

Young People's Awareness of Gendered Realities

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Young Europeans, Work and Family edited by J.Brannen; S. Lewis and A. Nilsen (Routledge/ESA Publications)

Introduction

The starting point of this chapter is that gender is, with class and race, one of the structural and cultural realities that affects the shape of young people's lives. The United Nations (1995: 29) noted that 'no society in the world treats its women as well as its men'; that 'In no society today do women enjoy the same opportunities as men.....'. ... 'a widespread pattern of inequality between men and women persists'. In none of the five countries included in the study do women earn as much as men; they are less likely than men to be in managerial positions; although in all the countries women make up roughly half of the professional and technical workers and they are doing better than their male counterparts at school. Women in all five countries are much more likely to be working part time or reduced hours than men, and are much more likely to be taking primary responsibility for childcare. Thus, gender is seen as 'a fundamental feature....: arguably as fundamental as class divisions...capitalism is run mainly by and to the benefit of men' (Connell 1995a, p.104).

However, the existence of gendered realities does not however necessarily equate with any individual's awareness of them (Beck, 1992). Indeed it is widely accepted that the most effective exercise of power is in situations where beliefs and practices are such that its exercise is seen as 'natural'; 'inevitable; what people want (Lukes, 1974). In times of rapid social change, where there are discontinuities in individuals' experiences, disjunctions arise between individuals 'practical' and 'discursive' consciousness (Haugaard, 1997). These kinds of disjunctions are evident in the accounts of the young people in this study as they deal with the contradictions between a gendered reality and what has been called (Chapter 2) a discourse of individual choices. It will be shown that such cultural tensions were greatest amongst Irish and Portuguese respondents. Thus in these countries, the accounts of the young people demonstrate the vivid reality of gendered inequalities as regards access to promotion; they struggle with the tensions between ideologies of sharing in domestic work and the ongoing existence of gendered conceptions of adulthood and division of labour in the family.

Connell has suggested that: 'Gender is the domain of social practice organised in relation to a *reproductive arena* constituted by the materiality of the body' (1999:464). He is at pains to stress that gender 'refers to bodies and what bodies do; it is not a social practice reduced to bodily functions' (1999:464). Connell suggests that (albeit to varying degrees), the majority of men, as men, enjoy a 'patriarchal dividend' (in terms of 'honour, prestige or the right to command' including a 'material dividend': 1995b: 82). Thus, gender is seen as related to privilege; with privilege deriving from male power at a structural or interpersonal level. Connell argues that although only a minority of men actively subordinate women, the majority are comfortable with such a dividend when it appears to be given to them 'by an external force, by nature or convention, or even by women themselves, rather than by an active social subordination going on here and now' (Connell, 1995a, p.215). Thus, it is because men wish to be men, within a society where being a man involves privileging, that patriarchy is perpetuated. Thus, for Connell

(1995 a and b) as for Bottero (1998) male privileging is maintained, not only by individual or group attempts to intimidate, oppress and exclude, but also by women and men's 'realistic' expectations. Their acceptance of the status quo effectively perpetuates 'a structure where different groups are rewarded unequally.' Thus awareness of the structural and cultural reality of gender is seen as crucial.

Connell (1995a and b and 1999) has been amongst those who have noted that societies vary in the extent to which they are 'mapped' by gender. Such mapping may be reflected in the gendering of concepts of adulthood and in social practices involving recruitment or promotion in the area of paid employment. Gendered realities underlie policies about child care (Chapter 7); and underpin the extent and nature of gender contracts (see Chapter 8). In crude terms, the existence of such mapping can be illustrated by comparing the ranking of the five countries in this study on a series of United Nations measures. Such countries vary in terms of what the United Nations has called their Human Development Index (HDI) and the Gender Development Index (GDI) –the latter taking into account the same basic measures as the HDI but measuring inequalities between men and women (i.e. as regards life expectancy, education and income). On these two measures, the two Scandinavian countries are at the high end of the continuum, with Ireland and Portugal at the lower end (See Table 1). The same basic pattern persists when we look at the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). It focuses on the extent to which women participate in the (public) economic and political life by focusing on their share of managerial and professional jobs; their share of parliamentary seats and their income. Again the Scandinavian countries are the most highly ranked with Ireland in this case being the lowest of the five, followed by Portugal, and with the UK being in an intermediate position. The Irish and UK ranking on this measure is lower than on the HDI- clearly suggesting that less priority is being attached to gender measures than to economic development in these countries. Overall, however on these crude measures, Portugal and Ireland clearly emerge as societies where gender is still very much a structural reality-although Portugal, while clearly more economically disadvantaged than Ireland has prioritised gender issues (as reflected in GEM) in a way that Ireland has not. However, it is important to note that 'gender equality does not depend on the income level of a society' (UN, 1995:75).

Table I Rank order of selected countries on the Human Development Index; the Gender Development Index and the Gender Empowerment Index

	HDI*	GDI*	GEM*
Ireland	18	18	21
United Kingdom	10	10	15
Portugal	28	28	18
Sweden	6	6	3
Norway	2	2	1

*174 countries being ranked UN,2000: 157, 161, 165

In this chapter a discourse analytic approach (Potter and Weatherell, 1987; Edwards and Potter, 1992) is used which allows a detailed, interpretative account of the opinions, views and debates surrounding gendered realities in the five countries (Wilkinson, 1998). This chapter first looks at the existence of gendered definitions of adulthood (and particularly at concepts of womanhood and manhood); and then at the perceived existence of gendered practices in the paid employment area (focusing on recruitment and promotion); and finally looks at the ways in which these young people negotiate the contradictions in their views about gender.

Concepts of adulthood

A gender neutral concept of adulthood ignores or denies the relevance of bodies. It has sometimes been confused with androgyny- this referring to the combination of male and female characteristics. On the other hand the key element in gender neutrality is the denial of any bodily reality. This perspective is evident in many public discussions that purport to disregard gender differences. Implicitly, such discussions suggest that gender is irrelevant; and hence that girls are the same as boys; that they can do anything boys can. It fits well with West European ideas about individuality and meritocracy. It is the classic liberal position and the model that underpins much EU thinking in the employment area and much of the official rhetoric of the educational system (see Lynch, 1999; Lynch and Morgan, 1995).

Recent reports have attributed such 'post-feminist' values to young women (Katz, 1997). When the focus was on the future and no context was specified, (*'Do you think being a man or woman makes a difference to your life?'*) young men and women, in all countries, from all backgrounds, typically said that gender had no impact on the shape of their lives. Scandinavia has a long tradition of equal opportunities so that discourse of gender there is very much a silent one. However, even young Irish men and women who were asked whether they saw gender as affecting what would happen to them in the next five years, simply said no: *'You make your own future'* (Irish women vocational trainees, mostly high education); *'Not really, not if you are determined enough- if you have your goals.....it doesn't matter what sex you are. Thirty years ago it was a different kettle of fish, but not now.'* (Irish skilled manual men in the catering area). Similarly the UK respondents did not think that gender would make a difference to their lives *'It's up to the individual'*, *'It depends on what you want'* were typical comments. Individual choice, and individual skills and qualities, were seen by the UK participants to account for any differences in lifestyle, job choices, future expectations etc: *'people should be able to do what they want; what the couples decide between themselves, they should be able to have the opportunity to do what's right for them, as opposed to being forced by society's pressures and what, you are to do the norm'* (UK, man, law student).

Nevertheless, a more in-depth examination of the transcripts revealed that gendered concepts of adulthood did exist-particularly but not exclusively amongst the Irish and Portuguese respondents.

Manhood: its definition and privileging

It has been argued that manhood/masculinity is culturally constructed. Connell suggested that: 'Masculinity ...is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experiences, personality and culture'(Connell, 1995:71). Connell identified various kinds of masculinity including hegemonic masculinity-which he saw as being organised around heterosexuality and domination; and conventional masculinity, which he saw as having similar elements but being 'more bashful about domination' (Connell, 1995a:215). Here we are simply concerned with the extent to which manhood was defined in terms of breadwinning, and with the broader relationship between work and family implicit in concepts of manhood.

In societies such as Ireland where the public importance of men has been associated with infantilising them within the domestic and family arena, the role of breadwinner is particularly important although there are some suggestions that it is under pressure. Thus, for example, Mc Keown et al, (1998:xii) suggested that: 'The tendency for men to find their identity and fulfilment exclusively in the world of work..... is increasingly challenged.' However, this role was seen by the young men and young women, in this study, as the normative role for men as men: *'I think that you have the tradition of the man being the breadwinner. A lot of men, even though they are in their 20s are still in that mode of thought. They feel they are the breadwinner. I can't imagine my husband staying at home looking after the family and me being the breadwinner- he couldn't cope with that'* (Irish women supervisors, high education). The proportion of dual income families doubled in Ireland between the mid 1980s and the mid 1990s (O'Connor, 2000a and b). Since the mid 1990s, in a tight labour market, there are numerous economic opportunities for women in an increasingly service oriented economy; while dramatically rising house costs have further eroded the viability of a male breadwinner. Indeed a 'crisis in masculinity' has been identified, reflecting 'the beginning and the end of male control' (Clare, 2000:217). Amongst the Irish respondents, there was widespread doubt about the realism of having a sole main breadwinner: *it 'would be nice but I dont think it would be possible- that is gone long ago'* (Irish women in routine non manual occupations); *'the days of one wage coming into the family are gone. You need two wages at this stage'* (Irish women business management trainees).

Nevertheless, this view of self as breadwinner was a very strong theme in the Irish men's own personal accounts *'I need money to do my bit to feed my wife'* (male hotel manager: high education). As he saw it he *'had no-one else to fall back on'* –although his wife was in full-time paid employment. In a wider European context, the focus on breadwinning as an element in definitions of manhood seemed to be associated with manual work, but it was much more widespread than this in the Irish focus groups. Thus, the Norwegian shipyard workers (Chapter 9) defined themselves in this way. Similarly, the Portuguese male construction workers defined themselves in terms of the breadwinner role: *'For me the most important thing is the job, without it you have nothing, afterwards the family. I am supporting a family- a wife and two children...If I don't work they don't eat'*. Amongst other Portuguese focus groups, there were conflicting views:

Q Do women have the same necessity of finding a job as you?

R1 'Maybe more so because for a long time they were under the dominance of men and now they have a bigger necessity for assertion, for independence

R2 '....The reality as I know it, I believe to be the same....

R3 'They [men] have that chauvinist perspective. If we have a child she is the one looking after it and I keep working' (Portuguese male administrators)

Beck (1992:112) has suggested that: 'In the stereotypical male gender role as 'career man,' economic individualisation *and* masculine behaviour are joined together'. Irish men, and to a lesser extent UK men, also made explicit that for them the choice was not between paid work and family, but between total career commitment and family i.e. the choice involved the extent of their commitment to a full-time job, not the existence of that full-time job in the first place. As they saw it: '*its your choice*'; '*if you want to get up the career ladder, that is one of the sacrifices you have to make*'; '*we can chose to work the long hours, get up the career ladder, earn lots of money and live that lifestyle if we want, or we can chose to take a different job and live a comfortable lifestyle and relax a bit more and have a good time.....to be honest, a high flying executive doesn't go well with family life*' (male hotel manager: high education). Thus clearly an ideology of choice had been superimposed on an unrecognised gendered reality. Amongst the UK men, particularly the professional ones, there was a much greater normative acceptance of the desirability of a man being at home at least part-time, bringing up children- although the wider structural context was still seen as not facilitating that

R1 'I'm very actually tempted to leave the work and actually bring up the kid, and at least work only part time, if that was possible, and yet, you'll always come up against employers in arranging that.'

I "Yeah, what sort of problems?"

R1 "Oh, some of them just aren't interested in it, I mean we talk about things like jobshare and stuff, but you know, some people you speak to they like the idea and it's just the issue of it."

I "So you'd be happy to do that?"

R1 "Yeah."

(UK man, professional)

Similarly it was argued by a male UK computer programmer that: '*Realistically, I think I'll be forced to work 5 days a week and leave childcare to someone else. Probably, in real life*'. For these men the breadwinner role was not an essential element in their identity. They expressed a desire to combine child-care with part-time employment- reflecting a long established British solution amongst women to the reconciliation of work and family.

It is not possible to know to what extent concepts of manhood in the UK focus groups have actually moved away from those revolving around breadwinning, or to what extent they are simply being politically correct (i.e. expressing the 'right' opinions for men of their age and social class, but falling 'reluctantly' into traditional gender roles). Stokoe (1998) points out that the management of a non-sexist identity is important for many UK young adults, and hence one might expect that this would be reflected in their discussions as a way of establishing 'face' in front of peers (Gough, 1998). This may have been what has happening here. However, it seems unlikely that this was the case since the participants did not hesitate to offer controversial or sexist views at other times. Furthermore, the use of passive language in the second quote. 'I'll be forced...' was striking. Effectively it is being suggested that the perpetuation of traditional gender roles was due to factors beyond their control- a recognised strategy amongst those endorsing conventional masculinity (Connell, 1995b).

There was some suggestion that norms in the UK had changed: *'My boyfriend told me, if I ever got pregnant, it would depend who was on the best income, but if I was earning and I was on a better income, he'd stay at home'* (UK, woman, business administration trainee). However, if the structures remained the same, the implication was that women simply had to see the outcome as reasonable and accept it (*'Not particularly [like it] but I'm sure I'll come round to it.'*) (UK woman accountant). Sometimes, albeit rarely, the 'money' argument seemed likely to lead to a change away from traditional gender roles: *'If me and my partner ever decide to have children, it would make much more sense for me to leave work than for her, cos she'll be, in a couple of years, earning more or less double what I'm on'* (UK man, research worker). In the majority of cases the 'gender neutral' strategy of financial considerations will result in practice in the woman giving up her job, or going part time, as men still consistently earn more than women (Eurostat, 1998), and a man is likely to be earning more than his female partner (Burgoyne and Lewis, 1994; Desmarais and Curtis, 1997). In effect, ignoring gender differences perpetuates men's role as breadwinners (Dally, 1996). Thus, while appearing gender neutral, it can effectively preclude the possibility of changes in gender roles. *'My partner would love to [stay at home and look after the children] but financially he earns more than I do, so it just wouldn't be feasible really. Cos all my work is kind of fixed contract all the time he's got a permanent job, it just kinda would be too, whatever the word is, not practical.'* (UK woman, professional).

Amongst the Irish respondents normative change clearly had not occurred in definitions of manhood. Thus, they noted that although *'more of them [i.e. men] are getting conscious of their children and want to spend time with them, they also have got the need to be the main breadwinnera man has to work or they don't feel right about themselves anyway'* (Irish women retail sales trainees). There was an implicit normative protectiveness towards men based on their perception of them as weaker and less competent: *'I think it is more difficult for a man to be at home minding the children if that is not what he wants. I think women cope a lot better with it'*. It is important to note that the politics of location (Braidotti, 1994) were clearly important since the views of lone mothers were strikingly lacking in protectiveness towards men (whether this was the cause or effect of lone parenthood) *'At the end of the week its the woman who has to get the money off the man, go down and sort out the bills, look after the child...they [men] just get up, go to work come home, have their dinner, they could go out, stay in ..there's no real pressure on them except the pressure they have at work'* (Irish female temporary employees; moderate /low education).

As previously noted, Connell (1995a:215) has suggested that conventional masculinity was characterized by a belief that the unearned privileges that were enjoyed by men were given to them 'by an external force, by nature, or convention or even by women themselves rather than by the social subordination of women going on here and now'. Particularly amongst the unemployed men, there was a certain uneasiness about men's domestic privileges and a good deal of embarrassed laughter.

R1 'Women seem to take it upon themselves. They do the child minding and...cooking the dinners and stuff. They just automatically start doing that.....Well I lived with a girl before and she used to always do that. When I'd come in the door there'd be a dinner there and I'd say 'why are you doing that'? I mean me personally, I'd prefer to cook my own dinner even if I was married....

*R2 'If you could get away with it you would '
(Unemployed low skilled males, low education)*

At both a normative level, and in their own accounts, there was no enthusiasm whatsoever amongst Irish men or women for role reversal (regardless of educational level). Indeed a female postgraduate saw men who chose to stay at home as 'useless' and as unworthy of respect- a position that sat uneasily with their views about degendered identities in a degendered world: *'I don't think I would be happy with a husband or a partner who gave up his job to look after the children.... I couldn't possibly I don't think have respect..... I know its terrible and I'm not a nineties woman'*. Such views were not peculiar to them however, with both UK men and women being less than enthusiastic about role reversal: *'with due respect, somebody who wants to stay at home, I'm not going to support him'* (UK, woman, university student); while the UK blue collar men stressed the distinction between housework and what was implicitly seen as 'real' work:

R1 'You can find work to do, well you can clean the carpets, dust the mantelpiece...do you know but I mean like...

R2 Its not working

Re 'Yeah, its not working;'

Overall, amongst the Irish and Portuguese there was a strong sense of normative gender differentiation between men and women- and this was reflected in gendered conceptions of manhood, when the focus was on breadwinning. In the UK, there were suggestions that the normative discourse had changed, with gendered patterns persisting, but being legitimated by 'practical considerations' which purported to be gender-neutral (although they in fact reflected wider gendered realities).

Womanhood: definition and value

Over the past thirty years, there has been a good deal of interest in the social and cultural construction of womanhood/femininity and particularly in the extent to which historically specific cultural constructions have attributed to women those characteristics (such as submissiveness, passivity and self-sacrifice) that are conducive to patriarchal control (Daly, 1978; Connell, 1995b; O'Connor, 1998). The concept of 'femininity' (Connell, 1995b) has echoes of quaint and faded glamour and so is not used here; although Connell's insight that concepts of femininity are constructed in the context of female subordination to men, with limited scope for institutionalised power relationships is revealing. In the context of this study however we are simply concerned with the extent to which the concept of adulthood is effectively gendered; and the extent to which womanhood is defined not only around the bearing and rearing of children but also in terms of general responsibility for a broader range of domestic tasks.

Portuguese, UK, Irish and Scandinavian respondents all referred to the fact that child care responsibilities were disproportionately – and inevitably- discharged by women. Thus they said: *'I think that a child will always look for its mother and you know the mother always seems to take on a major role in minding the child'* (Irish women vocational trainees, high education) *'Mother is the security, it's always mother, the father does not have an equally strong role'* (Swedish woman, temporarily employed). Amongst the Scandinavian respondents these

immutable differences revolved particularly around the bearing and rearing of children. In Ireland they extended much wider to include the whole area of domestic work and were very long term indeed: *'I would love to have been an air hostess or something like that....People say go back and do it but you can't with a child. Imagine flying all over the world. Who is going to mind James. My mother isn't going to mind him you know...You are just....My life now is James (son) until he is 18 and that is it'*.

In Ireland, traditionally, women's nature and destiny was seen as motherhood-and within an Irish context this was, until very recently indeed, seen as full-time motherhood. Such ideological essentialism was not peculiarly Irish, but that: 'what makes Ireland unique is that consensualism has forestalled any critique of essentialism' (Drudy and Lynch, 1993:55). In both the Irish and Portuguese focus groups, the concept of adulthood was gendered, with gender differences being related to innate characteristics- particularly biological nature. Within such an essentialist perspective there are no inequalities between men and women other than those arising from the 'natural order'. The ramifications of this 'nature' were seen as considerable. Thus as the Portuguese male construction workers saw it: *'Men think one way and women another ...the men worry about the job, the financial situation, the house while women worry more about new curtains, a new table or something like that'.....*

In Ireland as in Portugal, women have traditionally been better educated than men. In Ireland although they were excluded from the public arena of paid employment until relatively recently, they had a strong sense of the value of their own contribution to the domestic and family arena (O'Connor, 1999; O'Hara, 1998). Indeed they could also see themselves as powerful and 'play along' with the idea of male power -almost like a mother colluding with a child's delusions of grandeur (see Cowan,1996 and Rivera Fuentes, 1996_for similar patterns in Greece and Latin America). There was some evidence that the sheer experience of motherhood was seen as empowering: *' if you have a child or anything. You would be able to go more places, you will be strong and have your own goals'* (Irish female business management trainees). However, despite their perceived inadequacies, men were seen as necessary in so far as it was expected that a woman would have a partner and children once she 'got to thirty four or thirty five '

R1 'everyone laughs at you, you see it looking around you...families everybody.'

R2 '..... people will say 'Oh look at that old one without a man'. (Irish women hotel managers, high education).

Amongst the Irish and Portuguese respondents, gendered patterns as regards housework and child care were valued, and indeed were seen as reflecting women's greater competence and responsibility. Repeatedly, and in different ways, in their own accounts women were depicted as more responsible and more competent than their male counterparts. Thus, the idea of role reversal was greeted with incredulity *'If you swapped roles with your husband, would he be able to cope?'Not at all- he'd have them killed. He'd be bankrupt. He wouldn't be able to...'*. Similar kinds of pride in women's ability to cope were expressed by the Portuguese. Thus, Portuguese women undergraduate students responded to suggestions that fathers be given two months non-transferable leave to care for a new baby by saying that *'they wouldn't make it.....alone with the child' 'they wouldn't make it.'* These views were also expressed by Portuguese male high school students who echoed each others' view that *'They [women] are stronger.'* This valuing of gendered spheres of expertise was not found in the Norwegian or Swedish data; nor amongst

most of the UK respondents (the exceptions being those amongst those UK women who were already mothers).

It has been very clearly shown that across a wide variety of developed countries it is women who have the main responsibility for, and who disproportionately undertake housework and child care (Baxter, 2000; Coverman, 1989; Kiely, 1995; O'Connor, 1998, 2000a and b; Sullivan, 2000; United Nations, 1995). Sullivan (2,000) showed that, over a 20 year period in the UK, although the increase in men's contribution to cooking and cleaning was one minute per year, in one third of full-time employed couples the men now spend more time in domestic tasks than the woman. Thus, clearly under certain conditions, change in the domestic division of labour can and does occur. As Finch (1989) noted the negotiation about gendered activity takes place under specific structural conditions, which may be more or less conducive to the maintenance of men's patriarchal privileging.

It is important to stress that the majority of the young people in this study did not have children; that some were still living at home (see Chapters 1 and 9) so that their ideas about the division of labour as regards housework and child care were for the most part, not informed by their own direct experiences. However, it was striking that amongst the young women across the five countries in this study there was widespread endorsement of the discourse of shared responsibilities as regards housework and childcare : *'Now both parents are taking responsibility- before it was normal for a man to go out and work while the woman was at home. That is changing now'*. Thus, the changed parameters of men and women's lives were seen as creating the possibility for the sharing of domestic work. Nevertheless, when they were asked who would pick children up from school and/or take time off to look after them if they were sick, *'I think that a child will always look for its mother and you know the mother always seems to take on a major role in minding the child.'*(Irish female management trainees, high education). Similar views were expressed by Swedish respondents saying: *'Mother is the security, it's always mother, the father does not have an equally strong role.'* As the Irish and Portuguese women saw it what made the difference was for a woman to have children: *'I think women are always the ones to make sacrifices....I dont think it will ever be equal- completely equal...'*(Portuguese female University students).

There was clear evidence that, particularly but not exclusively in Scandinavia, there was normative consensus amongst both men and women that domestic labour should be shared. However, to varying degrees it was recognised that this was not what actually happened. *'those times I ask him to do it.. 'yes, yes, of course I'll do the washing-up.. yes, yes, I'll do it'. That's if he's visiting me, like. And then, if I'm at a lecture and come home, he's lying on the sofa and still asleep! And then I just do it, it irritates me that it's still not done. And it shouldn't be like that!'* (Norwegian woman student). It is obvious that in this case, the 'negotiated practice' (Finch, 1989) is not what she feels should exist. Indeed it was striking that at times the discourse shifted from what did exist to what should exist: *'They belong to both of you, don't they, so you should put a joint effort in'* (UK women, secretarial students); *'I'd like to do them both (work and childcare), but I want my partner to do both as well..... it's got to be shared. I think it's healthier for both people and the child'* (UK woman, community worker). This elision between what did exist and what should exist as regards sharing of household and family work for both men and women was particularly strong in Scandinavia:

R1 'Doing all the housework isn't fun.'

R2 No, for us it's completely unnatural, anyway for me, so... it's obvious, ...we'll share it out, like! Are you quite, quite stupid? It's nothing to discuss even...' (Norwegian women students)

Amongst the women a discourse of shared domestic work seemed to rest to a considerable extent on wishful thinking, on normative conceptions of what ought to exist as regards domestic and family roles. In some cases this disjunction between ideal and reality was made explicit:

I 'Do you see yourself sharing all the childcare [with your partner]?'"

R1 "In theory yeah definitely, but what will happen in practice I don't really know."

(UK woman, health worker, pregnant)

Particularly in the UK young men were likely to refer to 'practical' (and purportedly gender neutral) considerations which inhibited their sharing of domestic tasks. Thus, it was argued by a male UK computer programmer that '*in real life*' it would be difficult for him to take an equal role in childcare: '*Ideally, as I said, I would like to be able to share childcare when that came along equally, either working for part of the week, or working for part of the year, I'm strongly inclined to that.*' This perspective has some roots in empirical reality. Thus UK men have the longest working hours in Europe, and work longer hours when they have children (with women tending to work much shorter hours after having children than is the case in Sweden, Norway or Portugal: Chapter 1). However, the gendered context was obscured and the explanation misleadingly presented as a gender-neutral. The net effect was that: 'men have practiced a rhetoric of equality without matching their words to deeds' (Beck, 1992).

There were also intriguing suggestions that insofar as gender differences had disappeared ('*they have kind of met in the middle*': Swedish unemployed man), all round deskilling had occurred, with neither men nor women including task based competencies within their definition of themselves:

R1 'Everything has been evened out. Before girls were better at taking care of children because that was what they did. The guys were out fixing things. Nowadays guys can't fix cars and we girls can barely cook'

R2 'Now we are all equal. Nobody can do anything'

Swedish women (employed on temporary contracts).

Nevertheless, it was striking that particularly amongst the young women in this study, there was a strong perception that domestic labour was, or at least should be, shared. A wide variety of empirical evidence suggests that such expectations are, by and large, naïve, with persistent gender inequalities as regards the allocation of unpaid work in the home being very much a reality. In this context, an element of wish-fulfilment seemed to exist in UK women's attitudes as regards the sharing of domestic tasks. UK men's focus on the 'practical difficulties' of doing so can be seen as a way of effectively pre-empting pressures to increase participation in such unpaid work in the home. Particularly amongst the Irish and the Portuguese respondents essentialist definitions of womanhood were endorsed by men and women- such ideas radiating out to include not simply the bearing of children but a wide range of responsibilities as regards housework and child care. Women's ability to cope with what was implicitly seen as the more

important responsibilities (viz housework and child care) was very positively valued in both Ireland and Portugal and was seen as reflecting their greater strength and competence.

Paid Employment: Recruitment and Promotion

Despite the fact that in a gendered society, bureaucracies are unlikely to be staffed by 'degendered automatons' (Halford, 1992:172) the gendered reality of organisations is frequently ignored. It is well-established that horizontal and vertical segregation exists in paid employment right across Europe: 'The hierarchical order of work organisations with disproportionate numbers of women at the bottom and disproportionate numbers of men at the top is also an expression of gender. This order preserves traditional power relations between men and women and confirms the symbolic association of masculinity with leadership and femininity with supportiveness' (Acker, 1988:482). Nevertheless, gender, and particularly the materiality of bodies, is often seen as irrelevant to the world of paid employment. Women's rising educational levels have ensured that they constitute approximately half of those in professional and technical occupations in the five countries in this study (with the proportions ranging from 45%-46% in the UK and Ireland to 59% in Norway: UN, 2000). Women constitute a quarter to a third of those in managerial or administrative positions in these countries. As Savage (1992) noted, women have been considerably more successful in accessing positions of expertise in the professional and technical areas rather than line management authority. Differences are small across the five countries, but in all of them female expertise is not clearly translated into occupancy of positions of authority. Furthermore, societies such as Sweden which would be seen as being characterised by gendered equality contracts (see Chapter 8) are just as unlikely to have women in managerial or administrative positions as very much more patriarchal countries such as Ireland (Mahon, 1994: O'Connor, 1998). In fact, the countries with the lowest proportions of women in managerial/administrative positions were Ireland and Sweden (26% -27% respectively); with Portugal and the UK having the highest proportions (32-33% respectively: UN, 2000). Thus, quite clearly, issues related to the reconciliation of work and family are not sufficient to transform gendered patterns of vertical segregation.

In so far as the dominant discourse within the public arena appears degendered, and dominated by ideas about 'merit' and 'choice' there are strong pressures on women against perceiving themselves as women, and/or as disadvantaged within structures which are hierarchically male dominated and based on the perception of men as the norm. Cockburn (1991: 219) has vividly captured the subtlety of women's acceptance in such ostensibly degendered structures: 'You may find a place as long as you simulate the norm and hide your difference. We will know you are different, and continue ultimately treating you as different, but if you yourself specify your difference, your claim to equality will be nil'. In such contexts, the existence of men in positions of authority is seen as 'natural' and 'inevitable'.

When attention was focused on employers' perceived attitudes to potential employees, typically it was suggested that gender did not make a difference. Even in Ireland where a Bar on married women's participation in paid employment persisted in a variety of contexts up to 1973 (O'Connor and Shortall, 1999) getting a job was still mostly seen as related to personality, skill, experience etc. However, there were occasional dissenting comments about 'backward' firms who continued to be influenced by the conflating of gender and family responsibilities:

R1 'I think it is skills more than anything'

R2 'Yeah, I think its experience as well and the amount of work you have done before'

R3 *'And the type of work you've done. You will find that some firms are a small bit backward, they will give a job to a man if he's got a family to support quicker than they'll give it to a woman'*

R2 *'I think in the catering industry that attitude is going out and they are not too interested in that anymore. It is what skills you have' (Irish female supervisors, high education)*

Across the focus groups, commitment to paid employment was not seen as varying between men and women. However it was common for references to be made by Portuguese, Irish and Swedish respondents to young men as being more interested than young women in the salary: *'Starting salary is a huge topic of conversation-all they want to know is: what are you starting off at?...I think girls tend to ask what is your job like? And is it interesting? But they [men] look at the salary and they will apply for it'* (Irish female postgraduate students). Furthermore, many women emphasised that they had chosen their career, not for the money but for interest, usefulness and personal satisfaction : *"It is important to me in a job I like to feel that I am doing something useful, both professionally and to society'* (UK woman, nurse). However there was no indication that they were conscious of the wider context within which such gendered choices were being made (for example, the tendency for female dominated areas of employment to be lower paid; to have a lower ratio of promotional posts etc: O'Connor, 1998). Indeed they were also not aware of the fact that, as outlined in Chapter 1, transitions into work and family roles are still highly gendered in terms of the qualifications and career paths chosen by young women and men (Halford et al, 1997; Rubery et al, 1998).

In contrast, the gendered implications of women's body (and particularly maternity) were seen as considerable in affecting access to paid employment by the Portuguese and Irish respondents. It was simply taken for granted that employers would prefer to employ those without children (and those less likely to have them i.e those who were single). Portuguese groups were particularly likely to refer to employers attitude to maternity as an issue: *'they get pregnant and that's bad for the company the sick days. It is a big disadvantage for the company. For nine months they have to pay and they get nothing in return- that's what they think, and with men that doesn't happen.'* (Portuguese high school men): *'I think that employers will see that they[women] will be having children, missing work to look after them , leave work early and the option is towards men who do not have those kinds of problems.....'*; (Portuguese male administrators); *'I think there are situations where a female worker doesn't become permanent because she can eventually become pregnant and go on sick leave'* (Portuguese female administrators). In contrast, the UK focus groups emphasised that personal and implicitly gender neutral-skills and qualities mattered as regards getting jobs. The youngest participants were most likely to have this view.

I *"And do you think it's going to be, do you think it's easier for boys, men or women these days to get jobs? Is there a difference between the boys and the girls you know?"*

A *"Not among ourselves."*

B *'Not any more.'*

I *'You don't think there's any, um, sex discrimination?'*

C *'Well not...'*

D *'Most employers today are equal opportunity employers, so there shouldn't be any difference.'*

(UK secretarial student women, aged 18)

In the UK young mothers with ‘househusbands’ noted that they still got asked questions about child care even when they explained their own personal situation (see Chapter 7). In Sweden, some men and women said that it was easier for young men to get a job, because young women were more likely to be asked if they had children or intended to have them. However, amongst both the Swedish and UK respondents there was considerable sensitivity to possible ‘slights’ to men-with occasional references being made by Swedish respondents to paternal leave as increasing employers sensitivity to the possibility that fathers might take time off to care for their children.

The Irish and Portuguese respondents were particularly likely to refer to gendered difficulties as regards promotion: *‘they have to work a lot harder to get to the better positions than the males I think....(Irish male hotel managers, high education); ‘men do not need as much qualifications as the women.’* They noted that that in male dominated areas *‘it is not enough to be as good as the next male, you are going to have to be that bit better’* (Irish female vocational trainees, high education); *‘There are some positions where they clearly prefer a man or a woman....there’s a certain chauvinism in relation to executive positions’* (female Portuguese administrators). At the other end, low skilled and low paying areas were seen as appropriate for women: *‘Its all men in the good jobs, its the same everywhere’* except for *‘the little skivvies jobs’*; that *‘in the catering area men get the jobs like head chef and women don’t’* (Irish women temporary employees, low education). They wryly noted that changes in gendered patterns seemed to occur only in areas that were unskilled and unattractive: *‘there’s eleven girls cleaning the roads’* (Irish unemployed women, low education).

The complexity of the cultural situation was illustrated by the fact that Irish female postgraduates saw women’s subservient attitudes as increasing their attractiveness as employees: *‘It sounds very negative but being slightly less confident and slightly less cocky -it works...’*. The rapidity of the change in Irish women’s occupancy of positions of authority can be illustrated by the fact that women now constitute 28% of proprietors/administrators /managers-as compared with 5% in 1971. However, whereas women occupy 65% of positions in the professional services they hold only 0- 9% of those at senior management level in the Civil Service; the Local Authorities; the Universities etc (O’Connor, 1998 and 2,000b). Thus, it is arguable that the recentness –and incompleteness -of the gendered transformation has served to heighten an awareness of it. Nevertheless, the price of advancement at an identity level was still depicted as high in a context where cultural attitudes militated against women holding positions of authority: *‘I don’t think men like taking authority from women.....The most serious job I had there was only one woman out of say twenty at the top, and she was just.... she wasn’t well respected..... That’s the image you get: You have to be a real bitch to get anywhere in work.’* (Irish women post graduate students). It was striking that even in countries such as Sweden that were highly ranked on the United Nations Gender Related Indices, there were clear perceptions of discrimination as regards access to positions of authority. Thus, Swedish highly educated women who were employed in multinational organisations said that: *‘You have to be twice as competent to be taken seriously and even then it is very easy to make a mistake, and then you’re not good enough any more... I feel that if I were to become a foreman, as a woman I would be in a living hell’* (Swedish women on temporary contracts, high education). Such patterns are compatible with the relatively low proportion of women who are in executive/managerial jobs in Sweden (United Nations, 2000).

It was striking that most of the Irish men in the focus groups did not think that men were more competent than women and they felt ambivalent about a normative context that provided men with a 'dividend' as men: *'I don't think it should make a difference, to be honest.....that's just the way things are although it shouldn't be in my opinion.....People should be judged on their abilities'* (Irish male vocational trainees, high education). None of the men in any of the countries saw men as having a responsibility to change the system. At one level they accepted that the system was unfair to women, at another level they did not 'see' it this way-exemplifying the difference between what Haugaard (1997) has called discursive and practical consciousness: *'Most of women would like to think that they are able to do anything, I think most women are.....But men are still looked at as more dominant, even though they are not, they [men] are looked for in the management positions You just have to look at top executives of any company or anything like that and they are all men. So I presume there must be some disadvantage for women. But I wouldn't see it'* (Irish male postgraduate student).

Similar patterns emerged in the Portuguese focus groups-with references being made to some men's reluctance to recognise women's abilities:

R1 'Men dont want to admit this but more and more they recognise women's capabilities and I dont think there's a difference between a professional man and a professional woman

R2 Some people are not biased anymore. It is just that men wont admit that women are just as competent as them'(Portuguese female university students- late teens).

Overall then references to a gendered structural reality in the paid employment context were most likely to occur amongst Irish and Portuguese focus groups. Irish respondents referred mainly to women's under-representation in senior positions and attitudinal barriers, while discrimination on the grounds of marital status and pregnancy were particularly likely to be referred to by Portuguese men and women. Overall, the perception was one of discrimination against women as regards promotion even in Sweden, and a devaluing of women and women's work in the paid employment area. Irish and Portuguese respondents saw men as having unearned privileges. They recognised that the basis for these was tradition rather than merit, and they were ambivalent about this.

More complex realities and contradictions

The organisation of talk, is seen as a topic of study in its own right (Garfinkel, 1967; Edwards and Potter, 1992) and contradictions, confusion and inconsistency in everyday talk is viewed as central to understanding participants views. Earlier discourse analysis studies have demonstrated that the area of work and family expectations is often fraught with inconsistencies (Condor, 1986; Wetherell et al, 1987; Walkerdine, 1990; Athanasiadou, 1997). Billig (1989) argues that inconsistencies in everyday discourse are important for showing how mutually accepted 'commonsense' notions - socially shared beliefs, images, moral values and knowledge - are often in conflict.

We live in societies where much is made of the importance of equality- and where it is assumed that such equality - albeit at a basic level - exists - and that it is a key entitlement of all citizens

(Baker, 1997; Lynch, 1999). Indeed there are pressures towards political correctness in the sense that in certain public contexts (particularly in the UK) it is socially inappropriate to advert to the existence of discrimination. In Scandinavia, with their very much longer tradition of gendered citizenship, an equality discourse is part of what has been called a 'silent discourse' - a taken for granted reality. In contrast, in many of the Irish and Portuguese focus groups, issues surrounding the nature of equality and the appropriateness of attempts to deal with a gendered reality are much more openly contested. Nevertheless, even in such contexts, there was a great deal of confusion about the nature of equality, partly reflecting its depiction as synonymous with formal rights and equality of opportunities (Lynch, 1999) and as referring more or less exclusively to paid employment. Thus some of the respondents looked at what they saw as the most important areas of their lives (child care and family responsibilities) and assessed the reality of equality in terms of what they saw or experienced there. Others juxtaposed their own observations or experiences in the paid employment area and concluded that 'real' equality (implicitly in terms of outcome) did not exist even in the paid employment area. Such tensions have been recognised in other studies. Thus, for example, Benschop and Doorewaard (1998), showed that although men in the Dutch banking sector had higher status and higher paid jobs, employees in that sector stated in interviews that men and women were equal and that they had equal opportunities. They explained the continued existence of gendered patterns on grounds that appear to have nothing to do with gender (e.g by emphasising that skills and qualities mattered, not gender).

Contradictions existed at several levels within the data. The most obvious of these was where the respondents themselves recognised a contradiction between their endorsement of a gender neutral discourse and yet were confronted with a very clearly gendered reality both in the public and private area. This occurred particularly amongst the Irish and Portuguese respondents. Thus for example, a discourse of gender neutrality was juxtaposed with a reality where women were under-represented in high political office:

R1 'We will see the number of ministers

R2 ' That's another case

R3 'That's where we find real discrimination

(Portuguese male students)

Similarly the Irish respondents juxtaposed their perception of a gender neutral reality with their actual observations: *'Its nice to think that everything is equal now but looking at it from the outside it is still the women in the home who are looking after the kids, cleaning the home'* (Irish women supervisors; high education). Similarly, contradictions between a gender neutral discourse and the assertion of persisting physical or innate differences implicitly highlighted the limitations of the concept of equality: *'I think we are getting more equal aren't we, I mean we can do whatever they can do now, it's just children that stop us really.'* (UK woman, unemployed, single mother). For the Irish women in this study the real bottom line involved the sharing of domestic tasks and this was seen as very much a dream (with Portuguese respondents also describing it as *'virtual reality'*). In some groups there was an attempt to reconcile a gender neutral discourse of equality with a discourse which recognised immutable gender differences. Thus, for example the inconsistency was resolved by suggesting that the difficulty lay with their own choice of a spouse: *'we married the wrong men'*. In this as in other situations, 'individual decisions are heavily dependent on outside influences' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995: 40). The question as to whether the 'right men' exist is not asked:

R1 'We have equalness now. I'd say the man though somehow

R2 'Because you can't expect ...because the man won't cook your dinner...the man wont wash your clothes'

R3 'We met the wrong men'

R2 '...I know it is a bit like back in the 60s but...we just married the wrong men.'
(Unemployed Irish women, low education).

Finch (1989) has usefully highlighted the distinction between normative ideas and the kind of negotiated practices that emerged in specific situations. For example, the UK secretarial student women felt that if their partner and themselves were doing the same number of hours paid employment, they should do the same amounts of domestic work. In fact, however, the negotiated order within their relationships meant that in practice this was not what happened. Thus, it is arguable male privileging as regards domestic work was not part of the negotiated order within these relationships.

R1 'If you've both got the same hours in the job then it should be equal, but if you stayed at home and he didn't then you should do more than your husband or whatever, but if he stayed at home and you went to work then he should do more than you do.'

R2 Yeah."

I So would the boys you know be like that, if they lived with someone?

R3 They'd be off down town all day wouldn't they?"

(UK women, secretarial students)

Some of the participants were well aware of the contradictions between their normative definitions of gender roles and the unequal practices in their families. They noted with irritation that they slipped back into patriarchal privileging when they were in their family of origin, despite their normative commitments to shared domestic work. While these UK women say they would like a more equal sharing of domestic work, they also tolerate the unequal sharing they have experienced in their own relationships. Significantly, some of them did not even imagine bringing up their children differently.

R1... "I just look at my own family, um, the way my father doesn't even know where the kettle is never mind how to boil it. I actually go home and find myself dipping into this subservience and it's automatic."

R2 "I do that when I go home, find myself making cups of tea for people.."

R1 "Yeah polishing shoes."

R2 "...and think why am I doing that. When he's just sat on his bum doing, looking at teletext."

R1 "But I do think it's slightly better but not a lot, because they take their example from an early age from their parents, it's going to take several generations to get through it."

I "Do you think you'd bring your children up differently from the way you were brought up?"

R3 "No."

R4 "It would be nice to say yes, but I don't think so."

(UK Professional women)

As Billig (1991) argues, commonsense opinions reflect and reproduce prevailing ideologies. This appears to have been occurring in this study. The ideology of already achieved equality ignores and denies existing power differences (Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998). Equal Opportunities policies and practices are hindered in effectiveness by this. Amongst some of the Irish and amongst the British, other than amongst the Asian groups, there was a strong sense that the problem of equality was 'solved'- that gender equality was perceived as existing- at least partly because of the perceived efficacy of legislation: *'With all these equalities and lawsuits I think they will justregardless of sex they will just employ you- man or woman' (unemployed Irish women, low education); ' in this day and age, with equal opportunities and everything. Its the same really you know. .'(Irish skilled manual men in catering area).*

The awareness of discrimination was most common in the Irish and Portuguese focus groups and was particularly explicit amongst the Portuguese. Thus when asked if there was discrimination Portuguese female administrators said: *' Of course not in some sectors, but there are others like the factories in the North where it is obvious . Women earn sometimes half of what men earn, and in the agriculture it's the same.'* Similarly young male Portuguese University students said

R1 'Its easier for men...

R2 'There is still discrimination. We still haven't been able to eliminate it completely

R3 'I think so. All you have to do is consult the statistics. In the economic indices there's a part that speaks of discrimination in the work place. It says that women are discriminated against that's scientific- its palpable'.

(Portuguese male university students).

In the Irish, and to a lesser extent the UK focus groups, it was men and not women who felt most comfortable using the language of discrimination with men occasionally depicting themselves as victims: *'They won't want to take on a male secretary; 'some places men won't even try [for a job] such as women's clothes shops' (Irish male vocational trainees, moderate education); 'Late 20s, thirty-something white man is the most discriminated group in job hunting. This whole political correctness thing. You could have a man and a woman with identical qualifications, identical experience, the whole shebang and you might get a call down from head office - we'll give the job to her.'* (UK man, blue collar worker)

Even in contexts where gendered patterns which disadvantaged women were recognised, women were ambivalent about any kind of positive action-wanting to succeed as they saw it on their own (ungendered) merit: *'I'd be worried that was I brought on because they had to have a certain percentage of women' (Irish female supervisors in catering area, high education).* Thus, although at one level the structural reality of gender and its implications as regards women's promotion were recognised, at another level they had accepted a simplistic idea of equality with men and so were opposed to any kind of structurally created gendered advantage for women. Similarly, both male and female UK participants argued that positive discrimination was not acceptable: *'I was looking for jobs in engineering, I was applying to the big blue chip companies and they have to have a quota every year....one of the companies I actually applied for basically said, we need women you've got the job regardless of what the interview said, and I was, I don't want it thank you, and walked out.'* (UK woman, engineer). Amongst the UK respondents, such patterns can be seen as linked to a discourse which stressed individual choice. Amongst the UK respondents there was a general assumption that equality and lack of gender discrimination in the

workplace could or should be taken for granted. Equal opportunities policies were most approved of when participants constructed them as widening individual choice. For example, a male student approved of the notion of bringing in statutory paternity leave on the basis that it gives (women) more choice: *'yes she should definitely have the choic.'* (UK man, law student).

Thus, it is clear that although a discourse of normative gender equality existed, there were recognised limitations to the extent to which this was experienced by these young people and in the extent to which gender informed their negotiated practices in their own families and relationships. Given that many of these young people implicitly endorsed a narrow concept of equality, focused on access to paid employment, contradictions emerged in the context of the materiality of their bodies; the whole area of area of domestic work; and even when they looked at the workplace at the level of outcome.

Summary and conclusions

This chapter starts from a position of recognising that gender is a critically important cultural and structural reality. It is recognised however that it is frequently not perceived in this way: the obscuring of gender being seen as a way of perpetuating its structural reality and implicitly reinforcing a discourse of (degendered) individual choice. Using a discourse analytic approach we have analysed mainly focus group material in the five countries (viz Ireland, the UK, Norway, Sweden and Portugal). We have looked particularly at young people's awareness of gendered realities at a cultural level (as reflected in concepts of adulthood), and at a structural level (as reflected in attitudes and practices surrounding recruitment and promotion in the paid employment arena). In addition, we have looked at the more subtle contradictions and inconsistencies between their normative discourses and their own experiences and observations.

These young adults did not generally relate their experiences to social and political factors which play a large part in when, if and how people form families, and what sort of work and working patterns people participate in (Walby, 1994; Duncan, 1996; den Dulk et al, 1999). Within the overall context of their lives, typically young men and women thought of themselves in a degendered way as 'just young people' and saw their life options as unaffected by gender. Across all the countries, but especially in the UK, there was a strong sense that the problem of equality was 'solved'. Thus, the continued division of (paid) labour was justified, on the grounds that it had nothing to do with gender. However, a more in-depth investigation revealed a much more complex reality.

It was striking that the breadwinner role was seen by both Irish men and women (regardless of educational level or occupation) as a crucial element in men's definition of themselves as men. There was some recognition that this was fragile in view of wider social changes. A similar concept of manhood was articulated by Norwegian and Portuguese working class men—specifically those in what would be regarded as stereotypically male occupations (shipbuilding and construction). In the UK groups the discourse of choice was strongly endorsed, within what purported to be a gender neutral context. Indeed amongst some of the UK men there appeared to be a much greater normative acceptance of role reversal. However, these men stressed what they presented as gender neutral structural pressures which would militate against role reversal (such as difference in wage levels; length of working hours etc). They ignored the fact that these

structural patterns are also gendered- and so obscured a gendered discourse by what was fallaciously presented as a pragmatic adjustment reflecting individual or couple choices.

Across all five countries there was a considerable stress on the fact that child care responsibilities were disproportionately discharged by women. Thus, even in Norway and Sweden, and despite their position on the UN Gender Indices, gendered ideologies and patterns as regards division of labour in the home persisted. An essentialist and very broadly based and long term concept of motherhood was apparent amongst the Irish respondents. In the Irish and the Portuguese focus groups, there was a strong awareness of women's emotional superiority (particularly in the context of running a home and family). These countries have similar rankings on the United Nations Gender Development Indices (United Nations, 1998) and a strong tradition of educational superiority (Rubery et al, 1996). However, Irish and Portuguese respondents' views about women's strength and competence sat uneasily with the recognition that women's work inside and outside the labour market was not valued. The Irish and Portuguese respondents were particularly likely to refer to gendered difficulties in the area of paid employment (as regards promotion and pregnancy). In both cases there was a clear recognition that women were discriminated against in the area of paid employment. In the context of paid employment, amongst the Irish and the Portuguese respondents there was a tension between their 'discursive consciousness' of equality in terms of equality of opportunity and their practical consciousness (Haugaard, 1997) of a world which was hierarchically male dominated. Men in both countries felt uneasy about their unearned privileges. They clung to the idea that 'that's just the way things are'; that it was 'inevitable' and 'natural'- ideas which as Connell (1995a and b) have noted underpin the perceived legitimacy of the system. Even in countries such as Sweden there were clear perceptions of discrimination as regards access to positions of authority. Thus, it is possible that the reconciliation of work and family which has been facilitated in Sweden, has inadvertently reinforced women's position at the lower end of the occupational hierarchy.

It was also very clear that there were considerable tensions and contradictions in these young people's ideas about equality. There were strong elements of wish-fulfilment amongst the UK and Scandinavian women as regards division of domestic labour- with no clear distinction being made between what they felt should exist and what did exist. The UK men referred to practical considerations (such as pay or hours worked)-and so maintained a rhetoric of equality with no commitment to actual change in behaviour. In Ireland and Portugal the chasm between discourses about equality and the perceived reality of its absence was much more overt. Thus on the one hand, as the Irish respondents saw it, '*We have equalness now*'; but the limitations of this were patently obvious to them, '*Because you cant expect....because the man wont cook your dinner,....the man wont wash your clothes*'.

To a degree not perhaps fully appreciated, young people across Europe have grown up in a societal context where a crucial issue has been women's ability to participate in 'men's world' (i.e. the world of paid employment; politics etc). This 'push towards the insertion of women into patriarchal history' (Braidotti, 1994: 163) and the ideology of individual choice have created a context where young people start from a position of implicitly accepting a discourse of gender equality and under-estimating 'the systematic structuring of relations of domination' (Charles, 1996:10). A key issue is how to expose the structural and cultural inequalities and the subtle contradictions beneath such realities and ideologies of choice in the context of limited and confused ideas about equality. This has been the concern underlying this chapter.

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