

young women were chosen within the middle range of household incomes, excluding the least affluent and the wealthy, so they represented just half of all young women aged 18–27 in the 1990s. Within this admittedly non-representative sample, only 8 women (about 10%) were career-oriented, most of them planning to remain childless. Another 12 (about 15%) planned a marriage career, and most of them had already embarked on early marriage and child-bearing, with no investment in qualifications. The remaining 59 (about 75%) were adaptives, some of whom had invested early on in qualifications and work experience and delayed child-bearing, some of whom had entered marriage and motherhood early in life but thought they would return to employment later on (Procter and Padfield 1999). Within this small sample, the two extreme groups of work-centred and family-centred women are smaller than might be expected, but the polarization of preferences and priorities remains clear, even among young women born around 1970, well after the two revolutions.¹⁸ Like Gerson, Procter and Padfield's main report focuses on the twists and turns of life to which the adaptive women constantly responded, giving the impression that all young women are buffeted by their social context (Procter and Padfield 1998).

It appears that cross-sectional results are not misleading, as some enthusiasts of longitudinal studies would have us believe. Longitudinal studies confirm that polarization is a trend that cuts across all sectors of society, all age groups, classes, and sub-cultures. Given real choices in how to live their lives, women now differ radically in the choices they make, and sharp differences emerge at the very start of adult life. Longitudinal studies do, however, add substantially to our knowledge. They show that the two 'extreme' groups, of home-centred and work-centred women, are consistent and persistent in goals and priorities across the lifecycle. It is only in the middle group of adaptive women that priorities and activities change across the lifecycle, in response to experiences and events, opportunities and constraints. Instead of demolishing the picture from Chapter 4, longitudinal studies extend and reinforce it, whether they are based on large-scale quantitative data-collections or small-scale qualitative research. However analyses that seek to identify the 'average' or 'typical' woman's life history will tend to obscure the very real and growing process of diversification.

¹⁸ Unfortunately, Procter and Padfield never asked their interviewees explicitly about their long-term preferences and priorities. The classification of these 79 cases is thus based on the elegant summary presented in Procter and Padfield (1999) rather than their full report (Procter and Padfield 1998). The 8 career-oriented women consist of 7 single workers who intended to remain childless and were career-oriented, plus 1 who planned to work continuously across the child-bearing years and was career-oriented. The 12 home-centred women consist of 9 early mothers who planned the marriage career, plus 3 single workers who also planned to give up work permanently after marriage, even though they currently enjoyed their jobs. All other women in the study would be classified as adaptives, most of them planning to work only part-time after having children. Procter and Padfield (1999) claim that their results challenge preference theory, whereas in fact they fully support it.

6

Heterogeneous Preferences

The central tenet of preference theory is that women are not a homogeneous group but divide into three groups that are not only qualitatively different but also have *conflicting* interests. Table 6.1 summarizes the key features of the three groups more fully than in Table 1.1, and gives our best estimate of the relative sizes of the three groups in societies where government policy does not actively *force* women into accepting only one model of women's role. That is, Table 6.1 shows the relative size of the three groups in liberal and *laissez faire* societies. In Britain and the USA, by the end of the 20th century, the female population of working age divided very roughly into one-fifth in each of the two extreme groups: home-centred and work-centred, and over half in the adaptive group, which is generally the largest and most vocal in most countries. Within the minority group of university graduates in these two countries, the distribution was approximately one-quarter in each of the two extreme groups, and half in the adaptive group. In western Europe as a whole, the female population of working age divided very roughly into one-third in each of the three groups, because public policy favoured the role-segregated family in some EU countries but promoted the symmetrical roles family in other EU countries, as noted in Chapter 8. Irrespective of national policies, all three preference groups are found in all countries, as indicated by several Eurobarometer surveys, including Table 4.1.

The distribution of women across the three groups corresponds to a 'normal' distribution of responses to the family–work conflict.¹ The largest, middle group is labelled adaptive but could also be seen as ambivalent, torn between the conflicting pulls of family life, especially children, and employment. The two extreme groups are smaller, being the tails of the distribution, and represent more decisive choices in favour of one or the other priority in life.

Descriptions of the three groups of women which follow take the form of sociological *ideal-types* that are based on empirical research results. Few women have lives that conform exactly to these three ideal-types. The descriptions highlight the central tendencies and essential features of the

¹ I am indebted to Tony Fahey for this idea.

TABLE 6.1. *The full classification of women's work-lifestyle preferences in the 21st century*

Home-centred	Adaptive	Work-centred
20% of women varies 10%–30%	60% of women varies 40%–80%	20% of women varies 10%–30%
Children and family are the main priorities throughout life.	This group is most diverse and includes women who want to combine work and family, plus drifters and unplanned careers.	Childless women are concentrated here. Main priority in life is employment or equivalent activities such as politics, sport, art, etc.
Prefer not to work.	Want to work, but not totally committed to work career	Committed to work or equivalent activities.
Qualifications obtained for intellectual dowry	Qualifications obtained with the intention of working.	Large investment in qualifications for employment or other activities.
Number of children is affected by government social policy, family wealth, etc. Not responsive to employment policy.	This group is very responsive to government social policy, employment policy, equal opportunities policy/propaganda, economic cycle/recession/growth, etc. Such as: income tax and social welfare benefits educational policies school timetables childcare services public attitudes towards working women legislation promoting female employment trade union attitudes to working women availability of part-time work and similar work flexibility economic growth and prosperity and institutional factors generally.	Responsive to economic opportunity political opportunity artistic opportunity etc. Not responsive to social/family policy.

three groups, hence their differences and the contrasts between them. Reality is of course more variable and untidy, and there are overlaps between the groups at the margins.

Home-centred Women and the Marriage Career

Home-centred women accept the sexual division of labour in the home, prefer not to work, and give priority to children and family life throughout their life. Once married, they prefer to be full-time homemakers, and child-rearing activities are of central importance to them. The term 'homemaker' is preferable to 'housewife' for two reasons. First, the term housewife has acquired pejorative connotations. Second, the full-time homemaker may employ servants to do virtually all domestic work and basic childcare. The homemaker's role goes beyond housework to include family work: the education and social development of children and grandchildren; creating a home that all members of the family are pleased to return to at the end of the working day; the maintenance of family relationships; entertaining family and friends; organizing leisure activities, holidays and festival celebrations; general household management and the management of consumption.

Some home-centred women never do paid work at all. Others have a job until marriage or childbirth. Those who plan to work until marriage or childbirth may invest in qualifications and a short-term career with the aim of maximizing the short-term rewards—which may be financial, social, or something else entirely. For example, many young women regarded the job of air hostess as ideal, prior to marriage, both for the opportunities to travel around the world and for meeting people. Home-centred women may return to work after marriage, but normally only in extreme circumstances—for example if they become widows, if they get divorced, or if their husband is unable, due to ill-health or for other reasons, to support the family. Occasionally, home-centred women with no caring responsibilities will take a job if it fits in completely with their family-centred lifestyle: if it involves few hours a week, pleasant social contacts, and is located close to home. Such jobs are treated almost as a hobby or as an alternative to voluntary work, and do not involve competing commitments.²

The full-time homemaker is not necessarily someone with few or no qualifications, as economists have assumed. Some women attend college and university with a view to meeting and marrying a man of at least equal education and social status. Colleges and universities function as elite marriage

² A small study of female part-time workers in Australia found that one-quarter were women with no dependent children, who regarded themselves as secondary earners, and had no plans ever to do a full-time job (Walsh 1999: 190).

markets as well as educational institutions. Similarly, workplaces function to some extent as marriage markets, and one ideal job for a home-centred woman is to work, whether as a secretary or in a professional post, in a large company in a city centre where there are many opportunities for meeting young men with good career prospects in professional and managerial occupations. Women with educational qualifications bring an 'intellectual dowry' to a marriage, enabling wives to be an intellectual partner and equal to their husband as well as helping to educate their own children. The cultural capital represented by educational qualifications, especially in non-vocational subjects in the arts and humanities, contribute to, and shape, the style of consumption in the home and in leisure activities, and help to define the family's position within the cultural hierarchy (Bourdieu 1984). Similarly, a wife's social capital may extend and complement her husband's economic capital.³

The current emphasis on employment careers for women, and women's disadvantage in the labour market, overlooks the fact that the marriage career provided the principal avenue for upward social mobility from social class of origin for women throughout the 20th century, and it still offers the potential for greater upward mobility than women can achieve through their own employment, especially for working class women who are not intellectually or academically gifted but are attractive and ambitious (Elder 1969). The picture of consistent disadvantage for women produced by comparisons of the employment successes of men and women is replaced by a picture of equality when women's marital mobility is compared with men's employment career mobility. Research in the USA and Europe consistently shows that women's chances of achieving an upper class lifestyle through marriage are at least equal, and often better than men's chances of getting there through occupational ladders, and certainly far better than women's chances of upward social mobility through employment careers (Glenn, Ross, and Tully 1974; Tyree and Treas 1974; Chase 1975; Girod 1977; Thelot 1982; Dunton and Featherman 1985; Portocarero 1985, 1987; Goldthorpe 1987; Erikson and Goldthorpe 1993: 231-77). These conclusions are based on research evidence covering the 20th century up to the 1980s, so they take no account of women's increasing share of professional and managerial occupations towards the end of the century, after the introduction of equal opportunities policies (Rubery and Fagan 1993; Hakim 1992, 1996a: 155, 1998a: 42). Employment careers are now open to women as well as men, and provide a genuine alternative to the marriage career. However these research findings on marital mobility remain valid into the 21st century, for the home-centred women who continue to rely on the marriage market as their main avenue for

³ The terms social capital, economic capital, cultural capital, and political capital are defined in note 13 to Chapter 2.

'doing well' in life, and who do not expect to work to any serious extent after marriage. While they are young, such women may choose to work as fashion models, secretaries, receptionists, in public relations and other occupations that valorize youthful attractiveness and do not always offer long-term careers, because they do not anticipate continuing in employment in the long term anyway, and these occupations allow them to meet a large number of potential marriage partners. But they can be found in all occupations, including professional and managerial occupations as well as blue-collar work.

The marriage market continues to offer women equal or better chances of success than the labour market, even though very few marry a multimillionaire or a prince. In the past, women were often forced to adopt the marriage career, given their poor opportunities in the labour market, where male workers were preferred automatically, due to their obligation to be family breadwinners. Single women could be financially independent, but they rarely achieved affluence (Cargan and Melko 1982; Simon 1987; Gordon 1994). The fact remains that women can do as well from marriage careers as do men from employment careers. More important, women today have a choice between using the marriage market or the labour market to achieve social status, self-expression, and material well-being. The two options are not open to men because, as noted in Chapters 5 and 9, women and men rarely accept the idea of role reversal in the family.

The marriage career option remains permanently open to women, even in the new scenario. Women who work hard at an interesting job when young, can at any time switch to the marriage career instead if the right opportunity, that is man, comes up. The classic examples are the young model who marries a wealthy man and drops out of a career that would have been short-lived anyway, however successful, and the professional woman who realizes she does not have the talents or determination to rise very far and drops out of the labour market to become the model wife in a two-person career.

The *two-person career* is a useful term developed to identify those occupations and careers that can in practice involve the spouse in a junior partner support role. Examples are the wives of diplomats, politicians, and clergymen (Papanek 1973, 1979; Taylor and Hartley 1975; Finch 1983; Maret 1983: 112, 115; see also Fowlkes 1980). Upwardly mobile men in professional and managerial careers also find it advantageous to have the full support services and status-production work of a wife who has no competing career or job (Papanek 1979).

The fact that the marriage career option is permanently open to all women, does not guarantee that they have the necessary talents to be a success in this sphere. The productivity and quality of work done by full-time homemakers will of course vary, but its essentially private nature means that there are no public, fixed standards by which it can be assessed. There are four separate roles or functions that such a woman can offer in exchange for a

man's financial support. Baby-making and child-rearing are the first and most enduring functions of wives, and require mothering skills. The prominence of this role has diminished over time as families have become smaller in modern societies and as women live longer. Housekeeping and domestic work is the second function and, like childcare, can be delegated to others, but must be organized and supervised. Budgetary control cannot be delegated, and can be crucial in affluent as well as poor households. The third function played by the dependent wife is the specialist manager of consumption, leisure, and social relations. The expensive non-working wife is herself a status symbol, and her conspicuous consumption advertises her husband's wealth and success. This function is increasingly important in rich consumer-oriented societies (Veblen, 1899/1953; Galbraith 1975) where leisure and consumption styles define a family's social status (Bourdieu 1984).⁴ This role often requires superior social skills, for entertaining a husband's business or political contacts and clients at home, or for maintaining good social relations in public social gatherings or other social events at which status and wealth are displayed. The fourth role or function is the wife as a luxury consumption good herself: the doll, the beauty, the skilled sexual partner, the decorative and charming companion, the 'trophy wife'. Youth and beauty are at a premium in this area. Upwardly mobile and ambitious men are most likely to value physical attractiveness in a spouse (Elder 1969: 520). In countries where serial monogamy is the rule, rich men can change their wives for a younger model at regular intervals, just as they exchange their cars for younger models. In countries where polygamy is the rule, rich men add younger wives to their existing collection. Most full-time homemaker wives combine all four functions, to a greater or lesser extent, with varying degrees of skill, at different times. But in particular occupations, classes, cultures or countries, one or another function may carry most weight in determining the success and longevity of a marriage contract. For the senior diplomat, the third function may be the most important, and form the basis of a two-person career. For the working class man, the first two functions are often crucial. In some cultures, a marriage was not confirmed until children were born, or a man could divorce a woman who failed to produce children: child-bearing was the essence of marriage.⁵ The key point here is that the services supplied by a dependent wife may be of four quite different types, mothering being only one of them. In the future, these four roles may become more sharply differentiated, especially in the context of serial monogamy.

The successful marriage career requires that a woman first catch, then keep

⁴ Veblen (1899/1953: 74) predicted that, with economic development, conspicuous leisure would be replaced by the conspicuous consumption of goods. Thus the non-working wife today is just as busy as a woman in paid employment, devoting all her time to consumption work, as Galbraith (1975) pointed out.

⁵ This is one reason for the custom of young women giving birth prior to any formal marriage to the father. Such births are socially acceptable in many cultures.

her husband, unless she can 'trade up' to an even better catch. In periods when there is a shortage of males, due to wars for example, many aspirants to the full-time homemaker role may fail to marry and are obliged to work all their lives. If a woman marries, but the services she provides are considered inadequate in a competitive field, she may lose the post of full-time homemaker and be forced to seek another position. Alternatively, a husband may be less successful than his wife expected, or be deficient in other ways, and she may be forced to leave him and find another partner and/or work herself. Much depends on a good choice of partner right from the start; errors are costly, on both sides. In contrast, the labour market offers a wider range of opportunities, although redundancy can be equally disastrous for workers who have spent their entire career with one employer, and have such employer-specific skills that they cannot regain an equivalent grade job elsewhere.

Modern societies usually provide some form of financial assistance administered by the state to individuals and families that are temporarily suffering extreme hardship, assistance that is variously termed welfare, social security, family assistance, income support, and so forth. (In some societies, such as Singapore, the family has this welfare role.)⁶ For home-centred women, public welfare can be regarded as an acceptable alternative to the financial support of a male breadwinner, for example during economic recessions, when unskilled young men are often unemployed and make unattractive marriage partners. Mothers who accept the sexual division of labour in the home and do not work after marriage, or only work part-time or occasionally, are most likely to become welfare dependents if their marriage ends (Rainwater, Rein, and Schwartz 1986: 237). Some young women embark on a motherhood career as solo mothers, without marriage, because they know they can rely on state welfare to house and support them and their children. In some countries, lone mothers have priority for access to public sector housing. The key point here is that the home-centred woman who sees her role in life in terms of reproductive work rather than productive work may not take up employment even in a situation of relative poverty that would prompt an adaptive woman to take a job (Rainwater, Rein, and Schwartz 1986: 95-103, 237). There are diverse responses to the same situation in the same society depending on a person's aspirations, values, and preferences.

Home-centred women are not responsive to employment policy and to other policies that open or close opportunities in the public sphere. They are responsive to family policies and social policies that facilitate or reward—financially, or in public recognition and status—child-bearing and child-rearing. Similarly, the wealthier their husband, the larger the number of children they will usually have, although some pursue a more hedonistic lifestyle.

⁶ In Europe, access to welfare state benefits became one of the defining features and consequences of citizenship. In Singapore, other mechanisms were utilized to define and develop national identity and citizenship (Hill and Fee 1995).

Work-centred Women and the Voluntary Childfree

The polar group consists of *work-centred* women, who can also be described as careerist or career-centred women. Strictly speaking, these labels are incorrect. The defining characteristic of this group is that their main priority in life is some activity other than motherhood and family life. At present in capitalist society *economic* activity is the principal channel for self-actualization, so employment is by far the most common type of central life activity in this group. But it might equally well be political activity, religious activity, intellectual activity, sporting activity, or artistic activity, all of which provide channels for competitive achievement and self-expression. Whatever line of activity is chosen, it is pursued with single-minded determination throughout life. This is the stereotypical 'male' career and work history, which became accessible to women as a result of the contraceptive revolution and the equal opportunities revolution. Childless women are concentrated in this group, but are not exclusive to it. About half of all women in the top professional and managerial grades remain childless (as illustrated by Wyatt and Langridge 1996: 243). Some work-centred women have children, but motherhood never provides their core self-identity and principal activity in life. Their priorities do not change suddenly after childbirth, as with some adaptive women. Work-centred women have children in the same way as men do: as an expression of normality, and as a weekend hobby. Childcare is mostly delegated to others, either purchased privately or left to public sector day care nurseries and schools.

Whether they choose it or not, this work profile is at present imposed on the vast majority of men. Men only stop working when they are unemployed, temporarily or permanently sick, in prison, or retired. In effect, men cannot voluntarily leave the labour market, as women do. In the new scenario, a minority of women also adopt this lifestyle. All the evidence suggests that it will remain a minority, probably no more than one-third in any industrial society and more commonly closer to 10% to 20% depending on local social constraints and opportunities.⁷ There is also some evidence that the proportion of work-centred women can remain as low as 20% even among exceptionally able and highly qualified university graduate women (Ginzberg 1966: 45). The vast majority of women who claim to be career-oriented discover that their priorities change after they have children. The minority of work-centred women effectively adopt the male role and gender, even if their presentational style remains resolutely feminine.

Work-centred women do not fall into careers by accident. Their commitment

⁷ Recent studies show that around 20% of women are in continuous full-time work across the lifecycle, with a maximum of about 30% in France (for example Hakim 1996a; Blank 1998; Marry *et al.* 1998; Tanaka 1998: 93-5).

to employment or equivalent activities in preference to motherhood as a central activity, emerges early in life and normally leads to a serious investment in educational qualifications or other equivalent training for their chosen main activity. For those choosing politics, religion, sport, or art, formal educational institutions may not provide the most directly relevant training.

The term 'career' is often associated with high status or professional occupations, and the term 'career-centred' is often used to imply a workaholic obsession with a job to the exclusion of all else. But these distortions do not have to be accepted. A career is a sequence of jobs or activities that offer some kind of progression or personal development within the chosen sphere of activity. In countries such as Germany, where private life and worklife are kept separate, a career-centred man may work regular 9 am to 5 pm hours, and reserve weekends and summer holidays for family life. In France, a shop assistant can regard herself as having a career, and can take pride in the development of her specialist knowledge of the products sold and her ability to advise customers. A career-centred person does not cease to have a private life, but fits family life around the career—for example relocating the family to a new city, or country, in order to take up attractive career or business opportunities, instead of choosing a career in teaching because it provides longer holidays and more time for family life than office jobs.

This group of people is responsive to policies that shape opportunities in the labour market, politics, business, sport, or the arts. For example, it is this group that responds first, and most energetically, to the new options opened up by equal opportunities policies. But this group is generally not responsive to social policy, in particular family policy. For example, work-centred women, especially those who choose to remain childless, are not affected by incentives to have more or fewer children, or by schemes permitting them to stay at home to care for children full-time.

Adaptive Women: Drifters and Unplanned Careers

Adaptive women form the largest and most diverse group among women, potentially encompassing 80% of all adult females, as indicated by the research reviewed in Chapters 4 and 5. It is often assumed that they are the *only* group, and hence representative of *all* women. However this group excludes the two minorities of women who have a clear primary commitment to one main activity—either work in the public sphere, or motherhood and a domestic role.

The adaptive group consists of women who want to *combine* employment and family without either taking priority, as illustrated by women who

choose to become schoolteachers because it allows them to be at home with their children during the summer months and other school holidays. It includes women with *unplanned careers* who develop successful employment or political careers more by accident than by design or because the economic or political environment created special opportunities for them. The adaptive group includes large numbers of *drifters*, women with no definite ideas about the life they want, who respond to opportunities as they arise or not, and who modify their goals quickly and repeatedly in response to the changing social and economic environment. For example, they will take advantage of opportunities for higher education, but they may drop out before completing their course if they meet an attractive marriage partner.⁸ They will enter the labour market during economic booms, but will not actively seek work during recessions. Adaptive women who do not actively seek employment may still take a job if it is offered to them. The ambivalent attitudes and mixed objectives of the adaptive group are reflected in their approach to education and other training, which they will take if it is offered to them, or is readily accessible, or becomes fashionable, but will never pursue against the odds. Some adaptive women acquire good educational qualifications more as an insurance policy than in the expectation of using them, in case their marriage ends in divorce or widowhood and the woman is obliged to earn her own living for a while. In addition, higher education, and the professional and managerial occupations that ensue, can in practice function in part as elite marriage markets.

The adaptive group includes women whose plans and behaviour depend very heavily on who they marry, whether they marry, and whether they stay married. In effect, their plans can be determined largely by their husbands. If they marry a wealthy businessman, an ambitious politician or a dedicated academic, they may engage in a two-person career, actively supporting and assisting their husband in all his endeavours rather than developing a business or career of their own. If they marry someone with only moderate earnings, they may work themselves to boost family income to a higher level. They return quickly to work after divorce even if they never worked while married, unlike home-centred women (Rainwater, Rein, and Schwartz 1986: 95–103, 237). If they do not marry, or marry late in life, they may work throughout life, and thus appear, in behaviour, to be work-centred women. However they differ from work-centred women in not being committed to a career from the start. There were large numbers of women in Europe and the USA who remained single, or were widowed very early, and worked throughout life in the 20th century due primarily to the shortage of marriageable men

⁸ This may be one contributory factor in women's higher drop-out rates from educational courses that are demanding but lead eventually to remunerative careers (Fiorentine 1987; Cole and Fiorentine 1991: 220). It may be easier to marry a man who will complete the course, especially if one's own academic performance has been only moderate or poor.

after two World Wars. These women appeared to have 'male' careers, but by accident rather than by design, and most of them would have stopped working if they had married young. Many of them attained the very highest levels in their profession, in part because they never had the competing demands of a family.

Gerson's (1985) study of young American women shows that the adaptive group divides into two halves, suggesting two dominant approaches to solving the work-family conflict. Some adaptive women give a slight priority to motherhood over employment. They transfer to part-time jobs or to intermittent work, often in less demanding jobs in the local labour market, which offer convenience factors attractive to women, instead of the pay and promotion characteristics attractive to men. One example would be the women who have part-time jobs in local shops, supermarkets or offices.⁹ Another example would be the woman pharmacist who does regular part-time or *locum* work in a local pharmacy while she is bringing up her children, or even permanently (Hakim 1998a: 221–34). Teaching and nursing are often chosen by women who want to fit paid work around their domestic role, rather than vice versa.

Adaptive women in professional, managerial, and other occupations that do not offer plentiful opportunities for part-time or intermittent work adopt other strategies to combine continuous full-time work with family life. Perhaps the most common strategy is to have only one child.¹⁰ Substitute childcare is purchased, and husbands are invited to contribute to the child-rearing and domestic workload. It is the rise of the one-child family, rather than childlessness, that has had most impact on national fertility rates and that testifies to the absence of policies and structures enabling women to combine family life with paid work.

The adaptive group is very responsive to all government policies, just as they are responsive to all accidents and opportunities in their social and economic environment. Because this group is the largest single group in any society, and because it is so responsive to government policy, social scientists have often concluded that women 'generally' can readily be manipulated into working or not working, as the government wants, or as the economic cycle

⁹ Part-time jobs exhibit even more diversity than full-time jobs, and are taken by widely varying groups of worker (Hakim 1998a: 102–77). However, in all advanced economies, only a minority of part-time workers would prefer to be working full-time (Hakim 1990a, 1997; OECD 1999), so they are clearly a distinctive group. A small 1996 study of women working part-time in banking in Australia suggested that the vast majority were adaptive women: four-fifths were working part-time voluntarily, with no interest in a full-time job; four-fifths regarded themselves as secondary earners, being married women or students; almost half had been out of the labour market before they took their part-time job, being full-time homemakers or students; and well over half had no intention of ever returning to full-time employment (Walsh 1999). It seems clear that market work had a low priority in the lives of these women working part-time.

¹⁰ In countries where full-time jobs are the norm for women as well as men, and there are relatively few opportunities for part-time work, such as the USA and France, there is a higher incidence of one-child families than in countries where part-time work is plentiful, such as Britain and

dictates. However the responsiveness of women 'generally' will decline if the adaptive group declines in size relative to the two groups of committed women, both of whom are far less responsive to prompts and constraints in their social environment.

Social Constraints and Contextual Influences

Even the most liberal society and *laissez-faire* polity still has social institutions, laws, customs, national policies, and cultural constraints that shape and structure behaviour.¹¹ Preferences do not express themselves in a vacuum, but within the context of local social and cultural institutions. Most societies and cultures have models of the ideal man and woman, the ideal family and the ideal lifestyle, which are respected or given substance by government policy, the educational system, the arts, and mass media advertising, and are offered to young people as models to emulate and reproduce. In some societies, these models are defined tightly; in others they are drawn loosely and permit substantial variation. In addition, the choices people make are moulded by an unpredictable circus of events: economic recessions and booms, wars, the creation of new states or mergers of old ones, the rise and demise of socialism or dictatorships, revolutions, the rise or demise of religious fundamentalism, earthquakes and drought, simple changes of government with dramatic consequences. The vast majority of people accept the destiny offered to them by the country they are born in. Others design their own destiny by migrating to another country they like better—from an old nation to a new nation, or from a new nation to an old one. On top of these social, economic, and political influences on the shape of people's lives, there are the micro-level constraints and influences. The ambitious young man or woman may discover at some point in their education that they do *not* have the talents and abilities required for a particular career. The unambitious young man or woman may discover talents and abilities 'on the job', in the real world, that never blossomed in the sterile learning environment of the educational system. Accidents and ill-health, 'disastrous' marriages and 'brilliant' marriages, the luck of being accepted or rejected for a particular post, a particular company or trainee scheme—all these and many other accidents of fate shape individual lives.

¹¹ One illustration of this was the case of an immigrant Moslem man with four wives who claimed welfare benefits for all four dependent wives and their children when he was unemployed in England. He was informed that although his choice of religion, and hence polygamous marriages, were respected, so he would not be prosecuted for polygamy under English law, the benefit system would only recognize one wife and her children as being entitled to financial support. He was thus asked to decide which wife was to be his 'official' wife for the purposes of the English social welfare system.

Preferences do not predict outcomes with complete certainty because of the innumerable intervening factors in the social, political, and economic environment. But in the prosperous modern societies that permit a much greater variety of lifestyle choices than in the past, preferences become a much more important determinant of outcomes than in the past, when economic necessity or relative affluence was generally the dominant force shaping women's employment decisions. In particular, the combination of the contraceptive revolution, the equal opportunities revolution, and changes in the workforce discussed in Chapter 3, mean that in the new scenario women have genuine choices in how to shape their lives. The full-time homemaker role is no longer forced on women as the 'natural' choice for all, some modern Arab societies of the Gulf being exceptions; none the less a minority of women continue to choose it. The full-time work role is also not forced on women as a social obligation, Sweden and China being exceptions; yet a minority of women take up this option anyway. The majority of women fall between the two extremes and want the 'best of both worlds', in the sense of some combination of paid work and a family role. In practice, this choice often means lesser achievements in one or both spheres, compared to women and men who decide on one main priority.¹² The ambivalence of adaptive women also makes them highly responsive to external social, political, and economic influences and to cultural prescriptions about what is 'proper' or 'best'.

Table 6.1 presents estimates of the size of the three groups in the absence of systematic social structural influences, as evidenced by countries such as Britain and the USA, where contradictory policies are in force simultaneously, due to constant changes of government; where a *laissez faire* approach produces a relatively unregulated labour market and a great variety of jobs; and where a population that is richly diverse in terms of ethnic groups, religious groups, and political groups means that there is no single dominant ideology or intellectual perspective. Most societies are less 'open' than this, with social pressures which inflate, or squeeze the size of the three groups. With pronatalist policies offering strong public policy support for large families and stay-at-home mothers—as illustrated in the 1990s by France—the home-centred group can increase to one-third of all women. With strong fiscal and public welfare policies that push virtually all women into wage work—as illustrated by Sweden—the home-centred group shrinks to about 10% of women. In a society that offers no ideological, social, or economic

¹² Very few women have the talents and good luck to achieve significant success in public life and have a rich family life, notwithstanding appearances to the contrary. The fact that this is not possible routinely for *all* women is sometimes presented as evidence of sex discrimination and regarded as unfair. In reality, it is due to the fact that no one can be in two places at the same time and hard choices have to be made as to where one's priorities lie. Men understand this better than women, as noted in Chapter 9.

support for the full-time homemaker, there will be few women who develop, and retain, an open preference for this lifestyle. Similarly in societies that offer no ideological, social, or economic support for work-centred women, this group shrinks to one in ten of all women. With more encouragement, one-third of women can openly express this as their preferred lifestyle.¹³ The adaptive group also shrinks or expands as social structural constraints and contextual influences encourage or discourage more decisive choices. Women appear to be more malleable than men, though this may change in the future.

None the less, social structural and cultural influences are no more than that: influences, not coercive powers. As theorists often point out, social structures create *variable* degrees of constraint and opportunity with which individual actors construct their choices (Giddens 1984; Mouzelis 1989). People can choose to reproduce or transform social structures. Women can and do reject even the most dominant patriarchal definitions of their proper role in society to do something else instead (Rosen and Aneshensel 1976).

Japan provides one example. Japan has a low and declining birthrate, despite constant moral exhortation for women to conform to their primary social duty and role in life, which is to have and raise children. By 1993, the fertility rate had fallen to an average of 1.46 children per woman, and continued falling in the 1990s. Young Japanese women find it increasingly difficult to accept the terms and conditions of motherhood, in the context of alternative options opening up to them. When they do succumb to social pressures, it is often at the most minimal, reluctant level, by having just one child (Jolivet 1997). Socialization processes and social pressure do not have guaranteed results in modern society.

Among social psychologists, there is renewed interest in self-concept and identity as central determinants of behaviour in affluent modern societies. As Breakwell puts it, identity directs action. Situational constraints remain important, but they gain meaning in the individual's definition of the situation. Situational constraints are mediated by identity (Breakwell 1986: 43). For example, one young woman simultaneously pursues a full-time job, studies for a postgraduate degree on a part-time basis, and gives birth to two children in quick succession. Another young woman regards the three activities as sufficiently demanding to be mutually exclusive. A situation that presents an impossible stumbling block to one person may be perceived as a stepping stone by someone else.

¹³ An important feature of rich modern societies is that they permit all three work-lifestyle preferences to be openly expressed and implemented, even if only one type attracts the greatest social approval and support.

Cross-national Comparisons

Preference theory offers a substantially different perspective on cross-national comparative studies of women's role in society.

At present the usual approach is to seek to identify typologies of societies that have similar institutional profiles, similar economic, political and social histories, or apparently similar patterns of female employment. This approach builds on a well-established tradition in political science, sociology, and social policy analysis. Esping-Andersen's (1990) classification of the three types of welfare state is currently one of the most influential European contributions to this field. Adopting Kohn's (1989) classification of cross-national research, comparative analyses of women's employment treat nation as context, or unit of analysis, in order to develop and test the generality of findings and interpretations about the position of women in the family and in the labour market, and the relationship between the two. This approach is adopted in several unsuccessful recent attempts to explain the very variable levels of part-time work among women (Rosenfeld and Birkelund 1995; Fagan and Rubery 1996; Blossfeld and Hakim 1997; O'Reilly and Fagan 1998). Similarly, specialist analyses of the Eurobarometer surveys have tried to identify meaningful clusters of countries. For example the European Commission (1991a) tried to identify a typology of EU countries based on patterns of women's employment, especially around childbirth. Analysing a list of indicators taken from Eurobarometer No. 34, they concluded that East Germany and Denmark were each single isolated types, that southern European countries were similar, northern European countries were similar, with France and Belgium forming a separate special type. This typology was compared with those of other researchers, none having any obvious advantage, and none improving greatly on common sense classification. Studies usually conclude that the national societal context has some impact on patterns of women's employment at the national level because, of course, differences between countries have been observed.

It has to be asked whether any of these societal typologies do any more than offer *post hoc* rationalizations for cross-national differences or research findings that are already perceived as 'important' in some sense. Do they stand up to rigorous testing?¹⁴ For example, can they explain why it is that two very different countries in Europe, Finland and Portugal, both have the highest and most stable *full-time* workrates for women, whereas high workrates include substantial amounts of part-time work in other countries,

¹⁴ To be fair to Esping-Andersen's classification, it virtually ignored women, and was never intended to provide an explanatory framework for patterns of female employment, but has been adopted as a general classification of European societies.

such as Denmark and Sweden?¹⁵ So far no one has been able to fully explain women's employment in Portugal, why it differs from the pattern in the other three southern European countries (see Table 3.3), and why full-time workrates are so high in the absence of any of the institutional supports and childcare services that are considered essential elsewhere in Europe. Portugal is often sidelined as 'peculiar', or even excluded altogether from comparative studies to avoid confronting the problem. Attempts to explain female employment in Finland, as compared with West Germany and the Netherlands, or in comparison with other Scandinavian countries, are little more successful (Pfau-Effinger 1993, 1998; Melkas and Anker 1998). Typologies of countries that focus on institutional factors do not have real predictive value, in practice, when tested properly. For example, Evans (1996) tested Esping-Andersen's thesis using ISSP data for 25 countries and several points in time. He found that awareness of social inequality was not related to support for redistributive policies across the 25 countries, and that attitudes in Britain were closer to attitudes in other European countries, such as West Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands, than to the USA, New Zealand, Australia, and Canada. Overall, Esping-Andersen's typology of the three types of welfare state failed to predict country differences in support for redistributive policies. Competing theories proved no better at predicting actual national differences in support for redistributive policies (Evans 1996).

Most typologies of societies refer to institutional differences in the main, and assume that these institutional and social structural factors mould choices and behaviour. This assumption seems indisputable as regard political systems. It is less obvious as regard social institutions. They can mould choices and behaviour, if they are coercive enough, in the short term. But there must be some doubt as to whether they mould sex-role ideologies and preferences in the long term. First, as shown in Chapter 4, there are major differences *within* countries in sex-role ideologies and preferences, and the broad pattern of preferences is relatively constant across countries that seem to have little in common. Both Denmark and Spain have the highest proportion of adults preferring egalitarian family roles (see Table 4.1). This leads us to question whether country differences really are more significant than differences in lifestyle preference in shaping behaviour, unless societies are coercive. Second, the case of East Germany, and other socialist countries of eastern Europe, suggests that institutional factors can have just as tenuous a hold on behaviour today as attitudes and values were perceived to have in earlier decades.

In the former East Germany, the socialist government's policy of forcing all

¹⁵ Sweden appears to have high workrates, but only because statistics are not comparable with those for other countries. Swedish statistics on the workforce include large numbers of mothers who are at home on long parental leave but retain the right to return to their jobs in due course. See also note 17.

non-disabled citizens to do paid work, in part because of labour shortages, meant that some 90% of women were in employment prior to unification (Braun, Scott, and Alwin 1994: 30). Some scholars have interpreted these high workrates as implying high levels of commitment to work. In reality, women's commitment to work was driven primarily by economic necessity, rather than by an intrinsic interest in paid work, because two incomes were necessary for a family, especially a family with children, and remained necessary in the transition period after unification. Otherwise, Braun, Scott, and Alwin (1994) found little difference between East and West Germany in sex-role attitudes in 1991, despite 44 years of very different social, economic, and political organization. Differences between East and West Germany in female workrates did not reflect substantial differences in sex-role ideologies. Women were equally likely to regard themselves as secondary earners in both East and West Germany.¹⁶ This helps to explain why the pay gap between men and women was just as large in East Germany prior to unification as it is in most other western European countries, with occupational and industrial segregation contributing nothing to the pay gap (Sorensen and Trappe 1995). Braun, Scott, and Alwin (1994) conclude that egalitarian socialist states were more effective in changing behaviour than in changing sex-role attitudes. Similarly, other eastern European societies retained their sex-role attitudes virtually unaltered by 45 years of egalitarian socialist policies and high female workrates. For example, Hungarians still endorse role segregation in the family and believe that what most women want is a home and children, rather than a career. In effect, egalitarian socialist societies were able to alter women's behaviour in the short term, without changing sex-role ideologies and preferences in the long term (Braun, Scott, and Alwin 1994).

Similarly, China was successful in promoting egalitarian attitudes in many areas of family life, for example in eradicating centuries-old perceptions of sex differences in ability and in the practice of male dominance in the household. There was also substantial success in eradicating the sexual division of labour: a low-wage full-employment policy made it necessary for all adults to work and for couples to share domestic work. However in 1988, after the economic reform programme had introduced a new climate of opinion, there was a

¹⁶ For example, there were similar patterns of agreement with the statement 'For a woman, it is more important to help her husband with his career than to get ahead herself'. As expected, West Germans were more likely than East Germans to agree that 'It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family' (Braun, Scott, and Alwin 1994: Table 3). But the difference was surprisingly small, given that this statement proposes complete role segregation in the family, and given 44 years of separate ideological and institutional development in East and West Germany.

By 1996, East/West German attitudes had polarized again on this question. In West Germany, 65% of non-working wives compared to 30% of wives with jobs, endorsed the idea of complete role segregation in the family. In East Germany, the proportions were 30% of non-working wives and 18% of wives with jobs (Kurz 1997: Table 1). So the principal difference of opinion was between non-working wives in East and West Germany. In all four groups of women about one-quarter (or more) still endorse complete role segregation in the family.

major public debate over a new trend for women to withdraw from wage work. A survey carried out in 1993 in Beijing showed that one-quarter of women, one-third of wives, and two-fifths of men regarded role segregation in the home as the ideal to aim for (Hakim 1996a: 96). These results come from a survey of residents in Beijing, thus including the most educated groups in Chinese society, almost half of them professionals and senior administrators. Half the wives had earnings similar to or higher than their husbands. The one-child policy and excellent childcare services meant childcare was not a problem for these families. None the less, a substantial minority of women and men would still have preferred role segregation in the family, if this option were financially and politically feasible (Hakim 1996a: 95–8).

Treating nations as the unit of analysis, or context, for analyses of women's employment choices does not seem to have been fruitful, theoretically or empirically, even if it is convenient. We should in future identify the relative sizes of the three preference groups within each country, their relative visibility, and how preferences are translated into choices and behaviour, given the varying amounts of institutional support for each one. In effect, preference theory argues that work-lifestyle preferences are at least as important as social and economic factors in determining women's employment patterns in the new scenario. This perspective will of course only work well if all the countries being compared have achieved the new scenario for women. As the discussion in Chapter 3 indicates, this has not necessarily happened in all modern societies, not even in western Europe. Many countries are currently in a transition phase. Even so, cross-national comparisons should in future pay attention to work-lifestyle preferences as one main factor explaining cross-national differences, a factor of growing importance.

Other social scientists are drawing similar conclusions. An enormously detailed historical and comparative analysis of women's employment in the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, and Britain led Pott-Buter (1993) to conclude that preferences offer the only explanation for the continuing exceptionally low female workrates in the Netherlands when compared with the other six neighbouring countries. She reached this conclusion only after replacing the misleading conventional headcount employment rates with more comparable full-time equivalent (FTE) workrates, although she was unable to adjust statistics for Sweden to take account of the practice of recording women as in employment when they are in fact at home full-time on extended maternity leave (Pott-Buter 1993: 203–8, 321–2).¹⁷

¹⁷ For example, while the labour force participation rate of women with children under seven years was 86% according to Swedish labour force surveys, only 55% of the group were actually going to work, with the remaining 31% at home full-time (Jonung and Persson 1993; Pott-Buter 1993: 208).

Conflicting Interests

There are substantive differences between the priorities and values of home-centred women, adaptive women, and work-centred women that produce conflicting interests between the three groups, especially on family policy and employment policy. This phenomenon goes well beyond the current emphasis on 'diversity' in feminist theory.

The feminist idea of the diversity of women refers to cultural variations due to ethnic group or nationality, religion, sexual orientation—heterosexual versus homosexual—affluence, or social class. There is no suggestion that these variations are sufficiently important to break up the essential homogeneity of women as a social group and as an interest group. This means that the principal conflict of interests remains the conflict between men and women, and women's groups can continue to represent all women, more or less effectively. Feminist theorists are likely to overlook, trivialize or ignore conflicting interests *between women* because this heterogeneity of values and preferences weakens political demands for policy changes in favour of 'women generally'.¹⁸

Dependent wives, secondary earners, and career women who behave consistently like primary earners, whether they are married or not, form three interest groups with conflicting interests, which will vary in significance and intensity between countries or cultures, depending on local conventions and the local policy framework. However there is no single dividing line between the groups.

The childfree and couples with children might be expected to form two groups with conflicting interests. In practice, this does not always happen, because the childfree are often the first to recognize the serious burden of dependent children (Gerson 1985: 123–57), and to accept the need for state subsidies or other assistance for families with children. However the childfree may demand some public involvement, monitoring or control over parenting couples, on the grounds that if they are paid or subsidized for providing a public good and a public service, they must also be accountable for the quality of their work.

In some cases, the main conflict of interests is between women pursuing the marriage career and the two other groups, between women who prefer not to work after marriage, and women who want to work throughout life. In

¹⁸ Most writers discuss women's diversity as a source of *variation* in attitudes, without concluding that this destroys women's common experience of male oppression. However, Lovenduski and Randall (1993: 89–91) state that women's diverse *experience* and cultural *identities* preclude common political *interests*; and they conclude that the increasing emphasis on women's diversity has divided the women's movement and eroded its political influence. Skocpol showed that a universalist maternalist movement was successful in the USA even before women got the vote. She concluded that the women's movement today would be more successful if it addressed the concerns of home-centred women as well as the concerns of career women (Skocpol 1992: 525–39, 1995).

other policy areas, it is adaptive women whose interests conflict with the other two groups. Demands for subsidized or public childcare services provide an example of the second type. Home-centred women do not need childcare services because they prefer to look after their children themselves, full-time. Indeed they are likely to resent public subsidies for childcare for 'irresponsible' and 'selfish' working mothers. Work-centred women do not hesitate to pay the cost of childcare services, whether full-cost private services or subsidized public services, partly because they are far more interested in their own activities than in child-rearing, and partly because they often have better-paid jobs and can afford to pay for good quality substitute childcare services. Paying for childcare is accepted by work-centred women, along with paying for other domestic services, work clothes, and transport to work. It is adaptive women, who are torn between the desire to work and the desire to be full-time homemakers, who are most likely to demand affordable high quality childcare services provided by the state, in order to improve their flexibility of choice and assuage their guilt. They claim their interests are common to all women, but they are simply one interest group among three.

In employment policy, the main conflict of interests is between home-centred women and the other two groups, as working women stand together to defend their right of access to the labour market and the need to safeguard equal opportunities policies. Home-centred women who look to the male breadwinner to support them can be deeply ambivalent, at best, about policies that give equal chances to men and women in the labour market, as illustrated by the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) debate in the USA (Ehrenreich 1984; Marshall 1987). They do not forget that the long-standing convention of male advantage in the workplace was based on the assumption that, sooner or later, all men would have a family to support and therefore needed a breadwinner wage—and for them this still holds true. The old 'marriage bar' rule that forced women to resign from their (white-collar) jobs at marriage has been eliminated by sex discrimination laws. But the weaker idea that male breadwinners should have priority when jobs are scarce continues to attract widespread support. For example, the idea is still endorsed by half of all men and half of all full-time homemakers in Britain. Across all social classes, half of all homemaker women and half of adult men agree that 'in times of high unemployment married women should stay at home', whereas a two-thirds majority of working women reject the idea (see Table 4.3), with little difference between women working full-time or part-time, or between social classes. In Germany, immediately after World War II, widows and male workers waged a bitter war against married women who took scarce paid jobs, denouncing them as 'double income earners'. The idea that main breadwinners should have priority in getting jobs persisted well into the 1980s in both Germanies, along with the idea that main breadwinners were entitled to higher wages and to preferential tax treatment (Braun, Scott, and Alwin 1994:

37–8; Oertzen and Rietzschel 1998: 178–9, 182–3, 186). There are similar historical antecedents for the conflicting interests of working wives and dependent wives in Britain (Kessler-Harris 1990: 64–80).

A cross-national comparative study of women's support for policies to reduce gender inequality in the labour market produced similar conclusions. Davis and Robinson (1991) used the ISSP to compare women in the USA, Britain, West Germany, and Austria in the mid-1980s. They found that hours worked had no impact at all, confirming that women working full-time and part-time hours stand together on employment policy issues in all four countries. The main division within the female population was between those women who were dependent on a male breadwinner and those who were not. The wives of a sole breadwinner were significantly less supportive of policies to reduce sex inequalities in the labour market. As one of the attitude questions proposed positive discrimination in favour of women in the workforce,¹⁹ the study revealed differences more clearly than studies using more anodyne questions. The USA was also different from European countries in that women's own employment experience significantly increased support for equality policies compared to women who had never worked. Overall, there was far more variation in the level of women's support for policies to eradicate gender inequalities in the labour market than in awareness of these inequalities, with no association between the two. Support for interventionist policies was greatest among less-educated women (Davis and Robinson 1991).

The conflicting interests of women are illustrated by debates over women's access to education in Europe and by the abortion debate and conflict over the ERA in the USA. Women's colleges were established in Cambridge University only in the late 19th century, creating new teaching staff positions for women as well as giving girls access to higher education. This stimulated hostility and conflict between the wives of male academics, many of whom were not well-educated and/or openly rejected any professional ambition for themselves, and the women academics who taught in the women's colleges who did, often, espouse feminist causes. Women academics and university students were ridiculed as unfeminine, unattractive, and even immoral. Men exploited the conflict between the two groups, using it to discourage too many girls from obtaining a university education and competing with men for jobs (Sciama 1984: 53).

¹⁹ Positive discrimination is currently unlawful in the European Union, although it is often confused with affirmative action, which is permissible, as noted in Chapter 9. In the USA, there is no national policy or federal law on the matter, and 'affirmative action' policies often combine positive discrimination in employment hirings with affirmative action, especially to boost access to the educational system among blacks and Hispanics. Some states, institutions, and employers have implemented 'affirmative action' policies that include positive discrimination, but the fairness and legality of such policies became disputed by the end of the 1990s. For example in 1996 the State of California voted to end policies allowing any form of preference, or discrimination, in favour of or against ethnic or social groups, men or women, in state-funded education and employment.

In the USA, the abortion debate was turned into a debate on the place and meaning of motherhood in women's lives (Luker 1984; Gerson 1987; Skocpol 1987). On both sides, over 80% of activists were women, of similar age, family status, and education. The two groups were divided primarily by lifestyle choices and associated values, one group having a primary commitment to family life, and the pro-choice group having a primary commitment to full-time, lifelong employment outside the home. The real issue is, of course, women's access to reliable contraception, which enables them to manage and control their fertility so as to pursue lifetime employment careers or other roles in public life. In the USA, the debate about changing sex-roles, and the implications for family life, focused on abortion instead. It developed into a deep and bitter conflict between women, which over-rode social class and ethnic cleavages, a conflict about what type of family the state should support, and about women's 'proper' place in society (Luker 1984; Gerson 1987; Skocpol 1987; see also Marshall 1987).²⁰

Gerson (1987) describes the battle as profoundly and inescapably ideological, with both sides viewing their disagreement as a zero-sum game, where one group's victory is defined as another group's loss. Her understanding of this very public conflict of interests between what has been described as the two women's movements in the USA was based on her research on young women's preferences and choices between full-time motherhood, combined employment and motherhood, or a career combined with childlessness discussed in Chapter 5. That study also revealed the conflicting interests, ideologies, and political positions of home-centred and work-centred women (Gerson 1985: 132, 186-90, 223). Home-centred women resented social pressures on them to go out to work, the devaluation of the homemaker role and of full-time mothering, and the withdrawal of public support for single breadwinner families. They were often ambivalent about equal opportunities policies that created a more competitive labour market, because this might impact on their husband's opportunities for obtaining good jobs or promotion. For career women who were considering remaining childless as a permanent option, full-time homemakers represented everything they had rejected and left behind. Gerson sees polarization between the two groups of women as growing slowly over time, so that women's political views are likely to diverge further in the USA in the future (Gerson 1987).

A more optimistic view is that the heterogeneity of women's preferences opens up opportunities which can be exploited to the mutual advantage of all. For example full-time homemakers might be the ideal childminders for

²⁰ Beck (1986/1992) went a lot further to argue that in some societies, particularly Germany, but not yet France or Britain, social class has ceased *generally* to be the main determinant of lifestyles and biographies, which are becoming individualized. Although he admitted that there is a possibility of polarization of lifestyles within younger generations of women along the lines of the educational hierarchy (Beck 1992: 120), he did not foresee the emergence of conflicting interests.

work-centred and adaptive women. However, it is important for public policy, especially family policy, to recognize that there is a diversity of lifestyle choices, and to offer *all* of them equal levels of moral and financial support. Bitter disputes over public policy are caused in effect by the 'one policy fits all' approach, which necessarily treats one lifestyle group more advantageously than the others, an issue discussed further in Chapter 8.

The problem of conflicting interests helps to explain why opinion polls and attitude surveys regularly show women collectively to have apparently contradictory or inconsistent views. With women divided into three groups—rather than the common assumption of a single dividing line between career women and homemakers—there are cross-cutting views and interests on, say, childcare policy and employment policy. Similarly perspectives are too complex to be fitted onto a continuum from 'pro-feminist' to 'anti-feminist', or from 'modern' to 'traditional'. Cross-national comparative studies that differentiate between the many aspects of attitudes to women's role in society discover that there is little or no correlation between the separate aspects (Haller, Höllinger, and Gomilshak 1999). People can favour separate roles for men and women but also support women's right to work and the case for equal opportunities. People can favour the dual-earner family and also recognize that children suffer detriment from a working mother. It seems that social scientists' thinking has so far been less sophisticated than that of the people we observe.

Contradictory Evidence: Female Depression

The heterogeneity of women's preferences and the idea of conflicting interests between groups of women are sometimes challenged. The strongest piece of conflicting evidence currently available is research showing that full-time housewives are more often depressed than women with jobs. The usual interpretation of this finding is that women generally prefer to have paid jobs and that being a housewife depresses self-esteem and mental health. However, the reasons for this research result are somewhat more complex than is usually recognized. There are three generally observed patterns in mental health that contribute to this.

First, there is the 'healthy worker effect'. In general, employers select the healthiest people for jobs, so that people not in employment are physically and mentally less healthy than people in employment, due to selection effects. The healthy worker effect is a well established and undisputed phenomenon. Because women leave and re-enter the workforce more frequently than men, even after the equal opportunities revolution (Hakim 1996a, 1996c), and because the female workforce is generally smaller than the

male workforce, selection effects will be even stronger among women than among men. So the healthy worker effect is stronger among women than among men.

Second, it is well established that women as a group have much higher rates of mental illness than men as a group. Women are twice as likely to experience clinical depression, that is, major depression that may require treatment. Women outnumber men two to one among psychiatric patients in the western world. Women are more than twice as likely as men to attempt suicide.²¹ As noted in Chapter 5, young women in the NCDS sample were twice as likely as young men to report depression, with a similar imbalance in the 1970 cohort when interviewed in the 1990s (Bynner, Ferri, and Shepherd 1997: 79). It appears that women invest more of their identities in personal relationships, especially in their children, and they are more often distressed, even destroyed, when these primary relationships go wrong or fail in some way. What is less well understood is the steady increase in rates of depression and mental illness during the 20th century, among both men and women, at a time of increasing prosperity. James (1997) provides a detailed discussion of the possible explanations for rising rates of mental illness and rising demand for counselling and psychotherapy of all kinds in prosperous modern societies, and he also considers reasons for the continuing large sex differential. One possible explanation is that women have lower levels of serotonin than men. Many textbooks on sex differences discuss the sex differential in rates of mental illness (for example Archer and Lloyd 1982). Looking at the issue from a sociological perspective, Mirowsky and Ross (1995) note that there are also sex differences in rates of psychological distress, as distinct from clinical depression. After controlling for all likely causes and explanations, including sex differences in emotional expressiveness and 'feminine' rather than 'masculine' emotional responses to problems, they found that women still experience distress about 30% more often than men. Similarly, Warr and Yearta (1995) found a persistent 50% sex differential in sickness absence from work, even after all possible causes were added as controls to their analysis of LFS data for employed people of working age (16–59/64 years) in Britain in 1991. In general, women with full-time jobs had the highest rates of sickness absence. Contrary to expectation, the sex differential is largest in the highest grade, professional and managerial occupations, and almost disappears in the lower grade occupations. They concluded that motivational factors must contribute to these patterns of sickness absence.

Third, it is well-established that general happiness and satisfaction with life displays a U-shaped trend among people who have children. Contrary to the popular stereotype, children seriously depress satisfaction levels in the

²¹ However some argue that sex differences in mental health disappear if alcoholism and drug use are added into the picture.

middle years of marriage. Spouses are most satisfied with their marriage, and with life in general, at the two extremes of the lifecycle, prior to having children and after the children have left home. Marital satisfaction declines from the time children are born up to the teenage years, then rises again to former levels after children leave home and after retirement. These patterns were established from the 1970s onwards in societies such as the USA and western Europe, but are believed to have wider validity (Burr 1970; Luckey and Bain 1970; Rollins and Feldman 1970; Boulton 1983: 18–19; Whyte 1990: 140–1). Consistent results are reported by other studies. Divorcing couples have more children than couples who remain married, and their children are born closely spaced in a short period of time, so that the impact of child-rearing work is concentrated in a narrow time frame (Gibson 1980). In the past, psychotherapists, psychiatrists, counsellors and social workers have regarded voluntary childlessness as emotionally unhealthy or immature, and they have routinely insisted that parenthood would provide a solution to personal or marital problems. This belief that children help to forge a stronger bond between spouses has now been quietly dropped, with increasing recognition that childless marriages are happier than those with children (Goodbody 1977: 428; Boulton 1983: 3–7). This conclusion coincides with small group theory which has long stated that a dyad is the most satisfactory of human relationships. It also explains why couples with children often react with envy or resentment to couples who avoid the burdens and costs of child-rearing. Overall, studies have always found that happiness, however measured, is lower, on average, and depression and mental health problems are more common among women with children than among women without children, despite the fact that marriage is generally associated with higher levels of physical and mental health than among non-married people.

Almost all these studies were carried out on people whose adult lives started before the contraceptive revolution gave women (and men) real control over child-bearing. That is, these studies must include the women (and men) who had children because it was a woman's unavoidable destiny and the price of marriage rather than because they chose to, women who today would be childfree by choice. The problem of unwanted or resented motherhood would thus be added to the financial burden of children and the negative impact of children on lifestyle and careers. In the new scenario after the contraceptive revolution, when motherhood becomes an active choice rather than an imposition, we might expect smaller differences in the marital satisfaction and life satisfaction of couples with and without children. There is some evidence of this already. A study of highly educated women in Australia in the 1980s found that women had become consciously calculating in their well-defined preferences for childlessness, one child only, or two or more children. Women explicitly weighed up the advantages and disadvantages of a career and/or children, but the three groups drew quite different

conclusions in support of their preferences (Callan 1986; see also Callan 1985). The negative consequences of a child upon lifestyles and careers are discounted by women who do want children, who perceive the costs as outweighed by the benefits.

Healthy worker selection effects alone ensure that women and men with jobs will always be a group displaying higher rates of physical and mental well-being than women and men without jobs.²² The persistent sex difference in mental health means that wives collectively are more likely to suffer depression than husbands collectively. These two fairly universal factors in combination automatically predict that women at home full-time will have the highest rates of clinical depression while men in full-time employment will have the highest levels of psychological well-being and the lowest rates of ill health. If we add in the negative impact of child-rearing on marital satisfaction and general happiness, mothers of young children without jobs will undoubtedly be the most depressed. This last factor may possibly decline in importance after the contraceptive revolution, but it was still observed among 33-year-olds in the 1990s, as shown in Chapter 5.

All of these patterns are reflected in a series of studies by George Brown and his colleagues, which provide perhaps the most detailed and careful research on the aetiology of clinical depression currently available (Brown 1993; Brown and Harris 1978; Brown, Harris, and Hepworth 1995; Brown and Bifulco 1990; Nazroo, Edwards, and Brown 1997). The *Social Origins of Depression* concluded that the lack of employment outside the home was not in itself a cause of clinical depression in women but a contextual factor defining a woman's vulnerability to mental illness. A job outside the home usually increased a woman's friendship network, and good personal relationships generally helped women to cope with the pressures imposed by stressful life-events, such as divorce or a husband losing his job, and ongoing difficulties, such as living in poor quality housing or persistent poverty. The study confirmed that depression was far more common among women with children at home, especially those in the less affluent working class, who were more likely to experience severely stressful life events and major ongoing difficulties (Brown and Harris 1978).

This first report, showing clinical depression to be an understandable response to adversity, especially life events involving rejection, loss, and disappointment, was regarded as controversial, and provoked a lively debate over its methods and conclusions. Useful summaries of this debate are provided by Marshall (1990: 205–33) and Brown (1993). The timing of the study is also

²² Solo mothers seem to contradict this rule, as those with full-time jobs have much higher rates of depression than those with part-time jobs or no jobs (Brown and Bifulco 1990: 173; Brown and Moran 1997: 27). However solo mothers have many distinctive characteristics that cloud the picture, notably higher levels of financial hardship and social isolation, and their decision to work full-time is often driven by financial hardship rather than personal preference.

important. This early report was based on interviews over the period 1969–1975 with women aged 18–65 years, the great majority of whom would thus have reached adulthood before the contraceptive revolution of the mid-1960s in Britain, and before women had genuine lifestyle choices to make.

A subsequent study carried out in the early 1980s, of low-income mothers aged 18–50 with one or more children under 18 years at home is thus of even greater interest (Brown and Bifulco 1990). This sample of mothers is young enough for half the sample to have reached adult life after the contraceptive revolution. This study compared women with full-time jobs, women with part-time jobs, and non-working women, all of whom had recently experienced a severe crisis. It found that women working part-time had the very lowest risk of clinical depression, among solo mothers as well as among wives. Wives with full-time jobs and wives at home full-time had equally high rates of depression. Solo mothers only developed depression if they were working full-time. This suggests that part-timers really do have 'the best of both worlds' and that the working/not-working dichotomy is too simplistic for studies of female depression. For example, negative self-evaluation—which is related to depression—did not differ between working and non-working women. Once again, Brown found that the presence of a child under five years old at home was associated with higher rates of clinical depression among mothers without jobs. Among women with full-time jobs, family crises and problems with family relationships were the main catalysts for depression, whether they were personally committed to work or were working for purely financial reasons. Among the non-working women, long-term financial problems seemed to be just as important a catalyst as the presence of a young child at home and problems in relationships with partners. In effect, family problems of one sort or another were the main causes of depression, among both working and non-working women. The study concluded that depression was least likely if women were able to pursue their preferred activity and role, whether as full-time mother or as a worker in the market economy, and that women should be helped to achieve their desired role (Brown and Bifulco 1990: 178; Brown 1993: 33–5).

Reasons for sex differences in depression were explored more fully in an elegantly designed study of 100 married couples who had recently suffered a common stressful life event in the 1990s (Nazroo, Edwards, and Brown 1997). Wives were five times more likely than their husbands to suffer depression as a result of a crisis concerning the couple's children, reproduction, or housing, especially if they identified strongly with the homemaker role. No doubt, fathers were just as upset as mothers at a son becoming delinquent or criminal; however they did not become clinically depressed as often as the mothers. Wives were also more likely to get depressed at other events that affected both partners, such as a husband's arrest. Husbands were most likely to suffer depression when they failed in their role as financial provider for the family,

but wives also became depressive in these cases, although less often. So the disproportionately high rates of female depression—23% compared to 13% for husbands in this sample—were connected primarily with problems in family relationships, especially problems with children, as found in the previous study, but were not limited to this. In sum, the research of Brown and his colleagues shows that it is problems with children and relationships with partners that are the most important catalysts of female depression, among both working and non-working women. The homemaker role does not, of itself, carry higher risks. Problems that produce feelings of loss, humiliation, and entrapment have the highest risk of causing depression, and these occur to (full-time) working women as well as to full-time mothers.²³

Complementary results emerge from a longitudinal study of 292 mothers who were interviewed on four occasions before their baby reached three and a half years (Hock *et al.* 1988, reported in James 1997: 187–8). The mothers were asked about their preference between continuing with paid work or staying at home full-time with their child. As Table 4.8 shows, most mothers do stay at home with young children, or else they work part-time hours only. Few mothers work full-time when their children are very young. Significant psychological differences were found between the women whose identity was heavily invested in the role of mother and who worked primarily for financial reasons, if at all, after the birth, and women who were committed to their careers, who worked for personal reasons as much as for the money, and who regarded motherhood as just one of their many interests in life. The two groups differed in their feelings about leaving their child. The home-centred women who did work were very anxious about having to leave their child, and were distressed by doing so. The work-centred women were happy to leave their children in a daycare centre so they could continue with their job.²⁴ In effect, it was the *consistency*, or lack of it, between role preferences and actual activities that determined women's psychological well-being, not the decision to return to work or to stay at home of itself.

Finally, life events and the social environment may produce the catalysts for depression, but they cannot provide a complete explanation. All studies show that only a minority of about one in five women experiencing a stressful life event goes on to develop depression (Brown 1993: 30). Four-fifths are able to cope with crises. Clearly, many other factors, including psychological and biological factors, play a part in resistance or vulnerability to depression, as Brown himself recognizes (1993: 38–9, 45).

²³ George Brown's research on female depression was done in Britain, where social support for full-time homemakers caring for children dwindled rapidly after the equal opportunities revolution. It thus provides a strong test of the thesis that being a homemaker, of itself, carries a higher risk of depression. Any risk would of course be lower in countries with high social support for full-time mothers and homemakers, such as West Germany, Italy, and Japan.

²⁴ This study dichotomized participants into just two groups, those centred on motherhood and the family role, and those centred on the work role outside the home.

Sources of the Three Preferences

There is no single factor that determines or explains why women differ so significantly in their preferences. Ability, however measured, is certainly not a principal determinant, nor is educational level, although work-centred women are generally the most highly educated group. Economists have overstated the importance of educational qualifications as a predictor of employment decisions. It appears that qualifications attained have often been acting as a proxy variable for the effects of work-lifestyle goals, status aspirations, and motivation (Rainwater, Rein, and Schwartz 1986: 99). As shown in Chapter 3, sex-role attitudes become more important the more highly educated and affluent a woman is (see Table 3.4). And as shown in Chapters 4 and 5, the polarization of preferences is found among all groups of women, including the most highly educated and most able.

So why do women develop different work-lifestyle preferences? What determines their belonging to one or another of the three groups? An enormous array of factors in combination, the significance of each varying from one person to another. Socialization within family, school, and peer group is not a sufficient explanation for the choices people make. In *all* societies, girls are taught to be girls, and boys are taught to be boys, with hugely variable results (Adler 1993). A woman who rejects motherhood and prefers the employment career is frequently rejecting her mother as a role model, yet her sisters may respond to the same experiences by emulating the mother in question. Responses differ. Psycho-physiological factors of the sort described by Goldberg (1993) under the general label of 'testosterone' may make a small contribution. Testosterone levels vary little across women, whereas the variation across men is huge (see Figure 9.1), especially over the lifecycle (Treadwell 1987: 269, 279). Only a tiny minority of women approach the range for men, potentially leading to 'masculine' levels of aggression, determination to succeed, and achievement orientation. Social factors must contribute the greater part of explanations for women's achievement orientation expressing itself within the public sphere rather than in the private sphere of the family.

Social psychologists, especially career counsellors, have an interest in *predictive* theory, and have expended more effort than sociologists in trying to explain why women form such very different work-lifestyle preferences. They have so far failed to identify any single family characteristic, experience, or personal 'characteristic' that is sufficiently important to predict a woman's preference as between home and work, or to predict career-orientation and career-achievement (Faver 1984; Betz and Fitzgerald 1987; Farmer and Associates 1997). Sociologists are unlikely to be more successful. Gerson explains the differences between women as the result of 'uneven exposure to social change and differing reactions to that exposure' (Gerson 1985: 214). Which amounts to no more than saying that people's reactions vary.

A massive compendium and synthesis of the USA research literature on this subject was compiled by Betz and Fitzgerald (1987). They found that personality and sex-role ideology are strongly associated with career-orientation and career-achievement for women, and might even be treated as predictors, as they seem to develop early in childhood and adolescence. However from our perspective, sex-role ideology and career-orientation are two aspects of a single over-arching work-lifestyle preference. Psychologists measure them separately, with different scales, but conceptually they are connected, describing the role(s) one wants to play in life. Personality is a conceptually separate factor.

Women who are career-oriented tend to have high self-esteem and self-confidence, and this factor is predictive of women's career achievements, especially in male-dominated occupations such as scientist or politician. Women generally tend to underestimate themselves, whereas men usually overestimate their abilities and performance. This pattern is linked to women's tendency to attribute success to external factors, such as luck, whereas men attribute their success to their own abilities, as noted in Chapter 1. Women tend to attribute their failures to internal sources, such as lack of ability or effort, whereas men excuse failure by external factors, such as bad luck. A higher level of what psychologists call *instrumentality* or *independence*—essentially self-assertion and an emphasis on competence—among women is related to the choice of 'male' subjects in school and male-dominated occupations and greater career achievement. Women following high status professional careers such as medicine are more independent, individualistic, autonomous, and significantly less suggestible and submissive than women in general. Career-oriented women are more similar in personality to career-oriented men than to women in general. Career-oriented women generally obtain higher scores on aptitude, ability, and achievement tests than do home-centred women. Several studies found that women who persist and succeed in science courses, have the very highest ability scores whereas science courses attract men with variable levels of ability. Interestingly, career-oriented women score as high on tests of 'feminine' expressiveness as they do on tests of 'masculine' instrumentality/independence. What distinguishes home-centred women is that they score high on the 'feminine' expressiveness scale only (Betz and Fitzgerald 1987: 123; Farmer and Associates 1997: 299–300).

An interesting study of 200 professional couples found significant personality differences between full-time homemakers and working wives, and between their husbands. Burke and Weir (1976) studied 200 couples in Ontario, Canada, all with a husband who was an engineer or an accountant. The occupational grade of the working wives varied substantially, so they can be described as dual-earner couples, thus understating differences between dual-career couples and single-career couples. Full-time homemakers were

more passive, and were more concerned with relationships and with belonging. The husbands of housewives were most concerned with authority, and were most dominant and assertive in relationships. The personality structure of working wives resembled that of working husbands rather than that of housewives, except for a low desire to control other people. The results indicate personality differences between the two types of marriage, with dual-earner couples operating a collegial partnership, while single-earner couples had well-matched complementary personality structures. Burke and Weir (1976: 453–4) note that several other USA studies also found personality differences between working and non-working college-educated women. Given that women had access to a college education in the USA long before educational equality was achieved in Europe (see Chapter 7), these early North American studies indicate the likely pattern of developments in Europe in the 21st century.

Psychologists have devoted substantial effort to devising attitude scales that explore and measure all aspects of sex-role ideology, going well beyond the question of preferences regarding sex-roles in the family (Beere 1979; Betz and Fitzgerald 1987: 124–8). The main findings are fairly consistent across studies: women are more 'liberal' than men;²⁵ younger women are more 'liberal' than older women, with some evidence of (generational) change over time; 'liberal' sex-role attitudes are associated with stronger career motivation, higher educational aspirations, higher career aspirations, a tendency to remain single, a tendency to remain childless if married, perceived self-competence, higher intelligence on several measures, and stronger career development. A 'liberal' sex-role ideology has been found to be a powerful predictor of women's career involvement, in virtually any field of work, including skilled crafts and technical fields as well as male-dominated professional and managerial occupations. There is no evidence of any sex differential in achievement motivation, but men and women do seem to 'apply' it differently.

Finally, almost all these variables are interlinked, more or less strongly. Self-esteem and instrumentality are associated. Instrumentality is linked to competitiveness. And competitiveness, which is stronger among men, is strongly related to a preference for extrinsic rewards from work: pay, promotion, and advancement up the hierarchy. One important finding is that the *expression* of high intellectual ability is linked to the rejection of 'traditional' sex-role ideology. It seems that home-centred women are just as able as career-oriented women, but they eschew the overt display of high competence, especially in competitive contexts (Betz and Fitzgerald 1987: 124).

One problem with all these studies is that the differences they report, even

²⁵ In these studies, a 'liberal' sex-role ideology is more career-oriented whereas a 'traditional' sex-role ideology is more home-centred.

when statistically significant, are often *substantively small*. It appears that there is no single personality type or psychological factor which strongly distinguishes the work-centred woman from the home-centred woman. Cumulatively, all these factors may be important and predictive. But the fragmented approach of variable sociology and psychology means that researchers do not look at the collective impact of clusters of linked variables.

The social background factors that are associated with a career-orientation in women are: a working mother; access to female role models; a supportive father; highly educated parents; work experience as an adolescent; a relatively androgenous upbringing; and attendance at girls-only schools and colleges (Betz and Fitzgerald 1987: 143). Other studies have found that young women are more likely to develop a close relationship with a supportive father, who then introduces them to the possibilities of male-dominated professional and managerial careers, if there are no brothers in the family, especially if the girl is an only child (Fogarty, Rapoport, and Rapoport 1971: 300–33). Smaller families make this family situation far more common today than it was in the past. So this could be an important factor contributing to the inter-generational trend toward a more work-centred outlook among women. Attendance at all-women schools and colleges also regularly emerges as a crucial factor that allows women's talents to develop unconstrained by the presence of men. Education in all-women schools and colleges, plus a strong bond with their father, are the only common characteristics that emerge from comparative studies of women who became political leaders: Golda Meir, Margaret Thatcher, Isabel Peron, Corazon Aquino, Violetta Chamorro, Indira Gandhi, and Benazir Bhutto (Genovese 1993: 214–7; see also Sunder Rajan 1994). Similarly, single-sex education regularly emerges as a characteristic of women who reach the highest levels in management and the professions (for example, Wyatt and Langridge 1996: 241). Virtually all studies show that the husband's attitude toward his wife working is a crucial intervening factor.

It appears that a large number of factors in combination produce the 'normal' distribution of women's responses to the conflict between family and employment. The distribution simply reflects the usual variation in women's experiences and responses to them, and the three preference groups constitute three identifiably different ideal-types within it. There is no single factor, or experience, that stands out as especially important, and responses vary anyway.

As Nuttin (1984) points out, *all* people have a need to exercise agency, to act upon the world, to demonstrate competence and efficacy. The only difference between women and men is that women can exercise agency through two extra social roles in the private sphere: parenting and homemaking. These two roles have so far generally been less accessible to men, and women's attitudes to them have been the subject of some debate among feminists. Research suggests that, even in the new scenario, these roles will

continue to be attractive to many women as avenues for exercising agency and getting 'causal pleasure', as Nuttin (1984: 93–7) puts it.

Conclusions

Preference theory identifies three distinct 'packages' of predispositions and work-lifestyle preferences which lead people to respond in different ways to the social, economic, and political environment they are born into, or migrate into. Preference theory states that women are not a homogenous group but divide into three distinctive groups, with different patterns of behaviour, and different responses to policies. Women are heterogeneous and so also are men, to a lesser extent. These differences are becoming increasingly important in affluent modern societies in the 21st century. The presentation here has focused on women because they were already exhibiting heterogeneous behaviour by the end of the 20th century in some societies—notably the USA and Britain—and are thus the pioneers of the new scenario. As we move into the 21st century, it is likely that men will begin to reveal variations in their work-lifestyle preferences, a topic discussed further in Chapter 9.

Neither socialization processes nor biological programming are so uniformly successful and complete as to have guaranteed results. Public policies and social institutions may encourage and promote certain choices and behaviours, but they too cannot guarantee acceptance and conformity. A minority of women have no interest in employment, careers, or economic independence and do not plan to work long term unless things go seriously wrong for them. Their aim is to marry as well as they can and give up paid employment to become full-time homemakers and mothers. The group includes highly educated women as well as those who do not get any qualifications. As shown in Chapter 7, universities provide an élite marriage market as well as a springboard for employment careers. In contrast, other women actively reject the sexual division of labour in the home, expect to work full-time and continuously throughout life, and prefer symmetrical roles for husband and wife rather than separate roles. The third group is numerically dominant: women who are determined to combine employment and family work, so become secondary earners. They may work full-time early in life, but later switch to part-time jobs on a semi-permanent basis, and/or to intermittent employment (Hakim 1996a: 132–9; 1997). The characteristics and size of the three groups are revealed most fully in *laissez-faire*, liberal societies.

In the past, employment has almost always been driven by financial considerations, and it still is, for wives in poor families (Davies and Joshi 1998). After the new scenario is achieved in affluent modern societies of the

21st century, women's employment decisions, and, eventually, those of men also, will be driven primarily by their personal preferences for one of three qualitatively different work-lifestyles. Differences between men and women will become less important than the *conflicting* interests of people with three work-lifestyle preferences, who create three types of family. Preference theory throws new light on existing social and economic theories, restricting them to particular contexts, rather than replacing them wholesale. And female heterogeneity explains the often contradictory results of research in recent decades.

The three work-lifestyle preferences are presented here as ideal-types, that is, simplifications of reality. It is to be expected that case studies will reveal a more complex reality in particular situations, particularly as regards adaptive women, the largest group, whose priorities are the least stable on a day-to-day or year-to-year basis. The test of the classification is whether it proves useful as a heuristic tool, as a framework to guide new research and to make sense of research results for societies that have achieved the new scenario. The classification cannot be falsified by case-studies revealing a more complex reality. This is true of any abstraction.

Economists assume that preferences and tastes are stable, permanent. Preference theory states that there are indeed two groups with stable preferences, but these are contrasting preferences, for the marriage career or for the employment career. In contrast, the third group does not *appear* to have stable tastes, because adaptive women readily modify their outlook and behaviour to take advantage of special opportunities or to comply with constraints. The heterogeneity of women's preferences requires a reassessment of theories that worked reasonably well before the two revolutions. The problem is not that women are different from men, but rather that some women are not at all different, while others are seriously different in their orientations to home, children, and employment. In addition, the new scenario for women entails that some previously useful theories are now becoming dated.

Preference theory clarifies that certain theories apply only to particular groups of women, not to *all* women, because women are heterogeneous. For example Becker's (1991) theory that the sexual division of labour in the home is adopted and maintained because it is more efficient remains useful after women acquire genuine choices, but it only applies to two groups of women. The theory is contingent on women having a preference for a home-centred life, with a complete sexual division of labour, or for the combination of work and family life that still leaves women with a primary responsibility for domestic affairs. Work-centred women will insist on 'egalitarian' symmetrical conjugal roles or will forego the pleasures of child-rearing for the pleasures of a rewarding career. Childlessness of itself alters the domestic bargain in fundamental ways. And dual-career couples in professional and managerial occupations can often well afford to purchase childcare, housekeeping, and

gardening services that leave them free to pursue their main interests outside the home. Becker's efficiency explanation is particularly relevant to couples where the wife has 'married up', to a husband who is superior in education, occupation, and earnings. As noted in Chapter 7, trends in homogamy and wives marrying up vary a good deal in the post-war decades, even within Europe (see Table 7.7). We cannot assume that this practice is dying out as a result of women's greater education. It is not clear that Becker's theory has any applicability at all to couples who are equal in education, occupation, and earnings; who remain childless; and who are agreed that both are career-oriented. Any slight advantage the wife might have in cooking will be balanced by the husband's slight advantage in Do-It-Yourself and odd jobs, or vice versa. Both will be equally inefficient at domestic activities and equally productive in paid work, so a symmetrical, balanced sharing of tasks can emerge if it is preferred.²⁶ It is puzzling that no economic theory predicts dual-career symmetrical role partnerships, as distinct from dual-earner couples with adaptive wives. The mutual benefits of dual-career partnerships were of course invisible to male theorists living in single-breadwinner marriages. The only sociological theory to predict this arrangement went too far, arguing that all couples would eventually choose this arrangement (Young and Willmott 1973), whereas others have seen dual-career couples as restricted uniquely to higher grade professional and managerial occupations (Fogarty, Rapoport, and Rapoport 1971).

Recent research shows that there are additional mutual advantages to spouses within dual-career couples, which may outweigh the practical inconvenience of having no full-time homemaker, especially as many of these couples have no children, or none living at home (Philliber and Vannoy-Hiller 1990; Robert and Bukodi 1998). Shared social capital, intellectual, and work interests can allow spouses greater achievements and upward mobility than they would achieve alone. Husbands can afford to develop risky businesses or to pick and choose work they find most interesting, cushioned by their wife's steady income. Some degree of similarity in spouses' occupations has strong positive effects on a woman's professional career (Ginzberg 1966; Philliber and Vannoy-Hiller 1990; Robert and Bukodi 1998) and more generally on both spouses' careers (Bernasco, De Graaf, and Ultee 1998; Engelstad 1998: 13–15). Such couples can then afford to purchase services to compensate for the fact that neither have the time or skill for domestic activities.

²⁶ Becker argues that even a slight comparative advantage of one party in domestic work is sufficient to produce conjugal role segregation, even among basically identical persons (Becker 1991: 77). However he overlooks the fact that men also have a slight advantage in certain domestic tasks, such as car maintenance, putting up shelves, gardening, and house repairs. In practice, Becker's theory rests heavily on the idea that women have an advantage in the care of babies and small children, which sets in motion a separation of roles that was already anticipated anyway. This factor is eliminated completely among voluntarily childless couples and among older couples with no children at home (Atkinson and Boles 1984).

Most obviously, they can afford to purchase substitute childcare, but also catering services for special social events, cleaning and housekeeping services, gardening services and so on. These couples do not benefit from the efficiencies of the sexual division of labour, but they benefit from another form of task specialization, with alternative efficiencies.

Human capital theory assumes homogeneity of the workforce and fails to cope with female heterogeneity. Human capital theory assumes that qualifications are obtained primarily and exclusively as an investment in economic capital, and it treats the humanities degree as undistinguishable from the accountancy degree. The theory cannot cope with people who obtain qualifications as an investment in cultural capital and/or because higher education, and the jobs it leads to, provide access to elite marriage markets. It is discouraging that many sociologists have adopted this economic theory and applied it unquestioningly, without seeking to modify it to incorporate sociological knowledge and research findings. Preference theory offers a new integration of economic and sociological theorizing about involvement in paid and unpaid work. Unlike most earlier top-down theorizing, it is grounded theory, built up from empirical research evidence. Because of this, it is open to development by contributions from other social scientists with relevant research findings.

One promising development is the renewed emphasis on self-concept and identity in social psychology. Social and personal identity combine past experiences, the present and anticipated futures. Aspirations and life goals are an important part of self-concept and identity. Goals and plans for the future regulate and motivate behaviour through conceptions of 'possible selves' (Markus and Nurius 1987: 166) or ideal selves represented in 'the dream' (Levinson 1978, 1996). Thus a woman is home-centred if she looks ahead to a time when she will marry and become a full-time mother, even if she is currently happy in a full-time professional job. Social psychologists also recognize that there is a large element of choice in the particular identities adopted by people, and even in the choice of primary sexual identity (Breakwell 1992; Goodman 1999).

Chapter 8 looks at the policy implications of the theory. However the most important consequence for policy is that preferences are *not* converging on a single sex-role model for women, and there is no convergence on a single model of the family in western Europe, as many scholars have been anticipating, as if this were a logical consequence of agreement to a common European currency and common European labour laws. It seems even less likely that there would be convergence on a single model of sex-roles, or the family, across *all* modern societies, given cultural diversity. Policy-making for a heterogeneous society will be more difficult than in a society where there is a broad consensus backing a single model of the family, as illustrated by Sweden.

7

Marriage Markets and Educational Equality

Preference theory underlines the fact that marriage markets continue to be just as important as labour markets for women's status achievements, and hence for understanding women's position in society as a whole. For some women, marriage markets are more important than labour markets and have provided an equally effective ladder for upward social mobility, as noted in Chapters 6 and 9. Unfortunately, there is comparatively little research on marriage markets, especially when compared with the enormous volume of recent research and information on women's changing position within labour markets (for example, Hakim 1996a; Rubery *et al.* 1998). Becker's (1965, 1981, 1991) work on the economics of marriage and the family provides an important theoretical foundation for the analysis of marriage markets within economics, but there is no equivalent theory which serves to focus research in sociology. Becker argues that even if a husband and wife are identical, they achieve efficiency and productivity gains from a division of labour between employment and household work. The sexual division of labour in the family is mutually advantageous. Parsons' functionalist view of marriage was broadly consistent: he argued that the sexual division of labour in the family was functional and even essential. The family performed essential functions for society, in particular the socialization of children and the stabilization of adult personalities. Men were oriented to the public sphere and performed an instrumental role as main breadwinner in the family. Women performed an expressive role, concentrating on relationships and the internal dynamics of the family. The separation of parental roles was presented as beneficial: it helped to avoid competition between spouses, and between the universalistic and competitive values of the labour market and the particularistic values of kinship relations (Parsons and Bales 1955). The Parsonian view of the family is now rejected by many sociologists. However there are several recent sociological theories that offer similar justifications for the sexual division of labour in the family. Resource theory and exchange theory also present role segregation in the family as rational and efficient (Pleck 1985: 12-15), along lines similar to Becker's thesis.