

Gender Inequalities

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Introduction: forms of gender inequality

In this chapter I am going to consider gender inequalities in the UK today. I will start with an introduction to the different ways that genders can be treated unequally, before outlining how men and women, boys and girls, are differently treated, and have different experiences, in contemporary British society. I follow this with a discussion of some of the various legislative measures that have been enacted over the past 100 years, and outline how they have improved formal, and in some respects informal, gender equality. I then move on to consider the case of Sweden, where gender equality is formally enshrined in law but where traditional practices are frequently to be found within the family. From this I argue that, while legislation is crucial for reducing gender inequalities, it is insufficient on its own. I argue that education, and, specifically, sex and relationship education and education about gender, must be central to lasting social change.

‘Gender’ is a term usually used to refer to a form of identity with associated social expectations. In this sense it is separate and independent from sex, which is an attribute of the body, marking it, through anatomical, genetic or

other means as (in most but not all cases) male or female. For most people, gender identity, as a man or woman, boy or girl, follows from identification as male or female at birth: gender is thus frequently, though not always, correlated with bodily form. Much of the research, especially statistical research, into gender differences, while focusing on gender as an identity, assumes this correlation. It is important to bear in mind, however, in reading this chapter, that this may not be the case in particular instances.

There are two main ways that we might want to think about gender equality and inequality in the UK today. The first is concerned with inequalities between two genders: whether males or females are advantaged in various ways in contemporary British society. In this way, gender is mainly considered to be equivalent to sex, in that most people identify in ways that match their bodies and that most bodies are straightforwardly identifiable as male or female from birth. Much of my discussion in this chapter will focus on these kinds of inequalities. I will consider some of the available statistics that pertain to men and women, boys and girls in the UK today, and discuss how they are differently affected both by legislation and by the ways people in Britain live their lives. This discussion will necessarily be intersectional: not all men or all women are equally treated, in numerous ways, and both social class and ethnicity play important parts in the development and perpetuation of inequality. My main focus, however will be on these gender differences and how they might be addressed.

At the same time, however, we can also think about gender equalities and inequalities in terms of the extent to which a person's gender is acknowledged or accepted at all in the public sphere and in private life. While such

acknowledgement is taken for granted by those people whose identity conforms to their sex as identified at birth, this is not so straightforward for everyone. Approaching gender inequality with respect to the acknowledgement of preferred identity has two aspects. First, there are debates about the status of people who have transitioned across a gender binary: that is, men who were given a female gender attribution at birth, and women who were initially given a male attribution. These debates take a number of forms and are often related to issues of inclusion or exclusion: for example, questions of whether women with a trans history should be able to access women-only spaces or be placed on women-only shortlists. These political debates are bound up with and reflect in some more personal issues, arising from how people choose to identify. In my own research on LGBTQI+ parented families (Carlile & Paechter, 2018), for example, we interviewed parents who identified as trans men, and women with a trans history who identified simply as women. These different identifications are extremely important to the people involved but are not always fully recognised by legislation or in wider society.

This brings us to the second aspect of inequality regarding gender recognition. Some people identify as one binary gender but do not want to make a full legal and physical transition fully across a gender binary, including obtaining a gender recognition certificate and/or having their body surgically changed to conform to their preferred gender. Others do not feel able to identify with either binary gender, so transition across a binary is of no interest to them. The first group may have multiple reasons for their position, which could include not wanting to involve the medical profession in their transition but simply to live in the other gender. This can cause them difficulties because, at time of

writing, in order to obtain a Gender Recognition Certificate in the UK the applicant has to obtain a medical report either giving a specific diagnosis of gender dysphoria or confirming that surgical treatment to modify sexual characteristics has taken place are required. Even if such a certificate is desired, waiting lists for assessment and treatment (if required) are long, leaving the person in legal limbo in the meantime. While they are protected under the 2010 Equality Act, they are not legally recognised in their preferred gender.

The second group comprises people for whom identification as either male or female is problematic. People who do not consider themselves to fit into either binary category usually identify as non-binary or, sometimes, as genderqueer. There is also a growing movement of people diagnosed as medically intersex (either at birth or later in life) who are taking up intersex as a form of non-binary gender identity. There is inequality with regard to people with these non-binary identities because they are not currently legally recognised in their preferred gender or protected from discrimination in the Equality Act. While I will mainly focus in this chapter on people with binary gender identities, it is important to remember that these groups are not fully recognised. I will argue later that both greater recognition of the legal rights of these people is essential, and that education about gender, including non-binary identities, should be part of every child's curriculum.

Britain as an unequal society

Despite considerable progress in the last ten years, Britain remains an unequal society regarding gender. There are important differences between women and men in several key areas, and in some cases progress in tackling these is

painfully slow. Successive governments have been reluctant to enact positive discriminatory measures, preferring instead to legislate against negative discrimination, though the Public Sector Equality Duty does require public bodies to

have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2017)

As the protected characteristics under the Act, gender and gender reassignment (though only across a gender binary) are covered by this. However, as its name implies, the Public Sector Equality Duty applies only to the public sector rather than the whole of British society. Furthermore, even within the public sector, the Equality Duty has not by any means eliminated gender (or other) inequality.

In the area of work and pay, for example, 41% of women but only 11% of men, work part-time, and 69% of working age women are in paid work compared to 79% of men. The mean hourly pay gap is 17.5% and this is only partially explained by the greater propensity of women to work part-time: for full-time workers it is still 13.9% (British Council, 2016). This is not the only reason, however. There is considerable occupational segregation, especially in areas such as care (female dominated) and construction (male dominated), although this is less the case among workers in the professions (British Council,

2016). Average gender pay gaps can also hide considerable discrepancies. This is due both to occupational segregation, with women in many companies and sectors largely confined to lower paid areas while men occupy higher status, more highly paid positions, and to differentials in both basic pay and bonuses of men and women even in similar high status sectors and occupations.

Women with children can suffer multiple disadvantages, partly because they are more likely to work part-time, but also because pregnancy and childrearing can make women's employment more insecure, despite legislation aimed at preventing this. For example, one large-scale study of women in the UK found that 11% of those surveyed felt forced to leave their job while pregnant. 50% reported that pregnancy led to 'a negative impact on their opportunity, status, or job security', and 20% said they had lost out financially, including not getting a promotion due to them or having their salary or bonus reduced (IFF Research, 2016: 12). European Union research has found that, across Europe, having children 'means a financial penalty for women and an earnings boost for men', even when men raise children as a lone father (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2017: 23). This may be related to another survey of UK adults which found that 29% of people thought that a man becomes more committed to work once he has a child, while 46% of people thought that a woman becomes less committed (Olchawski, 2016). If employers perceive women as less committed than men, irrespective of their actual attitude and performance, they are less likely to reward them either financially or through promotion.

Although there are intersectional variations, girls in England outperform boys in GCSE (Department for Education, 2018). However, this gap is smaller than others, for example being less than half of that between disadvantaged and

non-disadvantaged students. Girls also outperform boys at Higher SCQF levels 5 and 6 (Department for Education, 2017a). At A level, however, although girls have higher average point scores per entry, a higher proportion of male students gets top grades. There are also considerable subject variations, with the percentage of girls taking further mathematics or computing only half of that of boys, and the gap in physics only marginally smaller (Department for Education, 2017b). This is exacerbated at degree level, where, in the whole of the UK, fewer than half of students in mathematics and computing and fewer than a third in engineering are women, while three times as many women study education as do men. Women also outnumber men considerably in social sciences and law, and art and design (Department for Education, 2017a). These discrepancies become much larger when we consider vocational qualifications: women taking up apprenticeships in health, public services and care vastly outnumber men, while the reverse is true in engineering and manufacturing technologies (Skills Funding Agency, 2016). This is not just a matter of workplaces ending up segregated by gender: the occupations women are training for are much lower paid than those dominated by men.

These differences in earnings, particularly for women, are reflected in differences in domestic and care work carried out by men and women, though neither completely explains the other. A recent nationally representative panel survey (Kan & Laurie, 2016) found that, on average, women account for approximately 70% of the total time spent on household tasks by married or cohabitating couples. Results from another representative sample survey (Olchawski, 2016) indicate that, in heterosexually-parented families, mothers take most of the responsibility for caring for children, including cooking their

meals, washing their clothes and taking time off work if they are ill. The author argues that this is partly because men 'do not feel supported in the workplace to take time off to look after their children' (3). A Parliamentary Inquiry into fathers in the workplace (House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, 2018) received submissions from both researchers and individuals which suggested that many employers still presume a family structure of male breadwinner and female carer. This is reflected in both statutory and employer-led arrangements for paternity and shared parental leave: maternity pay is paid at a higher rate for longer and is more likely to be topped up to full pay by employers. As a result, although 91% of UK fathers take off time around their baby's birth, around half take only the statutory paternity leave. Takeup of shared parental leave is under 10%. The Report points out that the gender pay gap between mothers and fathers is larger than between women and men more generally, making paternal takeup of shared parental leave, or for men to work part-time, unaffordable for many families (Burgess & Davies 2017). These discrepancies in time spent caring full-time for children affect not just women's careers but also men's confidence in taking sole or major responsibility for aspects of their children's care, with knock-on effects on their likelihood to do this.

Partly due to their greater involvement in domestic and childcare tasks, women have less access to sport and leisure than men. Gager (2008) argues that, in some families, childcare is seen as enjoyable and so part of leisure time: this makes it harder for women, who do more of the childcare in families, to spend time on other non-work activities, including sports. Research from Sweden suggests that men tend to have more expensive hobbies than their wives and feel less bad about spending family funds on them (Nyman, 1999). However, these

are not the only reasons for girls' and women's relative lack of involvement in sport. While for boys and men, sport is a strong marker of masculinity, lack of physical activity is associated with femininity, and, unless strongly encouraged to continue participation, girls start to exercise less during the later years of primary school (Clark, 2010; Paechter & Clark, 2007). This discrepancy is underlined and exacerbated in the public realm: the British Council report that women's sport receives only 7% of sports media coverage, and accounts for just 0.4% of sponsorship value (British Council, 2016). That sports should be a largely male domain with considerable public and commercial funds focused entirely on male sports seems to be something taken for granted in the UK.

Finally, violence is an area in which there are considerable differences between men and women, both as victims and as perpetrators. With the exception of victims of sexual violence and partner abuse, victims of violence age 16 or above are more likely to be male. Men age 16-24 are the group most likely to be victims of non-sexual violent crime, and boys age 10-15 are also more likely than girls of the same age to have experienced it. The data varies considerably by ethnic group, however, with some more likely to be victims than others.

Perpetrators were also more likely to be male, but in the slightly older age group of age 25-19; perpetrators of violence against children age 10-15 are also more likely to be male, but tend to be in the same age group as the victim, and in 68% of incidents was another pupil at the victim's school (Office for National Statistics, 2017b).

In contrast to the figures for violence more generally, sexual and domestic violence has overwhelmingly female victims. A third of violent offences in the most common category of assault with or without injury are related to domestic

abuse. Domestic abuse victims are mostly female, and are also more likely to be younger (this latter is also the case for men who are victims of domestic abuse). 70% of the domestic homicides recorded between April 2013 and March 2016 were of females: over three-quarters of these were killed by a male partner or ex-partner. Accurate figures for domestic abuse that does not result in murder are harder to obtain: around 79% of victims of partner abuse do not report this to the police (Office for National Statistics, 2017a). The Office for National Statistics, however, reports that women are twice as likely as men to have experienced domestic abuse (Office for National Statistics, 2017a).

Women are also over five times as likely as men to have experienced sexual assault and nearly twice as likely to have been victims of stalking (Office for National Statistics, 2017a). Harassment of women and girls without violence is common. Evidence to a 2018 House of Commons Inquiry into the Sexual Harassment of Women and Girls in Public Places attracted 70 written submissions from organisations and members of the public, some of which make shocking reading. For example, Girlguiding found in their annual survey of girls and young women age 7-21 that 49% of girls aged 11 to 21 (and 57% aged 17 to 21) have experienced unwanted sexual comments directed at them (18% often), and that 45% of these had changed their behaviour to avoid this (Girlguiding, 2018). Similarly, Bragg et al (2018) report that 'Gender-based sexual harassment and unwanted sexualised 'banter' towards children and young people is widespread' and that the street was the place girls felt most unsafe because of their gender (Betts et al., 2018). British Transport Police also reported that 80% of sexual offences reported to them occurred on the London Underground Network, and that these mainly involved sexual assault, which encompassed

'activity such as groping, rubbing, and stroking, and accounts for between 55-60% of overall BTP sexual offences' (British Transport Police, 2018). Vera-Gray (2018) argues that her research suggests that 'the sexual harassment of women and girls in public has a significant impact on women's freedom of movement and expression, as well as their experience of bodily autonomy' Given this evidence of the existence and threat of violence, both physical and sexual against women of all ages in both public and private places, it is unsurprising that the British Council (2016: 42) reports that 44% of women in the UK have experienced physical and/or sexual violence since age 15, and notes that 'violence against women and girls remains the most extreme manifestation of women's inequality in the UK'.

Addressing inequality through legislation

Over the last century there has been considerable progress in addressing structural inequalities related to gender through different forms of legislation. These include: the various Acts conferring voting rights on women; the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, which decriminalised sexual acts between two men over 21 in private; the 1967 Abortion Act, which introduced the possibility of legalised abortion; the 1970 Equal Pay Act, which laid down the principle of equal pay for work of equal value; the 1973 Matrimonial Causes Act, which declared forced marriages voidable; the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act which protected both men and women from discrimination on grounds of sex or marital status; the 2000 Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act, which equalised the age of consent for gay and straight sex at 16; the 2003 Female Genital Mutilation Act which made this an offence for the first time; the 2004 Gender Recognition Act, which allowed

legal recognition of gender transition under certain circumstances; the 2004 Civil Partnership Act, which allowed LGBTQI+ couples to formalise their relationships in law; the 2010 Equality Act, which brought together and updated previous equality legislation to provide for ten 'protected characteristics', including sex, gender reassignment, and pregnancy or maternity; and the 2013 Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act, which allowed LGBTQI+ couples to marry, though straight couples are still excluded from civil partnership. At a slightly less official level, during the 20th century, 'marriage bars', preventing married women from working in certain areas, including many public services such as teaching or the Civil Service, were also lifted.

This long list of progressive legislation has been crucial in the fight against gender-based discrimination and disadvantage. Nevertheless, as we have seen, there remains considerable gender inequality in the UK. While legislation is essential to underpin social change and to provide a base beyond which people cannot fall, it still has only limited impact on people's daily lives. This is particularly clear if we consider the case of Sweden, where progressive social policies regarding gender have been in place for many years. For example, Swedish parents have access to generously paid shared parental leave arrangements which include ninety days of non-transferrable leave that is lost if it is not taken by each parent, making it far more likely that it will be taken up by fathers. Employers are expected to 'actively pursue specific goals to promote equality between men and women', and as long ago as the early 1980s legislation was put in place to make it harder to pressurise women to withdraw allegations of domestic violence (The Swedish Institute, 2013-2018). School curriculum provision makes it clear that fostering social equality in Swedish society is a

central aim of education (Paechter, 2007b). Actual behaviour within families, however, has been much slower to change. Nordenmark and Nyman (2003) point out that, despite the official ideology of equality, household practices maintain traditional gender relations and ideas about family life. They argue that task allocation within households gives only an illusion of fairness, with women taking on daily tasks, such as regular cooking and childcare, while men do larger, more infrequent and more visible jobs, such as household repairs. Almqvist and Duvander (2014) note that even fathers who take more than two months parental leave continue to rely on mothers to do most of the organisational work around children, while Ahlberg et al (2008) suggest that Swedish fathers who are more involved in childcare still often do much less housework than their partners. Men and women also take up shared parental leave differently, with women using it for basic childcare and men for holiday periods (Ahlberg et al., 2008). It is therefore apparent that, even in what is, in legislative terms 'the most equal country in the world' (Nyman, 1999: 766), actual gender equality still has a long way to go.

Despite this, legislation can still play an important role in preserving and developing equalities. The recent UK requirement for larger organisations to make annual reports of gender pay gaps is likely to lead to at least some moves towards greater equality in this area. Furthermore, legislation could still, if enacted, work towards greater equality for people whose preferred gender is currently not recognised. Proposed changes to the law to allow people to change their legal gender by self-identification would rectify some of the anomalies identified earlier, and greatly reduce the currently extended periods in which trans people can be in legal limbo. Such legislation should include provision for

people to identify as non-binary, as having no gender, and as intersex, as all these groups are poorly served by the current legislative framework.

Education as a key driver of change

We have seen from the Swedish example that legislation can only go so far in addressing gender inequalities in the UK and elsewhere. If we want to make more significant changes to society, we need to find ways to change what happens within families, particularly those with heterosexual parents. Children learn about gender and how it operates very early in their lives, and they do so partly in their families (Paechter, 2007a). For example, by the age of nine months, children can correlate faces of men and women with objects used by men and women in their own homes (C. L. Martin, Ruble, & Szkrybalo, 2002), so if a family is traditionally organised this will be conveyed to the children before they are able to talk. By the age of about two to two-and-a-half, children can label themselves as male or female (Ruble & Martin, 1998), and this, combined with young children's tendency to over-generalise, is likely to lead to stereotypical beliefs developing early if left unchallenged (C. L. Martin et al., 2002). Given the salience of gender in contemporary society, it is unsurprising that young children, with their tendency to rigid categorisation and desire to participate in the world of older children and adults, form strong demarcation lines between what they think is appropriate for boys and girls. This can be exacerbated by older siblings, who are likely to have more gender stereotyped views than their parents (Stern & Karraker, 1989) and can reinforce strongly gendered play by 'correcting' alternative preferences (Gelman, Taylor, & Nguyen, 2004; B. Martin, 2011; Ruble & Martin, 1998). Such effects are further exacerbated when children

start to mix with others beyond the family, as peer relationships have a strong effect on young children's ideas about gender: there is evidence that in preschools and early years classrooms that the most conservative children are able to have the most powerful effects on the local gender regime (Lloyd & Duveen, 1992; Woodward, 2003).

This combination of intergenerational continuity, through children learning from their parents, and peer pressure, particularly among young children, to maintain strong gender boundaries means that the pace of change is really slow. We need to focus on changing the attitudes of the next generation while continuing to enact legislation that confirms the progress we have made so far and prevents any reversals. For this, education is key. Beyond ensuring that all genders receive a broad and balanced curriculum as of right, education for gender equality has two central foci: sex and relationship education and education about gender.

Sex and relationship education should be changed is to be much more inclusive, so that it reflects people's actual lives. In my study with Anna Carlile of LGBTQI+ parented families and their relationships with their children's schools (Carlile & Paechter, 2018), both parents and children complained that their own family forms were absent from school sex and relationship education, and this finding was backed up by my analysis of all relevant school policies in two English local authorities. While the policies did mention 'different kinds of families', examples given were generally of single parenting or grandparent care, with little recognition that a school might have one or more LGBTQI+ parented families in its community. Sex education itself appeared, both from the policy evidence and from the testimony of our respondents, to focus solely on some

aspects heterosexual sexuality, mainly penis-vagina penetrative sex and contraception. Young people in our study and elsewhere complained about the lack of information about safer sex in non-heterosexual relationships (Bradlow, Bartram, Guasp, & Jadvá, 2017). In some ways this lack of information is unsurprising given that the Equality and Human Rights Commission advice to schools on 'same-sex marriage' informs schools that while they 'must accurately state the facts about marriage of same sex couples under the law of England and Wales', 'no school, or individual teacher, is under a duty to support, promote or endorse marriage of same sex couples' (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2014: 2). Schools seem to have interpreted this as a licence to ignore non-heterosexual relationships beyond the basic requirements of the law and to see their duty of care to LGBTQI+ students simply as a matter of preventing and dealing with bullying. A wider remit for sex and relationships education should be supported by examples across the curriculum, so that LGBTQI+ people and their families are visible beyond the narrow confines of specific lessons.

It is essential that sex and relationships education, even for the youngest children, focuses on the formation and maintenance of healthy relationships, and on what such relationships look like. This can include working with children and young people on what constitutes a supportive friendship, while being alert to the underlying bullying that can take place in what appear on the surface to be well-functioning friendship groups (George, 2007; 2000; Paechter, 2018; Paechter & Clark, 2010, 2016). It is particularly important to teach children and young people, throughout their education, that violence and coercive control are unacceptable and to equip them with the means both to recognise and prevent it. A better sex and relationships education curriculum would also include a

broader range of sex and safer sex education, reflecting people's actual practices: children and young people are otherwise likely to turn to pornography as an information source (Albury, 2014; Measor, 2004), particularly given the lack of information about non-heterosexual practices in schools. Proposals for a new Sexuality and Relationships Education curriculum developed for Wales (Sex and Relationships Education Expert Panel, 2017) are extremely promising in this regard.

Children also need to be properly educated about gender. Young children, in particular, who often have strongly stereotyped views about what behaviour is 'permissible' for boys and girls, should have this firmly and regularly challenged with counterexamples. This challenge should include their focus on gender as binary: children and young people should be educated about other gender possibilities and expressions, including non-binary and trans identities. Children should be supported to understand not just that some people wish to transition across gender binaries, but that some people may identify as being of both genders, or none. Anna Carlile and I found in our research that even primary school children learn a considerable amount about trans issues from the media (Carlile & Paechter, 2018): it is surely better that they get their information about trans and non-binary identities from reliable, non-sensationalised sources in school, rather than celebrity gossip columns. Children should also actively be encouraged to explore and enjoy a wide range of activities and ways of being, not just to allow them a greater range of gender expression but also to support their learning in the longer term (Reilly & Neumann, 2013).

Conclusion

As we have seen, the UK remains a strongly gendered society in many respects, with detrimental effects on all genders. While the cumulative impact of legislation over the past century should not be underestimated, people's actual lives are more intractable in the face of attempts at change. The slow pace of change social change continues to disadvantage women and those who do not identify with the gender assigned to them at birth, including people for whom neither binary gender fits well with their sense of self. We need to maintain the legislative pressure and to ensure that the law is properly enforced, while working hard to educate the next generation to live in more equitable ways. The central issue throughout is that we need to move towards greater equality in terms of gender identity, expression and experience, including safety, security and opportunity for all currently gender-disadvantaged groups and individuals.

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