time staff compared to some full-time staff:

> She's [the part-timer] absolutely superb. She does more work than some of the regulars. More than twice. She knocks some of the regulars into a cocked hat. She is so organized. She knows the pressures, she's lived with them for so many years. It's not easy for her, but then, she makes an effort and she organizes herself. (Manager, Force 2)

It seems, therefore, that the actual problem with part-time working is less that this disrupts and damages an organization's service ethos and more that the traditional methods for delivering such service are inflexible and non-transferable because they are designed to be completed by individuals, not teams. The time that part-timers contribute is not the problem – it is, rather, how work is organized.

THE ROLE OF OCCUPATIONAL WORTH AND VALUE IN THE MAINTENANCE OF FULL-TIME WORK SCHEDULES

Working full-time has become such a taken-for-granted norm in contemporary workplaces that in itself, it is a major axis of our occupational identity and feelings of self-worth: it offers us very positive subject positions. Working full-time, as I argued in the introduction to this chapter, constitutes a major element of thick moral order in all organizations and, as illustrated by the empirical data presented above, maintains its moral significance because of how it is tied into beliefs about what is appropriate with respect to workplace equity, to the status of the employee and to core ideas about the *raison d'être* of the occupation. Nonetheless, as I have also illustrated, all of these parameters of thick moral order lose their logical coherence when we interrogate what they mean in practice and how they are implicated in maintaining the value and status of various roles and occupations. In this final section of the chapter, I want to add further support to this idea by showing how closely tied the assessment of an individual's occupational worth is to the hours that they work, an evaluation which lacks any real sense when we examine what a 'contribution' at work actually means, as already outlined above.

A core idea in some of the literature on the work devotion schema (Blair-Loy, 2001) or, more simply, the tendency for long hours to be valorized in many organizations, is that it is one way of enacting masculinity. For example Kellogg (2012), in a study examining efforts to implement a reduced hours schedule for hospital doctors in the US, found that much of the resistance to this proposal came from medics who were committed to the idea of themselves as 'iron men', which she describes thus:

> '[G]o-to guys' with 'hairy balls' and 'nerves of steel' who were 'unflappable' under pressure. A macho demeanor was de rigueur: hair was to be closely cropped, scrubs were to be worn low on the hips, surgical caps and masks were to be left dangling around their necks long after they had left the operating room (OR), they were to stride fast during morning rounds and swagger in the evening, they were to keep their bodies well toned. Much of their conversation with other residents involved fantasized or actual sexual exploits of team members. They used battle and war metaphors repeatedly, talking about 'rescue missions' and 'victories' in the OR. (p. 1552)

While a somewhat extreme version of what Connell (2002) refers to as 'hegemonic masculinity', Kellogg's description of iron men is not dissimilar from other accounts in the feminist literature (e.g. McDowell, 1997). Nonetheless, it is not only men who are invested in long working hours: women embrace this idea as well (Blair-Loy and Cech, 2017), largely because

it 'creates a cognitive, emotional, and moral construal of work as worthwhile in the service of noble professional goals and inspiring organizations' (p. 22), especially for professional women without young or school-aged children. Effectively, therefore, working long hours upholds not only the moral order in organizations, but also the moral status of those employees who stand to gain symbolically from its maintenance.

Long working hours, therefore, are very closely associated with the maintenance of social order (the status hierarchy) in organizations, especially for staff in professional and senior roles. Such staff have much to gain from the maintenance of the moral order and also occupy the positions of power that enable this maintenance to continue relatively unchallenged. Even so, and in support of points I have made earlier about the heterogeneity of all groups, not every member of a powerful group will support the status quo and there are individuals who are prepared to challenge and contest situations that work to the disadvantage of less-powerful groups (Kellogg, 2009). With respect to embracing the bureaucracy that accompanies handoffs in service work, Briscoe (2007) argues that some workers are perhaps more dispositionally suited to standardized work which relies less on individual autonomy and discretion. But an alternative way of thinking about this issue is, as already mentioned, that the meanings that work has for us are tied to our adaptational responses to work – they do not precede our adaptation. I will develop this argument more fully in Chapter 7.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I have focused on how work and workplaces are significant sites of moral order in many societies. Moral order refers to the implicit and tacit rules, embedded in taken-for-granted practices like full-time working, which regulate the behaviour of individuals by conveying to them what is considered to be the right and wrong ways of living and being. Working in itself carries moral status because it is seen to be a civic duty and responsibility, an idea that goes back to the Ancient Greeks. Within contemporary capitalist societies, work is seen to be a moral obligation for enabling the growth of wealth and the enhancement of prosperity throughout the population.

Using Snyder's (2016) notion of thin and thick moral ordering, I argued that full-time working is one element of thin moral ordering, inasmuch as it furnishes individuals with social worth on the basis that they are making an appropriate and meaningful contribution to society. Thicker moral ordering pertains to how the actual work that is performed carries differential social and economic value. This element of moral ordering is highly context-specific but, in general terms, full-time working is seen to be necessary for jobs to be executed properly and adequately, and it is this element of moral ordering

which part-time workers are often seen as transgressing. Working full-time is, therefore, a major axis along which the moral worth of employees and their social value in general and within particular organizations is calibrated.

I argued that the moral value of full-time working is a manifestation of the bottom-line ideology and how it promotes the notion that work centrality is a normal, natural and desirable relationship between adults and the economy (Hanlon, 2017). This logic is underpinned by the idea that time and productivity are themselves unproblematically related to each other, a logic that was questioned and challenged in Chapter 4. I then went on to explore how work centrality is reproduced in organizations by considering how this is implicated in the way that individuals understand and ascribe meanings to time use in organizations. In particular, with the use of empirical data drawn from a study into operational police work, I showed how the 'problem' with working less than full-time hours has less to do with limited temporal availability (which is the dominant claim made by complainants) and more with how work tasks are organized on an individualized basis such that handing work over to colleagues at the end of a working schedule becomes very difficult, especially for those staff who cannot put in extra hours to enable work to be completed before they leave work for home. This is exacerbated by processes of work intensification which prevent individuals from thinking about how to organize their work in ways that better meet the needs of all involved and encourages instead a crisis mentality in which individuals never feel able to 'get on top' of their workloads (Perlow, 1999). In short, work centrality as a moral obligation is taken for granted as the correct response to work demands – an idea which masks the location of the actual source of the problem with handovers.

I completed the chapter by examining how the moral order functions to furnish employees who conform with its imperatives with symbolic and financial benefits which, understandably, they are unwilling to sacrifice. As I illustrated in Chapter 4, these symbolic profits are closely tied to how working full-time is one dimension of work visibility; an attribute that is increasingly valorized within organizations because it is widely understood to enable the achievement of the bottom line. I pointed out that despite claims that long hours or, to use Blair-Loy's (2001) term, the work devotion schema reflect masculinized values and behaviours, women also enact and reproduce this mode of conduct, especially those in senior and professional roles without young or school-age children. That it is women, and particularly younger women, who are less willing to do so due to the demands of young and school-age children explains why women on aggregate are disadvantaged with respect to status and wages in many organizations, but for me this is attributable less to organizational-level patriarchy and more to the effects of capitalist and contemporary modes of production.

In the next chapter, I want to explore how the moral order is not simply a site from which certain groups and individuals acquire and consolidate their social and moral status, and therefore social value. I want to argue that for those individuals and groups whose interests are not represented by conforming to the demands of the bottom-line ideology, such as employees working in occupations and roles that are invisible, classed as low skill or part-time, or employees who simply place more value on life beyond and outside of work, the moral order also represents a site of potential contestation, challenge and change to the bottom-line ideology and taken-for-granted time norms. As I will argue, such processes are not revolutionary; they are not heralding some massive social transformation or upheaval but they are potentially laying the foundations for changes to the moral order which, over time, may have significant effects.

NOTES

1. Part-time work refers to a work pattern considered to be lower than 'normal', where normal may be defined as 35 or 30 hours dependent on the agency compiling the data.
2. The classification of work as skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled is extremely problematic and contentious. See Chapter 4.

6. Contesting the moral order

In the last chapter, I argued that the persistence of the full-time work norm, and the consequent marginalization and stigmatization of voluntary part-time work is closely related to the moral order in society generally and within specific organizations. Full-time working is a major dimension along which the social and economic worth of particular jobs is evaluated. I argued that one of the reasons for its power to influence such evaluations is because full-time work is a key source of visibility – an attribute that is highly valorized in contemporary workplaces. I argued that working full-time and working beyond full-time hours are significant carriers of symbolic profit for individuals who gain status, identity affirmation and a sense of social worth from the enactment of this norm. I showed how the idea that working long hours is necessitated by the 'nature' of particular jobs can be questioned and problematized. I argued that such practices stem more from how jobs are designed so as to position individuals (rather than groups or teams) as primarily responsible for the fulfilment of the various tasks that comprise jobs, a situation that, as discussed in Chapter 4, is a further enabler of visibility. Some organizations have recognized that this issue is a major source of inflexibility and have made efforts to increase temporal flexibility by developing procedures and protocols which enable tasks to be distributed and shared across work groups consisting of individuals who may be working different patterns and numbers of hours. I argued that such procedures and protocols are likely to be resisted by those individuals invested in maintaining certain elements of their identity, particularly those who benefit financially and symbolically from more traditional forms of work scheduling.

In this chapter, I want to explore how the thick moral order of specific workplaces is not only a site at which the social worth and status of employees is enacted and reproduced but is also one at which parameters of social worth and value can be challenged by those employees who do not profit (symbolically or financially) from its prescriptions and regulatory effects. One consequence of this challenge is its exposure and disruption of the tacit logic which enables the full-time work norm to maintain its status as a natural, inevitable and taken-for-granted feature of work in the contemporary era. Again, using empirical material from my project looking at part-time working in the police, I illustrate this claim by showing that when the tacit logic supporting full-time working becomes available for scrutiny, it can be used to 'call attention' to invisible work and to generate the conditions for a more reflexive approach

to work design and time use more generally. This involves a problematization and reconsideration of how contributions to work in organizations are understood and evaluated. I excavate the material consequences of this challenge on particular working practices. I then explore the moral approbation that is associated with working full-time in jobs and occupations that are considered to be 'real' in a societal sense (see Chapter 5). Drawing on the data from my project on women's careers, I show how 'epiphanal events' (see below) can be productive of reflexive spaces within and from which women make active and informed decisions to recalibrate their priorities with respect to work. I explore how we might theorize such processes as productive of challenges and resistance to thinner elements of moral order; specifically, to the dominant discourse of work centrality and to notions of what counts as 'real' work.

THIN AND THICK MORAL ORDERING AND THE ROLE OF TACIT RULES OF CONDUCT

One very important feature of moral ordering, whether in its thinner or thicker aspects, is that the rules which shape our understandings of what is good and bad with respect to working are generally tacit and are seldom articulated. They form the background canvas against which individuals are seen (by themselves and others) either to be doing the right thing or doing the wrong thing; to be considered good or less good employees or as productive citizens making valuable and worthwhile contributions to the 'moral community'. Even though, as individuals we can relatively easily justify a negative moral evaluation of the paid work that others do or how they do it, we may find it difficult to explain the assumptions (or rules) from which this justification is drawn. For example, women with small children who work full-time can be seen as breaching the moral codes of motherhood which prescribe the importance of mothers being at home with small children and putting them and their needs before any others; an idea which many people would readily be able to draw upon if asked to explain their disapproval of a mother of young children working full-time. A full-time professional woman with young children and working additional hours may not, therefore, easily access the symbolic profits often associated with such behaviours because she is being judged to have breached the moral code of motherhood (Blair-Loy, 2001). Nonetheless, we might ask why it is assumed that mothers should be at home with their children? Why mothers and not fathers? What exactly are we saying will happen to children if mothers (rather than fathers or other carers) are not there for them? Do we have evidence to support any claims we might make here? These assumptions, if surfaced, could challenge the common-sense appeal of the 'good mother' discourse but are seldom surfaced because the discourse itself is so taken for granted. Nobody needs to explain why they think it is wrong for a mother with

young children to work full-time because we tend to accept the basic premise that young children need their mothers and this is such a taken-for-granted idea that we feel no need to explicate the assumptions supporting this premise.

In Chapter 3, I explored the production and reproduction of taken-for-grantedness and I drew attention to some critical issues that, I argued, require close scrutiny if we are to properly understand how some ideas develop the sort of prima facie acceptance illustrated in the discourse of 'good motherhood' outlined above. One of the ways that taken-for-grantedness works to produce the sense that the world 'is unproblematic until further notice' (Schutz and Luckmann, 1973: 3) is by relying on shared understandings of what is and is not considered to be normal and appropriate in any given social setting. I pointed out that this is contestable because shared understandings are not derived from any consensual view of reality but from the perspectives of those groups who have the power to promote particular versions of social reality as the definitive versions. For example, returning to the 'good mother' discourse, this is not a view of motherhood shared by all mothers. Some mothers do not want to be at home with their small children for a variety of reasons and some mothers cannot be at home with their young children for practical and financial reasons. Nonetheless, the dominant understanding of good mothers as those who put their families before their work is that which tends to hold sway largely because, I would argue, it serves the interests of powerful groups such as male professionals. This, therefore, raises our attention to the fact that everyday and common-sense presumptions are inherently gendered and classed not because they reflect any supposed attributes of these groups but because of how these presumptions work to the symbolic and material advantage of some groups more than others. For example, women who can afford to stay at home to look after their children due to the earnings of their husband are likely to be seen as 'putting their children first' in a way that a woman who has to work full-time for financial reasons cannot.

Nonetheless, it is because these presumptions carry moral implications for the individuals and groups who comply with the rules generated by them that they also become sites of contestation whereby individuals who cannot or will not comply with such rules surface, contest and challenge the assumptions from which they are derived. I am now going to move on to illustrate this process using more data from the project on part-time working outlined in the previous chapter.

CONTESTING THE MORAL ORDER OF POLICING

As explored in Chapter 5, part-time female officers fall foul of some elements of thick moral order in policing due to what is considered good versus bad conduct in the context of policing. Good police officers are those who accept

that managers have the right to make decisions about their temporal availability; who do not try to negotiate special temporal deals for themselves; and who accept that staying on duty to complete a job is an obligation that is critical for the provision of good public service. The complaints about part-time working I identified in Chapter 5 and briefly reiterated above, were seldom made directly to part-time officers themselves, though the vast majority of the part-time participants (95%) I interviewed were very aware of and sensitive to how they were perceived and evaluated:

> You get negative comments [from colleagues], but in a jokey way, so if you were to speak to them about it, they would say, 'I'm only having a laugh and a joke.' It depends on what kind of person you are. I mean sometimes, you know, you take it to heart and you feel like … you know, you feel guilty. You know, 'I'm going home and I'm leaving you in the lurch. I've got to go home because I've got children…' but you're leaving somebody with your job then, you know. (Part-timer, Force 1)

Implicit in this account is the idea that a good colleague and, by inference a good police officer would not leave colleagues in 'the lurch'. Notable is the reported speech the participant uses: 'I've got to go home because I've got children' which can be seen as an attempt to morally mitigate her actions by locating the responsibility for them in the highly legitimate activity of childcare. What is not oriented to in this extract is that it is temporal organization itself that has generated both the perception that she is leaving the workplace early and that, in doing so, her colleagues are left with 'her job'. Hence part-time women were not only highly aware of these moral evaluations but also accepted the moral prescriptions underpinning them as entirely valid.

In line with much of the literature on the response of part-time professionals to the stigma they experience for working part-time, nearly half of the part-time women interviewed engaged in what Epstein et al. (1999) refer to as 'passing' and 'information control'. Passing involves attempts to hide or conceal one's part-time status by acts of commission (e.g. maintaining a full-time workload) or by using information control as acts of omission (e.g. failing to tell a client/customer/colleague that one is a part-time worker).

> The job must benefit because as a part-time worker … we're all good workers. You know, that we don't skive off at the drop of a hat. But the amount of times that we sort of work through our lunch is probably 99% of the time. I think as a part-time officer as well, I'm being given workloads in the same proportion really as everybody else, but I'm actually doing two hours less a day than everybody else. I was trying to put in as much work as everyone else because … it's like you were saying, 'I don't want to feel guilty'. I don't want them looking at me thinking, 'Gosh, she doesn't do half the work that we do'. (Part-timer, Force 1)

Passing, as described in the extract above, includes such elements as working through lunch; carrying a similar sized workload to full-time counterparts and fitting an essentially full-time workload into part-time hours. While passing was the most common strategy part-timers reported for managing the perception that they were negatively evaluated in work groups, this could take its toll on the officer's mental and physical wellbeing. In one case, for instance, the part-timer had applied for a less temporally demanding role as she felt she could not cope with the feelings of guilt she experienced through not being able to fulfil the temporal obligations expected in an operational response unit. There was a further case where the part-timer had decided to return to full-time working in a unit where the shift work was less onerous than in the operational response unit in which she was originally located. The overall consequence of passing is that the taken-for-granted status of the temporal norms and structures that generate the obligations part-time officers are perceived not to be meeting, is left intact as the individual bears full responsibility for the consequences of her 'lack' of availability.

Even so, as part-time participants reflected on these and other moral implications of part-time arrangements, they would frequently engage in defensive detailing (Drew, 1998; Jefferson, 1985) in which they made efforts to mitigate the morally transgressive features of part-time working. This was achieved by contesting some of the ideas or rules underpinning the complaints about part-time working, often by questioning and subverting their logic. Such participants were able to deconstruct this logic by utilizing a variety of alternative understandings about the 'nature' of police work and what this required from individuals. I identified four common patterns of contestation: (i) ever-availability does not necessarily signify good professional conduct; (ii) availability is not the primary criterion for judging a contribution; (iii) private time is as important as work time; and (iv) parental authority can trump managerial authority.

(i) Ever-Availability Does Not Necessarily Signify Good Professional Conduct

The idea of ever-availability is central to the routine enactment of the full-time schedule in policing because, as pointed out in Chapter 5, one dominant temporal expectation for police officers is that they will not hand over any unfinished tasks to the incoming shift when they have finished their own shift. This requirement is justified with reference to the 'nature of policing' which involves reacting to public demands for service as and when these occur. Failing to meet the requirement for ever-availability is not only, therefore, seen as consequential for the provision of 'good' public service but also for the occupation of the category – 'good' police officer and, by implication, the

demonstration of 'good' professional conduct. Part-time officers showed much sensitivity to this morally implicative consequence of their limited availability, which many resolved by attributing the motive for ever-availability not to professionalism but to financial incentives. These officers drew attention to the fact that one of the reasons they tended not to work beyond scheduled hours was because they would not receive overtime rates of pay until they worked more than 40 hours which meant that, unlike full-time officers, remaining on duty to complete tasks is financially disincentivized for part-time officers:

> I let it be known, that yes, all right, I'm not there, but then I'm not being paid to be there either. You know I'm only getting paid for when I'm working. (Part-timer, Force 2)

At first glance, this discursive tactic appears to subvert the idea that professionalism underpins the performance of ever-availability by implying that its enactment is motivated by instrumental not professional concerns. However, what is being contested by these participants is not the relationship between long hours and professionalism per se, but the idea that working long hours is the only signifier of its enactment. In drawing attention to the instrumental value of working beyond scheduled hours, part-time officers also implicitly contest the traditional conception of policing as a 'calling' or vocation – a conception that has been strongly linked to the masculine ethos that, it is claimed, pervades police occupational cultures across the world (Van Maanen, 1975; Waddington, 1999). Thus, while appeals to professionalism were implicit in many colleagues' and managers' complaints about the impact of part-time working on the provision of public service, here this idea is contested by uncoupling the enactment of professionalism from the enactment of ever-availability.

(ii) Availability is Not the Primary Criterion for Judging a Contribution

The majority of managers interviewed complained that part-time working was problematic in terms of providing adequate cover within particular schedules, either because part-time staff were not available on particular days, or for particular portions of the day. This complaint is premised on the notion that adequate staffing of schedules depends upon the *quantity* of officers or hours available rather than the *qualities* of particular officers; a principle that is common to staffing in bureaucracies operating continuous coverage (Zerubavel, 1979). This meant that if a part-time officer was present within a schedule, s/he was classed as part of the cover but was not providing as many hours as full-time staff. The dominant managerial response to dealing with this

situation often involved deploying the part-timer to jobs and tasks that were more temporally bounded but less professionally satisfying. One part-time officer who had experienced this managerial response and had been deployed to what she considered 'menial' tasks on returning to her unit part-time challenged the idea that the quality of public service is diminished by part-time working:

> I would imagine my colleague would say to you, 'It's okay working with a part-timer, but you can't follow the enquiry through to the end,' which is fair enough because say if I come on a Monday and I work until Wednesday and I don't work Thursday, Friday and they do Thursday, Friday, they'll finish it [the job] off. But they don't ever say, 'Well, them (sic) first three days (name) contributes such a hell of a lot that if she hadn't have done we wouldn't have got to the end result.' (Part-timer, Force 3)

As illustrated in this extract, the notion that availability should be the primary attribute for evaluating an officer's professional contribution within a particular schedule is contested, and the participant points instead to the criticality of skills and experience. Not only does this idea challenge the bureaucratic principle of *impersonalized* coverage (whereby officers are treated as essentially interchangeable units of cover) upon which scheduling is based, but undermines the notion that the quantity of time that is available for tasks is critical for the provision of a high-quality service. Instead, the participant constructs an argument in which it is *how* time is used that matters (see Nentwich and Hoyer, 2013 for similar arguments). Several participants including managers drew upon this alternative conception of time use when reflecting on the temporal contribution of part-time officers. For example, one manager who had complained about part-time working at the start of his interview later commented:

> but the other way of looking at it is I mean [you might have] 4 full-time people who you think aren't suitable for the job and you'd prefer the part-timer because they've got the skills and I'll get more out of them than these four are giving me in their 40 hours. (Manager, Force 2)

(iii) Private Time is as Important as Work Time

Although the vast majority of participants, whether full- or part-time, believed that the nature of police work necessitates the requirement for unsocial and lengthy working hours, many part-time participants invoked their parental

responsibilities to account for why they were not prepared to work as many hours as seemed to be expected of them:

> I don't want to go back on [response]. You just feel as though you're always at work, and not only that, you can be asked at a moment's notice to do overtime, and we get our rest days cancelled and it's like, well, 'tough' you know. But at the end of the day I want to be with my family and because my kids are my step children, I have to put more importance on gaining a family unit type thing, because it's harder when it's not your own children and I couldn't do that when I was having to work nights, especially on a weekend, because we only have them on certain weekends and if I was working nights on that weekend, my husband was under pressure to take the kids out of the house so that I could sleep, and it shouldn't be so because it's then affecting everybody you know, not just myself. (Part-timer, Force 3)

While in principle equity can be realized only if all officers work their share of unsocial hours, as discussed in Chapter 5, in the extract above the participant orients to the notion that individual differences generate different temporal needs and priorities to justify her unwillingness to work such hours. In doing so, the idea of parental responsibilities works as a 'strong' device (Galatolo and Drew, 2006) for morally mitigating her decision to avoid response work, as this is attributed to incumbency of the identity category 'parent' rather than 'police officer'. It also works to subvert the idea that time at work should be privileged above time at home. The idea of temporal equity, therefore, works to justify complaints about part-time working only where actors can be treated as effectively interchangeable units of cover. Once individual differences become a factor requiring consideration in temporal organization, the achievement of temporal equity is rendered complex and problematic.

(iv) Parental Authority can Trump Managerial Authority

As already discussed in Chapter 5, managerial authority in the police service has traditionally rested on a principle of command and control (Butler, 2000), understood as necessary for the management of a disciplined service. This principle is being eroded by newer ideas regarding more democratic authority relations (Silvestri et al., 2013), materially embedded in organizational policy on how requests for part-time working should be managed. As outlined in Chapter 5, this has resulted in the practice of negotiation between managers and part-timers with respect to the number and scheduling of the latter's hours. These developments work to challenge the traditional basis of managerial authority and were sometimes used discursively by part-time participants when accounting for their responses to managerial commands. For example, one participant from Force 2, a new mother, articulated the stress she experienced when a manager in her locale commanded the whole unit to remain on

duty following a particular incident in the town centre. After recounting her repeated attempts to ascertain whether she would be allowed to go home to see to her child, attempts that, in themselves, subvert the idea that officers should respond without demurral to managerial commands, she told me,

> I know everybody deserves warning [about needing to work extra hours] and should be told, but I think when you're part-time and you've got a baby, you need them to understand that little bit more that you do need notice sometimes. And when they're in a position like they were [on] Sunday when they could have given me plenty of notice but didn't, and even when I stressed that I needed to go home, they said, 'Well we can't say, cos we don't know how long you're gonna be'. Y'know things like that, and it ended up with me getting meself (sic) in a state to actually let me go home and sort me baby out. I just was very annoyed. (Part-timer, Force 2)

While the precarity of the participant's own position on the matter is illustrated in the hedging displayed in the extract, for example 'everybody deserves warning'; 'understand that little bit more'; 'need notice sometimes', the moral basis of managerial authority is contested by using private and domestic responsibilities and obligations to penetrate and puncture those generated by the temporal norms of policing. Here, the legitimacy of motherhood as a set of moral obligations trumps that of a disciplined police force where managerial authority is positioned as sacrosanct, furnishing this account with a strong, morally defensible and legitimate justification for the actions and reactions described.

As illustrated above, therefore, participants were able to mobilize alternative understandings of temporal availability, time use, temporal priorities and temporal demands to contest the thick moral order of policing. In doing so, these participants are effectively reconfiguring the tenets of moral order in ways that differ from the organizational norm. For many part-time women who participated in this study, work does not occupy a privileged position in the range of demands that configure their lives and they draw upon the 'good mother' discourse to legitimize this position. Nonetheless, they also refuse to accept the tacit accusation that work lacks importance in their lives. On the contrary, work is a significant element of their overall sense of self-worth, representing the thinner element of moral ordering. At the thicker level, however, they likewise refuse to accept that there is only one way to make a contribution at work and they actively and successfully disrupt the logic which links ever-availability to better or more effective performance, a logic that some managers also see as flawed and challengeable.

THE MATERIAL INFLUENCE OF ALTERNATIVE LOGICS OF TIME

Within the data I collected for this project, there were not only discursive challenges to the logic of ever-availability and the sanctity of managerial authority with respect to time use, but there were very small pockets of material transformations to some of the dominant work-based structures and processes that supported these logics. In three cases, for instance, the part-timer was allowed to work across a number of shifts rather than being allocated to one dedicated shift. In another case, the part-timer was deliberately partnered with more junior staff in a move away from completely individualized workloads.

These very small changes to the way that shift work was organized within operational police units were improvized responses to impasses occurring between managers and part-timers, whereby the latter refused to work in either a non-operational role or to accept a work schedule that did not suit their personal and work needs. Managers, on the other hand, were unwilling to push for their preferred solution to this impasse which could involve commanding the part-timer to work a particular schedule or to transfer to a different role. This reluctance was generated by fear that a part-timer could contest such decisions on the grounds of sex discrimination, potentially resulting in a grievance being lodged against the manager, which could be costly with respect to that manager's career. In the four cases of material changes to work scheduling outlined above, the managers concerned justified their unusual responses to the impasses existing between themselves and the part-timer by drawing on some of the contestations to the taken-for-granted assumptions about the necessity of shift and full-time work outlined above. Specifically, they would refer to how the skills of the part-timer trumped any concerns about availability when considering the part-timer's deployment in a unit and would defer to the notion that parental responsibility is a critical human right.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Thus far in this chapter, I have argued that full-time working can be considered an element of 'thin' moral ordering in organizations inasmuch as, in the contemporary era, it is seen to be a major signifier of real work which is societally legitimate and which furnishes the individual with a certain level of moral approbation. It is the contribution of full-time work to this thinner element of moral ordering which, I have argued, explains its social value which carries over to the individual who works full-time. At the thicker level of moral ordering, the picture becomes more complex, especially for women. Women who work full-time and who also have young or school-age children can be seen

as breaching the societal moral order due to their dereliction of responsibility towards their children, but working part-time, even in a 'professional' role, carries the moral jeopardy of being seen as less serious about one's work. And if working part-time is perceived by colleagues as disrupting how work is routinely carried out, the moral penalty for part-time workers can be high – they can be seen as putting at risk the overall ethos of a particular role; in the case of the police service, the provision of good public service.

The thicker elements of moral order detailed above are those which are experienced as particularly meaningful by individuals who appear to be breaching the norms and prescriptions through which they are comprised. The moral transgressions they are perceived and perceive themselves to be making are what generate efforts to mitigate these transgressions, by surfacing and contesting the tacit rules of conduct that shape understandings of these transgressions. Here, the part-time women in my policing study disrupted the value of visibility and visible work by calling attention to their own mostly invisible contributions, in the form of particular skills, knowledge and know-how. These contributions, they argued, were critical for enabling the provision of good public service but were overlooked or devalued precisely because, unlike long working hours, such contributions could not be quantified. Their refusal to accept and their contestation of the dominant premise that working long hours equates to making a solid contribution in its own right, not only called attention to the invisible work which contributes to a particular role but, in doing so, enabled a few managers to see that in fact police work can be temporally organized differently.

Interestingly, the thinner element of moral ordering wherein women with young or school-age children can be morally disapproved for working full-time furnished the part-time women in this study with discursive resources which they used to dispute other elements of the organization of police work which are, arguably, further generators of gender inequalities. Specifically, because police managers are authorized to command and control how officers use their personal as well their work time, some part-time women drew on their societal obligations as a parent to challenge this authority; a challenge which was highly effective for enabling women to push for flexible schedules that were more suited to their personal and workplace needs and to breach workplace norms (such as not handing over work tasks).

Nonetheless, this latter set of processes was less successful in disrupting the taken-for-granted dimensions of how police work is organized, largely because the behaviours involved generated feelings of inequity within work groups which the more creative practices outlined above (cross-shift working and partnering experienced part-timers with more junior officers) did not. This is because leaving a colleague to pick up work, or leaving early to pick up a child, affects the *individuals* working with the part-time officer in a way

that these other changes do not. Cross-shift working, for instance, was barely noticed by the colleagues of the part-timers working these patterns and this was because the part-timer was not part of the formal 'head count' of available officers and therefore was seen as an additional resource. An implication here is that elements of work design which draw attention to physical availability may be problematic for enabling individuals to profit from working flexible schedules (see also Gonsalves, 2020). Partnering more with less experienced officers works to distribute the responsibilities of a given workload in a different way than when workloads are allocated to individuals. Thus, one major implication here is that individual workloads are a key generator of problems for accommodating individuals (like women) with responsibilities outside of work. This element of work organization which is also a key source of visibility in organizations is, therefore, from the perspective I am developing here, extremely problematic.

In the next section of this chapter I want to move on to develop some further arguments about the effects of moral ordering in organizations by utilizing some data from a more recent study I have undertaken which explores how women make sense of their lives and careers. In this section of the chapter I want to show how women reject and resist the inexorable demands of remaining visible at work via working full-time or carrying a workload for which one is solely responsible. These prescriptions, I want to argue, are a form of 'temporal privileging' through which it is assumed that working should occupy a place of temporal centrality in one's life rather than being perceived as one, but not the only or most important, source of temporal demands and personal identity. As I will show, some of the women I interviewed for this study rejected these norms, opting instead to work in ways that capitalized on their felt strengths and interests, working in jobs and roles that are by no means conventional and which, for some of them, carried the risk that they were not seen to be doing 'real' jobs.

This last section of the chapter will pave the way for the material I will present in Chapter 7, where I will discuss how women's relationship to work evolves through the various and uneven phases of life that are more characteristic of women than of men. In Chapter 7, I will problematize the idea that gender inequality can be read off from statistics on occupational segregation, wages or occupational position and show how it is manifest only in particular moments of experience. Using the strong process ontology I outlined in Chapter 3, I will argue that some of the choices that women make with respect to work and careers are not easily understood as instances of subordination but instead are positive and highly reflexive choices, albeit made in conditions that are not of women's own choosing. Nonetheless, these choices are dialectally related to these conditions, and in Chapter 8 I will explore what this might mean for rethinking gender inequalities in organizations.

REJECTING THE DISCOURSE OF WORK CENTRALITY

The project from which the data in this section are drawn was developed in collaboration with a local business with social aims, offering coaching and development services for women. The co-directors of this business regularly run a pro-bono workshop entitled 'work–life discovery' aimed at helping women review their current working situation and develop plans for the future. The workshops run over a day and involve lots of reflexive and interactive exercises including thinking about strengths, future goals, values and work–life balance. Working with the co-directors, over a couple of years we developed the idea to embark on a project that would explore how women make sense of their careers; an idea developed from our mutual observations that many women we knew did not feel that they were discriminated against or subordinated in their workplaces, and indeed felt that they had made positive and informed choices about the place they wanted work to occupy in their lives. Their career choices reflected these decisions and were not experienced as forced choices. These observations, of course, chime very much with Hakim's preference theory which I reviewed in Chapter 2. However, we also recognized that women's career choices were informed by current discourses and ideologies (such as, for example, the bottom-line ideology, discussed in Chapters 4 and 5) which for many of the women we encountered, lacked resonance and appeal. We believed that the subject positions offered by current discourses of career success, which involve positioning work as central to one's life, were not attractive to many women, but we wanted to understand how women did define success and whether there were any signs of a dialectic – were these definitions having any impact on understandings of career success within organizations themselves or society more generally and if not, why not?

The project methodology involved observation of three of the work–life discovery workshops (the data from these observations are not utilized in this text) and interviews with 28 women recruited for the project from these workshops. About two-thirds of the women involved were interviewed more than once over three years (which included the pandemic years 2020–2021). Interviews were conducted using a life history format where participants were asked to provide an account of their lives from birth to the present, and in which they were encouraged to highlight themes and occurrences of importance to themselves. All participants were informed about the aim of the study – which was to explore how women make sense of their careers – and hence most interviews did focus heavily on work experiences but a variety of other issues were also discussed, including the impact of family, relationships, hobbies and future life goals.

To analyse the data, I made reflexive memos of the interview transcripts which involved reading each transcript and distilling from it some of the core themes discussed by the participant. This could be a particular career choice; a particular relationship at work or home; children and related concerns, and so on. From these memos, I developed a number of generic themes that cut across all participants. For the purposes of this chapter, I am going to focus on what women want from their careers and on what influences women's career choices. As the title of this section indicates, a dominant thread running through women's accounts of their careers was a rejection of the notion of work centrality. Although, unsurprisingly, for some women this was precipitated by the birth of children, for others, significant life events, or what I came to refer to as 'epiphanal' events (see also Dick, 2000b), involving illness of self or others; moments of insight brought about by specific experiences or social interactions (both positive and negative); or a gradual realization that work was only one small element of life, acted as the triggers for this rejection.

THE COSTS OF 'REAL' WORK

The extant literature on women's careers is, as discussed in Chapter 2, dominated by the idea that women's choices derive from rational decision-making processes in which women reflect on what it is they are looking for from their working lives at particular times. This is perhaps most cogently captured by Sullivan and Mainiero's (2008) kaleidoscope career model in which they propose that women's career decisions are informed by three distinct sets of concerns – authenticity, challenge and balance – which vary with respect to their relative importance for women at the different stages women's lives follow, such as 'starting out' or 'having children'. This idea has been critiqued in the extant careers literature where it is argued that women's relationship to work is 'discontinuous and fragmented' with career decisions impacted both by family and the 'blurred boundary between work and non-work' (Cohen and Duberley, 2021: 8). My findings to some extent corroborate this latter critique but additionally suggest that women's decision making is much more serendipitous than is suggested in extant careers literature. Women experience various events in their lives which push and pull them in particular directions – directions which themselves need to be understood as socially located. In this section, I am going to focus on three serendipitous event types that were experienced by a number of women and narrated as having been central to their subsequent career direction, specifically, decisions *not to* prioritize work. These event types are

(i) lack of recognition or other destabilizing employment experience;
(ii) lack of certainty about occupational 'fit';

(iii) demands from the non-work sphere.

These three events were not always distinct in the accounts obtained from participants but rather overlapped and interpenetrated each other. I will focus on two participants in particular to illustrate the influence of these events on women's career decision making.

The Changing Nature of a Role and Changes to Domestic Responsibilities Over Time Prompt Reflections on Occupational 'Fit': Beth

Many of the women in my study reported that they had not ever developed a definite sense of the type of work, job, occupation or profession that they were 'cut out' for and oriented to this as an accountable matter (Widdicombe, 1995) – that is, they attempted to justify this situation. Such justification is typical in interactions in which participants show awareness of having revealed a dispreferred element of their identities. This lack of certainty about their occupational destiny led many of the women in my study to 'fall into' particular types of work, through word of mouth opportunities or through simply needing money and applying for any job they thought they would be able to do. Beth, for example, a 41-year-old mother of two, had worked full-time as a charity fundraiser for several years after graduating, a career she entered after meeting a friend who was in this line of work and who prompted Beth to think that fundraising was something she herself could probably do. Beth became part-time following the birth of her children (after several years working full-time), but at the time of her research interview she had moved to a new job in this field as she had experienced 'misfit' in the part-time role she had occupied just prior to our interview. This had happened because the third-sector charity she had been working for had, she felt, moved to an emphasis on business as opposed to social ends; an orientation that led to the valorization of staff who were prepared to work full-time, a working pattern impossible for Beth due to her family responsibilities. She said:

> They [the charity] said that I couldn't work three days, because they needed someone full-time … and the sort of [fundraising] targets were getting higher and higher, and I said to my boss after about seven months 'look, you know, this isn't … this is not great, because I don't think I'm doing a good enough job for the charity, I'm feeling very conscious that, you know, I'm not working as well as I used to, because I've got half a brain on my kids'.

What is notable here is that Beth internalizes the changed work requirements (need to bring in more funding and to work full-time) as a lack within herself, though she did feel hurt by her manager's ready acceptance of her resignation.

While the new job she obtained was also fundraising (but on a part-time basis), her experiences in her previous role had led her to feel that she was no longer cut out for fundraising and had lost her ambition, attributing this to her age rather than to the changing employment expectations of the sector as outlined in her account. When I first interviewed Beth she was unsuccessfully applying for different types of job, and when I interviewed her the second time she had secured a job with the local council which involved healthcare advice. By the time of her final interview, this had turned into a full-time role. However, the demands and responsibilities of this role were not as great as her part-time role fundraising had been, and she talked about how the easing of these demands and responsibilities created 'headspace' for her to focus more carefully on her life outside of work which she felt vindicated what might be seen as a somewhat 'backward' career move.

An Epiphanal Event Transforms Self-understanding and Employment Situation: Sue

Sue is a 36-year-old with one child. At the time of the interview, she was portfolio working, engaged in a number of formal and freelance jobs which all revolved around wellbeing (e.g. yoga, resilience and emotion regulation training) but was not finding this work particularly fulfilling and, given the very small financial returns from the work she was doing, was in a deeply reflexive phase of her life, thinking hard about what she wanted to do work-wise in the coming months and years. Sue had trained and qualified as a teacher when she left university and taught in a local school, but experienced a very unpleasant period of turmoil during this time which involved her being bullied by one of the senior members of staff. Although she put up with this for a long time, she finally reached breaking point and stood up to the bully which utterly transformed their relationship inasmuch as the bully now sought approval from Sue. She said this experience provided her with a whole new perspective on herself and following the birth of her child, which she described as the beginning of a 'spiritual journey', she decided to quit teaching. She explained this was largely because she wanted to spend more time with her child; a desire which, she said, proceeded from her own childhood experience of being left alone for long periods while her own mother worked full-time. Although her current working situation was financially precarious, difficult to manage and not terribly rewarding, as already outlined above, she expressed feeling liberated from the exigencies of full-time permanent employment and believed that the imperative to make ends meet was helping her think more creatively.

WHAT DO THESE FINDINGS IMPLY FOR MORAL ORDER?

What can we take away from these findings? One possible interpretation of Beth's story, which is aligned with what is said in the feminist literature, is that her narrative is illustrative of the lack of opportunities or support for upward mobility that many women experience in workplaces. Beth's narrative, therefore, simply reflects the fact that women do not aspire to positions and achievements that are unlikely to be available to them – such decisions are signals, in short, that they have adapted to the structural barriers that prevent them from achieving career success. This is certainly one way of thinking about Beth's story. However, another way of thinking about it is that the structural conditions that apparently impede women from achieving upward mobility (such as, in Beth's case, the requirement for full-time work), whilst certainly not questioned or challenged by Beth (and a number of other women in the study), are nevertheless resisted when women like Beth and Sue refuse to work such hours. As they recalibrate their ambitions and needs against what is available to them, they carve out alternative understandings of what success will or does look like and means for them. Success does not, for some of these women of which Beth and Sue are two examples, inhere within the performance of 'real' jobs which confer social value, but lies in living a life well – a life that enables them to be with their children or significant others; to engage in activities that might otherwise be unattractive or unrealistic (such as learning new skills that are not connected to the occupation or profession originally trained for); and to experience the freedom and liberation from the idea that they should always be heading somewhere or, as one of my participants recently put it, to be continually 'hustling'. In short, the idea that women should be able to occupy high-status positions in organizations was, for many of the women in my study, experienced as a significant pressure and one which many rejected due to the personal costs (particularly of time and energy) entailed and illustrated in Beth's and Sue's narratives.

This draws our attention to a point I have made in earlier chapters. High-status roles in organizations and the criteria developed for judging the individual's 'fit' for these roles often require the individual to be highly visible; to be prepared to work long hours and to put the demands of the workplace first. From this perspective, the problem is not that women need to be helped to achieve these positions, but that the enactment of these positions needs to be radically rethought if the aim is to attract women into them. Some individuals do want to position work as central to their lives, and there were women who participated in my study who reported currently experiencing this motivation or having experienced this motivation at earlier points in their lives

(see Chapter 7). One of my arguments in this text is that gender inequality is related less to the fact that women are underrepresented in particular roles and occupations, and more to how these roles and occupations are those which carry significant levels of social value.

What my findings illustrate is that as women move through their lives, their needs and ambitions evolve, largely because they have to adapt to the external changes that occur as their lives develop along with the social conditions in which their lives are lived (e.g. changes to an occupation's ethos in the case of Beth; the desire to be present for a child by opting out of a well-paid, permanent and professional job in the case of Sue). Unlike the policewomen we met in my study of part-time working above, the women in my careers study do not reject the idea that in abandoning hopes or ambitions for upward mobility they lack social value, largely because these women were not perceived (nor perceived themselves) as breaching a particular organizational moral order. Rather, these women are offering different narratives of success. They are drawing on alternative discourses which position work as a means to an end, not necessarily an end in itself. In doing so, they fall victim of the thinner element of moral ordering discussed above because they are not seen, nor do some of them see themselves, as doing 'real' work. What is interesting is that these women do not experience this as a problem or an identity threat, but as a worthwhile pay-off for enabling them to live in ways they find rewarding and comfortable. In Chapter 7, I am going to explore this issue of 'real work' at considerable depth.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I continued to develop my argument that it is the moral order in society generally, and organizations specifically, which accounts for the persistence of the full-time work norm and the various practices (such as individualized workloads) which render this temporal pattern ubiquitous and taken for granted. Thicker moral ordering, I argued, is underpinned by tacit and taken-for-granted assumptions about what constitutes a proper and adequate execution of a particular job or role. Using empirical data from my study into part-time working in the police service, I showed how part-time officers who sometimes felt as if they were being judged by colleagues as failing to perform their roles adequately, surfaced and challenged these assumptions as they reflected on these feelings. In doing so, they contested the idea that professionalism can be shown only by being ever-available; that making a substantive contribution is dependent on the quantity of time an employee contributes to a role; that private time should always be subordinated to work time; and that managerial authority with respect to time use at work is always legitimate. I also showed how some managers accepted and acknowledged that a sig-

nificant contribution to a work task was dependent more on the quality of an employee's input than on the quantity of time they could provide; an acknowledgement which appeared to underpin the willingness of a few managers to rethink temporal organization in their units. The small changes engendered by this rethinking, whilst hardly transformational, nevertheless draw attention to the fact that work can be organized differently and in ways that shift attention away from an employee's availability to a focus on their less quantifiable skills and abilities.

Drawing on empirical data from my study into women's careers, I then went on to develop my argument about how thin elements of moral ordering can be challenged. Here I illustrated how the discourse of work centrality which is embedded within the full-time work norm, was challenged by some of the women in my study. I used the notion of 'epiphanal' events to show how women were often pushed and pulled into different jobs and ways of working which, whilst not always experienced as positive at the time, were later accommodated within their life history narratives as constructive and liberating experiences which enabled them not only to resist and challenge the discourse of work centrality but also to redefine what career and success meant for them. In doing so, these women are directly challenging (albeit unintentionally) the idea that being a 'good' citizen or employee requires working full-time, doing 'real' work. Instead, they see personal fulfilment as a more meaningful subject position, believing that their own wellbeing and that of their significant others are what is most critical and important for leading a 'good' and worthy life.

As I have argued in previous chapters, for me, the problem of gender inequality inheres less in the fact that women are less likely to be found in high-status, high-paid roles, and more in the higher economic and social value attaching to these roles. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 have enabled me to excavate and identify the processes that lead to such differential valuation, and to explain why the work that women typically perform tends to be seen as less socially and economically valuable than the work that men typically perform. Central to this situation, I have argued, is the bottom-line ideology which, with its emphasis on the visibility and calculability of performance, means that work that is *seen* to be making a direct contribution to the bottom line is that which is most highly valued. As this analysis has illustrated, while women are, on aggregate, most likely to fall foul of the bottom-line ideology with respect to the value of their work, men are also potential victims of this ideology, especially those whose work or enactment of work, focuses more on relationships, relationality, support or caring.

In the next chapter, I want to further explore the rewriting of the moral order outlined in this chapter. Here, I want to drill deeper into the experiences of the women from my study of women's careers to show what these can tell us about experiences of subordination, marginalization and inequality, and whether

such experiences can provide further potential for rethinking gender inequality in organizations. In Chapter 7, therefore, utilizing the strong process ontology I outlined in Chapter 3, I want to show how the various social, structural and organizational conditions that have been identified as 'barriers' to women's equality at work (see Chapter 2) are actually experienced in the lives of women and to show the precise ways in which these pull and push women in particular directions with respect to their work and their families. In this final empirical chapter, I will empirically illustrate the uneven and fragmented relationship women have with temporality in workplaces and in society more generally and how this relationship influences their understandings of their careers, career decisions and life trajectories.

7. Rewriting the moral order: the narrative ordering of disorderly lives

In Chapter 4, I made a case for the role of moral order in explaining the persistence of the full-time work norm, arguing that the valorization of visibility and its relationship to bottom-line ideology is central to this situation. In Chapters 5 and 6, drawing on Snyder's (2016) differentiation between thin and thick elements of moral ordering, I examined the precise ways that these elements of moral order produce subject positions which confer symbolic and material profit to those who conform with the temporal requirements of workplaces. I went on to use empirical data from my projects on part-time work in policing and women's careers to explore how these elements of moral order are contested by women who cannot or will not meet the standard temporal demands of workplaces. Using data from my project on part-time working in policing, I showed that thick moral order is underpinned by sets of tacit assumptions about what constitutes good or adequate work performance; assumptions that can be surfaced when individuals judged not to be meeting these standards, reflect on their meaning and veracity. This reflexivity, I argued, can lead not only to contestation of the assumptions which underpin the taken-for-granted status of the full-time work norm, but can also call attention to alternative and subordinated meanings of adequate and good work performance. In particular, the criticality of invisible work in enabling good performance can be surfaced and articulated. This, I argued, disrupts the taken-for-granted status of the full-time work norm and can facilitate changes to temporal organization. Although only very small pockets of changes to temporal organization were apparent in my study on part-time working in the police service, these are nevertheless indicative that is possible to organize work in ways that enable the more invisible contributions of staff who do not work full-time to be valued by colleagues and managers.

The chapter then went on to examine how work centrality, embedded in the full-time work norm and widely seen as critical to the achievement of the bottom line, is resisted and disrupted by women who do not see work as central to their lives, though they do see it as important. Drawing on detailed accounts of two of the women in my careers study, I showed how work centrality as a dominant subject position offered to those who are considered and consider themselves to be serious about their work confronts women in different ways

and with different outcomes. Beth, for example, was not allowed to continue working part-time in her role as a third-sector fundraiser due to the changing priorities of the organization and its belief that these changes demanded a full-time commitment. The experience of misfit which ensued led her to change jobs which, on reflection, she felt had been a positive outcome. Sue, on the other hand, following a very upsetting, albeit resolved episode of workplace bullying, reflexively engaged with the place she wanted work to occupy in her life. She made an active decision to change her employment status so as to enable her to spend more time with her child. Like Beth, this was narrated as a highly positive and enabling decision. By opting for work that is less likely than their previous roles to be evaluated as societally meaningful, these women transgress thinner elements of moral order, though they did not appear to experience any psychological discomfort as a consequence of this. Rather, they both expressed feelings of liberation and satisfaction with how their lives had 'turned out'.

I concluded the chapter by reflecting on what the findings from these projects reveal about moral order and its role in maintaining taken-for-granted practices such as full-time working. Women who have formerly experienced visibility by working full-time do not blithely accept the reduction in their social status that comes from reducing their hours. Part-time policewomen, for instance, drew on various sources of legislative and discursive power to challenge the view that they were no longer making a worthwhile contribution to the organization, and in doing so gave some managers pause for thought, resulting in more creative approaches to the implementation of part-time working. On the other hand, Beth and Sue, the women from my project into women's careers, were pushed by changes in their work environments to reflexively engage with the costs visible work can entail, ultimately rejecting the potential social value that such work can confer by investing their emotional energies in their children.

In this chapter, I want to continue to develop some of the arguments that I have sketched in earlier chapters, focusing specifically on the *effects* of thin and then thick moral ordering. In doing so, I want to show how reading off subordination, domination or inequality from the experiences of individuals is not empirically supportable which, I will argue, alerts us to the fact that at present, we are not adequately theorizing the position of women in organizations and other sites of paid work. I want to argue that we need a better conceptualization of social structural constraint, an idea which connotes that preferences or choices are limited by social conditions, implying that the former precede the latter. This detracts attention away from how individuals confront and engage with the various social conditions, ideologies and material circumstances that configure their lives as they encounter situations and events that need to be navigated and managed. To this end I will argue that the idea

of 'tension' best captures how women experience the various pushes and pulls generated by dominant ideologies and discourses of work and life, and which are experienced in actual moments of living and working. I will illustrate three specific tensions that emerged from the analysis of the data from my project into women's careers: tensions between what women think they should be doing (with respect to work) and what is practically achievable; tensions between what women strive to achieve and the emotional consequences of that striving; and tensions between the visible and invisible work that women do in workplaces.

The chapter is structured as follows. In the first section of the chapter, I will focus on the tensions generated by discourses of career (what women think they should be doing) and the actual career paths (what is practically achievable) that characterize women's lives. In this section, focusing specifically on how these tensions compromise women's capacity for conforming to the thinner elements of moral ordering, I will examine how women make narrative sense of these tensions and the impact of this narrative on their feelings of confidence and wellbeing. In the second section, I will focus on the tension between the desire for career progression (what women strive to achieve) and the various circumstances that influence these desires. Impinging on women's capacity to conform to thicker elements of moral order, I will show how the emotional effects of these tensions (the emotional consequences of this striving) create reflexive spaces from which women recalibrate the meaning of their work and their ambitions. In the final section, I will examine the tension between visible and invisible work in workplaces. While, as I have previously argued, many women already do invisible work in paid employment, this work is nevertheless observable. In contrast, the invisible work which characterizes women's engagement with life outside of paid employment is not observable, yet is nevertheless critical to productive outcomes within workplaces and within the home. This double invisibility is, I will argue, a further explanation for women's lack of representation in more senior roles. It is a tension that women recognize, yet do not articulate as a legitimate concern. This double invisibility provides further insights into why women find it difficult to conform to the demands of the bottom-line ideology and its valorization of calculable outcomes. I complete the chapter by discussing examples of positive and enabling workplaces that were experienced by two participants. These accounts illustrate the non-inevitability of full-time working, individualized workloads and the valorization of calculability.

TENSIONS BETWEEN DISCOURSES OF CAREER AND WOMEN'S ACTUAL CAREER PATHS

Very few of the women in my study of women's careers expressed a desire for upward career mobility, with most aiming for work they found interesting, fulfilling or for which they felt a passion. Nonetheless, some of the women who had entered particular occupations as graduates, and had stayed in these occupations, experienced a gap between what they had been brought up and socialized to expect from their careers and what they actually felt about them. This gap derived not from some inherent dissatisfaction with their occupation but from the perception that it lacked social worth and legitimacy; participants experiencing this gap believed themselves to be in occupations that did not seem to count as 'real' work. Some participants oriented to this as a highly accountable matter, struggling to see their careers as meaningful against this backdrop of vocational expectations. For example, one participant, Frances, whose career path was characterized by stops and starts and changes in direction within various jobs related to human resource management, reflected as follows on her ongoing feelings of precarity and financial insecurity:

Frances: I always wish that I had mapped out a career path, you know, so that I could have kind of gone into something and perhaps had … I don't know, it's difficult, because my career path has been quite up and down.

Penny: Yeah, quite a lot of women's career paths [are similar], yeah.

Frances: Yeah. So, you know, for different reasons, but for having children, but that's not the only reason. So whether it would have made … so, for example, one of my friends is a dentist. Now, I wouldn't have been academically strong enough to go and do something like that, because there's no way I could have done maths and sciences, for example. So I'm not saying that I could have done that, but when I look at her life and think, now, kind of from a point of view of having, you know, having a vocation that she will always have, and financially will always be in a very stable position…

The idea that one should have a definite and concrete career which proceeds upwards in a linear fashion, accompanied by attendant improvements in pay, was experienced by several participants, like Frances, as something that other people had and that they had somehow failed to achieve. Yet it is clear from the literature on women's careers that many women do in fact work in non-traditional careers and experience the stops and starts that have so far characterized Frances' work experience (O'Neil et al., 2008). Thus discourses

of vocation and upward mobility acted as strong normative standards against which women calibrated their past and current career situation. Another participant, Sian, recounted similar self-misgivings, believing that her secure and relatively well-paid library job, an occupation she entered after graduating some 14 years previously, was a 'noddy' job which, for her, meant that it was easy, 'cosy' and lacking in status and recognition.

Working full-time in a job that is considered societally meaningful and/or prestigious therefore emerged as a core element of thin moral ordering that some of the women in this study felt they were transgressing and which operated as a strong push factor, causing them to seriously reconsider their current work roles and whether they should change them. For Frances, for instance, a mother of two school-aged children, the decision to leave her previous human resource (HR) role in an organization to become a freelance HR advisor due to her needs for flexibility with respect to time and location, exacerbated her feelings about the lack of legitimacy and social worth attaching to HR work. At the time of our second interview this was having a very strong and detrimental effect on her mental health and she felt highly uncertain about her future and what she should do. Sian, on the other hand, was actively seeking different jobs or roles that would provide her with the social affirmation she felt she currently lacked. For Sian, lockdown and the necessity to move her work online proved to be an epiphanal event which revived her interest and belief in her work; a process facilitated by increasing her hours.

Theoretical Implications

One issue raised here is that there is a disconnect between the discourses of career aimed at women who are likely to see themselves as professional workers and the actual availability of professional jobs that provide the levels of social status and affirmation that are normally associated with such work. Thus the issue confronting some of the women in this study is less about being prevented from accessing opportunities for meaningful, well-paid jobs with the potential for upward pay and progression and more about the labour market itself and the proliferation of work that is characterized by immaterial labour producing immaterial goods such as knowledge, service or communication (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Lazzarato, 1996). Such work, whilst increasingly common, nevertheless lacks social value largely because its outputs are not easily calculable (Mörike, 2017), illustrating yet again the ubiquity of the value placed on visibility.

Even women who did not express concerns about the social status of their work sometimes oriented to their current position as being normatively problematic, often articulated as a feeling that 'I'm not as far on in my career as I should be by now'. Again, this was expressed as a dispreferred subject posi-

tion, even though such women often acknowledged the fact that their current domestic commitments were not conducive to taking on more senior roles or working in ways that would get them noticed, that is making themselves more visible. The women expressing these concerns were also likely, however, to celebrate the fact that they were physically, emotionally and psychologically available for their children or other family members; an availability they believed would not be possible if they occupied more demanding or responsible roles.

It is very important to point out here that the problem is not so much that women are prevented from applying for higher-value or senior roles because they cannot provide a full-time commitment, but rather that they perceive the *enactment* of these roles to require working very long and *inflexible* hours which extend *beyond* scheduled full-time hours. With this comes an expectation that the employee should be 'always on' (McDowell and Kinman, 2017); a recognition of the continuing valorization of visibility and how this is increasing with work intensification. This is borne out by Beth's experience of being able to take on a full-time job that *did not* require physical or psychological ever-availability but was sufficiently flexible to enable her to manage her domestic commitments.

These findings suggest that thin moral order and the sense that one's work is societally meaningful and therefore worthwhile derives more from the type of work available in the so-called 'knowledge economy' than to a lack of opportunity provided by specific organizations. Also important is the extent to which the individual perceives their career trajectory as aligned with societal expectations about upward mobility and how this should be something that naturally occurs once an individual has been in an occupation for a certain period of time. The career stasis reported by some of the women in this latter group and, indeed, the notion of career statis itself, is attributable to their unwillingness to work (or the impossibility of working) full-time hours due to domestic pressures and confirms the view of many feminist scholars regarding the centrality of ideal worker norms to the achievement of upward career mobility. What is notable about the findings reported here, however, is that the problematic experience of career statis proceeds less from the individual's perception that she is failing to conform to ideal worker norms and more from the normativity of upward mobility itself. This has acquired the status of a natural and inevitable career trajectory for the professional classes, which connotes the possession of societally positive attributes such as motivation, ambition and drive. Taken overall, therefore, these findings suggest that it is the perceived lack of social value that attaches to particular occupations and particular career trajectories which is more closely related to feelings of normative transgression than a perceived lack of opportunity to enter or progress within particular occupations.

There were other women in the study who did not enter conventional or traditional careers on leaving school or university and were also in jobs characterized by immaterial labour, but who did not experience or at least report experiencing the feelings outlined above. They made no comments regarding the lack of social value attaching to their jobs or their career positions. What characterized this group of women was their feelings of engagement, fulfilment and satisfaction with what they were doing. For this group of women, work was one of several sites for self-expression and for enacting a self that could not be performed within the constraints of a traditional job or work schedule. Some of these women were younger, some older; some had formal educational qualifications and others did not. Jan, for example, a 59-year-old freelance alternative health consultant, had worked in a variety of jobs both in the UK and overseas, all involving alternative health therapies. She had gained A-level qualifications at school and qualified as a beauty therapist at a college of further education, though had not ever worked for a formal organization. She expressed no discomfort with her career history and its many stops, starts and turn arounds which proceeded from what she saw as her natural curiosity to continue to learn and develop. She continually referred to herself as 'lucky' throughout both our interviews, believing that she had made the most of all the chances and opportunities with which life had presented her.

For these women, moral order in its thinner sense appeared to have little influence on how they lived their lives and how they oriented to their work and their career trajectories. One way of understanding this is to see it as a consequence of the success of neo-liberal discourses in promoting responsibilization and self-reliance (Rutherford, 2018). But another way to read this is as resistance (albeit not intentional) to the importance and centrality of work in contemporary societies and as a refutation of the notion that 'real' work is always something we do for formal organizations if we want to be seen as economically productive and therefore morally worthy citizens. These women did not worry about being in insecure and precarious forms of employment, believing strongly in their abilities to 'make do' and to make the most of whatever employment they could get whilst ensuring that their jobs did not interfere with their other life projects. A further explanation for this could be related to the woman as homemaker discourse and how this constructs work as less of a financial imperative in women's lives, but not all of the women in this group were married or in relationships. Another way of thinking about these findings, therefore, is that these women are eliding the disciplinary power of the discourse of productive citizenship that is a dominant feature of the contemporary world (see Chapter 8), declining to engage with its central tenets. Their subjectivities are not attached to this way of being, though they likewise experience no impetus to overtly resist or challenge this idea. Their orientation to their work and lives does, however, politicize dominant discourses of contemporary

citizenship, since they expose the relations of domination which attempt to fix citizens as particular objects of governance (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983). In actively or passively ignoring the discourses aimed at producing the individual as a particular object (the biddable and economically productive citizen), the object itself is rendered irrelevant and meaningless. Nonetheless, at the same time, these women effectively reproduce discourses which position work as naturally less central to the lives of women.

Overall, then, what is clear from these accounts from women who do and do not experience their work as morally transgressive, is that their subjectivities and experiences cannot be read off in any straightforward way from ideologies, discourses, social conditions or social structures, such as gender. These women forge the meanings of their lives in conditions that are not of their own choosing but in ways that, at one and the same time, disrupt *and* reproduce dominant ideologies and discourses about work in general and women in particular.

TENSIONS BETWEEN THE DESIRE FOR CAREER PROGRESSION AND THE VARIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES THAT IMPINGE ON THESE DESIRES

As outlined in previous chapters the thicker elements of moral order refer to how our subjectivities are shaped by our desire to be perceived as good employees and to work towards socially valorized goals and outcomes. As I illustrated in Chapters 5 and 6, this element of moral order does not exist in any objective or apolitical sense, but rather is derived from both broader discourses which confer social and moral value to certain types of work and to more local or occupational/organizational specific discourses which construct norms about what good workers should and should not do and how they should and should not act. For instance, as we saw in Chapter 5, operational policing is constructed through a discourse of public service which functions to justify and rationalize the norm of ever-availability. Part-time operational police officers who do not enact this norm often experience the tacit accusation that they are not providing adequate public service because of their lack of availability, an accusation which, as we saw in Chapter 6, some women challenge and contest by drawing attention to more invisible elements of public service, such as the quality of their inputs.

In current theory on careers, it has been posited that '[i]ncreasingly, individuals are driven more by their own desires than by organizational career management practices' (Sullivan and Baruch, 2009: 1543). Critical management and organization studies scholars have pointed to this trend as being a consequence of neo-liberal governmentality which, as outlined above, operates to produce individuals as independent and self-reliant. However, another way of thinking about the desires that individuals have with respect to

their lives (which include their non-work activities and networks, not just work and careers) and how they see them evolving is that they are not only *products* of this mode of governmentality, but also *shape* it. For example, as more and more women have entered the workplace and have become economically productive, they have come up against taken-for-granted practices (like full-time working) that do not enable them to live their lives in the way they desire – desires that, as suggested above, are culturally produced. They have not, for instance, been able to advance in their careers in the ways that are advocated in career discourses.

As discussed in previous chapters and as outlined above, however, women are targeted not only with neo-liberal discourses of the good employee but also with discourses of the good mother and the good professional woman, along with discourses in which women's relationship to work is constructed as different from that of men. And as women have worked to both conform with and challenge these discourses, the discourses are themselves evolving. One way in which we see the effects of these challenges is the emergence of a dominant societal discourse which promotes the idea that women have the rights to work *and* to be available for their children. The legitimacy of these discourses is seen in successful industrial tribunals where women have legally contested organizations' refusal (such as in the police service) to allow individuals the opportunity to work part-time; in the legal rights women now have to request part-time working and in the increasing workplace attention to policies on equality, diversity and inclusion. Another way we see the effects of this dialectic are in how women both orient and adapt to career norms and their meanings. As discussed in the section above, for instance, the norms which advance the idea that it is only certain types of work that are socially legitimate and valuable can operate to push women out of or trouble their occupation of particular jobs and careers. However, women who want to or have to stay in those jobs and careers can redefine the meaning of real work on their own terms; such as, for example, that work represents just one of many possible sites for personal fulfilment. In positioning fulfilment as their primary concern (a concern whose legitimacy is related to traditional conceptions of women's relationship to work), these women eschew the moral obligation to be engaged in socially legitimate work.

In the next section, I therefore want to examine the microprocesses involved in this dialectic in some depth. To do this, I am going to first explore what can happen when women conform with the bottom-line ideology and make efforts to demonstrate the visibility that is valorized in many workplaces. As I will show, while there can indeed be symbolic and material profits from such conformity, there can also be considerable costs and, as the forms that visibility takes in organizations become more and more demanding and exacting, these costs can be experienced as overwhelming. Nonetheless, by viewing such

experiences as emergent and always evolving features of lived experience, it is also possible to analyse how individuals absorb them into their life narratives in ways that enable them to make sense of and transform the meaning of their relationships to work.

Conforming with the Bottom-Line Ideology: Anna and Gemma

Anna, a 43-year-old environmental scientist who had always worked in technical roles, had started her career with a strong focus on upward career mobility, a focus that enabled her to quickly ascend the career ladder within the public sector organization she had, up until very recently, been working for. She describes her performance thus:

Anna: I've always done very well in terms of hitting my targets and meeting and exceeding expectations and all of that jazz.

However, a series of events and circumstances including getting married and planning her wedding, managing a group of 'difficult' people in her department, commuting and selling her house, combined to produce deleterious effects on her mental health. Having recovered from this mental ill health following an extended period of sick leave, Anna said she had begun to feel trapped in this job. She had felt that she was paid too well to enable her to easily resign from it, despite having reached a point at which she felt little interest in her work and, following her mental health issues, had come to the realization that she wanted to do something more practical and creative, such as baking. She talked about her mental health issues as proceeding from her felt pressure to be achievement-oriented and from the imperative to climb higher and higher occupationally, seeing these pressures as originating societally rather than psychologically. She talked about how her mental health crisis had been followed by a period of intense reflection and a recalibration of her life goals and beliefs and future career trajectory. At the time of our first interview, Anna had secured a new job which did not involve commuting and which she hoped would be less physically and psychologically demanding, though nevertheless still intellectually challenging. At the time of our second interview, she had been in the new job for some time and was not finding it sufficiently 'stretching'. She recognized the constant tension between wanting to be involved in challenging work and the toll this could take on her health due to her own difficulties in regulating the level of effort she puts into jobs and roles.

Gemma is a 32-year-old mother of two small children whose career began on graduation from university when she was single and childless, with a successful application to a local government graduate scheme, which was

focused on enabling graduates to acquire experiences in various departments and in a variety of roles, including commissioning, procurement and general management. Gemma found many elements of the scheme both interesting and challenging, though with an eye to progressing quickly to senior management she was also keen to ensure that she undertook roles that would be conducive to this goal. At the time of our first interview, Gemma was working in a senior management role which she said was 'a few grades above' the position she was in when she applied for it. She was finding that, since reducing her full-time hours by 30% following the birth of her first child, it was difficult to manage her time effectively within this role. Some of this difficulty, she felt, was related to her experience of post-natal depression, but she also attributed a lot of this problem to a general lack of organization and communication in her department which working part-time had exposed much more clearly, and which she saw as a consequence of historically poor management practices. Working reduced hours, dealing with a baby and with her depression had, she felt, diminished her capacity to cope with these issues. She was thinking about trying to change roles at the time of our second interview (and was also pregnant with her second child) but was concerned that the hours and location that might be offered would not fit with her child-minding arrangements. Reflecting on her career to date during our conversation, she said,

Gemma: I feel like up until, say, this point, I did have a [career] plan, and I did a grad scheme and I did a postgrad diploma and then I did that and then I was looking to the next thing and the thing after that. But I don't know if it's entirely worked out for me, and I wonder if you reach a certain age where you start to think, ooh, I don't know if I really want this planned thing that I'd been told I should want any more, maybe I want something different.

Penny: Was this sort of the climbing up the career ladder, and now you're starting to question that?'

Gemma: Yeah, and I think questioning how if you climb the career ladder that would interact with your other life priorities, or if you climb the career ladder do you really want to be like those people who are in those positions? So I look at my boss and I think, actually, I don't want your job.

As illustrated, the difficulties Gemma recounted in her interview and outlined above have led to her experiencing doubt about her previous career goals. She also mentions an issue she raised earlier in our conversation regarding the lack of senior management role models whose enactment of their jobs is not aligned with her ideas of what senior management should do – which is to actually deal

with and solve problems related to staff performance, rather than seemingly accepting them as background irritations. At the time of our final interview, Gemma had given birth to her second child and had successfully applied for a new role in which she was allowed to continue working 70% of full-time hours. Whilst this role was in many ways easier because it was less temporally and psychologically demanding, she was also experiencing it as less fulfilling largely because much of it was immaterial in its outcomes, involving conversations with others and seeking information.

Theoretical Implications

Achieving particular career goals, such as more senior roles, was for Anna and Gemma dependent on being able to sustain the energy required for their fulfilment, a process that was rendered difficult by events (including childcare, events occurring in life outside of work, reduced hours and difficult co-workers) which made further demands on the finite amounts of energy which individuals possess. When these women came to recognize that these demands were outstripping their supplies of energy which, in both cases, was surfaced through their experience of psychological distress, this precipitated a period of intense reflection which had a fundamental influence on how they understood themselves, their past behaviours and their aspirations. For Anna, this involved a complete rethink of her future and what fulfilment meant for her, seeing this as possibly proceeding more from within a particular activity (like baking) than from external validation such as might be obtained through career advancement. She nonetheless struggled to feel satisfaction with her current organizational role because it did not demand the levels of effort that she had previously provided. Gemma was also in the process of rethinking her future, finding it difficult to cope with a role whose immaterial outputs rendered it difficult for her to evaluate her own contribution in quantifiable terms, whilst also recognizing that for work to be satisfactory for everybody, managers need also to engage in relational and therefore invisible work. With no role models available to show how such relational work could be enacted alongside the more visible work she enjoyed, Gemma found herself questioning whether she wanted to continue her currently upwards career trajectory.

Feminist accounts of women's careers often attribute the underrepresentation of women in senior roles in organizations and occupations to structural barriers including the rules of entry or career progression which, as discussed in Chapter 2, are characterized as reflective of masculine attributes and preferences. In previous chapters, I have argued that these rules can be more usefully understood as products of the bottom-line ideology and its valorization of visibility (particularly with respect to the need for full-time work) and tangible, calculable outputs. As the extracts in this section illustrate, both Anna

and Gemma willingly accepted and conformed with the rules for career progression in their respective organizations and also found this conformity to be a source of considerable personal fulfilment. In Chapter 3, I argued that social structures, which include the types of career pathways that Anna and Gemma aspired to follow, should be theorized as 'continually evolving material and symbolic patterns of activity' which means that we need to understand not only how and why these patterns come to exist (an issue I explored in Chapters 4 and 5) but also how they are enacted in specific, concrete circumstances.

As illustrated in the analyses above, the enactment of visible work (meeting targets, producing definite calculable outcomes and working full-time) is experienced as highly fulfilling, which Anna in particular attributed to both her own dispositional tendency to work very hard and to the cultural valorization of career advancement. In reality, of course, the two cannot be disentangled. Would Anna feel the need to work as hard were it not for the fact that it is only by doing so that she can acquire the visibility necessary for such advancement? Likewise, while Gemma was beginning to understand that invisible work has to be done if managers are to deal adequately with staff who do not or cannot perform in ways that are considered efficient, and bemoaned the lack of role models available to demonstrate how this could be done, she found her current and largely invisible work unfulfilling and demotivating. Would this be the case if this work was as highly socially valued as more visible work?

The occupational self-worth of each of these women then, was directly tied to thicker elements of moral ordering in their respective organizations. In each case, these accounts illustrate that performing visible work is internalized as a signifier of an ambitious, career-oriented employee. These findings suggest that we cannot read off the lack of women in senior roles as indicative of the influence of masculinized rules, embedded in traditional career structures. While it is clearly the case that a focus on tangible, calculable outcomes could well be interpreted as reflecting a masculine rather than a feminine orientation, as both Anna and Gemma illustrate, women can be just as likely to valorize and enjoy enacting the behaviours that are associated with the achievement of such outcomes. Nonetheless, women are more likely than men to both seek to reduce their hours following the birth of children and to take on responsibilities connected to life outside of work (such as planning weddings and house moves). These women, paying the inevitable price of trying to maintain high levels of employment-related effort in circumstances which demand that their efforts are also expended in other domains of their lives, are experiencing irreconcilable tensions. Effort, like the energy resources needed to produce it, is finite, and when this recognition is viscerally experienced the reflexivity this can induce is one space from which individuals question the personal costs of career advancement and what that will entail. For instance, the tension experienced between embarking on career paths historically designed to align

with the needs and preferences of male employees and the exigencies of motherhood has produced legislative and workplace changes (such as flexible working arrangements (FWAs)). In the same way, the tensions between the behaviours currently required for the enactment of senior positions and the experience of that enactment which, as the cases of both Anna and Gemma illustrate can result in exit, may have the potential to influence that enactment and, in turn, the discourses that prescribe what that enactment should look like. As I will illustrate below, one potential site for this transformation is where organizations are struggling to find the skills they need for enabling core and other functions to be executed. Here, organizations are having to rethink the enactment of everyday work to attract women who possess the necessary skills but are unwilling to sacrifice their home lives to their careers.

THE TENSION BETWEEN VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE WORK IN WORKPLACES

In this section of this chapter, I want to focus explicitly on invisible work which is carried out every day by the vast majority of adult women. This invisible work is not simply that which is done within organizations or within the home, but is the work that is carried into the workplace from other domains of life. This work which, I will argue, is critical for enabling the ongoing perpetuation of economic productivity is a further drain on women's energy resources and represents a further site at which the regulatory effects of both the thin and thick elements of moral order are called to attention.

After providing an empirical exploration of invisible work, both as a core element of the paid work of three participants and as an everyday element of psychological work for the majority of the women who participated in my study on women's careers, I will finish the chapter by exploring how this everyday, unacknowledged psychological and emotional labour that women routinely engage in is a further explanation for why many women find the exigencies of an 'always on' work culture very difficult to deal with. Their choices to find work which underutilizes their skills but is practically expedient is, I will suggest, one of the main explanations for their underrepresentation in very senior roles in organizations. I will finish the chapter with an examination of two examples provided by the women in my careers study of workplaces which are deliberately organized in ways which are much more enabling for women with respect to their paid and unpaid labour.

Invisible Work in Paid Employment: Vicky, Amy and Josie

Vicky is a 55-year-old qualified librarian, educated to Master's level. Vicky describes her career history as reflective of herself as a 'butterfly', which she

illustrates by telling me about the many temporary jobs she has had throughout her life. At the time of our first interview she was unemployed, and reflected on how her career has not followed the trajectory that is normatively expected of professional women. During our conversation she dwelt particularly on a job she had done relatively recently, which at four years was one of the longest periods of continuous employment she had ever experienced. This job involved working in a software support team. She says she particularly enjoyed the invisibility of this work, especially with respect to 'providing the stuff that no one else could see', but became very aware of the lack of organizational value attaching to this work, explaining to me that her boss would be interested in what the technical staff were doing or the problems they had, but was disinterested in the support staff. Vicky summarizes this situation thus:

> the support teams were completely undervalued, because the big money is in selling software and making sure it works. The big money is not in keeping the customer happy.

She talks about nevertheless feeling proud of achieving an outcome within this job which was not valued by the organization. This, she told me, involved building a customer service team which was focused on the provision of good service rather than seeing service as a signifier of subordination. Reflecting, somewhat sardonically, on this situation, she told me that despite this achievement, she left the job due to how the relentless pressure and lack of appreciation and recognition eventually resulted in her experiencing severe anxiety.

Lack of recognition was mentioned by several of the women in the study. For instance, Amy, a 56-year-old self-employed travel consultant had worked for several years with an established travel company, which had changed ownership during Amy's tenure. She describes the new owner as focused on making money through the numbers of holidays sold, and not very concerned with the quality of the customer service. Priding herself on exactly this element of travel consultancy, Amy had begun to feel unappreciated and unrecognized and decided to leave the organization and set up her own business which she could run in a way that aligned with her customer service ethos. Another participant, Josie, a 40-year-old primary school teacher talked about how her enjoyment of teaching was located in helping children express themselves through creative media like dance or music, but how she was prevented from doing this by a new head teacher who was more focused on hitting tangible and measurable developmental targets in classes. Not only did Josie feel that her talents were unappreciated, but also that the type of work she did was undervalued precisely because it made no apparently visible or calculable contribution to the achievement of such targets.

All of these cases illustrate that invisible work can be what women find most fulfilling, because it is aligned with their values (Amy); or their perceived skills and talents (Vicky and Josie). Nonetheless, the bottom-line ideology in organizations which valorizes work that produces tangible outcomes such as sales, technical outputs or the achievement of targets, calls attention to the lack of value attaching to invisible work with attendant effects on individual needs for recognition and affirmation. While each of the women discussed above could, in one sense, maintain a belief in the value of the work they were good at performing, trying to do so in a context in which this was not only unappreciated and undervalued but sometimes actively discouraged, was a tension that could not be easily accommodated in psychological terms. Each of the women discussed above eventually resolved this tension by leaving the jobs concerned but suffered financially from doing so. Only Josie had financial support at home to counter this problem. Both Vicky and Amy bore sole responsibility for their financial needs, yet ultimately felt that peace of mind was more important than financial stability.

Invisible Work as Emotional and Cognitive Labour

The types of invisible work thus far illustrated and discussed in this text, whilst arguably more often carried out by women, are also carried out by many men. However, a form of invisible work that has, as far as I can see, not been identified or discussed in the extant literature on gender in organizations is work that is related to the fact that women, especially those in heterosexual relationships, carry the lion's share of responsibility for the home, be that childcare, parental care, housework, cooking, recognizing the need for and organizing house repairs, shopping or any issue that is related to keeping a family fed, housed and functional. This work which is material, emotional and cognitive is a substantial drain on the psychological resources that women have available to invest in the workplace and occupies a significant proportion of women's cognitive and emotional space whilst actually at work. The vast majority of the co-habiting heterosexual women who participated in this research mentioned this issue in their interviews. The following extracts are typical:

Beth: And yeah, the sort of targets [in my job] were getting higher and higher, and so, yeah, when you've sort of got half your brain on your children … so anyway, I said to my boss after about seven months 'look, you know, this isn't … this is not great, because I don't think I'm doing a good enough job for the [organization], I'm feeling very conscious that, you know, I'm not working as well as I used to, because I've got half a brain on my kids…'

Sian: When I was working in London, I lived and breathed that job. So I was at work, I was living just with a flatmate, I used to … I'd be on the tube thinking about work, I'd go home and think about it, I'd think about it on the way into work, and I would get into work, and in my head, I'd already done four hours. So I'd go into work and start actioning what I'd worked out. And at the point of having children, I can distinctly remember with a babe in arms thinking, oh, shit. I'm going to have to think about every meal we're going to have for the rest of my life, because … in amongst being happy … but because it feels to me like it comes down to who worries the most.

As part of the research process I fed back emergent findings to participants during second or third interviews and, whilst there was diversity with respect to the resonance of some findings, this issue of invisible work with respect to thinking about responsibilities at home resonated for nearly every participant, irrespective of sexuality or marital status. The following extract is from my second interview with Nikita, a 40-year-old single Asian woman living with her family which included both parents, sisters and brothers who, she felt, relied on her to sort out any problems that cropped up for them; a discussion which took place when I told her about the findings with respect to women taking on the majority of the responsibility for events at home:

> Sometimes, yeah, I am lumbered with the problem, and I think people don't realize, you know, I'm still at work, and some of those things [e.g. Wi-Fi not working] … you're on the phone for ages, you usually get through to a call centre, and I can't do all those things at work. Sometimes by the time … I can't ring before work, because they're not open, I can't ring after work because they're not open, sometimes you have to wait for the weekend to do things, and all those things. And I think sometimes you could all [i.e. the family] sort things out [laughter].

The invisible work associated with responsibility for the wellbeing of others at home or in non-work domains was experienced by the women who reported on this directly and spontaneously as having a definite deleterious effect on their ability to perform their jobs. This was sometimes to the extent that the individual perceived themselves as not fulfilling their workplace obligations, resulting in feelings of inadequacy (as illustrated in Beth's extract) or of being cognitively and emotionally overloaded and sometimes overwhelmed. What is most startling about these findings is both their ubiquity and the lack of legitimacy such feelings have for the women experiencing them. Women do not see this issue as anything other than a personal problem which it is their duty to deal with – a perception which works to responsibilize women for the home and prevent a collective response to such issues, so that both workplaces

and men are incorporated into thinking about and resolving this issue (Gentile, 2009).

Theoretical Implications

As discussed in Chapter 6, invisible work has gained increasing attention over the last two decades, recognized in the literature as a characteristic of women's work in particular. My data corroborate much of what has been said in this literature, especially with respect to how invisible work contributes to the lack of social and economic value which attaches to the types of work typically performed by women, and the attendant effects of this situation on their perceived social capital, self-esteem and self-worth, as well on more material outcomes such as pay. The three women discussed above (Josie, Vicky and Amy) experienced psychological and emotional harm from performing invisible work within the workplace, yet were also able to articulate the idea that the problem lies less in themselves and more in the valorization of visible and calculable outcomes by powerful individuals and groups in organizations. Nonetheless, for the three women discussed above, the only answer to the psychological and emotional costs incurred from performing unrecognized and underpaid work of this nature was to exit the organizations concerned.

Unlike invisible work performed as part of a given job or role, the largely invisible cognitive and emotional work that is generated by women's overall responsibility for all things 'home' was not problematized by the women I spoke to other than in terms of its effects on their capacity to perform their paid job effectively. It is the essentially private nature of this work that renders it particularly invidious and which produces what I have termed a double invisibility for women's work. The preoccupying effects of this latter type of invisible work provide further insights into women's lack of representation in more senior roles – they simply do not have the headspace to take on a role that they *perceive* to involve high levels of responsibility; a perception that was, perhaps, a further factor in Gemma's aversion to the idea of promotion (see above). The double invisibility which characterizes women's work also speaks to both the thicker and thinner elements of moral ordering. Women's work at the occupational level is seen to lack social and economic value because it is not often understood as 'real' work, whilst the invisible 'home' work that women routinely do interferes with their capacity to deliver and participate in the more visible and valued elements of a given job. The double invisibility of the work women do, therefore, also presents a notable tension. Performing work that lacks value eventually erodes the worth of the positive subject positions that are offered by work in itself, whilst performing the cognitive and emotional work that is required to keep things at home running smoothly interferes with the capacity to deliver what is considered an adequate performance.

POSITIVE WORKSPACES

Despite the rather bleak picture that I have painted of workplaces for women thus far in this text, the data from my research on women's careers also revealed a rather more optimistic picture. Here, individuals reported working in organizations that not only recognized some of the difficulties that can be experienced by women in particular, but also deliberately designed work so that it was more enabling for those with domestic responsibilities.

Ruth, a 43-year-old scientist and mother of two school-aged children experienced career stasis following the birth of her children, unable to find work that she felt both matched her skill level and would allow her to work part-time. Eventually, she and her partner agreed that she would return to full-time work and he would assume more of the responsibility for childcare. The organization she was working in at the time of both interviews was, she said, recognizing that 'returning mothers are a huge untapped skill base', understanding that skills do not become obsolete but are rather 'dormant'. This, she said, had prompted the senior management in the organization to a rethink of how time should be used at work, with a deliberate policy shift from an emphasis on being physically present at work to something termed 'productive work time'. This meant, in practice, that as long as individuals completed the projects to which they were allocated, they could work from anywhere (including home) and at any time that suited them. While all staff were obligated to complete their contracted full-time hours, this was not monitored. Moreover, the organization was characterized by an ethos of teamwork, which meant that staff were not held individually responsible for particular projects, rather this responsibility was shared. These processes were facilitated by ensuring that calendars were kept updated so that the team knew who was available and when, enabling meetings to discuss work co-ordination and allocation to take place at times that suited everyone. Interestingly, Ruth's occupation and organization had been historically male-dominated but she felt that the difficulty of recruiting staff with the necessary skills was one of the core drivers of the productive work time policy.

A second example of a more enabling workplace comes from Laura, a 25-year-old graduate working for a third-sector organization, which had been founded less than five years prior to her employment with it, and whose remit is raising awareness of environmental and climate issues. She had been working for this organization part-time for the last four years, and by the time of our third interview the organization had expanded exponentially and Laura was working full-time for the charity as acting director following the

resignation of the existing CEO. The organization had developed a very strong collaborative culture from the start which Laura describes thus:

> We usually check back in with each other, like, when we're doing work. But it's quite interesting, and it's interesting how in that collaborative environment you do spend a lot more energy considering, like, how you're working with other people and how you might propose something or how you might resolve something within the organization, whereas when you're on your own, like, you've only got yourself to worry about [laughter] and everything's done over phone call or Skype call or emails.

As the organization grew and became more bureaucratic (for example, manuals and protocols were developed for new staff), there was some disgruntlement, but the overall ethos of the workplace remained caring and supportive. Some routine practices were in place which reinforced this ethos including a weekly 'highlights' meeting, where individuals shared their positive experiences, and communal relaxation sessions, where the team was encouraged to down tools and quietly meditate. Laura felt that some of her friends working in more traditional organizations and occupations viewed her workplace as rather 'hippyish', but the experience of the staff working there was that it was incredibly enabling and supportive. Clearly, the age and size of the organization were critical factors in explaining the development of this highly unusual culture but, even so, this is indicative of how work can be designed in ways that recognize and celebrate the contributions of everybody and not just those producing calculable outcomes.

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this chapter has been to problematize the idea that we can read off claims about gender inequality, subordination or discrimination from looking at charts and graphs showing the underrepresentation of women in particular occupations and roles. Higher-status and higher-paid roles can be constructed as those that are more likely to reflect cultural conceptions of masculinity, inasmuch as the behaviours required in these roles are often those which are deemed to be more technical than relational (e.g. planning and goal-setting versus supporting and developing others). But the value that attaches to these behaviours, I suggest, stems less from their gendered nature than from their perceived, direct impact on the bottom line. Even so, the core problem is less to do with the nature of these requirements per se, and more with their relationship to visibility and an individual's ability to enhance this visibility through physical presence and constant availability. While it is probably true that women are less likely to enact their roles in these ways, this is not universal. What is critical is the fact that women often carry the vast majority of the

responsibility for the home and for family relationships; a responsibility which is not just manifested in giving birth and raising children, but in the amount of psychic space such responsibility occupies. This means that women can find that they are not able to continue working in roles which are extremely demanding in both cognitive and temporal terms, simply because the invisible work they carry over into the workplace from home depletes their mental and physical resources, sometimes, as illustrated in the cases of Gemma and Anna, to the extent that they become physically and/or mentally ill. Gemma and Anna both made deliberate and informed choices to disengage from the career ladders in their professions due to these experiences.

One very important issue raised by the arguments I have presented in this chapter relates to a dominant claim made in the feminist literature: women's career choices are constrained by structural and cultural influences, including the requirement for full-time working; the valorization and prioritization of masculine modes of conduct; and the lack of recognition attaching to the work that women typically perform in workplaces. Such constraints, it is argued, push women into making choices that are deleterious for career progression. While in many ways my data could be read as directly supporting this claim, I suggest the picture is rather more complex and nuanced.

First, for instance, career progression in many cultures and societies across the world is understood as a linear and upward journey to higher status and higher pay. But not everybody wants this, and there are undoubtedly many men (as well as women) who fall into this category. I have argued that the normative status of upward career progression is as big a problem for women as the requirements that are needed to achieve it. Upward career progression offers attractive subject positions of ambition, drive, status, skill and excellence and the associated cultural, social and financial capital that goes with them. However, upward progression is not possible for everyone in every organization because there are only a finite number of senior positions available. The idea that longevity in a profession or occupation should be accompanied by upward progression troubled some of the women in my study far more than did their actual status. They viewed their lack of career progression as troublesome due to what this signified about their ambition or motivation; a dispreferred subject position that, I would argue, derives from how the normative status of upward career progression is a significant element of the thinner elements of moral order, especially for professional and semi-professional roles.

Second, and relatedly, upward progression in many workplaces, as I have argued in previous chapters, is not necessarily predicated on being excellent at one's job, but on being *seen* as meeting the requirements of the bottom line. Individuals who perform roles directly related to the generation of profit, growth and positive corporate reputations are those most likely to occupy high status and higher-paid roles or to be seen as suitable for such roles. Likewise

those who are good at rendering their workplace performance relevant to these goals and, critically, visibly so, are also likely to be highly valued. Nonetheless, it is important to point out that visible work and visibility are not in and of themselves responsible for the achievement of these bottom-line outcomes. Strategic and operational plans and procedures and savvy decision making do not produce these outcomes in a social or contextual vacuum, but are rather enabled by the invisible work of others who render those plans and decisions executable and executed. An individual who very effectively promotes themselves as a valuable employee by using their impression management skills is not necessarily making the level of contribution that he or she is claiming to make. Equating long hours with hard or good work or with high levels of responsibility is not a reliable proxy. As I demonstrated in Chapter 6, part-time women who are perceived to be breaching these thicker elements of moral order through their lack of physical presence in the workplace are quick to point out that what constitutes a contribution in the workplace is contestable: less quantifiable and visible inputs to a job or task can be just as critical as valorized outcomes. In short, *being seen* to meet bottom-line requirements is what is likely to enable upward progression, but the assumed relationship between certain behaviours and the achievement of the bottom line is neither clear-cut nor unambiguous. Visibility has become decoupled from the outcomes it apparently enables, achieving the status of a valorized mode of being in the workplace that is now seen as the only correct means for achieving the bottom line. Meanwhile, the pursuit of the bottom line itself continues to be taken for granted as the most rational goal for organizations across all sectors, despite the mounting evidence that this short-term and partial view of an organization's *raison d'être* is generating huge social and environmental costs (Pfeffer, 2016).

Women, whether through nature, nurture, socialization or culture, tend to be attracted to roles characterized by behaviours that are more associated with relationality and meeting the needs of others. Not only are such roles largely invisible, so too are the behaviours required to enact them and the outputs they generate. Such behaviours, more concerningly, are not seen as skills but as natural attributes more likely to be possessed by women than by men. It is this invisibility which is responsible for the lack of value attaching to these roles and to the people, often women, who perform them. What this means is that unless senior roles in organizations are radically rethought and redesigned to encompass and celebrate relational as well as more technical and/or cognitive skills, no amount of effort to encourage women to apply for such roles is going to change the status quo. Moreover, until it is recognized that the invisible work that women (in particular) bring into the workplace from home is not conducive to enabling the level of focus and intensity that is now a taken-for-granted requirement for many professional and managerial roles,

then women will continue to see such roles as unattractive and irreconcilable with the demands that configure their lives. Invisible work performed in-role is now gaining recognition as a social problem, evidenced by the burgeoning academic literature on this issue. However, the invisible cognitive and emotional work that is carried from the home and into the workplace by women is presently understood as a private matter, not a social or collective problem (Brown, 2006). Yet it is precisely this type of invisible work that disables women from demonstrating the behaviours seen to be most important for attracting visibility and recognition in workplaces. Again, until this invisible work is recognized as a problem that requires the efforts of men, women and organizations to solve, the position of women in workplaces is unlikely to be substantively improved.

My core argument throughout this text, and in this chapter in particular, is that it is not helpful to think about women's career choices as constrained choices, because this implies not only that such constraints have a universal or objective meaning and are fixed and determinate elements of the social context, but also that choices would be different if certain social conditions were not prevalent. The social, economic and cultural conditions in which women make their career choices are not only constantly evolving and changing, but so too are the lives of the women making these choices and how significant these various conditions are to them at particular moments in time. Such choices can, of course, mean that women occupy subordinated roles in organizations; it can mean that they take jobs for which they are over-qualified; it can also mean, however, that they are liberated from the idea that the only way of contributing to the moral order is to occupy positions which connote that individuals are making an important contribution to the economic wealth of society. Instead, many of the women who participated in my study resist this idea, enabled by ideologies which position women as more suited to the home than to the workplace. These ideologies furnish them with the legitimacy and freedom to devote their time to their families and to experience great joy as a consequence of doing so.

In the penultimate chapter of this text, I am going to pull together the threads of the various ideas that I have used to interrogate some of the dominant ideas currently in existence about gender inequalities in workplaces.

8. Rethinking gender inequalities in organizations: review and synthesis

In this, the penultimate chapter of this text, I want to pull together the various strands of theorizing and thinking that I have presented in previous chapters to produce an overall synthesis and the development of a conceptual framework that I believe will be useful for enabling a more nuanced understanding of gender inequalities.

Throughout this text, I have challenged mainstream approaches to gender inequalities, and have sought to problematize how we understand them. As discussed in Chapter 1, inequalities of all types are understood as social and economic disadvantages that are more likely to be systematically experienced by particular groups, like women. However, this basic idea, which makes much prima facie sense, is problematic when we start to interrogate what we mean by 'disadvantage'. Disadvantage connotes the idea that there should be some fair and equitable way of distributing resources, such as money or status, but quite what this means when we try to put this into practice is not straightforward. For example, we tend not to consider people who are earning a lot less than others disadvantaged if we believe that the better-paid group deserves their pay because of the social value, difficulty or complexity of the job or occupation for which they are remunerated. The problem is that we cannot detach the social value of particular jobs and occupations from the processes through which they have acquired this value, and these processes may not be fair and equitable. Medicine, for instance, is a highly socially valued occupation and the vast majority of people would accept that doctors should receive higher pay than nurses. However, the status and social value of medicine have developed from processes of occupational closure (see Chapter 2) through which powerful groups have restricted entry to this profession and set the rules for admittance, which often reflect the preferences and behaviours of the white middle-class men who have historically dominated this profession. Thus, medicine, whilst in theory open to anyone who acquires the necessary qualifications, training and skills, is in practice open only to those individuals who have the means to acquire these credentials, and the credentials themselves reflect ways of knowing and acting that are more typical of already socially and economically advantaged groups. This is not in any sense to belittle or challenge these credentials but to encourage us to question why some credentials and

not others have such high social value. This, as I have argued throughout this text, is an outcome of the relationship between politics and culture and is not derived from some inherent quality of these credentials.

This fundamental issue, I have argued, means that we need to rethink gender inequality by seeing it as residing in social processes of valuation, not in the differential achievement of outcomes such as high-status roles and occupations. It is processes of valuation which produce the idea that some people, ways of being and acting, and particular jobs and occupations, are better than others. If we insist on seeing inequalities, including gender inequalities, as discernible in outcomes such as pay, career progression or representation in particular roles and occupations, we focus on ways to improve the numbers of women achieving these outcomes and not on why particular outcomes acquire the social value that precedes their high remunerative value.

As discussed in earlier chapters, for instance, job evaluation methods which are used to determine pay scales in workplaces are based on assumptions about the remunerative value of jobs located in different positions within organizational hierarchies. Jobs located at higher positions are assumed to be more important and complex than many lower-level jobs, leading to unquestioned acceptance of the higher pay that senior organizational members can often secure. But this assumption is challengeable. It conflates hierarchical seniority with job complexity and responsibility, in the process glossing over the fact that many jobs lower in the hierarchy are also highly complex and carry responsibilities. Complexity and responsibility take multiple forms, and what constitutes complexity or responsibility differs dependent upon the specific task in hand. For instance, care work, which is often classified as unskilled and simple work, may involve assessing a patient's needs, communicating with that person to ensure that this assessment concurs with their own views, developing a care plan and executing that plan. On the other hand, developing an organizational strategy, often seen as a very complex highly skilled task, may involve evaluating various pieces of information, interpreting their meaning with reference to a preferred future and making plans about how that future might be realized. Clearly both tasks are complex, but on what basis do we claim that the latter is more complex than the former? As Steinberg (1990: 451) argues, skill categories 'either grow out of political struggle between employers and employees or are a result of unilateral choices by employers to maximise control over production', illustrating the core thesis of this text: the value of jobs and the skills or attributes required for their performance do not derive only from their 'masculinity' (a core argument in the feminist literature which I reviewed in Chapter 2) but also from political processes through which powerful groups make decisions about what jobs should involve or achieve, how they should be designed, how they should be performed and how the skills involved in their execution should be understood and evaluated.

While many outcomes produced by such decisions may reflect cultural conceptions of masculinity, they more often reflect the interests and goals of organizational power holders. Although this is often a group comprised of men, this is not always the case. And even if it is, we cannot assume that all men share the values, beliefs and preferences prevalent in groups of powerful men, nor that such attributes are shared by all men who are members of powerful groups. As argued in previous chapters, it is important that we recognize this issue as otherwise we reify subordination and domination and see them as inhering within specific groups rather than in the processes of valuation which enable this relation to emerge, persist and, critically, evolve and change. We also risk homogenizing masculinity, assuming it to be comprised of fixed and essential attributes. Gender inequality is, therefore, a complex issue. Not only do we tend to conflate equality of outcomes with equality of opportunity but, as illustrated above, in reality the two are not easily disentangled.

A central argument in this text is that the major problem with respect to the differential valuation of work, prevalent in many contemporary workplaces, is the valorization of visibility and how this is embedded in *taken-for-granted*, inflexible, everyday practices, such as full-time working. This situation, whilst certainly attributable to the actions of powerful groups, cannot be easily located within particular groups or individuals but rather reflects Foucault's view of a *strategy of power*: directed by nobody but involving everybody (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982). I will return to this issue below. It is visibility, I would suggest, that therefore needs to be the target of critique and interrogation, though, as I elaborated in Chapter 4, visibility carries many risks for individuals who pursue it or who are already visible, because it also generates significant vulnerability.

The valorization of visibility, as I have argued in previous chapters, is a consequence of the increasing dominance of the bottom-line ideology and the belief that economic growth and financial and symbolic profit are the only truly important outcomes for society generally and workplaces in particular. These taken-for-granted ideas generate a moral order which confers social value to individuals and groups who conform to the norms and prescriptions deemed appropriate and 'right' for generating symbolic and financial profit, whilst marginalizing or even pathologizing those who do not. It is the taken-for-grantedness of the bottom-line ideology and how it is embedded in everyday mundane practices (such as full-time working and individualized workloads, which are themselves taken for granted) that explains why even in parts of the world where gender inequality is diminishing, women continue not to be well represented in the very top jobs in many organizations (see Chapter 2). Taken-for-grantedness therefore represents a further critical focus for exploration and theorization as it is only when the suppositions supporting

taken-for-granted ideas, practices and processes are called to attention that we can start to envisage that things could be different.

GOVERNMENTALITY, THE PRODUCTIVE CITIZEN DISCOURSE AND THIN MORAL ORDER

In Chapters 1 and 3, I introduced and outlined Foucault's conception of governmentality which refers to dispersed and often uncoordinated efforts to regulate the conduct of populations within any given era. It is important to emphasize the uneven and fragmented nature of such processes, as otherwise we fall into the trap of seeing some of the processes and ideas already discussed and developed in this text as being products of the deliberate and intentional actions of men in particular. As I will discuss in this section, while governmentality produces definite 'objects' of concern in society, such as economics, efficiency, productivity and gender inequality (to name but a few that are relevant to the focus of this text), the unstable and dynamic processes that produce our understandings of and responses to these objects, paradoxically render them *ungovernable*. These processes generate a vast array of what could be called unintended consequences but should perhaps be referred to more accurately, as unpredictable consequences.

A central tenet of governmentality in our contemporary era is what we might call 'the productive citizen' discourse; a discourse that has a long history and whose content and meaning has evolved over time, but which is, in general, a moral appeal. It is the idea that in any society, individuals should make some form of meaningful contribution to the health and wellbeing of that society. Work and working have always been a key part of the productive citizen discourse, reflecting in part the Protestant work ethic (outlined in Chapter 5) through which working was seen to be a means to secure God's grace through diligent and effortful labour, and as a 'calling' rather than a practical necessity (Weber, 1905). Hence, within this discourse, the value of work is broader than economic contributions – it is also a means of demonstrating civilized and disciplined behaviour, the signal that one is a member of a broader moral community (Wadel, 1979).

The contours of work and working have been transformed since the Industrial Revolution and the advent of capitalism, largely because of the symbiotic relationship between production and consumption. Here, through the desires we develop for 'things' that are produced, we feel compelled to earn more money in order to acquire the things that we see as symbolic of a 'good life' – be these houses, furnishings, clothes, holidays or technology. Those who 'work hard' are seen as deserving of the good things in life, those who don't are not. The transformation of work has accelerated over the last couple of decades. Traditionally, making an economic contribution through work for many

people in the UK often meant working in manufacturing industries, producing material goods and products that could be conspicuously consumed, sold and exported. Working productively in the manufacturing sector was something that could relatively easily be observed. You either produced your allocated quantity of widgets or you didn't. You either typed 70 words a minute, or you didn't. This observable element of paid work was what permitted productivity to be quantified and measured and profit and loss to be calculated, enabling the assessment of how these outcomes were directly related to the inputs of time and labour provided by workers and paid for by capitalists.

As the early feminists were at pains to point out, however, production costs are not only visible costs (see Chapter 4). They are also the costs of invisible labour, usually performed by women at home, enabling men to attend work and put the mental and physical energy required into their work by feeding, clothing and caring for them. It is this issue that underlies the idea that 'women are more likely to choose socially rather than economically useful occupations' (Blackburn and Jarman, 2006: 293); an idea which completely ignores the fact that 'socially useful' occupations are what enable those classed as 'economically useful' to be staffed. If women (and some men) were not providing the childcare, elder care or other 'socially useful' activities, very few people would be available to work at all.

Productivity in our current industrial era is much less easy to calculate than in previous times, especially in those industries that are characterized by immaterial inputs and outputs; a situation that has accelerated since the transformation of the industrial base in many European countries from manufacturing to services. Nevertheless, traditional conceptions of productivity as a calculable outcome continue to dominate our cultural understandings of what constitutes *real work* and thus retains immense power as one of the primary dimensions along which the value of different types of work is evaluated. As Smith and Riach (2016: 27) point out, 'the framing of paid work within particular moral economies has led to economic activity being increasingly conflated with one's value as a neoliberal citizen'.

To be a productive citizen in our current time, however, does not just depend on doing work that can be shown to be of economic value but rather retains a connection to the Protestant work ethic, whereby working is seen not only as a moral obligation in its own right but as additionally tied to what is considered socially useful. For example, traditional professions such as law and medicine which do not make direct contributions to the economy (other than through private practice) are nevertheless generally seen to be of high social value, whilst other professions that could, in principle, be judged similarly, such as public relations or management consultancy, are seen as somewhat dubious and trivial. On the other hand, care work or work involving social service (such as policing or social work) are seen to be socially worthy occupations but are

not deemed to be as deserving of the high status and wages typical of the 'true' professions. What constitutes real and socially valuable work, therefore, is not attributable to one particular dimension of work, but in general seems to be related to the economic or moral value of the outputs of that work, coupled with the value of the inputs (particularly skills and qualifications) seen to be necessary for its execution. Such evaluations have developed over long tracts of historical time.

The imperative to do 'real' work represents the hallmark of the productive citizen in the contemporary era and reflects what Snyder (2016) refers to as *thin moral order* – the overall value that attaches to our work in a broad, cultural sense. Thin moral order is, I have argued, closely related to the broader economic and industrial context but, as my analysis in previous chapters has shown, there is a cultural lag (Ogburn, 1957) between what we understand as real and productive work and the dominant types of work that now configure our economic landscape. Full-time working as a practice is, I would argue, a material manifestation of this cultural lag. Full-time working is a norm that developed once individuals began working outside of their homes and capitalists wanted to ensure that they were gaining maximal productive output from their employees. In this era it was a cultural norm that men were breadwinners and women were homemakers, which meant that men were able to be in full-time attendance at work because they had wives and mothers at home doing the invisible work of home and family maintenance. But in the current economic era, with the proliferation of immaterial, professional, managerial and service work, with equal numbers of men and women now working, and increasing wealth in the Global North, this work norm is out of sync with how people work and how people live. The persistence of the full-time work norm is in no small part related to its taken-for-grantedness (see Chapter 3) and ubiquity but also, more fundamentally, to the role that it plays in the reproduction of thin moral order: the transmission of the idea that the full-time individual is a 'real' worker, a productive citizen making a worthwhile, visible and ideally economic contribution to society.

What is considered real and useful work is therefore part of the 'grid of intelligibility' (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982) through which organizing under capitalism is seen to be a rational process and a contract to be fulfilled – your work time is owned by the wage provider. Working full-time means that the individual counts, is doing the right thing, takes their work seriously and is deserving of whatever social and financial benefits working full-time brings. Whether it actually enables and generates the high levels of productivity and efficiency that are claimed by some economists remains an open question, but it is certainly one of the central drivers of gender inequality if we see that as differential access to valorized occupations and roles. While it remains uncontested and taken for granted, this norm will ensure that women's choices

about work are not those that will enable them to enter high-status, high-value occupations and professions in the same proportions as men.

Traditional ideas about what real and productive work involves and how it should be enacted continue to strongly influence the general worth, value and social affirmation that individuals associate with their work. Those individuals working in immaterial occupations which are not considered 'true' professions, may find it particularly difficult to believe that they are doing something that is worthwhile and valuable (see Chapter 7); a situation that for women is exacerbated when they opt to work part-time or in other ways that enable them to obtain the flexibility they need to manage their domestic and childcare demands (see Chapter 6).

THE AMBITIOUS AND MOTIVATED WOMAN DISCOURSE

As already outlined above, we can understand the subject position of the productive citizen as a power effect of governmentality. This process, I would argue, has produced a further object of concern in the contemporary era: gender inequality. As more and more women have entered workplaces and attempted to secure employment within roles, professions and occupations once considered the rightful and exclusive domain of men, so women have questioned and challenged what, until fairly recently, was their limited access to these positions. In Chapter 7, I outlined some of the legal consequences of these challenges and argued that these have generated the current concern with equality of opportunity, which we might therefore understand as an unpredictable consequence of women's take-up of the subject position, 'productive citizen'. Simply put, as women have taken up such subject positions, they have experienced tensions between the material effects of this discourse (the requirement for temporal availability) and discourses of motherhood (the requirement to 'be there' for one's children). It is these tensions that have stimulated the fight for equality of treatment. The discourse of equal opportunity has, I would suggest, produced its own subject position: 'the ambitious and motivated woman' – a subject position that was once seen as inappropriate or even irrelevant for women, but is now a major axis of identity for professional and managerial women.

This subject position, which positions the pursuit of career upward mobility as a high-value mode of being in the workplace, is one that infuses the self-understandings of professional and managerial women, often leading them to feel accountable for decisions to leave their workplace or seek part-time hours when they have children. I first noticed this issue when conducting my PhD research in the police service in the 1990s when policewomen who were talking to me about their futures would often engage in lengthy justifications

for their decisions to rethink their career ambitions on account of either having given birth to a child or considering doing so (see Dick, 2004). As I argued in Chapter 7, the costs of this subject position, especially in the contemporary context where visibility is the currency *du jour* for those who want to further their careers are, for women, sometimes too high. As women continue to play the major role in raising children, caring for relatives and keeping the home fires burning, they simply do not have the energy or the time to put into the 'hustle' required in workplaces to ensure that they are sufficiently visible so as to be noticed and rewarded.

THIN MORAL ORDER AND THE PRODUCTION OF GENDER INEQUALITIES

The discourses, prescriptions and norms of thin moral order explain why women 'make choices' not to pursue career opportunities or jobs which they perceive to be too demanding, or opt into particular types of work that become classed as women's work. For instance, as discussed in Chapter 2, in economies whose mode of capitalism is based on longer-term considerations of labour markets, as is typical in many Scandinavian countries, gendered occupational segregation is much higher than in Europe, North America and the UK, a situation that seems anomalous with Scandinavia's reputation as a gender-equal region. This appears to be because in these countries, many organizations offer firm-specific occupational training which is relevant only to that firm. Women, more likely to want portable qualifications that will enable them to more easily move jobs as family and domestic commitments require, therefore opt for occupations that do not require the level of commitment needed to acquire vocational skills, such as apprenticeships. Similar to other nations in the Global North, however, while women's representation in high-status and high-paid roles is improving in Scandinavia, women do lag behind men in this respect, a situation that I have suggested is related to the difficulty in reconciling normative prescriptions with practical realities.

Even so, this situation alerts us to the fact that gendered occupational segregation is not (only) a consequence of patriarchy with women filtered into roles and jobs that match cultural conceptions of femininity. Segregation is also a consequence of how forms of capitalism influence the nature and form of the labour market, shaping and influencing the choices women and men make within particular sets of cultural values and relations of power. Within capitalist relations of power, for instance, there is an imperative for all citizens to be productive, and men are as much targets of this discourse as are women but with fewer legitimate opportunities to resist or reject the subject positions it produces. Thin moral order also has a major influence on how the subject positions of productive citizen or ambitious and motivated woman signify to

women. Those working in 'real' jobs that are also considered to be high skill and high status, may profit from enacting the behaviours deemed appropriate for productive citizens and ambitious women, but they may also run up against the tensions that such behaviours generate, specifically irreconcilable energy demands stemming from the home and the workplace (see Chapters 6 and 7). It is this tension, I have argued, which offers at least part of the explanation for why women 'opt out' of their careers.

For women working in what are perceived as 'real' jobs that are classed as low skill and low status (such as, for example care work), there is little in the way of either symbolic or financial profit to be had. Like the women occupying jobs that are seen to be trivial or unimportant, these women appear to derive their sense of personal value from intrinsic elements of their work, from a 'job well done' rather than from external sources of affirmation (see Chapter 7). However, the productive citizen discourse compels women in low-skill and low-status jobs to continue working hard and for little recognition; a compulsion that, for some of the women in my study, was psychologically damaging. This problem is almost wholly related to cultural conceptions of skill which can be considered to be a gendered issue because of the assumption that the skills more typically associated with women, such as caring, communicating and nurturing, are not 'real' or achieved skills in the way that technical or intellectual skills are (Warhurst et al., 2017).

THICK MORAL ORDER AND THE PRODUCTION OF GENDER INEQUALITIES

While thin moral order deals with the meaning of work in a broad cultural sense, thick moral order refers to how what we actually do in workplaces shapes and informs our identities as workers. Productivity and its fellow concept, efficiency, are fundamental aspects of thick moral order, influencing how we evaluate our own work performance and contributions. Productivity and efficiency are, however, political as well as economic concepts (Foster, 2016; Perkins, 2002), reflecting the interests of powerful groups often to the detriment of those who lack power which include both workers and external communities. For example, the Big Four accountancy service providers in the UK, whilst lauded for the quality and prestige of their services and their apparent commitment to social justice and equality, have been involved in various privatization projects over the last 20 or so years which have resulted in deskilling and job losses for employees working in these newly privatized industries (Ingram and Gamsu, 2022). What is sauce for the goose is not always sauce for the gander. I agree with Perkins (2002) that while productivity and efficiency are important because of their relationship to economic growth (a principle that is related to the capacity of societies to remedy poverty

and health inequalities amongst others), unbridled growth or growth for its own sake needs challenging – we need, in short, to 'call attention' to the unreflexive endorsement of growth at any cost, showing it to be a contingent and not an unassailable project.

Yet, unassailable growth in profits and corporate income appears to be the goal of many organizations, whatever their location in the economy (public, private or third sectors). Hence, even though, as pointed out above, some types of work that could be classed as socially rather than economically useful are valued in society there is nevertheless an imperative to show that this work offers 'value for money'; that employees are working in ways conducive to this outcome (Lapuenta and Van de Walle, 2020). The growth imperative, I have argued, is the goal that underpins, reproduces and maintains the bottom-line ideology and the increasing value and centrality of visibility within organizations. This valorization of visibility means that attributes and skills which are seen to *directly* influence the generation of financial profit, corporate reputation and corporate growth are those that are then seen to be most important and valuable. Working full-time and long hours, being able to showcase one's skills and abilities in ways that tie them directly to bottom-line outcomes (McCluney and Rabelo, 2019), networking and generating large numbers of external contacts, and producing outputs that 'look good' even if they may not have much substance (Alvesson and Spicer, 2016) are examples here. Visible individuals, as discussed in Chapter 4, rely on a relationship of 'instrumental invisibility' with individuals who provide the background work that enables them to perform their visibility and it is this relationship and the necessity of having to continually reproduce visible outcomes that renders visible workers highly vulnerable as well as highly valued. This vulnerability explains the compulsion of the visible to maintain their investment in those behaviours (such as working long hours) which secure their sense of centrality to the achievement of bottom-line outcomes and, I argued, explains why women continue not to be well represented in the most senior and high-status roles in organizations. Within the matrix of cultural values that configure society which, for women, include prioritizing family and domestic commitments, many are simply physically and psychologically unable to maintain the performances that visibility requires.

Full-time and long hours working are prevalent proxies of the assumption that visible work is the most important and valuable form of work. Working full-time on its own is, as discussed above, a significant source of positive social worth for employees but is also tied into dominant ideas about being productive and effective. As I illustrated in Chapter 6, women professionals working part-time who experienced the marginalization and stigmatization that has been charted as all too frequent for such workers, contested and challenged this taken-for-granted assumption, arguing that productivity (in

their case providing good public service) is not just dependent on physical availability (or visibility) but on providing critical yet invisible inputs enabling the achievement of outcomes like good public service. I argued that this is indicative of how the relationship between personal identity and moral order can become a site of potential social transformation. As individuals whose sense of being a 'good' employee is disrupted by working in ways that run counter to dominant norms (i.e. working part-time), they surface and call to attention the challengeable logic that underpins these taken-for-granted ideas.

Invisible workers do not, therefore, blithely accept their subordinated positions in organizations and they are often only too aware of how the work they do maintains the visibility of dominant and powerful groups. Invisible workers, however, often lack the power to contest the status quo and, with their own concerns centred on developing 'instrumental intimacy' with powerful individuals, may often simply get on with working hard but with little recognition (see Chapter 4). As I illustrated in Chapter 7, this can take its toll on individuals who can come to question why they are working in an organization that appears not to care for those who are maintaining the organization's basic infrastructure – the solid work which actually keeps an organization functioning. Those with portable and valued skills may be able to leave such organizations; those without can be stuck in degrading, low-value jobs from which it can be difficult to extract meaning.

Women, I have argued, are often found in work that can be characterized as invisible, such as care work or work involving relationships and emotional labour (Daniels, 1987) even when they occupy higher-status professional and managerial roles. The low value of this work stems from its invisibility which in turn derives from the idea that such work does not require skill, but rather taps into women's *natural* propensities for nurturing and caring. Skill tends to be understood as something that is credentialed or achieved through training or dedicated and intensive application, something requiring intellectual effort to achieve and not widely or commonly distributed among a population. It therefore has value. But the taken-for-granted supposition that some forms of work do not require skills or that certain behaviours or activities do not count as skills is also a process of domination, since this means that the individual undertaking such work is rendered 'a mere instrument of production – unimportant, interchangeable, and lacking in individual interests' (Lengermann and Niebrugge, 1995: 30).

MORAL ORDER, CULTURAL RESILIENCE AND TAKEN-FOR-GRANTEDNESS

As discussed in previous chapters, the taken-for-grantedness of particular versions of social reality is what furnishes thick and thin moral order with their

stability and capacity to act as barometers of what should be considered good, bad, appropriate or inappropriate with respect to where and how we work. All taken-for-granted ideas and practices maintain their taken-for-grantedness when the suppositions on which they rest can 'go without saying' or are background, 'common-sense' understandings of the world that are not (often) surfaced or challenged (see Chapter 3). As I have shown in previous chapters, individuals who experience a sense of being judged as 'inappropriate', such as part-time professionals, are those most likely to reflexively engage with these suppositions and question their meaning and veracity.

But the taken-for-grantedness of the cultural idea that some skills and forms of intelligence are much more valuable than others is highly resilient, largely because those subordinated groups who people those jobs and roles classed as unskilled do not have the power or occupy a position from which to question or challenge the status quo. Lacking positional power and the opportunity to see that the world could be different for them (in the way, for example, that part-time professionals who were once full-time can see this possibility), the chances that their own identities might become sites for challenge to or transformation of the moral order seems remote. Yet, the 'spectacle' of visibility in contemporary life in general and within workplaces in particular is generating its own cracks and fissures as individuals question the value and worth of this mode of being in the world (Fleming, 2020). While, of course, the financial necessity of work poses limits here, there is evidence that individuals are questioning the place that work occupies in their lives. Such evidence is visible from individuals 'quiet quitting' (Warrick and Cady, 2022), from the women we met in Chapters 6 and 7 who have eschewed the subject positions of productive citizen and ambitious and motivated woman to invest in forms of work that are personally rather than economically or socially meaningful (see Petriglieri and Ashford, 2023), and from the groups of women who, whilst still ambitious, were redefining the meaning of success to encompass their whole lives, and not just work (see Chapter 7). Also of note here are those workplaces which are experiencing skills shortages and increasingly relying on women returners as a solution to this problem (see Chapter 7). Forced into rethinking whether full-time work is actually necessary, such workplaces demonstrate that this practice is neither inevitable nor imperative. And just as discourses can bring about changes in practice such as the introduction of flexible working arrangements (FWAs), so changes in practices can bring about changes to discourses and ideologies. Like the small and possibly insignificant transformations to temporal organization that part-time police women precipitated (see Chapter 6) such changes 'call to attention' how work does not have to have to signify to us in the ways prescribed to us by contemporary moral orders. Things can be different.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I have attempted to synthesize the various ideas, concepts and arguments developed in previous chapters to produce an overall conceptual framework. This framework positions processes of governmentality, within which economic growth, profit maximization and cost minimization are the chief and primary concerns, as central to an adequate understanding of gender inequalities. As the industrial landscape has evolved into a knowledge economy, characterized by occupations whose inputs and outputs are increasingly immaterial, there has been a concomitant rise in the valorization of visibility: behavioural and frequently temporal proxies used to make evaluations about the economic worth of particular occupational activities. Alongside this feature of the industrial landscape are traditional and deeply taken-for-granted ideas about what constitutes skills, with those more typically performed by women (caring, communicating, emotional labour) seen to be natural attributes of womanhood that do not require learning, credentialization, or development. Conversely, skills that carry high social and economic value are those that are seen to require the ability to learn 'difficult' knowledges, such as maths or science, evidenced through high-status educational credentials and such skills are more typically performed by men.

Taken together, occupations whose outputs are assumed to be of high economic utility and/or requiring inputs assumed to require acquired or achieved skills are those which carry the highest social and remunerative value. Conversely, occupations assumed to be primarily socially useful and as requiring little in the way of achieved or acquired skills are those which carry the lowest. This situation, I have argued, has produced a moral order within which evaluations of individuals with respect to their value as paid workers in both a broad cultural and an organizationally specific sense, are increasingly tied to conforming with norms and prescriptions that enable organizational power holders to accrue financial and/or symbolic profit.

Immaterial work is not readily calculable with respect to the financial value of its inputs and outputs, but temporal contributions are assumed to provide adequate proxies of this value, despite a lack of supporting evidence for this assumption. I have argued that the resilience of this idea and the idea that the most valuable skills are those that are believed to be difficult to acquire or achieve, explain both the valorization of visibility and persistence of gender inequalities. Visible workers are heavily invested in maintaining the idea that their inputs are those which are central to organizational success and working full-time and long hours is one way of performing this centrality. Yet, invisible work is what enables visible work to be conducted, and hence visible workers rely on keeping invisible work invisible in order to maintain the belief in their

own importance. This, I argued, means that visible workers are also highly vulnerable; a status which compels them to maintain the behaviours (particularly long working hours) seen to be the signifiers of their centrality to work and workplaces.

Disrupting the taken-for-granted status of full-time and long hours working and the notion that only particular types of skill have social and economic value is, therefore, critical if the aim is to improve the status of women's work. Given that this would require the assumptions underpinning the taken-for-granted status of these ideas and the practices in which they are embedded to be surfaced and challenged, and given that this is not likely to happen when individuals see their positions in the social order as legitimate, this possibility seems remote. Nonetheless, the fact that there are individuals who reflexively disengage from the prescriptions of the moral order, investing their time, energies and self-worth in activities that they experience as personally meaningful, even if seen as socially and economically dubious, are indicative that the legitimacy of the moral order can be challenged indirectly.

Finally, I have argued that the norms and prescriptions generative of social and remunerative value and embedded in taken-for-granted and mundane practices, particularly full-time and lengthy work hours, are culturally misaligned with the nature of the current industrial landscape and the needs of the workers peopling it. It is this misalignment that, I suggest, could be generative of further challenges to the existing moral order. This misalignment is part of the general societal instability we are currently experiencing in the world; 'unsettled times' which occur when the certainty attaching to social positions, commitments and shared values erodes (Wuthnow, 1989). As workplaces experience the effects of such uncertainties, including difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff, they may be forced into rethinking what counts as a valuable contribution if they want to attract and retain the invisible staff who provide the backbone of their undertakings.

9. Conclusion: theoretical, methodological and practical implications

Having set out the conceptual framework that I have used to rethink gender inequalities in organizations, in this final brief chapter I want to review what my framework and analysis suggest for the various issues I have identified as problematic with respect to understanding gender inequalities. I have already made and explicated a case for focusing our attention less on indicators of inequality (such as the representation of women in senior roles and high-status occupations, the gender pay gap and gendered occupational segregation) and more on the social processes of valuation that furnish particular occupations, jobs and roles with the high social value that underpins such outcomes. I begin this final chapter by focusing on three key ideas which, as I have illustrated in previous chapters, are often mobilized to explain inequality as it pertains to these indicators or to theorize the processes that produce and maintain these indicators of inequality: the notion that the 'problem' inheres in the dominance of masculinity as a mode of being and acting and in patriarchy more generally; how we understand and theorize subordination and domination; and how we theorize the relationship between individuals and the social and economic conditions within which our lives are lived. Following this, I will draw attention to the various methodological implications of my arguments. In the final section, I am going to review some of the practical implications of the arguments developed in this text.

MASCULINITY AS THE PROBLEMATIC

As discussed in several chapters of this text, one of the most dominant explanations for the production and maintenance of gender inequalities resides in the idea that modes of work enactment and taken-for-granted practices, such as work centrality and full-time working, reflect masculinity and therefore advantage men (on the whole) relative to women. While, as I have made clear in several chapters, there is little doubt that these enactments and practices do, on aggregate, advantage men because of how they are more aligned with men's relationship to work, this is also an historical *legacy* from the time when men

were numerically dominant within the labour market and when it was more accepted that women's primary role was within the home.

The idea, therefore, that masculine modes of conduct are the primary explanation for women's current workplace disadvantage offers only a partial picture and is problematic for several reasons. First, is that this idea connotes a stable, identifiable and fixed notion of masculinity. Yet it is clear from research into masculinities, and from empirical work in organizations, that there are many forms of masculinity in society. While this issue has to some extent been addressed in the gender inequality literature with the notion of 'hegemonic masculinity' – a form of masculinity which is characterized by the desire to dominate and control others and by an emphasis and value placed on rationality above emotion – this nevertheless continues to reify and essentialize masculinity. This is problematic not least from an ontological perspective (see Gill, 2003) but also because this perspective is somewhat myopic, taking our attention away from why certain behaviours and activities are perpetuated in organizations irrespective of the gender of the actor. For example, the queen bee phenomenon, through which female leaders 'reproduce rather than challenge the existing gender hierarchy. Rather than adding diversity, they may assimilate to the male-dominated organizations and adjust their self-presentation and leadership style to fit the masculine organization culture' (Derks et al., 2016: 456), is assumed to be a consequence of social identity processes which lead women, as a devalued social category, to 'distance' themselves from other women and to assume masculine characteristics so as to be perceived as in-group by male managers. But this explanation, similar to the notion of hegemonic masculinity, homogenizes female managers, assuming them to be comprised of similar identities and attributes. Moreover, as I outlined in Chapter 2, the enactment of gendered identity is highly occasioned and it is therefore not possible to 'read off' identity from social category occupation alone. Hence, the idea that the masculine nature of particular behaviours, processes and practices is the problem does not help us understand why particular features of work are so highly valued, why some women and men reproduce these features, and why some women and men do not.

Focusing on processes of valuation that emerge from more macro-historical, social, political and economic processes (such as forms of capitalism) and their influences on labour markets and the evolution of cultural ideologies offer, I suggest, greater explanatory potential. This is because they enable us to understand how members of every social category, including those characterized as privileged, can experience undervaluation. Not all men, for instance, are advantaged over women (Benatar, 2003). This is not in any sense to deny that, as a group and on aggregate, women are more disadvantaged in workplaces. But the danger of seeing this to be a consequence of masculinity or patriarchy per se means that we lose the opportunity to explore how power

as a naturalizing phenomenon, embedded in processes of governmentality, is implicated in the generation and reproduction of all forms of inequality. The productive citizen discourse, which I discussed in the previous chapter, whilst of long historical standing, varies across time and culture with respect to its content, reflecting the various changes and transformations in labour markets which, in turn, reflect shifts in capitalist modes of production. As a mode of governmentality, the productive citizen discourse reminds us that power is not only the ability to use social position, authority or resources to get other people to bend to your will, but is also embedded in mundane, taken-for-granted ideas that produce society's predictability and stability e.g. the notion that full-time working is necessary to be considered a 'serious' and real worker. It is these processes and how they are maintained as 'common sense' that needs to be the focus of analysis as it is these which legitimize and maintain the differential valuation of people and their work. This approach is also much more sensitive to the dynamism of social conditions and how these shift and change dialectically with the relations of power such conditions generate, drawing our attention to the transience of all ideas and practices, no matter how stable they might appear to us at any given point in time.

SUBORDINATION AND DOMINATION

A further and connected issue that I have discussed in previous chapters relates to notions of subordination and domination and how these terms are used to capture the position of women relative to men in workplaces and society more generally. As I have pointed out, the issue with current understandings here is that these processes are, yet again, often reified, seen to be identifiable outcomes that are the consequence of membership of particular social categories. Not only does this lead us, as O'Connor (2019) has pointed out, to pathologize certain social categories so that we focus on trying to identify attributes of that group which 'cause' subordination or dominance, but we also mask the 'texture, complexity and variation' within all groups, failing to explain why it is that irrespective of social category, all individuals can experience subordination and domination.

The tendency to reify subordination and domination is also problematic from a social-constructionist perspective. Naming certain positions or experiences as reflective of subordination or domination warrants much more serious academic attention as it strikes me as a case of 'ontological gerrymandering' (Woolgar and Pawluch, 1985: 216) whereby 'the truth status of certain states of affairs selected for analysis and explanation [is rendered problematic], while backgrounding or minimizing the possibility that the same problems apply to assumptions upon which the analysis depends'. In the case of the couplet subordination/domination, for instance, this means that what is rendered prob-

lematic is the heterogeneity of responses to these conditions (i.e. why some people do not see themselves as subordinated or dominant even though others would claim that they are exemplars of this condition) whilst the possibility that subordination and domination are themselves contingent and contestable social realities is not considered. Of course, this argument applies to the idea of inequalities in general.

My view about this situation is that we have to recognize that 'conditions' such as inequality, subordination, domination or privilege are themselves social constructions that we can use to render particular situations, events or circumstances meaningful, but that we need to remember that such meanings are always historically and culturally contingent and open to challenge and contestation. Individuals who do not interpret their circumstances as reflective of inequality, subordination or privilege are not mistaken or unable to see things as they really are, but are simply agents drawing on meaning systems that have resonance for them in the context of their own lives. The women in my various studies who do not see themselves as 'victims' of inequality or as experiencing subordination within organizations are exerting their own interpretive privilege here, and we should be respectful not sceptical of this. While, for example, I personally believe that certain types of work are undervalued in workplaces, I also recognize that the idea of undervaluation is a social construction that could be problematized and challenged by alternative interpretations of the various situations (e.g. the gender pay gap) I have discussed in this text. As researchers, we need to be aware of and receptive to this as otherwise, as I have said at various points in this text, we are guilty of ignoring or taking for granted our own power as a group with the capacity to dominate others by imposing on them our own definitions and understandings of social reality. Processes of classification that produce categories such as inequality, subordination, domination and so forth are always exercises of power and we would do well to remember this in our own research projects.

AGENCY AND STRUCTURE

We also have to remember that while individuals make choices in social, economic and material conditions that are not of their own making, these conditions are themselves constantly evolving and confront individuals not as definite 'things' with fixed and determinate meanings but as situations and events in the social, economic and material landscape within and from which individuals carve out their existence. For example, as mentioned in earlier chapters, the family is a dominant social structure that transcends any given individual but its meaning, shape and configuration vary both in a broad sociological sense (a family is no longer, for instance, simply a woman, man and one or more child/ children) and in a highly individual sense (how individuals

use the term in the course of their own lives). However, unless we understand the micro-moments that shape our enactment or rejection of normalized versions of family we will not understand how and why it evolves. Likewise, even a fundamentally material object like a school cannot be properly understood without examining how the individuals who people that school as teachers, students, caretaking staff and so on, make sense of their physical surroundings and their interactions, and how the latter influence and are, in turn, influenced by the more and less material aspects of schooling such as décor, layout, educational techniques or outcomes or school reputation. In short, we need to follow Ingold's (2011) advice and dissolve the agency structure dualism by understanding agency as always/already embedded in action that takes place within and on the various conditions, both material and non-material, that confront us in our engagement with the world.

Adopting this more textured ontology enables us to think rather more carefully about issues such as 'structural constraint' that are commonly used in the feminist literature to explain women's choices. As I have illustrated in the empirical chapters, the decisions women make about their careers emerge from their entanglement with the various social, cultural and material conditions within which they live their lives. Hence, for example, making a decision to work part-time proceeds neither from a preference for part-time work that is dispositionally generated, nor from a forced choice between work and home, but as a practical and expedient response to the various dilemmas and tensions that confront women as they try to work full-time hours whilst also trying to fulfil their non-work obligations – sets of obligations which, as discussed in previous chapters, can be located in various historically and culturally contingent conditions of possibility. As women confront and engage with these conditions, they not only influence the meaning and contours of these conditions but they also make changes to their own self-understandings. Career ambitions, preferences and desires are shaped in these moment-to-moment experiences and are carried forwards into the next set of experiences that are encountered. As Ingold (2011: 4) puts it, life has a capacity 'to continually overtake the destinations that are thrown up in its course … it keeps on going, finding a way through the myriad of things that form, persist and break up in its currents. Life, in short, is a movement of opening, not of closure.' The meaning of experience emerges from these temporal flows of activity and this meaning influences not only how we act when confronted with new experiences but becomes, in a sense, publicly available as we share, make sense of and account for these experiences with others within our interactional spheres. Thus, just as a given condition, such as full-time working, can constrain women in the sense that some cannot or will not fulfil this obligation in order to climb particular career ladders, at one and the same time it can be experienced as liberating as

women celebrate the pleasures and affordances that emerge from not fulfilling these obligations.

METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Reifying the 'objects' that we want to interrogate and explore, such as gender inequalities or subordination and domination, means that we omit exploration and analysis of other important processes and issues; such as, for instance, that individual women vary considerably in their orientation towards work and what it signifies to them. Some women do embrace their roles as homemakers and mothers and see these as their absolute priority; others find the discourses that morally anchor women to this way of being oppressive and depressing; others still move in and out of different understandings of themselves in relation to their homes, their relationships and their work. To adequately understand some of the 'data' on women as workers, therefore, we need to take the wide-angled view advocated by O'Connor (2019) which looks beyond women's experiences of workplace disadvantage to encompass those women who have not had such experiences or do not see their experiences as illustrative of disadvantage. We need also to locate these diverse experiences within macro-historical influences, such as the various discourses and institutions that have influenced women's societal positions in the past and in the current time, whilst always recognizing that institutions and policies do not bear down on individuals in some standard and uniform manner, but are always performed and enacted in response to particular micro-level situations and interactions, as outlined above.

Researching gender inequalities is, therefore, extremely difficult and complex. As I have argued in this text, we cannot read off from data about the numbers of women occupying particular roles and professions apparent 'facts' about the status of women in organizations or the meaning such positions hold for individual women; such as, for instance, that they are victims of discrimination. On the other hand, relying on interviews with women (and men) in which we discuss their views on gender inequalities, means that we are already naming and framing a problem without thinking through how research practices themselves are producing and reproducing dominant ideas about women's experiences and the meaning of those experiences (Wylie, 2017). When I was conducting the fieldwork for my PhD in the 1990s, I continually ran up against this latter problem. I followed Wendy Hollway's (1989) advice and was transparent with the participants I interviewed about the aims of my study (to what extent does the police service possess a gendered organizational culture?) but this simply led me into a socially constructed web of differing views on this issue, with both women and men arguing for and against this proposition (Dick, 2000a). Ultimately, therefore, I was not able to answer my

own research question because the answer was always, 'it depends who you ask and what they think'.

I have continued to wrestle with this problem throughout my career as a gender researcher and I have not resolved this very basic problem. The ideas of discrimination and gender inequality are 'out there', available as linguistic and discursive resources for individuals to utilize when accounting for and making sense of their own and others' experiences (Giddens, 1984). There is no 'truth' about this situation that can be accessed with better or more sophisticated methodologies (see Pollner, 1987). I am not advocating that we abandon our efforts to understand the effects that work has on individual women (and men) or on groups of women (or men), but that we develop and maintain an awareness of our own taken-for-granted assumptions about the world and the organizations we are studying, as well as our own positionality and methods of data collection and analysis. And, as I hope I have managed to communicate in this text, this means that we think about the phenomena we want to study as being socially constructed, historically and culturally contingent and always/already political. Political not only because particular ideas and knowledges work in the interests of some groups and individuals more than others, but also because individuals make their own decisions about what their lives mean and how they will respond to that meaning. While meanings are, I would suggest, always socially produced, they are also experienced and lived and, through these latter processes, transformed. As I argued in Chapter 3, where experiences and life events contradict or simply fail to connect with available meanings, individuals can and do resist and challenge them and this is where we see the seeds of the dialectic between agency and structure emerge or, as I would prefer to phrase this relationship, where we see action and socio-material conditions intersect to produce new meanings.

What does all of this mean for the methods we use to explore gender inequalities in organizations? In agreement with other researchers in different fields of study, it is important to bring divergent approaches to the study of gender differences with respect to pay, jobs, roles and occupations into conversation with each other (see Ahram et al., 2021, for a discussion of this issue in educational research). As I have pointed out in previous chapters, research examining gender differences at the macro level with respect to pay, role representation and segregation, illustrates that these differences cannot be understood with simplistic models or explanations, such as sex discrimination or 'women's choices'. While, for instance, it is clear that, compared to men, women are generally underrepresented on corporate boards, as outlined in Chapter 1, to fully understand this situation requires an analysis of macro-level conditions including specific national socio-economic and cultural factors, as well as industry type and how these shape and influence the behaviour of organizations in general terms. What is also needed, however, is micro-level

research which examines how these various conditions are interpreted and experienced by actors within organizations and how these are translated into particular policy initiatives and activities. Alongside this, we need to understand how these interpretations and experiences inform, shape and influence power relations within organizations and specific interactions relevant to the focus of study. Bearing in mind the arguments I have made about modes of governmentality, we also need to situate our foci within these grids of intelligibility, exploring their genealogical conditions of possibility and ongoing significance. For example, a concern with female representation on corporate boards is, I would argue, one of the power effects of the interaction of the productive citizen discourse with newer discourses regarding the rights and obligations of working women (see Chapter 8).

These are complex undertakings requiring approaches that move beyond the quick fixes that current publication and grant capture pressures (at least in the UK) encourage and perpetuate, such as cross-sectional interview and survey-based data collection. Even when more ethnographic and/or longitudinal methods are used, the time pressures for producing publications from these studies from grant award bodies who expect research to be conducted (which includes finding and hiring research staff, fieldwork, analysis and reporting) within often quite limited time frames, such as two or five years, are highly limiting. But research of the nature I am advocating needs to be conducted over extended periods, utilizing time-intensive methods such as multi-level ethnographies which can capture the many processes and factors (outlined in the paragraph above) influencing the experiences of women and men in organizations (O'Connor, 2019). None of this is easy and the fact that, as I suspect, a lot of researchers will view these ideas as being unrealistic and unachievable is illustrative of the current epoch in which research institutions are located – an epoch in which organizations see time as money, achievement of the bottom line as imperative, and a desire to look good rather than be good. But if we want to understand the complexity and nuance of the processes that are producing and maintaining the many 'crises' humanity is said to be currently facing, we do need more thoughtful, slow scholarship (Hartman and Darab, 2012; Marinetto, 2018).

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The final issue I want to turn to in this text concerns the practical implications of my analysis. This is difficult because the push for 'impact' – yet another beloved mantra of neo-liberal universities – reflects a contemporary discourse regarding the importance of research 'relevance' whereby domains of study that are (rather like particular forms of work) considered (by some) as trivial and unimportant (e.g. organization and management studies), tend to be those

that are less likely to quickly or ever turn into products, practices or applications that have economic value. This, in my view, is another short-term financially driven outlook which diminishes if not eradicates the value that attaches to not only changing the way people think and feel, but also challenges them to do so. I have written this text to be deliberately provocative, to encourage people to think about what we take for granted as 'facts' about women and men and how they live. In doing so, I hope I have drawn attention to how certain things that we do to apparently improve the position of women (such as counting how many occupy particular roles and hierarchical levels) do not only fail in helping us understand why this might be the case, but also encourage a focus on methods for improving these numbers rather than on examining why such roles and levels are seen to be of such high social value. But as I have said repeatedly, unless we start to also value the work that many women (and men) do in organizations, and the associated behaviours and enactments of this work which are currently invisible, only a certain 'type' of person is ever likely to be seen and see themselves as suitable for these roles and this is likely to include mainly men but plenty of women as well.

Therefore, one of the main practical implications of this text is to encourage people both within and outside of formal organizations to think very carefully about why they place such high value on some ways of behaving and being at work and so little on others. This is something that cannot be achieved with a shiny new piece of technology or by a three day training course hosted by the latest management guru, but only by a collective effort to think about this issue more carefully and sceptically; to eschew the lure of coming up with some 'innovative' solution to the problem of inequality that makes some individual or team look particularly good and creative, and think instead about what we actually mean by inequality, who in particular might be experiencing this condition, in what ways, how and based on what type and quality of evidence. So, in sum, the practical implication of my analysis is that we all need to slow down, to start thinking more deeply about what we do and why we do it, and to remember that fundamental change is not something that can be carefully planned and managed – it emerges and flows; its contours, meanings and resonances shift and change but it is inevitable and inexorable.

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