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Dimensions of Inequality: The IFS Deaton Review
Gender

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In the decades since the Equal Pay Act and the Sex Equality Act were passed in the UK, women have exceeded men's educational attainment, they have entered the workplace in larger numbers, they have combined family with work, and they have gained far more positions of power and influence. Yet how close are we to sex equality? What is holding us back? And why should we care?

The article written by Alison Andrew, Oriana Bandiera, Monica Costa Dias and Camille Landais, the two commentaries by Fran Bennett and Lynn Prince Cooke, and the two articles by Alita Nandi and Lucinda Platt, and by Claudia Goldin, Sari Pekkala Kerr and Claudia Olivetti address these questions. They are approached in different ways with a focus on different elements of men's and women's lives and their contexts. Yet there is consistency in the diagnosis of the imbalances we currently observe, whether in employment and earnings, childcare and housework, poverty across the life course, or the experience of violence and representation, and of what is needed to redress them. Institutional and social processes that allocate roles differently to men and women, and the hierarchy of value attached to particular roles and activities, result in a situation in which women tend to do more of the nurturing roles within society than men, and the roles they take on tend to be less valued and leave them with lower earnings, incomes and social status. As the commentaries and articles show, this is bad for both men and women, even if men benefit financially from the status quo. The answer? Rather than seeing differences in patterns of employment or care as innate or as 'choices', what is required is the transformation of gendered norms and expectations, through institutional arrangements that not only enable women to enter the labour force but also enable men to undertake caring roles and address the different social and economic valuation of each.

Andrew et al. plot earnings gaps of women compared with men over a 25-year span. These earnings gaps are made up of differences in chances of being in employment and in the number of hours worked and hourly wages for those in work. While the earnings gap closed slightly over the period, this could largely be accounted for by the large increases in qualifications women gained relative to men over the same period, driving greater participation in paid work. Moreover, the authors show differences in the trends for women with different levels of qualifications, and in the relative role of employment, hours and wage rates in the overall earnings gap. For example, while earnings gaps are greater among those with lower qualifications, due in large part to their lower likelihood of being in employment, it is only among these women that the overall earnings gap and the gap in hourly wages have decreased. This can be attributed partly to policies, such as the minimum wage that maintains a floor on earnings of the lower-paid alongside the declining earnings of less-educated men in recent years. For higher-educated women by contrast, the largest share of the overall earnings gap comes from differences in hourly wages, although differences in hours and in employment rates still play an important role.

The authors highlight the role of motherhood in impacting employment and hours, with sharp drops in both after the birth of a child. The effect on wage rates of those in work is more gradual as the consequences of loss of experience with reduced hours or of changes in jobs consequent on motherhood kick in. The result is that 10 years after the birth of a child, mothers' earnings are around half those of men. The importance of motherhood in determining labour market inequalities between women and men cannot be attributed to the relative earnings of men and women within a couple. That is, it is not simply the lower earner who takes on the caring role. Instead, it is the gendered way in which the tasks related to child rearing are allocated, which has consequences for mothers' but not, typically, fathers' work and careers. This was brought into sharp relief during the COVID-19 lockdown, which brought with it school closures and greater working from home. It was observed that even in those cases where the mother was the higher earner in a couple—even after having children—she still took on more of the childcare and housework.

The authors highlight the ways in which gendered norms around breadwinning and caregiving influence men and women at all stages of their lives, including in early decisions they make about their future work and study, which can then have long-term consequences for their employment and earnings. But norms also influence all those who interact with men and women, creating barriers for men in enacting caring roles, as well as for women in resisting such roles. The result is costs not only for individual men and women but also for society, with the potential of both men and women not being used to its fullest extent. The status quo is not only 'unfair', it is also 'inefficient'. The solution? The

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authors argue for a 'big push' in policy which, rather than accepting women's primary responsibility for childcare, creates clear incentives for a better division of both work and care between men and women.

The relevance of norms and gender role attitudes is also at the heart of much of Nandi and Platt's discussion, which focuses on ethnic differences in women's employment outcomes and how these can be explained. They draw attention to the importance of intergenerational transmission of norms via both attitudes and behaviours in helping us to understand why differences in labour force participation rates across groups persist. They highlight that ethnic differences in the parental generation, in terms of mothers' education and labour market participation (and homemaker status) and parental and community attitudes, will tend to make gaps between groups sticky across generations, even as there are some changes across those generations in attitudes and education levels. The feedback loops that thereby contribute to the persistence of these gaps can also help us to understand the persistence in norms and gender inequalities highlighted by Andrew et al. for the population at large—as children perceive their mothers doing more caring and their fathers less, once starting a family themselves women will tend to assume more of the caring role and men less.

Goldin, Kerr and Olivetti take up the key issue addressed by Andrew et al. of the motherhood penalty in earnings; but, looking at the US case, they explore women's outcomes further down the track. That is, they consider the extent to which those women facing a 'motherhood penalty' in their employment and earnings when their children are young, catch up as those children grow older. The authors focus on college-educated men and women, because it is among these more-educated women that motherhood is more likely to interrupt careers and to affect their accumulation of experience when they reduce hours or change jobs to accommodate their childcare roles. The article shows that mothers can compensate for the employment and earnings deficits they faced as a result of childcare responsibilities by increasing their work as their children approach maturity. However, they never catch up with fathers, whose earnings continue to dramatically outstrip those of women. Men gain in terms of earnings from fatherhood, while women lose out from motherhood. The fact, however, that mothers can catch up with non-mothers later in their careers suggests that it is not motherhood alone driving gender gaps—at least in later mid-life. This raises the question of how far the gender norms that lead mothers to undertake the lion's share of both childcare and domestic work also shape the lives of non-mothers, whether through their own behaviours and activities—such as care for older relatives, prioritizing partners' careers, or the jobs they end up in—or through the behaviours of others—whether employer discrimination, the dominance of partners' advancement over their own, or the differential demands made on women relative to men by parents or other relatives needing care.

Such issues are picked up by both Bennett and Cooke. Cooke highlights issues of power and hierarchy in terms of the jobs men and women end up in, the valuation accorded them and also within interpersonal relationships. She discusses how the allocation of differential status, and hence rewards, leads to legitimization of these differences by those with both higher and lower positions in the hierarchy, resulting in a vicious cycle. As she puts it: 'Women's relative social status puts them at a disadvantage in the organizational allocation of economic resources and power, and their relative level of economic resources and power reinforces their lower social status'. Cooke also draws attention to issues of physical power and violence. We know that in the UK a woman is killed by a man every three days on average. In nearly two-thirds of these cases, the man is a partner or ex-partner, and in a similar share of cases there was a history of domestic violence. While men are more likely to be homicide victims than women, they are rarely victims of domestic homicide or killed by women. Lack of representation of women in positions of power and authority, outlined by Cooke, can also have consequences for the status hierarchy and for political willingness to address gendered inequalities. But this is not immune to interventions, such as 'all-women shortlists' that can shift the status quo. However, she cautions in favour of a robust but incremental approach in order to avoid the backlash against women's advances to greater equality, a backlash that we have already observed. Like Andrew et al., Cooke also supports changes to parental leave policies that explicitly encourage men's caring role. Moreover, she argues that enhancing men's caring roles has the potential to undermine the role of violence in the power hierarchy.

Bennett echoes Cooke's attention to force and male control of women when considering intra-household dynamics, a key focus of her contribution. She questions the assumption of equal well-being of all household members that is implied by household measures of income and poverty. Instead, she urges us to consider also the dynamics of the household, the costs of time and energy that household management imposes on women, particularly in poorer households, as well as the imbalances of power and control of those with different contributions to household income. Bennett highlights the issue of financial control and coercion—forms of domestic abuse that are now beginning to receive greater attention. She stresses the importance of autonomy and independent access to secure sources of income at an individual level to ensure such autonomy.

Bringing a social policy perspective to the question of gender inequalities, Bennett is particularly concerned with poverty and the economic precarity disproportionately faced by women at different life stages, including in later life, and the specific policies that might sustain work, progression and income. Like Andrew et al., Bennett challenges the idea that women's 'preferences' are met by working below their potential or in poorly paid jobs. But that lack of options for managing work and care may result in them getting stuck. She draws attention to the fact that care constraints may not only be about childcare but also about meeting the needs of older or disabled relatives, where women also take on the lion's share of caring. And such demands may increase as children reach independence, limiting the possibilities for catch-up highlighted by Goldin, Kerr and Olivetti. Bennett also stresses the need to 'bring men in' to analysis of gender inequalities, noting the disadvantages—both economic and socio-emotional—that single men may face at different stages of the life course.

Taken together, these pieces provide an account of the challenges that face greater movement towards gender equality. They also highlight the familial processes that generate inequalities in households but also across society, through intergenerational transmission of norms and behaviours, as well as between partners and parents. The challenges are not insuperable, and all the contributions offer discussion of policy and institutional frameworks that sustain inequalities alongside the potential of interventions to reduce them. A common thread is that to understand inequalities it is not effective to only target women, but that greater equality—and greater gains for society—will only be achieved through also promoting men's opportunities and incentives to take on caring roles.

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