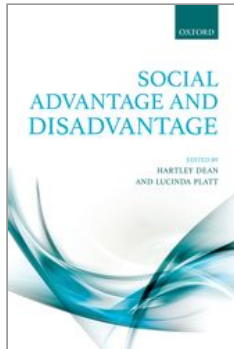


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## Social Advantage and Disadvantage

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## Gender and (Dis)advantage

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### Abstract and Keywords

This chapter considers gender as an inherent and intersecting dimension of advantage and disadvantage. It examines the processes by which gender relations are implicated in the construction of (dis)advantage by adopting a multidimensional approach where gender intersects with other social dimensions. The first section addresses the reciprocal inequalities which arise from the gendered division of work and gender gaps in a series of social spheres worldwide. The following section goes beyond the gendered division of labour to consider issues of culture and agency. The concluding section considers new manifestations of gender disadvantage deeply entrenched within processes of global social inequality.

*Keywords:* gender disadvantage, gender policies, labour market inequalities, sexual division of labour, structure and agency

Much water has flowed under the bridge since Simone de Beauvoir famously claimed that one is not *born* a woman but rather *becomes* a woman. After decades of feminist work and activism, most people would agree that behavioural differences between women and men are socially acquired rather than biologically set. Some might still find it tempting to keep the myth of biological determinism alive by explaining men's more violent behaviour, girls' underperformance in maths, or

women's greater inability to read maps on the basis of different brain compositions and hormone fluctuations (see Fausto-Sterling, 1992). However, by and large, the fact that gender constitutes 'one of the most fundamental divisions of society' (West and Zimmerman, 1987: 126) is today hard to dispute even if gender, as indeed class (see Chapter 4, this volume) is a highly contested term. If biological facts are not dictating inequalities between the sexes to perform and access resources, if we agree that our behaviours are the consequence of a complex array of social factors that operate even before we are born, then the quest becomes unveiling the social roots of gender (dis)advantage. This chapter is committed to such endeavour.<sup>1</sup> Women are not systematically paid less because by nature they cannot access better paid occupations; men are not more likely to be in positions of economic or political power because they have a natural impulse for domination, children are not overwhelmingly cared for by their mothers because fathers lack the instinct to do so. The list is endless. The point is clear: anatomy or evolutionary theory offer little help to understand processes of gender advantage and disadvantage. We need the explanations that the social sciences can offer and even here, the road has been long.

(p.224) Sociological theory has traditionally concentrated on social divisions based on class remaining oblivious to other forms of subordination. Likewise, political theory has anchored notions of political rights to 'the male citizen' (Lister, 1995). Feminist theory of the 1960s and 1970s stressed the need to understand the ways in which dividing lines around productive and reproductive work result in a series of disadvantages for women. At least in Western societies, gender differences in life chances have primarily been explained from the perspective of the interplay between the public and the private spheres. A set of dichotomies pivoting around the public-private divide shape the formation of gender identities, the subordination of women by men and the division of labour between paid and unpaid work. The way in which emotional labour is encapsulated as reproductive work has already determined its subordinated nature within the division of work. Domestic labour in the household is not counted as economic activity, although it takes up a large part of women's (and also men's) everyday lives. To overcome this distinction between the outside world of paid employment and the private world of unpaid work, Glucksmann developed the concept of the *total social organization of labour* referring to the 'manner by which all the labour in a society is divided up between and allocated to different structures, institutions and activities' (Glucksmann, 1995: 67). This gendered division deeply

affects women's access to employment and social rights as well as men's responsibilities towards care.

This chapter considers gender as an inherent and intersecting dimension of advantage and disadvantage. It examines the processes by which gender relations are implicated in the construction of (dis)advantage. The study of disadvantage demands a multidimensional approach where gender intersects with other dimensions such as social class, ethnicity, age, and so on (McCall, 2005; Davis, 2008). The reciprocal inequalities which arise from the gendered division of work will be addressed in the first section of this chapter together with a consideration of gender gaps in a series of social spheres worldwide. The following section goes beyond the gendered division of labour to consider issues of culture and agency. The concluding section considers new manifestations of gender disadvantage deeply entrenched with in processes of global social inequality.

### 11.1 Understanding Gender Disadvantage

Throughout the globe, the disadvantages that women (and girls) face are a major source of inequality. The United Nations' Gender Inequality Index (GII) looks across different indicators of sex inequality in health, education, politics, and employment to identify the presence and degrees of systematic differences between men and women. These differences are not just a relevant (p.225)

**Table 11.1. UN Gender Inequality Index (2013)**

	Gender Inequality Index		Share of seats in parliament	Population with at least some secondary education (% aged 25 and above)	Labour Force Participation rate (% aged 15 and above)	Human Development Ranking
	Value	Rank	(% held by women)	Female	Female	
Switzerland	0.030	2	27.2	95.0	61.2	3
Germany	0.046	3	32.4	96.3	53.5	6
Sweden	0.054	4	44.7	86.5	60.2	12
Denmark	0.056	5	39.1	95.5	59.1	10
France	0.080	12	25.1	78.0	50.9	20
Spain	0.100	16	35.2	66.8	52.6	27
Poland	0.139	26	21.8	79.4	48.9	35
United Kingdom	0.193	35	22.6	99.8	55.7	14
Australia	0.113	19	29.2	94.3	58.8	2
Japan	0.138	25	10.8	87.0	48.1	17
United States	0.262	47	18.2	95.1	56.8	5
Argentina	0.381	74	37.7	57.0	47.3	49
<b>Regions</b>						

## Gender and (Dis)advantage

	Gender Inequality Index		Share of seats in parliament	Population with at least some secondary education (% aged 25 and above)	Labour Force Participation rate (% aged 15 and above)	Human Development Ranking
	Value	Rank	(% held by women)	Female	Female	
Arab States	0.546	-	13.8	32.9	24.7	-
East Asia and the Pacific	0.331	-	18.7	54.6	62.8	-
Europe and Central Asia	0.317	-	18.2	70.4	45.5	-
Latin America and the Caribbean	0.416	-	25.3	53.3	53.7	-
South Asia	0.539	-	17.8	28.4	30.7	-
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.578	-	21.7	21.9	63.6	-

*Note:* The Gender Inequality Index (GII) is a statistical indicator which measures inequalities between genders in three dimensions considered relevant for human development: reproductive health (maternal mortality ratio and adolescent birth rates), empowerment (rate of parliamentary seats occupied by women and share of secondary education in the population above 25 years old) and economic status (expressed as labour market participation). The higher is the value of GII, the greater are the disparities among men and women.

**Source:** For Gender Inequality Index: UN statistics (2013), for share of seats: IPU (2013), for education: UNESCO (2013), for labour market: ILO (2013). Denmark data for labour market refers to population 25-74, Australia data for labour market refers to population 25-64, Argentina data for labour market are estimations

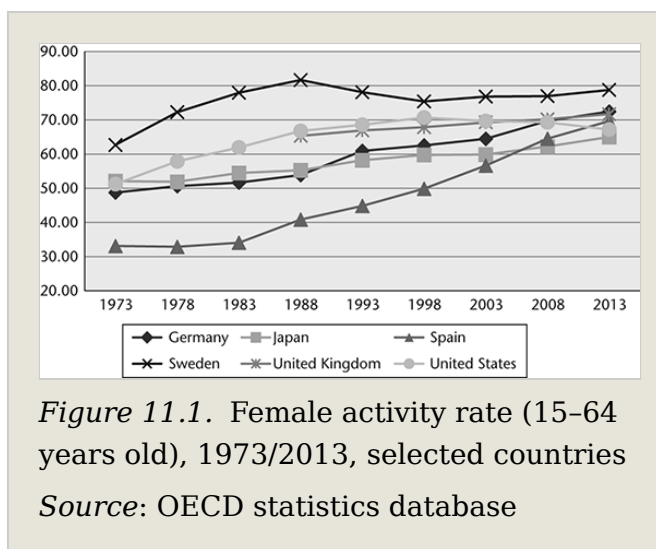
concern from a social justice viewpoint. As the UN's synthetic indicators show, there is a close link between gender (in)equality and human development: high levels of gender inequality are associated with a more unequal distribution of human development. In other words, societies where women encounter systematic differences in accessing education, health care, the labour market, or health care are those which do not create the necessary conditions for the general enhancement of human abilities. The UN's human development approach stems from Amartya Sen's work on human capabilities which will be explained later in the chapter.

As Table 11.1 shows, significant differences exist between and within regions. There is a sharp cross-regional contrast between Western and non-Western (p.226) countries. In certain parts of the world as for example in Latin America and Caribbean, South Asia, Arab States, and sub-Saharan Africa, women have a much lower representation in politics compared to men, more difficulties in accessing education, and consequently a lower labour force participation rate. A recurrent question in the literature is the extent to which policies and instruments widely used in the developed world are in any way useful when prescribed to developing contexts. Indeed, in Western countries, the gender gap with regards participation in employment, access to education, and political representation has narrowed considerably over the last decades. In all countries the percentage of women elected to national parliaments has increased, partly because of the spread of the practice of quotas (Dahlerup, 2006). In addition, the gender gap with regard to educational attainment has in some countries been reduced to zero. In fact, in many countries educational attainment of women now outstrips that of men. Buchmann for instance has investigated on the causes for the gender gap in college completion in the US which has reversed from favouring men to favouring women (see Buchmann and DiPrete, 2006). Furthermore, the participation of women in the labour market is no longer the exception, but the rule. In advanced industrialized countries, general trends in education, health, and also the labour force have contributed towards reducing the gender gap in these general indicators. The introduction of gender issues in the political agenda and the creation of gender-specific social policies have also contributed, even if only partially, to these improvements in the life chances of women.

There are nevertheless significant differences that can still be observed between countries. In Europe, the distance between the North and the South is mainly attributed to the lack of specific policies supporting women. Comparative social policy research tends to agree on the role of the welfare state, through for instance the expansion of childcare services, as enabling the participation of women in paid employment. The presence of social-democratic governments is also positively

associated with the presence of women-friendly social policies (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Huber and Stephens, 2000). Still, even in countries where gender gaps in employment, education, or politics have been reduced, notable levels of gender disadvantage prevail when we take a closer look. Systematic differences between men and women persist despite 'social' and 'economic' development. In fact a twofold effect seems to take place: on the one hand welfare states promote the participation of women in the labour force whilst on the other, levels of occupational segregation increase since women concentrate in welfare-related jobs in the public sector (Mandel and Semyonov, 2006).

With regard to the participation of women in the labour market, at the beginning of the 1970s, only a few Western countries had female employment rates above 50 per cent. For all countries there has been an upward trend. Since (p.227)



**Table 11.2. Female integration in the European labour market (2012)**

	Employment rates (% aged 15-64) Female	Unemployment rates (% aged 15- 64) Female	Part-time employment (% aged 15-64) Female	Gender pay gap
Denmark	70.0	7.7	35.8	14.9
Germany	68.0	5.3	45.0	22.4
Spain	51.2	25.2	23.9	17.8
France	60.0	10.0	30.0	15.4
Italy	47.1	12.0	31.0	6.7
Austria	67.3	4.4	44.4	-
Poland	53.1	11.0	10.6	6.4
Sweden	71.8	7.8	38.6	15.9
United Kingdom	65.1	7.5	42.3	19.1
Switzerland	73.6	4.6	60.1	-

**Source: Eurostat database**



the end of the 1990s Western countries have converged in rates of female employment above 60 per cent (see Figure 11.1). But as Table 11.2 shows, despite increasing participation of women in the labour market, gender disadvantage remains present in a number of ways.

Countries such as Denmark, Germany, Sweden, and Switzerland have rates of female employment close to or above 70 per cent. However, a large percentage of women who participate in the labour market in these countries work part-time (with the highest peak in Switzerland where the majority of women are part-time workers). Lower female employment levels in Southern and Eastern European countries are also linked to the low presence of part-time (p.228) employment. Part-time work has customarily become an efficient way to increase levels of female employment. At the same time it operates as a contradictory way of integrating women into the labour market since it usually brings lower hourly wage and limited opportunities for advancement. It also increases the risk of female segregation in the labour market, because part-time employment is more frequently available in feminized occupations such as education and care, or in the lowest level of organizational hierarchies (Maestripieri, 2015). In countries where part-time employment is a common option for women (especially for those with caring responsibilities) the pay gap between men and women tends to be high. Therefore, part-time work does not equalize the position of women vis-à-vis full-time workers but becomes an option for households' additional income which maintains families' sexual division of labour (Blossfeld and Hakim, 1997). The decline of the so-called 'male breadwinner model' has been replaced by a 'one and a half earner model' rather than by a more balanced arrangement where both men and women work and care (Lewis, 2001). In this respect, and as will be later discussed, with the exception of a few Nordic countries, the support for women's equal employment opportunities has not been matched by considerations of men's sharing of childcare and household responsibilities or attempts to transform organizational structures (i.e. long hours at work) that hinder the reconciliation of work and family life (Haas et al., 2002).

Changes in employment have undoubtedly challenged the rationale of the gendered division of work. In general terms, the division of labour as it has been typically set up does not any longer cater for the great complexity and diversification we today find in the world of work. In gender terms, women have massively entered the labour market and men's employment is in decline. It is clear that as the participation of women in the world of paid employment increases, the boundaries around which productive and reproductive work are placed have become more blurred. Still, two important points are worth making. First, the existence of gender disadvantage in the world of paid

employment signals the presence of institutional/structural barriers to equality between men and women. Second, even in countries with high proportions of female labour force participation, housework is still heavily gendered.

With regard to the first point, the concept of a glass ceiling refers to the gender pay gap (see Table 11.2) across the wage distribution and (difficulties for) promotions to top managerial position of female professionals. In all Western countries, despite mass incorporation of women in the labour market, a general increase in the levels of education of women, and the introduction of equal pay and sex equality legislation, women are still in a disadvantaged position for promotion to jobs of higher responsibility and pay. Research carried out in several countries shows that hidden gender-specific mechanisms are at play in (p.229) the ways in which corporations hinder women from reaching top positions. Albrecht and colleagues (2001) for instance used micro data to explain the gender gap at the top of the wage distribution in Sweden, which accounted for the large majority of the overall gender wage gap in this country during the 1990s. Controlling for other variables such as occupation, age, or education, the authors conclude that gender differences in rewards are the primary factor responsible for the observed gap. In this sense, they argue, the way in which policies in Sweden support the role of women as workers and carers might be part of the explanation: 'women may have strong incentives to participate in the labour force but not to do so very intensively' (2001: 20). In sum, an understanding of women's underrepresentation and underpay in top managerial positions requires analysing the context in which women make career choices including procedural discrimination, the set up of policies for the reconciliation of work and family life, women's own preferences, and the work culture (such as, long hours and the personal characteristics which are linked with professional success) (Liff and Ward, 2001).

Considering household work, in 1992 Gershuny argued that a process of 'lagged adaptation' was taking place between women taking on paid work and households adapting to change. He based his argument on data that showed that the longer a woman had been in paid employment, the more equal the division of household work with her partner had become. Some years later, Sullivan also analysed time use data which in general terms supported Gershuny's hypothesis. In the UK, by the end of the 1990s women were doing less housework than in previous decades although they were still doing more housework than men. Recent studies show, however, that the 'lagged adaptation' explanation only worked up to a point. Despite women's increasing

labour force participation, men’s share of household work and childcare has been rather modest (Blossfeld and Drobnic, 2001): see Table 11.3. So, in Beck’s terms, couples continue to ‘do’ gender despite mass incorporation of women to the labour force. According to Breen and Cooke (2005) progress in gender material equality needs to be paired with an evolution in men’s gender ideology.

The contentious question of who takes responsibility for reproductive work has in many countries been solved not through a more equal distribution of domestic and care work within a couple but by externalizing tasks that used to belong to the exclusive realm of the family. The commodification of care work through informal channels has given way to what Hochschild (2000) has called the *Global Care Chain*: women from the South migrating to the North to care for children and the elderly leaving behind their own children, who are in turn looked after by female relatives or even migrant women from even poorer countries. In the most affluent societies, the percentage of migrant female workers employed as care workers or household employees in both (p.230)

**Table 11.3. Female to male ratio devoted to unpaid care work (2014)**

	Unpaid care work
Denmark	1.30
Sweden	1.49
Switzerland	1.75
Germany	1.79
United Kingdom	1.85
France	1.90
Austria	1.95
Poland	2.01
Spain	3.04
Italy	3.37
Argentina	2.88
United States	1.61
Australia	1.81

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	Unpaid care work
Japan	4.83

**Source: OECD Statistics Database**

institutional and non-institutional settings is on the rise (Van Hooren, 2014; Anderson and Shutes, 2013). And everywhere paid domestic/care work is among the poorest paid and most precarious jobs (León et al., 2014). Thus, as women's employment patterns become more like those of men the division of reproductive labour becomes increasingly international and still heavily gendered (Anderson, 2000, Parrenas, 2001; Williams, 2012). This together with a global increase in income inequalities (Krugman, 2008; Piketty, 2014) warns us against too linear interpretations of gender advantage and disadvantage. Many women are relatively advantaged compared to other women (and men). So the notion of gender (dis)advantage needs to be seen in relative terms. In this sense, what becomes relevant is not so much whether some women (Western upper- to middle-class professionals) have 'escaped' the tyranny of domestic and routine care work by paying other women to do it but the fact that work linked to the world of reproduction continues to be undervalued and underpaid (cf. Chapter 9, this volume). Moreover, some professions decline in prestige and working conditions when they become increasingly feminized--primary school teachers and general practitioners for instance (León, 2014). So the question is not only (or not so much) women's economic disadvantage given prevailing gendered divisions of work but the fact that productive models determine some occupational categories as less productive and competitive, which translates into low salaries and less security (Chang, 2000). The dichotomy of unpaid *versus* paid employment is too limited to understand the complexity of gender disadvantage because it does not necessarily challenge the undervaluing of unpaid work.

Feminist economics, today a well-established sub-discipline within economics, looks precisely at alternative measurement of economic growth and (p.231) national accounts to include the monetary value of unpaid domestic and care work. The seminal work of Marilyn Waring *If Women Counted: A New Feminist Economics* (1988) gave way to a prolific field of research preoccupied with finding accurate measurement of the value of non-market household labour for national incomes and product accounts. In many ways, issues embedded in feminist economics connect with wider debates on human progress and to issues of ecological sustainability. The neglect of non-monetary values is a concern common to these. Criticisms of neo-liberal models of economic growth stress the need to concentrate not just in women's engagement with the world of production but in the improvement of working conditions worldwide. To the extent that growth strategies come with a deterioration of job quality, the tensions between economic growth and gender equality are self-evident (Fraser, 2009).

### 11.2 Politics and Policy: Addressing Gender Disadvantage

In policy and in politics there is much greater awareness of gender disadvantage today than there was in the past. Labour shortages, demographic disequilibrium, and the perseverance of gender inequalities have led modern welfare states to abandon the prescription of the male breadwinner model and engage, with varying degrees of success, with the implementation of policy mechanisms that support women in their double role as workers and carers (Daly, 2011; Orloff, 2005). These new policies addressing new needs imply a recasting of the concept of family in terms of roles, functions, and relations vis-à-vis other institutions (Daly, 2011). Current new social policy paradigms place gender prominently on the agenda not only to grasp the nature of the transformation of contemporary welfare states but also to propose new ways forward. Addressing gender disadvantage has also become a fundamental component in global agendas to combat poverty and enhance social and economic development. The link that has been established at the level of policy rhetoric between empowering women and effective poverty alleviation has resulted in programmes targeting women specifically and giving additional resources to women instead of men.

The introduction of gender in the political agenda at different levels has been achieved thanks to the embedding of feminism and feminist causes in institutions, just as women's entry into politics has also been central to the transformation of public policy paradigms (Orloff and Palier, 2009: 407). Feminist research and women's movements of the 1960s and 1970s managed to unveil the gender-blindness of public policies (Walby, 2011; Jenson, 2009). Progressively, women's advocacy groups were able to place their demands within the structures of the state, giving rise to the concept of 'state feminism' (p.232) (Hernes, 1987; Stetson and Mazur, 1995). Of course, as Walby (2011: 57) notes, changes in the form of feminism from protest to engagement have implications for the effectiveness of feminist projects. A stronger coordination of feminist activities at organizational, national, European, and international level increases their influence, although concerns have been raised as to the weakening of radical demands and being drawn into dominant perspectives. Action on the part of institutions on mechanisms targeting gender disadvantage cannot be disassociated from this process of institutionalization of the feminist movement and the incorporation of women's policy agencies within the state apparatus.

In Europe, the Nordic countries have been clear pioneers on gender equality legislation, playing also an active role in enforcing gender equality policies at EU level. That said, sex discrimination in the workplace has been an item on the agenda of the European Community since the inception of the Treaty of Rome in 1957 which introduced the principle of Equal Pay for Equal Work. The requirement to reward equal work by men and women with equal pay was designed to enhance the functioning of the internal market, and so was motivated by considerations of economy and competition rather than gender justice. Nevertheless, the pursuit of equal treatment between men and women has rapidly developed into a social policy objective in its own right. Compliance with EU legislation has become in many countries the main force behind the introduction of gender equality norms and policies at national level (León, 2011). However, despite a common EU legal framework, benchmarks, and policy recommendations to address gender inequalities, differences between member states led to a variety of 'EU gender equality regimes' (Krizsan and Squires, 2014; Siim, 2014; Kennett and Lendvai, 2014). Outside the EU, other international agencies such as the United Nations and the World Bank have since the 1990s been introducing gender equality and gender mainstreaming policies as strategic instruments to tackle discrimination against women, and poverty and disadvantage more generally. A key turning point was the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing when strong pressure from feminist activists at national and transnational levels served to put gender justice in the political agenda of global actors (Kennett and Payne, 2014).

But, how far have we gone? Certainly, there have been clear advances in the position of women around the world and greater awareness of the causes and consequences of gender disadvantage, but inequalities between the genders persist and as Kennet and Payne note, 'there has been a failure to translate the global policy paradigm of gender equality in the everyday lives of many men and women'. In many countries, progress in procedural equality might actually hide obstacles and barriers placed at the level of institutions as well as individuals. As we know too well, the ideal world of the policy paradigm might (p.233) encounter all sorts of mutations when ideas and discourses end up in different places (Béland and Cox, 2010; Jenson, 2010). There are two main shortcomings of gender equality policies. Firstly, it has become increasingly hard to interpret gender inequality without understanding divisions among women in terms of class, ethnicity, levels of education, or age. At EU level for example, the most recent Treaties indicate a policy shift away from discursive approaches solely addressing gender inequalities towards a more comprehensive intersectional approach on

multiple inequalities addressing all grounds of discrimination (Lombardo et al., 2009). Secondly, in some instances, gender equality has been instrumentally used to target wider social problems resulting in a narrower understanding of the term. Two clear examples are the emerging social investment (SI) paradigm to recalibrate welfare states and the feminization of poverty agenda. In the first case, social investment is an approach to social policy that emphasizes equalizing life opportunities rather than life outcomes (Morel et al., 2012; and see Chapters 5 and 6, this volume). Most of our contemporary welfare states offer insufficient institutional support for the reconciliation of work and family life, which usually works as a deterrent to the participation of women in the labour market and to having children. Women who anticipate a high conflict between the sphere of employment and family life are either less likely to be employed or to 'resolve' the conflict by not having children and so, what Hobson and Ólah (2006) have called 'birth striking effects' are likely to be found in countries with weak reconciliation policies, including childcare (Brewster and Rindfuss, 2000; Gauthier, 2007; Esping-Andersen, 2009; Kamerman and Moss, 2009; Boje and Ejnraes, 2011; Drobic and León, 2013). The SI perspective thus argues that enabling women to reconcile their family life with being active in the labour market has positive returns in fertility and economic productivity more generally.

In the case of the feminization of poverty agenda, targeting women as recipients of anti-poverty programmes also has positive returns in the rates of success of these programmes. However, the predominance of 'investment' and economic rationales often reveals an understanding of gender equality as an instrumental means to productive gains through high returns on investment and/or development. Some apparently win-win scenarios, that is, addressing simultaneously gender equality and economic growth or poverty reduction and development, can in fact exacerbate, rather than reduce, gender differences. Policy measures addressing the work/family conflict often rely on specific arrangements especially designed for women: low hours of part-time work when children are small or long maternity leaves, for instance. Very few countries make enough effort to make these arrangements for men as well. Likewise, poor women often become overburdened in targeted programmes by increasing their responsibilities (in working outside the home while continuing with their household tasks). So, while there are positive aspects to (p.234) having gender figuring so prominently in the overarching goals of the social Investment and poverty and development agendas, more comprehensive approaches to address gender disadvantage are still needed. As Chant (2008: 182-3) points out, 'the emphasis on alleviating gender inequality and poverty

simultaneously is misguided when these are distinct, albeit overlapping forms of disadvantage'. In these policy directions in high-income countries as well as low- to middle-income countries what has been lacking (with some honourable exceptions) is a consideration of gender relations. Somewhat paradoxically, these 'gender aware' policy agendas (poverty reduction in the global south and welfare adaptation in the global north) have ended up hijacking a more comprehensive understanding of gender equality and disadvantage. In sum, while the introduction of gender in certain policy fields is at first sight encouraging, the way in which gender disadvantage has been framed calls for a cautionary view. As Jenson has put it referring to social investment:

At first blush, this gender awareness seems to represent a victory for decades of feminist mobilization and analysis. Closer attention reveals, however, that something has been lost in the translation of egalitarian feminism into the gender awareness that infuses the social investment perspective. (Jenson, 2009: 472)

Of course, policies and politics can only to a limited extent intervene in modifying pre-existing gender cultures. Culture certainly intervenes in the way in which institutions regulate and shape family life and gender relations, and the way in which gender disadvantage is reproduced in a society. Besides institutional constraints, shared social norms, values, and beliefs also interact with institutions and are also crucial in understanding gender divisions in society (Pfau-Effinger, 2005; Kremer, 2007). A particular culture or normative frame might either encourage or discourage the participation of women in paid employment, might welcome or not the involvement of fathers in childbearing, might justify or denounce unequal social mobility for men and women, might facilitate or hinder the participation of women in politics, and so on. Thus, the 'acceptability' of various forms of balancing care work and employment given cultural and social values and norms plays a major role in shaping these different care models (Crompton et al., 2007; Lister et al., 2007; Pfau-Effinger, 2005). Understanding how norms, beliefs, social practices, and traditions intervene in (re)producing social disadvantage is also key to explaining certain patterns of gender disadvantage in the labour market. One of the problems of dealing with cultural traditions that perpetuate gender disadvantage is that it would require dealing with unequal power relations in the private sphere of the home and it does not seem easy to make this subject to policy intervention. One exception though is programmes to combat domestic violence where private relations are subject to public interventions.



(p.235) 11.3 Beyond 'Structure': Issues of Agency

Our capacity to make decisions, to choose between different options, to take 'risks', in sum our capacity for autonomous agency is bound to depend on the economic, social, and political environments in which we live. The open-ended debate within the social sciences between structure and agency is also mirrored in debates about gender (dis)advantage. Although classical social theorists tended to see structure as dominating agency, modern social theorists have come to understand the capacity of agents to also modify and shape the structure. This is the case of Giddens' structuration theory (1984) or Bourdieu's 'habitus' concept. For the latter, we are socialized in a 'field' with a set of roles and relations, we position ourselves in relation to such a field but at the same time with our actions we modify such relationships and expectations. Contemporary feminist theory has increasingly reflected on Giddens and Bourdieu's sociological concepts to develop further the relationship between structure and agency from a gender perspective (see for instance Adkins and Skeggs, 2004).

The capabilities approach originally developed by Sen in the early 1990s has incorporated a new perspective on the relationship between agency and structure. The capabilities approach offers an integrated understanding of the complex ways in which our capacity to make decisions and to choose freely is intertwined with the opportunities we actually have to make those decisions and choices. In other words, the capabilities approach asks us what the opportunities are to exercise 'real' choice (Hobson, 2014). It is intrinsically multidimensional in the sense that inequalities between men and women are not reducible to inequalities in income and means. Martha Nussbaum further developed the analytical implications of moving beyond income inequalities to integrate issues such as time autonomy, reproductive work, or household labour. Sen and Nussbaum's work has been highly influential in the development of the United Nations' Gender Empowerment Index and Gender Inequality Index discussed earlier (see Table 11.1). Disadvantage in health, education, political representation, or participation in the labour market has negative repercussions for women's capabilities and freedom of choice. Benería (2008) for instance claims that the capabilities approach might provide a useful framework for designing reconciliation policies for non-Western countries in ways which can expand the individual capabilities of women. The relevance of subjective dimensions of poverty and a capability approach that gives the possibility of moving beyond lack of income as the primary indicator of poverty has also been vindicated by scholars who criticize the instrumentalization of gender and

development (GAD) in poverty reduction programmes (Jackson, 1996; Chant, 2008).

(p.236) However, as Burchardt and Hick argue (Chapter 2, this volume) the very complex and subjective component of the concept can be an obstacle for its implementation and analytical research. The fact that we do not have an agreed capability list means that we do not yet have a precise understanding of how to measure these, and so the ordering of advantage and disadvantage becomes problematic. As the authors argue the multidimensional and open-ended nature of the capabilities which might be included has led to some questions about whether the approach can be successfully operationalized. In her edited collection, Hobson (2014) shows ways in which the capability approach can be applied to issues of work-life balance. The starting point is that whilst rights and entitlements for the reconciliation of work and family life, such as reduced working time, parental leaves, and childcare have been introduced in Europe following EU legislation and benchmarks, there still is an agency gap in the actual possibilities for using these entitlements. The ways in which firms and workplaces interpret entitlements and how these adapt to individuals' circumstances are two elements which might account for this agency gap. Research showing the interactions between welfare state policies and socio-economic positions also call for differentiated approaches to the reconciliation of work and family life rather than addressing universal work-family tensions (Mandel, 2012).

### 11.4 Further Reflections: New Manifestations of Gender Disadvantage

How is gender disadvantage placed within the changing nature of economic and social structures in late-capitalist societies? Societies are changing and the changing role of women is probably one of the strongest triggers for this transformation. Whilst some old cleavages of gender (dis)advantage have disappeared and others have remained, new manifestations of gender tensions arise, creating new sources of conflict and also new possibilities for action. These new cleavages are often embedded within a global context and are strongly associated with multiple forms of disadvantage. The global dimension of some of these problems justifies the intervention of international organizations which attempt to operate beyond the nation state. One example is the United Nations' work on violence against women:

Violence against women is a problem worldwide, occurring, to a greater or lesser degree, in all regions, countries, societies and cultures, and affecting women irrespective of income, class, race or ethnicity. All these forms of violence...are (p.237) not examples of random victimization, but are associated with inequality between women and men, and strategies to perpetuate or entrench that inequality.

(<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/news/unwvaw.html>)

Political mobilization and public intervention in issues such as gender violence, forced migration, or sex trafficking have taken several decades to crystallize thanks to the work of grass-root and non-governmental organizations. In this sense, the space of mobilization has also gone global to a large extent. As Fraser (2005) proposes, nation states are very limited in dealing with transnational problems connected with women's rights and therefore a transnational solution is needed. Fraser's theory of post-national justice comes as a response to the global nature of struggles for economic and social redistribution that need to be dealt with at a supra-national level. This global dimension to gender disadvantage is translated with more or less success into a global policy paradigm on gender equality with gender mainstreaming being the most accepted policy instrument. However, doubts exist as to the real effectiveness of this goal at different scales and geographical locations. Furthermore, the apparent consensus behind political discourses and policy paradigms hides a whole array of contradictory views. This is the case of the highly contentious feminist debate around the legal status of sex workers and the state regulation of sexual commerce—the criminalization versus legalization debate (see Bernstein, 2014). All in all, while there have been noticeable improvements in the status of women around the world, forms of disadvantage between men and women remain. The global policy paradigm of gender equality encounters obstacles when it needs to be applied in practice. In Kennett and Payne (2014)'s terms, there is a disjuncture between the ideal world of the policy paradigm and the lived experience.

In sum, while we ought to recognize the global interconnectedness of different forms of inequalities, policy prescriptions should be able to adapt to the specifics of local, cultural, social, and economic contexts. In this chapter we have seen how 'gender troubles' in work-family tensions, in trafficking, in migration, or in poverty have come to the fore in national and international political arenas. Women are often the subjects of intervention and action as victims and also as the source of solutions since they seem to produce 'effective returns'. Meanwhile

discussion of men within these systems, the relational aspects of gender inequality and the need to change these relational dynamics as a way to solve at least some of the issues are relatively lacking. Finally, as has been addressed in other chapters in this volume, dealing with social 'disadvantage' more generally means focusing on the ways in which 'advantage' is created and reproduced, on how and how much the gains of some elucidate the loss of so many others.

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