

DEMOS

Mind the Gap: The women that policy forgot

Commissioned by YWCA

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Mind the Gap: The Women That Policy Forgot

'Low-paid women always were and still are in largely segregated work doing women's traditional three C's – catering, cleaning and caring: the men who take these jobs have to accept female status.....The bad treatment of women remains the key reason for working poverty in Britain. Change has been snail's-pace slow.'

Polly Toynbee¹

How have thirty years of legislation, innumerable work based initiatives and training schemes failed the primary group of people who experience working poverty in Britain? Polly Toynbee goes on to note that well over 70 percent of low paid workers in the UK are still women. The pay gap between the earnings of men and women is, of course, one of the primary reasons for this. This pattern is pronounced even at the very beginning of a young woman's working life; recent research indicates that many young women who start working life as apprentices earn a quarter of what male apprentices earn.²

The first phase of policy countering gender discrimination did not go far enough. Macro level approaches that established government departments and research taskforces represent an impressive start, but the next phase must look to the micro-level. The details of women's lived experience provide a blueprint for strategy. Policy must start to address the day-to-day reality of young disadvantaged women. This includes appreciating how cultural, practical, and social issues join up to create significant barriers that severely hinder their economic mobility.

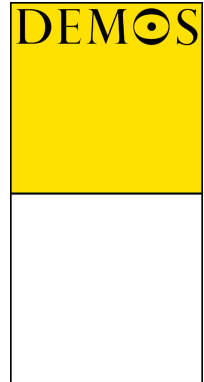
It is now accepted that young women and men should receive equal rewards for equal work and the Equalities Review recently furthered the moral case for ending the causes of disadvantage. The economic case for extending the opportunities available to young women is equally as obvious: the Women and Work Commission estimates that removing the barriers to women working in male-dominated occupations and increasing their participation in the labour market could be worth between £15 billion and £23 billion to the UK economy.³

This report looks again at the nature of low pay and job segregation, but this time, we consider the local actors and micro level locations of responsibility. We delve deeper into who disadvantaged women are and the impact their different backgrounds and experiences might have on their employment prospects. The assumption that everyone has the same options or starting point will overlook the

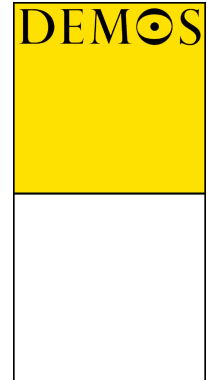
¹ Toynbee, P., *Hard Work: Life in Low-Pay Britain*, p.233 (Bloomsbury 2003)

² House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee Inquiry, *Employment and Training Opportunities for Low-Skilled Young People - TUC Evidence*. See <http://www.tuc.org.uk/skills/tuc-13167-f0.cfm#tuc-13167-2> (accessed 15 May 2007)

³ Women and Work Commission: *Shaping a Fairer Future* (February 2006)



needs of this section of the population. It is clear we need a new set of policies focusing on the everyday exchanges in women's working lives.



1. How unequal are we?

This Government has had some conspicuous successes in reducing poverty – the number of children and pensioners living in poverty has fallen by 800,000 and 600,000 respectively.⁴ Surely we should be feeling satisfied with the gains; confident that our society is more equal today than it was twenty years ago? In fact, despite the significant measures Labour has taken, the Government has merely managed to put the brakes on a growing distance between rich and poor. Britain has had a widening gap since the 1980s, despite having the fastest growing GDP amongst the G7 countries.

Furthermore, according to Institute for Fiscal Studies, the number of people in relative poverty rose between 2005 and 2006 from 12.1 million to 12.7 million.⁵ Young people are particularly at risk; one third of 16-24 year olds live on a low income, compared to one in four in the population as a whole.⁶ As social mobility continues to decrease⁷ the concept of a poverty trap has never been more real.

The Impact of Gender, Race and Class

The first step towards a more sophisticated analysis to inform policy is to acknowledge how race and class interrelate with gender to compound disadvantage. Gender discrimination is only one dimension that impacts women's employment prospects. It is not enough to simply develop programs that 'help women'. Often being a woman is one of several aspects that can open or close doors.

Inequality along one dimension can be mitigated and deemphasised while inequality in another may have a 'multiplied or cascade effect'.⁸ Race and class tend to amplify disadvantage. The 2007 report from the Low Pay Commission documents how 'workers from ethnic minorities are also more likely to be working

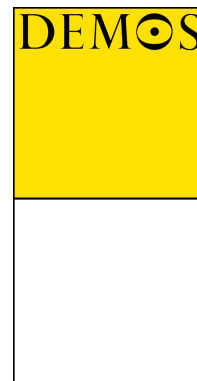
⁴ Howarth, C. and Kenway, P., *Why Worry Any More About The Low Paid?* (New Policy Institute 2004)

⁵ Relative poverty measured as those living in households with less than 60% of the median income. M. Brewer et al, *Poverty and Inequality in the UK: 2007* (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2007) See <http://www.ifs.org.uk/bns/bn73.pdf> (accessed 15 May 2007)

⁶ Gordon, D. et al, *Poverty and Social Exclusion in Britain*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2000

⁷ In fact, overall social mobility has stalled in the past decades: a recent study comparing the fate of children born in 1958 with those born in 1970 found a sharp drop in social mobility between those years. Blanden J., Goodman, A., Gregg P. and Machin S., *Changes in Intergenerational Mobility in Britain* (Centre for Economic Performance, LSE, January 2002 No. 517)

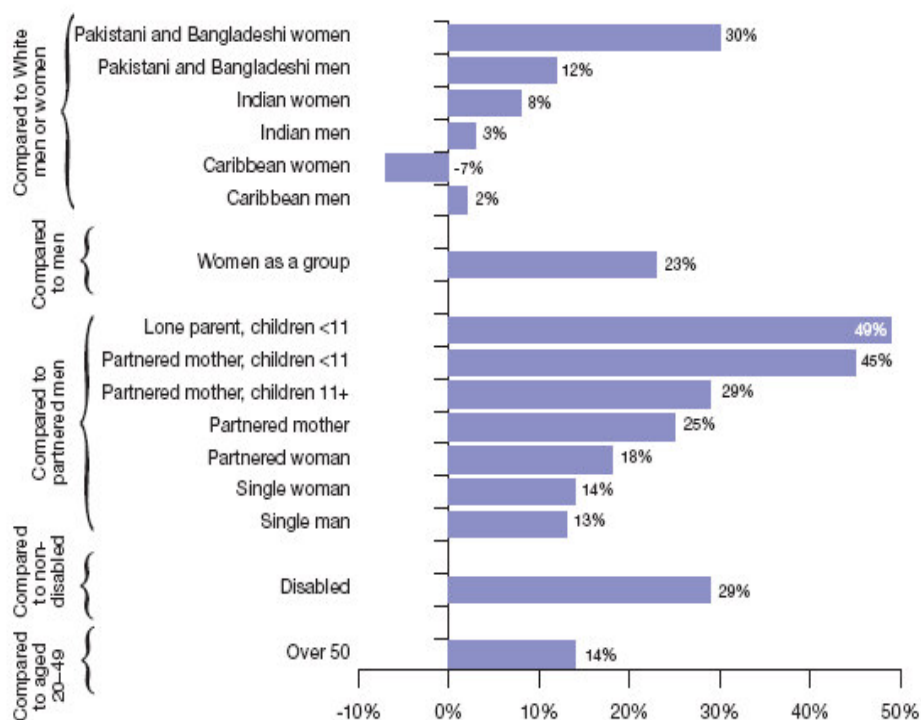
⁸ *Fairness and Freedom, the Final Report of the Equalities Review* p51 (February 2007)



in the low paying sectors or occupations. Around 36 per cent of ethnic minority employees work in low-paying sectors compared with 29 per cent of white employees.’ The report goes on to explain that ‘the sectors with the highest concentration of ethnic minority employees are food processing, hospitality, textiles and security.’⁹ When government passes policies to correct for discrimination, it must be aware of the differential effects of the individual’s starting social position, and often, their race. The best legislative intentions can be undermined if the social structure overrides the policy goal.

The Equalities Review, in the chart below, provides an illustration of multiple disadvantage groups in the labour market.¹⁰ This review has used the term ‘employment penalty’ as a way of measuring the level of disadvantage that an individual with a particular characteristic or circumstance (i.e. gender or disability) might experience in the workplace. The statistics here demonstrate that not only do women still suffer significant employment penalties, but also that being a woman *and* a Pakistani or Bangladeshi, or being a woman *and* a mother or lone parent, is an even stronger predictor of being out of work or on a very low wage.

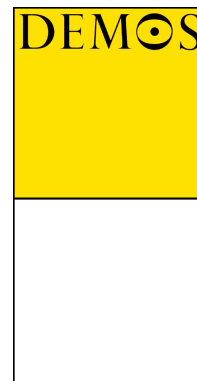
Figure 1. Employment Penalties in the early 2000s (Percentage Points)



Source: *The Equalities Review*

⁹ *National Minimum Wage: Low Pay Commission* (March 2007)

¹⁰ *Fairness and Freedom, the Final Report of the Equalities Review* (February 2007)



Class and culture weigh just as heavily on economic prospects as does ethnicity. The immediate circumstances in which a young woman lives will inevitably affect her training or employment opportunities. When it comes to making choices about education or employment, making ends meet or providing for a family may come first. Because working class are less likely to have accumulated wealth, they rely much more on their weekly wages. Furthermore, in these families the primary responsibility of care for children and elderly relatives falls squarely on the women and getting ‘whatever job they can’ to hold it all together becomes even more important.¹¹ As Charmaine explained to the the YWCA:

‘I don’t care what I do as long as I get enough money to look after my family and keep a roof over our heads. I don’t care what I do. I’d do anything, anything, anything’.

Charmaine, 26, Dagenham.

In these circumstances the long-term gains derived from education or training do not outweigh the immediate need to earn a living wage for the young women and those that rely on her. This lack of further training decreases the likelihood that young women such as Charmaine will gain the skills necessary to pull themselves out of poverty.

The Impact of the Skills Paradox

Despite these problems, the rising place of skills on the political agenda should lead to greater opportunities than ever before for low paid workers to gain qualifications. Unfortunately this is not always the case. Ongoing work at Demos has pointed to a skills paradox. Participation in training happens in inverse proportion to need – those with the lowest skill levels are also the least likely to benefit from education and training. People without qualifications are three times less likely to receive job-related training compared with those with some qualifications.¹² Jobs such as hairdressing, elderly care and nursing tend to offer training qualifications linked to specific types of employment and can rarely be used to transfer to other jobs in different sectors.

The problems inherent in accessing training are reflected in higher education. The Equalities Review shows that disadvantaged young people are persistently less likely to enter higher education than their wealthier peers.¹³ From 1980 to 2000, the number of graduates from the most disadvantaged families increased from 6 per cent to just 9 percent, compared with a 26 point increase in graduates from wealthier families (20 per cent to 46 per cent).¹⁴

¹¹ Warren, T. *Moving Beyond the Gender and Wealth Gap: on Gender, Class, Ethnicity, and Wealth Inequalities in the UK*. *Feminist Economics* (12 January/April 2006, 195 – 219)

¹² Quoted in D. O’Leary *Five Tests for Leitch* National Adult Learning Survey 2002, DFES, (2003)

¹³ *Fairness and Freedom, the Final Report of the Equalities Review* (February 2007)

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p 64

Inequality in the workplace

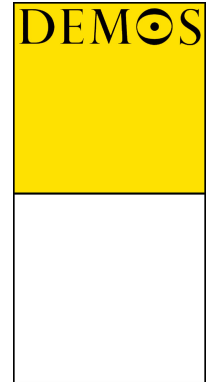
An unequal start can impair women's choices all the way through employment and training. The effects of inequality become more pronounced as we look from individual situations to institutional settings. Despite the best efforts of many employers and government initiatives, the majority of disadvantaged women find themselves in the 5 Cs of the economy: employed as a caterer, carer, cleaner, cashier or clerical assistant.

Pay gaps and Job Segregation

Job segregation is indeed still a strong characteristic of the UK labour market; the 2001 census showed that women formed 84 percent of the workforce in personal services, 78 per cent in administration and 71 percent in sales and customer services.¹⁵ The implications of a labour market with gender dominated sectors are stark:

- Even when issues such as skills and hours of working are excluded, for each ten percentage increase in the proportion of men in a particular occupation, the wages are 1.3 percent higher.¹⁶
- Pay differentials emerge early on in a woman's working life: girls' starting salaries for full time work are, on average, 18 percent less per hour than boys.

Recent EOC research has highlighted the problem of gender segregation in apprenticeships and work based learning, a fact which will have significant consequences for the shape of the labour market in years to come.



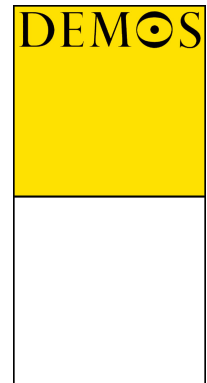
¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Quoted in p7 Trade and Industry Committee's *Jobs for the Girls : the effect of occupational segregation on the gender pay gap House of Commons*(2004 – 2005)

Figure 2. Gender Segregation in Work Based Learning 2005/06

England	Percentages		
	Men	Women	All (=100%) (thousands)
Engineering and manufacturing technologies	97	3	92.0
Retail and commercial enterprise	35	65	86.2
Business, administration and law	28	72	76.8
Construction, planning and the built environment	99	1	60.7
Health, public services and care	9	91	50.2
Information and communication technology	81	19	15.5
Leisure, travel and tourism	54	46	12.4
Agriculture, horticulture and animal care	51	49	9.6
Arts, media and publishing	91	9	1.1
Area unknown	62	38	70.8
All areas of learning ³	58	42	485.5

1 People aged 16 to 24. Data include a small number of people aged over 24 (around 2 per cent of the total).
 2 Work Based Learning for young people comprises Advanced Apprenticeships at NVQ level 3, Apprenticeships at NVQ level 2, NVQ Learning, and Entry to Employment (E2E).
 3 Includes all of the areas above plus preparation for life and work, education and training, science and mathematics, history, philosophy and theology, social sciences, and languages, literature and culture.
 Source: Learning and Skills Council; Department for Education and Skills



Job segregation at all levels is significant for two main reasons. Firstly, organizational cultures become entrenched and harder for those on the outside to penetrate. Recruiters will continue to replicate their existing workforce. Secondly, segregation consolidates social expectations of who ‘should’ be doing which jobs – perpetuating existing inequalities.

2. So Why Hasn’t Policy Worked?

In this report we argue that many of the Government’s significant measures to reduce poverty and improve women’s working lives has not always translated into the best outcomes for disadvantaged young women. Fundamentally, policy has failed to take account of class and race in its attempts to lift people out of poverty and into work. Additionally, this section of society not always derived the maximum benefit from initiatives such as a National Minimum Wage and the New Deal.

Low Pay and Poverty

The introduction of the National Minimum wage in 1999 did immediately have a positive impact on those at the extreme end of the pay scale, the Women and Equality Unit reported that 2/3 of beneficiaries uplifted by the minimum wage increase in 2006 were women. However, there has been no discernable ripple effect for those who are 'just getting by' in our society. Employers predicted that all low-paid workers would demand a rise in their pay to reflect the increases at the bottom end of the scale. In fact this has yet to materialize and many women continue to be paid at the level of the NMW or only a fraction above. There is also a strong argument to be made that the wage has been set at a cautious level – not high enough to represent a 'living wage'.¹⁷ Consequently, the minimum wage has by no means resolved the problem of low pay for women in the UK.

Alongside these initiatives the Labour government has also made a commitment to halving child poverty by 2020. While we should applaud the intensive investment of resources into this problem, the Women's Budget Group has produced compelling evidence to demonstrate that many policy steps in this area risk neglecting the gendered nature of child poverty. Lifting a mother out of poverty also means lifting a child out of poverty. Women often absorb the impact of poverty on a family, and addressing their needs is an effective way of addressing child poverty itself. Recent statistics indicate that child poverty was up by 100,000¹⁸ suggesting that concentrating on tax credits for families have not proved to be sufficiently effective. Arguably, they only deal with the symptoms of poverty, rather than tackling the underlying problem of low pay. This 'props up' a system of low pay rather than providing companies with an incentive. New gender-sensitive strategies will be needed to tackle a problem which shows no sign of disappearing.

Getting Women into Work

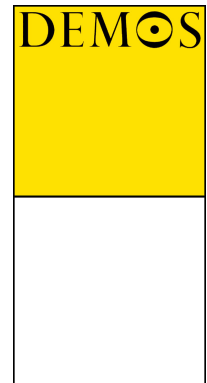
The New Deal for the Unemployed represented the Government's comprehensive approach to dealing with long-term unemployment.¹⁹ New measures were introduced to encourage all people into jobs and, as the poverty implications of being a young, lone mother are well documented,²⁰ there has also been a strong emphasis on getting mothers into work. Whilst paid employment is undoubtedly the main route out of poverty for women, however, the sustainability of jobs also

¹⁷ See the London Citizen's Campaign for a Living Wage <http://www.livingwage.org.uk/> (accessed 15 May 2007)

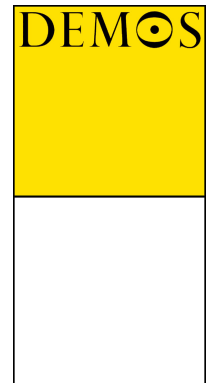
¹⁸ L. Elliot *Only the Rich Can End Child Poverty*, The Guardian, April 2 2007
<http://society.guardian.co.uk/social/exclusion/comment/0,,2048055,00.html> (accessed 15 May 2007)

¹⁹ See
http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/Employers/Ourservices/Programmes/New_Deal/index.html
(accessed 16 May 2007)

²⁰ Hendessi, M. and Rashid, F., *Poverty: The price of Young Motherhood in Britain* YWCA, Oxfam, 2002



needs to be considered.²¹ Initiatives which are solely driven by economic goals often fail to take account of the varying motivations and social influences experienced by young women, and more specifically by young mothers. It has been argued that for all the success in securing jobs for unemployed women, some New Deal initiatives fail to take account of the *quality* of that work. The Women and Work Commission observed that Jobcentre Plus targets measured in terms of points for successful matches into jobs did not provide incentives for Personal Advisers to match women returners into jobs with prospects.²²



3. Start With People

'It is these thoughts, born of experience, that we need to take to policy makers as our contribution to producing just solutions...'²³

Moraene Roberts, ATD Fourth Worlds 2005

The problems outlined and the statistics quoted above are all too familiar. Poverty, low pay and job segregation have attracted a raft of policy initiatives. Many of these have been effective in addressing gender inequalities, but for all the success the women's movement has had in enabling young women to enter higher education, the board room or elected office, the YWCA reminds us that these gains do not touch all women. At the first stage the focus of gender policy was on building infrastructure and ensuring there was national recognition of the problem. Success is evident at this level, and many have benefited. The introduction of the Gender Equality Duty²⁴ last month signals a continuing commitment to this issue, as well as a welcome shift in emphasis from the elimination of sexual discrimination to the active promotion of gender equality by all public authorities and across society. This is a critical time to re-consider our approach to gender equality legislation to ensure that anti-discrimination initiatives reach the concentrated parts of society where inequality persists.

Reaching the women that existing policies have been unable to help requires both macro and microlevel strategies. The poverty trap for these young women is a complex one. The roots and the causes of civil, social and economic poverty are inextricably linked. These links constitute the more human dimension to the problem; the day-to-day interactions that effective policy needs to address. A

²¹ Harris, J., Howard, M., Jones, C. and Lucy Russell, *Great Expectations: how realistic is the government target to get 60 per cent of young mothers into education, employment or training?*, YWCA (2005)

²² Department for Communities and Local Government, *Towards a Fairer Future: Implementing the Women and Work Commission Recommendations*, p.11 (London: April 2007)

²³ Moraene Roberts, ATD Fourth Worlds, cited by The Women's Budget Group, *Women and Children's Poverty: Making the Links*, p.19 (March 2005)

²⁴ See <http://www.eoc.org.uk/Default.aspx?page=17686> (accessed 15 May 2007)

common response to these problems is to argue that these young women lack aspirations. Testimonies provided by the young women themselves, however, demonstrate that this is not often the case. In their experience it is not the lack of drive that keeps them where they are, but the expectations of others, the predetermined types of jobs that they are encouraged to go into, and along with a range of practical and cultural barriers.

Caring responsibilities

One of the practical barriers to many young women achieving their aspirations is the lack of suitable and affordable childcare. Despite the increasing availability of flexible working hours, the increasing number of women in the workforce and other such progress, when caring responsibilities threaten to interfere with employment or training, it is still very much a woman's problem. When Ipsos MORI asked 2,000 British adults what had stopped them from doing the job or occupation that they had hoped they would do while they were still at school, 22% of the women cited 'family reasons / commitments', compared to only 8% of men.²⁵

For young women having to provide for a family, flexible working and childcare is essential. This is supported by research by the Women's Budget Group (WBG), which shows that the shortage of childcare facilities needs to be urgently addressed²⁶. As Beverley Hughes, the Minister for Children, Young People and Families has commented, excellent careers advice is of little use if there is nobody to care for the children while the mother is at work: 'What parents consistently tell us is that a lack of suitable, flexible childcare is one of the major barriers to work and also to taking the educational training opportunities that will enhance people's prospects for work'.²⁷

There is no doubt that the increase in flexible working hours is crucial in encouraging young women with children to build upon their skills or to seek employment, but employment policies such as these will be unable to fulfil their full potential if the supply and demand for childcare facilities is not examined simultaneously.

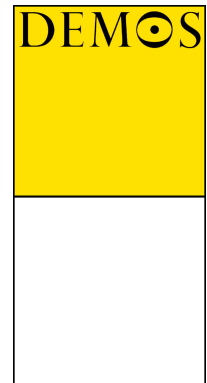
Poor information and guidance

A young woman's aspirations can appear to be unachievable if she lacks the necessary guidance and information, not only about training and education, but also about the less traditional career paths that are available for women. Recent EOC research into apprenticeships found that 80% of girls said that they would be

²⁵ Ben Page, Ipsos MORI SRI, *Creating a high aspiration culture for young people in the UK* (Jan 2007). Mori conducted telephone interviews with 2,000 British adults and held a workshop in Luton with 25 parents and 23 of their children.

²⁶ Women's Budget Group, *Women and Children's Poverty: Making the Links* (March 2005)

²⁷ SureStart, *Partners: Helping Parents into Employment* (Issue 40, Aug/Sep 2005)



interested in non-traditional occupations.²⁸ Why does this not translate into the career choices that they make? The Women and Work Commission believes that:

‘Girls need a better understanding of the world of work, to experience working in jobs traditionally done by men and more and better careers information...if girls are made more aware of the consequences of their choices for their future pay and career progression they might make different choices’.²⁹

Self-worth

In addition to the practical and economic constraints discussed above, there is also a complicated web of personal and social factors that shape a young woman’s outlook. Above all, aspirations are inextricably linked to expectations: the expectations that young women have of themselves, the expectations of parents and teachers, and those of society as a whole. The frustrating cycle does not begin in the job interview but in the home, at school, and with the attitudes of her community and the images of herself that she sees reflected in popular culture. It is imperative that policymakers look as far back as possible in this cycle, so that policy can perform preventative, rather than reactive, functions.

Designing and analysing strategies to facilitate the realisation of goals can be a long and complex process because many of the policies already in place have gradual, generational effects which are not yet apparent. Furthermore, the expectations that a disadvantaged young woman may have of herself are undoubtedly tied up with very sensitive and personal issues such as esteem and self-worth. Sarah explained to the YWCA that discrimination and poverty can make young women feel worthless:

‘The way I felt inside, I was pure scum. I wasn’t worthy of anything. I wasn’t worthy of breathing the same air as people...’³⁰

Such low levels of confidence represent a huge challenge even when financial assistance and careers advice is well targeted and expertly delivered. At times the benefits system itself can be closely associated with feelings of dependence and low self-esteem. When the YWCA asked Charmaine, 26, where she would like to be in 5 years time, she said:

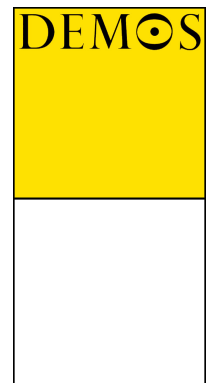
‘I’m finally happy, grounded, settled and actually able to provide for myself and my child without the government. That is my aim, my main aim, to get away from the system and really to get out of the system.’³¹

²⁸ EOC, *Free to Choose: Tackling gender barriers to better jobs* (March 2005)

²⁹ Women and Work Commission, *Shaping a Fairer Future* (Feb 2006)

³⁰ Sarah, 24, *Just YW: England & Wales Annual Review* (2005-6)

³¹ Charmaine, 26, Dagenham, YWCA



Parental Expectations

Support services need to be sensitive to the individual as well as to the environment in which a disadvantaged young woman might live. Parental expectations, for example, may influence a young person's aspirations from a very young age and can sometimes act as a barrier, however unintentionally. In a recent survey conducted by Ipsos MORI, parents were asked a series of questions about their children's futures.³² When asked about the types of employment their children would find after graduation, 48% of group AB chose 'something professional that will require further training', compared with only 21% of group DE. One quote from the research aptly illustrates the impact of this type of perspective:

'I wanted to be a window dresser. My Dad said, 'you'll end up washing windows'.³³

It is, of course, far too easy to 'blame the parents'. For parents themselves there are both practical and cultural barriers. For many, the cost of higher education is prohibitive. For others, their own experiences prevent them from being able to assess what their children could and could not achieve. MORI concludes from these opinions and statistics that the 'parents' expectations of their children are framed by their own sphere(s) of reference. They need guidance on helping their children help set their sights high'.³⁴

Expectations of Society

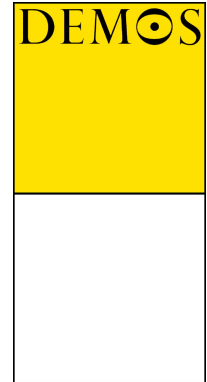
While legislation to combat discrimination during recruitment processes performs a crucial function, much of the indirect discrimination has already occurred before the job applications are even filled out. Gender stereotypes and expectations begin to form at a much earlier age than one might think. In *Young people and sex stereotyping*, a survey carried out by NOP for the EOC, young students were asked to divide certain occupations, chores and characteristics by gender.³⁵ When boys were asked which jobs were better suited to a woman, a man or equally suited to both, students demonstrated a distinct tendency towards gender segregation. When asked about a car mechanic, 250 considered it to be a male occupation, not one considered it to be a female occupation. 203 of the respondents considered a care assistant to be a woman's job, and only 1 boy thought it could be a male profession. These stereotypical gender divisions will be carried into adult life and the realm of employment. Another piece of research demonstrates that even those adults responsible for careers advice also make similar judgements: of the 43 girls surveyed who were doing a work placement in childcare only 29 had listed it as a

³² Ben Page, Ipsos MORI SRI, *Creating a high aspirations culture* (Jan 2007)

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ See <http://www.eoc.org.uk/Default.aspx?page=15609> (accessed 15 May 2007)

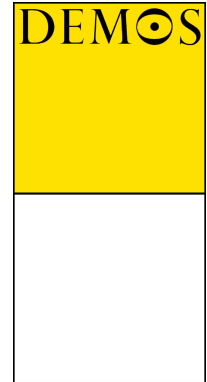


possible future job.³⁶ Job segregation is taking place before young women even enter the workforce.

The Department for Education and Skills is already taking steps in the right direction. Following the recommendations from the Women and Work Commission, this month the DfES will publish guidelines for careers advisors about gender stereotyping.³⁷ Additionally, the Government action plan, *Towards a Fairer Future: Implementing the Women and Work Commission recommendations*, states that: 'A new quality framework for services to children, the new Early Years Foundation Stage, will become statutory from September 2008. It will help to avoid gender stereotyping in all early years settings and will stipulate that practitioners must promote equality of opportunity and a positive attitude to diversity'.³⁸

Policymakers are starting to recognise the important role that teachers, careers advisors, parents and those in guidance roles have to play in the dismantling of gender stereotypes. However, it is essential the policy interventions at this level are given teeth; such a profound shift in attitudes is unlikely to happen on its own - even with the aid of guidelines. Public opinion and society as a whole has just as significant an influence on young women's choices as discrimination in the workplace or the careers office. Although the media, the film industries, day-to-day language, conversations and more sub-conscious levels of gender stereotyping do not always interact directly with young women, they provide a powerful backdrop to these more 'target-able'/tangible actors.

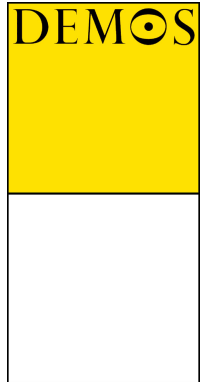
The diagram below shows some of the people involved in supporting and influencing young women, many of them also help young people to form judgments about their own abilities. The diagram includes not only those who occupy specific guidance roles, but also those who participate in the more common, day-to-day sites of interaction. Every one of these sites is a place to combat disadvantage.



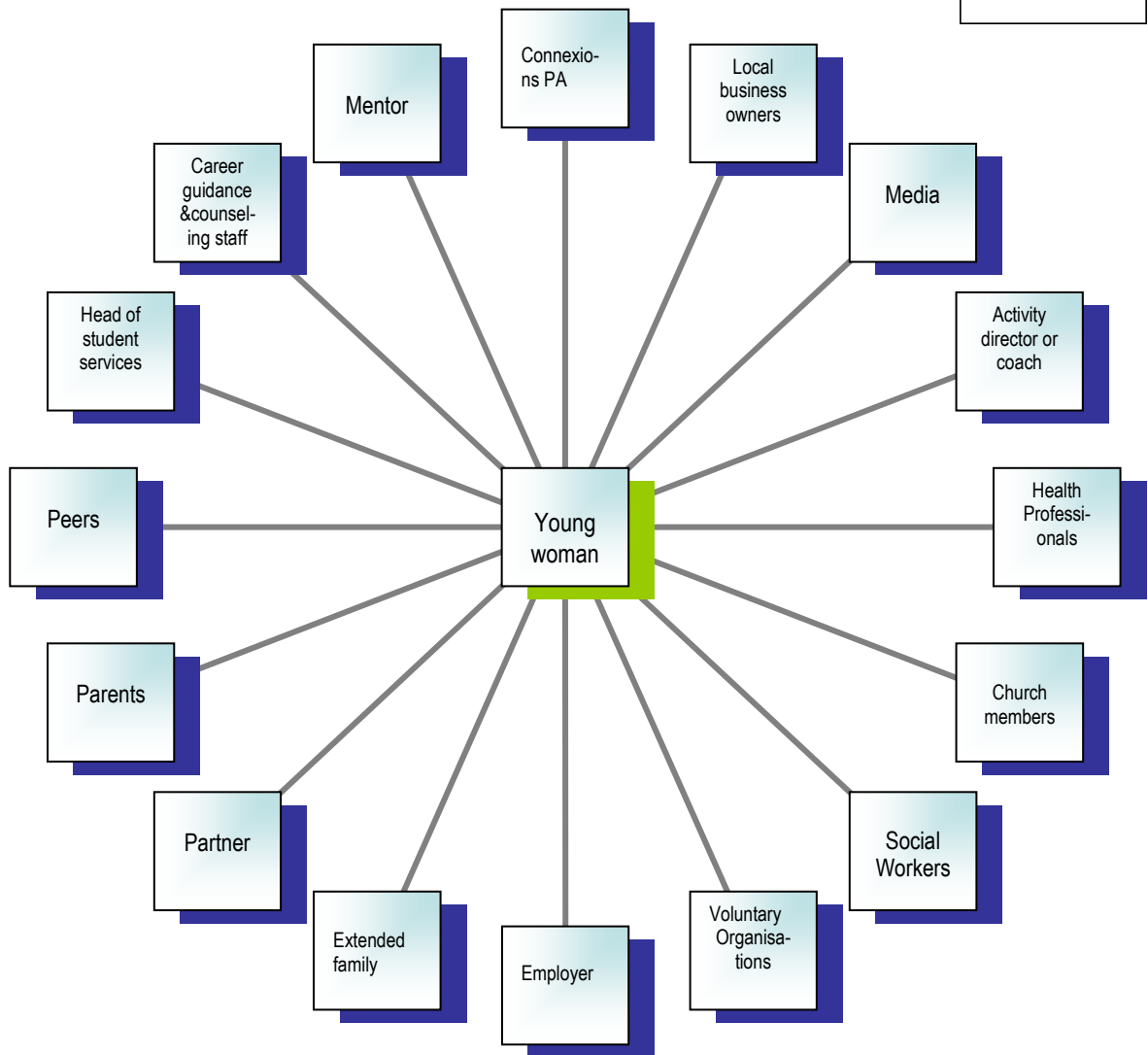
³⁶ EOC, *Free to Choose: Tackling Gender Barriers to Better Jobs: England Final Report- EOC'S Investigations into workplace segregation and Apprenticeships* (March 2005)

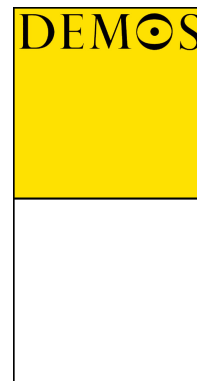
³⁷ Department for Communities and Local Government, *Towards a Fairer Future: Implementing the Women and Work Commission Recommendations*, p.11 (London: April 2007)

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.12



Everyday Contacts





4. New Frontiers of Equality Policy

We must be aware of the extent to which practical barriers can disrupt good intentions. If the realities of women's lives remain unobserved, policy will continue to only help women who are in a position to use the legislative support. The testimony provided by women themselves shows how often 'real life' gets in the way. The complexity of every young woman's experience of education and work means that the next phase of gender mainstreaming and the next set of discrimination policies should take a hard look at the micro-level. All the actors that we have identified need to be considered when we look for ways of helping women to realise their potential. Policymakers, parents and head teachers also need to be challenged to examine their expectations of young women. How do we all contribute to their stalled career development?

In the process of policymaking, women are too often treated as a homogenous group, and as a result, disadvantaged young women have not always been the first to benefit from equality legislation. If it is women who make up the majority of those in poverty then policy which concentrates on gender issues alone will do very little to assist them. From the initial report on the impact of the pay gap on productivity published in 2002,³⁹ to the 2006 Government Action Plan for implementing the Women and Work Commission recommendations, there is still very little focus on how race and class interact with gender. A policy that unifies the experience of all women into a single category of 'gender' is unlikely to hold the answers to an extremely complex set of problems.

As YWCA recognises, the aspirations of disadvantaged young women need attention in a supportive and empowering space. Every young woman should have access to alternative careers options,⁴⁰ and this should become the standard across our education system. While it is important that we increase the number of options available to disadvantaged young women, it is equally as important that when we talk of raising aspirations we do not devalue the work done by those in the caring and service industries.

Our society will always need these vital jobs to be done and encouraging women to leave these sectors will create a vacuum which must be filled by someone. Low pay and poor progression will then affect the next worker who fills that position – in many cases an immigrant employee. These are important roles and anyone doing them is entitled to good pay, good conditions and, above all, respect. YWCA call for fair pay for women doing apprenticeships, an important place to start if we are

³⁹ Department for Trade and Industry, *Jobs for the Girls : the effect of occupational segregation on the gender pay gap* House of Commons(2004 – 2005)

⁴⁰ This has also has been recognised by the EOC, the Women and Work Commission, the Trade Industry Committee and most recently by YWCA's policy calls.

to ensure that young women are not financially penalised for their career choices. Politicians from all sides of the political spectrum are looking for new ways to tackle poverty and raise skill levels in the workforce. Disadvantaged young women - the women that policy has left behind - should be at the centre of this debate.

