Gender Stereotyping and Career Expectations

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This research investigates the efforts of schools and others to counter gender stereotyping in relation to career aspirations and identifies issues involved for careers education programmes in secondary schools.

Men and women in the labour market

More than twenty years after equal opportunities legislation was implemented in the UK, the position of men and women in the labour market shows resistance to significant, positive change (EOCa, 1999). Young women have made gains in education, especially pre-16, but there is little evidence that these have been translated into changes when they join the workforce. Jobs are still segregated along gendered lines.

European legislation now requires that in principle all jobs in whatever sphere, should be equally open to women and men, and women and men undertaking those jobs should not be discriminated against in terms of pay or conditions of service. However in the workplace:

- 96% of engineering apprentices are male
- 89% of health and social care apprenticeships are female
- 79 % of computer analysts and programmers are men
- 86% of primary and nursery teachers are female (EOC, 2001)
- 4% of employed graduate engineers are women (WISE, 2001)
- 1% of those working in childcare are men (DfEE, 1997)

Despite legislation, both young men and women fail to apply for or secure jobs for which they are suited and where they are needed. Women are still less likely to advance to higher levels in their occupational choice and still continue to bear primary responsibility for childcare and continue to earn less than men in all ethnic groups (EOC, 2000). Women in Britain working full-time earn on average 19% less than men (EOC 2000). However, women's employment patterns have changed. The total number of 15-59 year old women in the labour market who are economically active in England and Wales has increased from 38% in 1931 to 68% in 1999 and more women work part-time, flexi time and job share (Bimrose, 2001).

While the number of women employed has increased dramatically, since the 1970s the number of men in employment has remained the same. This has reflected a shift in the type of jobs available, away from manufacturing towards service jobs. Because of gendered 'scripts' men may be restricted in terms of obtaining jobs in expanding sectors of the economy. Until the early 1970s, there had been a 'natural progression' for most young men moving from school into work. Irrespective of educational achievement, if young men stayed broadly within an acceptable framework of behaviour then work would be available to them (Lloyd, 1999). It has also been argued that men may not have the same lifestyle choices because of the social pressure exerted upon them to work (Hakim, 1996).

While a great deal of statistical information relating to gender is available, the relationship between gender and other important variables, particularly class and ethnicity is unclear. Most published data takes only one variable into account. The EOC confirm that 'One of the most important omissions is the lack of good quality, accurate data on the qualifications, performance and employment experience of young people disaggregated at the very least, by gender and preferably also by ethnicity and social class.' (EOC, 1998). Ethnicity and class intersect with gender to reduce or compound disadvantage. For example:

- White women earn more than women from minority ethnic groups in London, but outside London women from Chinese and 'other' ethnic groups have highest earnings. Men display similar earning patterns.
- Minority unemployment rates are usually at least twice as high as those for white people, and highest for Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black-African people. However, Indian and Chinese people tend to experience relatively low unemployment rates.
- 85% of white men aged 16-64 are economically active compared to 77% for all minority groups, while 74% of white women of the same age are economically active compared with 56% of minority ethnic women. (DfEE, 2000).

The cost of segregation in work includes:

- Discrimination - leading to isolation and harassment.
- Wasted talent - people cannot fulfil their potential and individual ambitions of both men and women are limited.
- Skills gaps - some industries with skills shortages are recruiting from a restricted pool. For example, there is a skills shortage in the computer industry yet the number of women entering this industry is falling.

The next section turns to a consideration of qualifications gained by young people to explore the extent to which segregation in the workplace is mirrored by segregation in education and training.

Young people, qualifications and career routes

Achievement at GCSE

At the end of the 1980s GCSEs were introduced into schools in England and Wales, establishing a common award scheme for all young people, where previously there had been a range of possible qualifications. Since then, while the performance of both young men and women has improved, young women have consistently performed better than young men in the majority of subjects. For example, in 1990/91 44.0% of girls achieved 5 or more A*-C grades compared with 36.0% of boys. By 1998/9, the results were 53.2% of girls and 42.6% of boys. Girls outperformed boys in English, maths, joint science, design and technology, history and all modern languages. Boys outperformed girls in physics, chemistry, biological sciences, IT, geography (DfEE, 1999).

However, gender intersects with socio-economic class and ethnicity to produce a more complex picture. For example:

- White students perform better than those from minority ethnic groups overall, but fewer achieve 5 or more passes at GCSE grade A* to C than those from Indian and 'other' ethnic groups.
- The most common level of achievement for Black males is 5 or more passes at grade D to G.
- Two-fifths of Black females achieve 1 to 4 GCSEs at grade A* to C compared with an average of just over a quarter for males and females from all ethnic groups.
- Across all ethnic groups, 69% with a father in a managerial or professional job achieve 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C compared with 36% with a father in manual profession.
- Young people from minority and ethnic groups are more likely to remain in full-time education than their white peers.

Social class is a primary factor and young people from professional backgrounds have the highest levels of attainment at GCSE and those from manual and unskilled families the lowest (Women's Unit, 2000).

Pathways after 16

The Careers Service Activity Survey *Moving On* reveals that young women are more likely to be in full-time education after year 11 (75.7% female, 65.8% male). For young people with very good GCSE results the gender gap relating to staying on in education is very small (Payne, 1998). Conversely, young men are more likely to be in the labour market, either training or employment (20.9% male, 13.1% female). Young men are slightly more likely to be 'not settled' in full-time activity (7.9% male, 6.6% female). (DfEE, 2000).

Post-16 education and training offers a wide range of options including 'A' levels, vocational qualifications and modern apprenticeships. Strong gender differences are to be seen in choice of subject in both 'academic' and vocational courses.

'A' levels

Research indicates that what students have studied at GCSE and how well they performed dominates their decisions about what to study at 'A' level (Payne, 1998).

There is some evidence that pupils in single-sex and mixed schools make different choices as to what subjects to study at 'A' level. Girls in single-sex schools are more likely than girls in mixed schools to study maths or physical sciences (but less likely than boys). The Youth Cohort Study estimates show that, among 16 year-olds taking at least two 'A' levels, approximately 50% of girls are not taking any science subject (including maths) whereas the equivalent figure for boys is 30% (Payne, 1995).

After the age of 16 pupils appear to revert to traditional choices with girls choosing arts/humanities and boys choosing science/technology subjects. There is evidence that traditional patterns of subject choice may be difficult to alter because girls do well at literacy-based subjects and enjoy them and are, therefore, more likely to pursue arts and social science subjects than science. Recent statistics show that:

- 74% of 'A' level English students are female (EOC, 2000)
- 72% of those taking 'A' level computing are male (EOC, 2000)
- 77% of 'A' level physics students are male (WISE)

Vocational qualifications

The proportions of young men and women who go on to study for GNVQs is similar. However:

- 90% of GNVQ health and social care students are female (EOC, 2001)
- 81% taking GNVQ IT are male (EOC, 2001)

A similar situation is found with regard to Modern Apprenticeships (DfEE, 1999a):

- 3% of engineering and manufacturing modern apprenticeship trainees are female
- 1% of construction trainees are female
- 1% of engineering trainees are female
- 11% of health and social care trainees are male
- 3% of childcare trainees are male
- 8% of hairdressing trainees are male

Once again it is important to remind ourselves that gender intersects with socio-economic class and ethnicity. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) Inaugural Conference on Equal Opportunities, January 2001 warned that:

'Young people from ethnic minority groups are less likely to obtain qualifications and jobs after they complete their training and are seriously under-represented amongst Modern Apprentices, particularly in traditional craft sectors.'

The Survey *Moving On* shows the percentage of year 11 students entering training or work by occupation. Some of the statistics for 1999 are entered below:

	% Male	% Female	% Total
Managerial/professional	5.3	2.4	4.2
Clerical/secretarial	8.9	25.2	15.0
Skilled construction	13.3	1.0	8.7
Skilled engineering	5.2	0.3	3.3
Personal services			
7.catering	4.3	5.6	4.8
8.health care	0.3	5.4	2.2
9.child care	0.1	4.9	1.9
10.hairdressing	0.6	16.3	6.5
Sales occupations	7.1	14.2	9.8
Labouring and other elementary occupations	16.2	10.8	14.2

The Early Leavers study (DfEE, 1999b) showed that young women are more likely to leave youth training schemes early. They reported that 'female trainees aged 17 and those with non employed status had the greatest propensity to leave the scheme early'. The same study also reported that young black African and Caribbean students were more likely to leave than young white/Indian/Pakistani or Sri Lankan students. The main finding about the process leading to early leaving was that careers advice provided by schools was a key issue, with the main criteria centring on the provision of advice, its quality and, in particular, the preference given to academic education over vocational courses. Other reasons given for leaving were lack of support from the provider, poor experience on placement and personal reasons. Trainees with prior qualifications and those working toward qualifications at higher level were most likely to complete the course. Research conducted by the Policy Studies Institute (DfES, 2001) also found that in both Advanced Modern Apprenticeship (AMA) schemes and Government Supported Training (GST) schemes young women were more likely to leave than young men.

Higher education

Women represent over half of all new students admitted to first-degree courses. However, they tend to study subjects such as social studies, humanities, languages and business studies (EOC, 2002).

Technical disciplines continue to attract many more men than women. Biology is a notable exception and more than half of all admissions to first degree courses in this subject are female. Women constitute around one-third of admissions to chemistry and about one-fifth of admissions to physics and engineering and technology.

Despite the rapid growth in computer science student numbers, women students are in the minority. There is evidence that some students - particularly women - reject computer science/IT because it is seen as desk-bound and 'anti-social' in some way. However, many young people are drawn to this subject due to the perceived high rewards in terms of career and salary prospects (EOC, 2002).

Again it is important to disaggregate the statistics by socio-economic class and ethnicity. For example, research also shows that at present less than 20% of young people under 21 from the lower socio-economic groups go to university compared with over 70% from the highest (DfES, 2002). In 1997/98, ethnic groups comprised nearly 13% of students at first degree level in UK universities – considerably higher than the minority ethnic share of the population of young people. However, they tended to be concentrated in post-92 universities and are more likely to be mature students (DfEE, 2000).

While it is important to consider statistics about employment, education and training, it is also imperative to consider young people not in education, employment or training. The Social Exclusion Unit's Report (DfEE, 2000), *Bridging the Gap*, explored the problems faced by young people between the ages of 16-18 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). They found that females spent more time NEET in total than males and were more likely than males to be economically inactive rather than unemployed. However, males were slightly more likely than females to have more than one NEET spell. The *Young People and Gender* report states, 'Though official figures for unemployment suggest that this affects more young men, a large group of young women who are outside education and training, remain hidden. Many of these are young women with caring responsibilities ... The negative impact on long-term educational and employment involvement of being a young mother has been identified.' (Women's Unit, 2000).

The review of research submitted to the Women's Unit on young people from a gendered perspective concludes 'Of critical concern to policy-makers is the question of whether males or females are more at risk during the adolescent years. At different times in the past decades public anxiety has focused on one or other of the genders, but it needs to be recognised that both young women and men may be vulnerable in different ways. The central conclusion of this review is that it would be wrong to identify either males or females as being more in need of attention from policy makers.' (Women's Unit, 2000).

Stereotypes

One explanation that has remained popular to account for segregation in education, training and work has been gender and ethnic stereotyping. Stereotyping, it is argued, restricts the careers of women and men of all ages, despite legislation and the efforts of careers guidance services, educators, trainers and many employers. Stereotyping, it is argued, is embedded in many industrial sectors, and in social and family expectations and attitudes. For example, explaining why and how educational and occupational segregation is perpetuated suggests that young people do not cross into 'gender contrary' areas of training because of culturally determined definitions of skill, cultural norms, and ideologies surrounding masculinity and femininity (Cockburn, 1987). These largely determine the training that young women and men pursue. 'Those involved in (training) schemes such as managing agents and employers 'passively' discriminate (often unconsciously) against young women because of their narrow definition of equality.'(DfEE, 1997).

Stereotypes are seen as negative and act as barriers to individuals achieving their potential. They also set standards on which people are judged and what people expect of themselves. Additionally, they may lead to disaffection. For example, masculine stereotypes which glamorise 'laddish' behaviour, may have a negative effect on boys' performance at school (Epstein, 1998).

The EOC conducted research with young people aged 11-16 which focused on their attitudes towards, and experiences of, gender roles and identified the major influences upon them. This research indicates that young people with parents who are in professional occupations have less stereotypical attitudes than those with parents who have manual occupations. In responding to the statement 'It is okay if the father stays at home and looks after the children and the mother goes out to work' approximately 80% of girls and 70% of boys agreed in social classes ABC1 compared with approximately 68% of girls and 60% of boys in social classes C2D2. (EOC, 2001).

The EOC research also found that:
'Older girls and boys are more egalitarian in attitude than younger children, yet this change in attitude becomes apparent at a time when their own subject choices reflect traditional male and female roles.'

This finding that beliefs around gender, careers and ambitions are firmly entrenched by the time young people are making choices at GCSE is confirmed by other researchers (Morris, Nelson, Rickinson et al., 1999; Miller and Budd, 1999).

Miller and Budd found that out of 221 jobs, 17 showed a gendered distribution in preference rating for both male and female at all ages, but the preference decreased with age. (Miller and Budd, 1999). Boys sex-typed appropriateness of occupation to a significantly greater degree than girls, although this difference was not significant in younger children. No consistent or stable pattern or preference emerged for males and females across age groups for school subject preference. They conclude that reduction of stereotypical views with age is attributable to changes in the beliefs of the female sample. However, while females believed that more jobs should be carried out by both male and female, they showed little interest in employment within the majority of the 'masculine' occupations presented by the researchers.

This finding seems to support the same finding from the EOC (2001) that:

'There is a contradiction between what young people think are suitable jobs for women and men, and the choices they make for themselves which often follow traditional stereotypes.'

Miller and Budd conclude that 'Perhaps more importantly these findings do not differ from those of many previous studies dating from the early 1970s.' (Miller and Budd, 1999).

The Fifth Framework Program project 'Gender and Qualification' investigated the impact of gender segregation of European labour markets on vocational education and training (VET), with special regard to key competencies of men and women. They took a comparative approach to gender competencies in Finland, GB, Greece, Portugal and Germany. The focus was on identifying key competencies in three occupations: engineer, waiter and nurse. Results were presented at a conference at the Institute of Education on the 27th and 28th February 2002. Anke Kampmeier's paper 'Transcending gendered features of key qualifications. What did we learn from the project?', although recognising the prevalence of stereotypes, also asserts that there are many differences between men and women which cannot be ignored. Hence they are labelled 'competencies' and viewed positively, rather than 'stereotypes', which have a negative connotation.

Key competencies in her view are 'more typical' for either men or women because they are either performed or perceived or expected from women or men in contrast to the other sex. Her findings from observation in the workplace and interviews with both training providers and

workers in the three occupations is that females are considered more industrious, attentive, accept better routines, accept external controlled work, are more sensitive, more sweet tempered, more patient, better at taking care of children, better with fine work, work more emotionally, work more precisely, are more co-operative, better communicators, take different roles, more creative, tolerate ambiguity, are more responsible and eager to learn. However, on the negative side they are less original in mathematical and technical thinking and do not like dirty, uncomfortable or heavy work. Men are said to be more competitive, autonomous, refer to own interests, determined, have an orientation toward fixed rules, more practical, emphasise entertainment, work more rationally, enjoy power, be better with heavy work but are less emotional, less relaxed in social contact and less relaxed in using their bodies (i.e. making physical contact). The inference from the work of the Fifth Framework Program is that young people choose careers in which they can use their natural competencies. However, more research is needed on whether this is, indeed the reason for a particular career choice, or whether the picture is far more complex.

Interestingly the list of 'stereotypes' or 'competencies' has changed little since the 1970s (see Askew, 1988), but possibly the value which we attach to them is changing? In the 1970s, those stereotypes attributed to males were generally viewed as positive while those attributed to females were viewed negatively. Kampmeier concludes that 'Female key competencies will gain more importance with the growth of the service sector' (Unpublished conference paper).

In the European research while it is accepted that not all females and males will have the ascribed gender traits, nevertheless they are seen as 'typical' for either sex. This is a worrying argument since each trait is open to a number of interpretations and varies according to context, e.g. boys are more practical, girls are more sensitive, depends on the context. In a context, which involved sewing, it may be that girls are considered more practical than boys, and when we talk about females working more emotionally, do we infer that they are more likely to be angry at work! Clearly the notion of gendered competency is interesting but open to misuse. Stereotypes maintain people in particular positions of inferiority and superiority and ascribed competencies may well do the same. The notion of gendered competencies does not address the intersection of class, ethnicity and sexuality.

In the 1970s and 1980s there were many projects which attempted to challenge stereotypical career choices (Myers, 2000). Much of the work involved raising awareness and challenging stereotypes; increasing the profile of high achieving women in non-stereotypical careers and of domestic and caring roles for men and encouraging girls into science and engineering related work, e.g. the Girls into Science and Technology (GIST) Project, an action research programme carried out in co-educational comprehensive schools in Greater Manchester between 1979-1984. Strategies included visits to schools by women working in technical jobs, the development of teaching material more orientated towards girls' interests and a humanistic view of science, observations in school labs and workshops, and careers education linked to option choices in schools (Whyte, 1986). This was a very important first step. However, while it can be argued that this early work was partly successful, (for example, since its inception in 1984 the WISE campaign, has helped double the number of female engineering graduates in the UK from 7% in 1984 to 15% in 2001), clearly there is much to be done. There is a lack of information about what works in challenging gender inequalities in all aspects of young people's lives and how to meet the specific needs of young women and young men. Sharing good practice is crucial, as is proper evaluation of programmes to examine the extent to which they meet their objectives.

Rather than a focus on challenging stereotypes or on developing gendered competencies it may be less divisive to identify what kinds of competencies are needed in the modern market and to ask how we can develop these in both young women and men. It may also be more useful to ask how educational and vocational practices can contribute to reducing inequalities and segregation.

Finally, a focus on gendered stereotypes or competencies invites us to take a 'blanket' approach to work with young women or to work with young men without recognising the differences between young women and between young men. There are common influences that affect all young people living in a western society, including the media and education. However, the way these influences are interpreted will depend both on individual characteristics and on culture. This requires that effective careers education is dependent upon an understanding of the different worlds inhabited by young people and the impact of family, religion, culture and community.

Career decisions and the careers service

There is need for a more complex theory about how career decisions are made – young people's choice of career may reflect a far more sophisticated and rational understanding than that suggested by an explanation which puts 'stereotyping' at its core. If young people tell us, for example, that childcare is a 'female' occupation, we need to explore this using qualitative research methods to discover the rationale behind this assertion. The next section turns to a review of literature which asks questions about how career decisions are made. 'Currently, mainstream systems and programmes, rather than challenging traditional patterns of gender stereotyping and segregation, may only serve to reinforce them. There is, however, little evidence that this aspect of equality is an issue which politicians, policy-makers and practitioners across education and training are seeking to address.' (EOC, 1999b.)

Hodkinson (1997) argues that 'People make pragmatically rational decisions within the culturally derived horizons for each'. Decisions are neither 'individual choice' nor socially determined. Decisions are made because of chance or opportunity. 'Limitations on decisions are realistically recognised.' Choices are 'pragmatically rational' – located in the familiar and known. Opportunities are based on contacts and experience. One reason career advice is rejected is because it doesn't fit with young people's view of themselves; it lies outside their horizon. Beven (1995) argues that the capacity and willingness to make rational informed choices about careers is context related and cannot be separated from the social and cultural background and the life experiences of young people. Ideas drawn from personal construct theory may also be useful: 'To try and give guidance to pupils without taking account of their interpretation of events, their terms of reference and ... what is important to them can lead to making assumptions about motivation, values and choices, and the subsequent guidance given may not be particularly appropriate' (Beven, 1995). The implications for careers work in school are that both an approach which treats all young people as individuals and as free agents who control their own destinies, and one which sees young people as constrained by socially constructs (e.g. gender stereotypes) are not going to be entirely fruitful. Both these understandings need to be held alongside one which recognises cultural (and possibly religious) affiliations.

Bimrose (2001) asks what the dominant influences and inhibitors on women's career development are and how these differ for different groups of women. Evidence relates mostly to individual characteristics including high self-esteem, multiple role-planning and strong locus of control. Inhibitors include poor self concept, low expectations of success and the effects of gender role and occupational stereotypes (Betz, 1994). Structural barriers include ways the educational systems operate, the emphasis on gender roles, exclusion from certain activities, lack of role models, gender biased career counselling, career-family conflict, discrimination and sexual harassment. (Krumboltz and Coon, 1995). It is clear from this that the career guidance needs of girls and women are different from those of boys and men and that some single sex work may well be useful.

Vocational choice is a process of eliminating options and narrowing choices – individuals compromise their goals in coming to terms with reality as they try to fulfil their aspirations (Gottfredson, 1996). This implies the need for discussion with young people about why, for example, certain options seem to be out of the question or why some compromises are more acceptable or more accessible than others. Careers education programmes need to deal explicitly with the way individuals restrict their career choices and sensitive to sex, social class, ethnicity, ability and vocational interest. Career self-efficacy work would help young people develop self-confidence by exploring perceptions of ability and 'reframing' them. Practitioners need to be familiar with research on the relationship between gender and career development and the complex interactions of gender, ethnicity and social class require training support and knowledge of discrimination in education and the workplace. Young people need political awareness of the ways social structure has moulded and limited them. A relationship between client and practitioner needs to be established and maintained to avoid the abuse of power.

Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (1997) looked at perceptions of career guidance received and perceptions and knowledge of specific careers held by pupils age 10, 15 and 17. 410 pupils were interviewed in focus groups and questionnaires were used. 90% of young people cite 'enjoyment' and 'interest' as important choice criteria. Young people are more interested in the lifestyle associated with a job than with the job itself. In careers education and guidance (CEG) young people are often only told about the careers they ask about and therefore ignore careers which are unfamiliar or already rejected. They see CEG as predominantly an information providing service. Foskett and Hemsley-Brown comment that CEG mostly starts in upper secondary school and perceptions which develop at a much younger age are not explored when they need to be. In primary schools, formal careers education is almost completely absent even where opportunities arise naturally within the curriculum. Research confirms the view that occupations and career intentions are chosen at an early stage.

The implication of this research on career decision making is that practitioners and policy makers must recognise the complexity of career decision making processes. As Hodkinson states:
'Approaches which see guidance simply as providing more and better information plus professional advice in making a single choice are naïve and probably doomed to failure.' (Hodkinson, 1995).

The need to highlight gender, race and class issues

This section raises several important recommendations for Connexions, The Learning and Skills Councils, the Careers Service and careers teachers.

Connexions provides the opportunity to broaden the concept of career, and to see it in a more holistic context – broadening the range of learning and work opportunities. Connexions personal advisers are key to the delivery of the eight key Connexions principles. Their role includes direct work with the young person, including assessment, planning and intervention; working with schools and colleges to share best practice; enhance resources and contribute to curricular work in PSHE, drugs, health and careers education and citizenship; planning and working with parents/carers; reviewing progress and outcomes; developing informal and community networks; planning and working with other agencies (DfEE, 2000a).

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is another new organisation whose targets include raising achievement of young people aged 16-21, raising participation post-16 and raising the quality and effectiveness of the education and training they support.

Clearly, the important knowledge and skills which the Personal Adviser and officers working for the LSC will need must include awareness of equal opportunity issues as well as an understanding of career decision making processes – these are not highlighted in the Diploma for Connexions Personal Advisers (DfEE, 2001). The issues to be addressed in partnership agreements should include gender, race and class issues – these are not highlighted in the DfEE publication, 'Establishing the Connexions Service in Schools'.

Careers education and guidance in school also needs to include awareness of gender and other equal opportunity issues. EOC research in 1999 found that on documentation supplied, gender equality did not have a high profile in most careers services (Newscheck, 2001). Official publications need to highlight these issues. There is no mention of gender issues in the DfEE publication, *Preparing pupils for a successful future in learning and work* (DfEE, 2000b). Failure to highlight gender and its intersection with socio-economic class and race can only result in maintaining the status quo in relation to gendered work segregation.

Work experience and GCSEs in vocational subjects

Research by the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) has found that many young people are greatly influenced in their subsequent career choice by their work experience. It appears likely that socio-economic class, ethnicity or gender are very likely to affect where young people do their work placement. Yet a recent report commissioned by the DfEE (Hillge et al., 2001) did not include any reference to ethnicity or socio-economic class in its findings. The only reference to gender is:
'While there has been a slight narrowing of the gender gap in some sectors, e.g. production, legal and media, large differences remain in education and health, where placements are predominantly taken by girls.'

However, recommendations made in the DfEE report do not address this issue. Further research is needed into the different work placements undertaken by girls and boys, as well as further research into socio-economic factors affecting work placement choice. For example, are children from middle class homes more likely to find placements themselves (with the help of parents) and do these placements more closely match the young person's career hopes?

The DfEE emphasises the importance of developing a competitive, efficient and flexible labour market. Key reorganisation of the education and training system in the last two decades has involved enhancing vocational pathways post-16. Intellectual and practical skills, as well as skills necessary for lifelong learning, career re-orientation and adaptation to the technological and work practice needs of a post-industrial, post-modern society are priorities in government education and training policy. The Government White Paper 'Schools Achieving Success' proposed the introduction of 'vocational' GCSEs. The government also plans to increase the number of specialist schools and the range of specialisms, to include subjects such as mathematics and computing. Proposals also included the possibility of pursuing predominantly vocational programmes which provide a basis for progression to a Modern Apprenticeship at age 16 or to further vocational study after 16.

The first new GCSEs in vocational subjects are to be available from September 2002 in some schools. These new GCSEs will initially be available in Applied Art and Design, Applied Business, Engineering, Health and Social Care, Applied ICT, Leisure and Tourism, Manufacturing and Applied Science. Each will be a double award, equivalent to two GCSEs.

In January 2001, the then Secretary of State announced proposals for 14–16 year olds to study at a college or with a training provider for one or two days a week throughout Key Stage 4 and to work towards worthwhile qualifications. General FE colleges were invited to form partnerships with schools, training providers and other agents to put these initiatives into effect. Partnerships will benefit from a comprehensive programme of training and support from the Learning and Skills Development Agency (DfES, 2002).

All these proposals could limit rather than extend girls' and boys' education and career opportunities. As we have shown, subject choices in vocational subjects are even more stereotyped than in traditional 'academic' subjects.

'The particular role of vocational education and training is to prepare young people for their post-school employment. The issue of gender stereotyping is therefore linked directly with the current provision and delivery of vocational education and training to young people.' (Miller & Budd, 1999). Since the late 1980s the national curriculum has meant that all students have to study a range of subjects at GCSE, which limits the effects of stereotyping. The perceived success of girls in education pre-16 has been argued by some to be due to the fact that a core curriculum and examination system was introduced at the end of the 1980s where previously there had been a range of possible qualifications. The argument is that where boys and girls take the same examinations, they perform as well or better than boys. This argument is supported by data from the 1800s and early 1900s (Cohen, 1998). In terms of educational and vocational equality, therefore, there remains a strong argument against 'choice' in pre-16 examination subjects. We would also argue that individual 'choice' should not be

the sole or main criterion for work experience placements. 'Encouraging young people to take up work placements in non-traditional fields of work is an excellent way of broadening their experience' (Newscheck, 2001).

It will be important to closely monitor the gender, economic background and ethnicity of young people who follow the 'vocational route' pre-16 and to ensure that the new differentiated education system does not lead to even further gendered segregation in the market place.

Summary of recommendations

A focus on gender stereotypes as an explanation for gendered job segregation is reductionist and ignores the very complex inter-section of gender with socio-economic class, ethnicity, sexuality, disability and age. It is suggested that work which targets the needs of specific groups of young people is likely to be more useful. This work should be informed by discussion with young people about, why, for example, certain options seem to be out of the question or why some compromises are more acceptable or more accessible than others.

Work with young people on gender, race and class in relation to career expectations is not simply a matter of offering different role models and challenging stereotypical attitudes and expectations. The social and economic context in which people find work needs to be addressed, as do issues of self-efficacy and decision-making processes.

Gender and how it intersects with socio-economic class and ethnicity should be a central issue in training programmes for personal advisers, careers advisers, careers teachers and those working in the LSCs. This training should go beyond a common sense understanding of stereotypes to include an understanding of current research in relation to the complexity of career decision making and of how different femininities and masculinities are constructed. Personal advisers and others working with young people on career decisions will need a range of very specific skills to enable them to work with different groups of young people.

Young people need opportunities to explore their perceptions of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' with highly trained professionals.

Work on attitude clarification needs to start in primary schools.

Inter-agency work such as that being conducted by Equality North West in Wigan seems an excellent way forward.

We need to encourage participation and partnership with parents and communities.

Peer education and mentoring for young women and men from other young people is a useful way forward.

More liaison is needed between college and school – Lloyd (1999) discovered that many young men find themselves on inappropriate courses with little prior information.

The introduction of new vocational pathways pre-16 needs careful monitoring in relation to gendered segregation.

Work placements should be carefully monitored in relation to the sex, socio-economic class and ethnicity of pupils.

Further research

The research for this report has highlighted a number of gaps in our knowledge about how different groups of young people make career choices, how they experience the transition from school or college to work, the kind of lifestyle they hope for and the values attached to this hope, their beliefs about what particular jobs entail and about their own abilities. Until we have more information we are likely to fall into the trap of identifying solutions which may be simplistic. This is not to argue that challenging stereotypes, for example, is unhelpful – on the contrary we are arguing here that challenging stereotypes is important, but that on its own it is extremely unlikely to make any but the smallest difference in challenging gendered segregation at work.

We need to know how different groups of young women and men think about themselves in respect to work. For example, Lloyd (1999) reported on the views of 63 young men living in Newham, Salford and Leicester aged between 18-20. Most were school underachievers, had been in temporary, insecure and on the whole poorly paid jobs. For the majority of young men in the study, most jobs in the workplace were seen as appropriate for both men and women. It was pay, rather than gender, that appeared central. Lloyd concluded that perceptions of masculinity affected their view of the male role, career decision-making, attitudes towards school and teachers, and their reluctance to seek help and advice and suggested that these perceptions must be engaged with if schools and others are to better prepare young men for the transition into the labour market.

We need to know more about how young people make decisions about their careers, and whether these decisions are based on stereotypical assumptions or on more pragmatic considerations related to understandings about pay, conditions in the workplace, training opportunities, issues relating to harassment or isolation, and so on.

We need to know more about the experiences, background, and beliefs of young men and women in jobs not 'typical' for their sex. This would help establish why some young people do choose non-stereotypical career routes and may indicate some ways forward for careers work in school.

Research shows parental influence to be the single most important factor for young people (Robinson, 2002; Lightfoot, 1997; Foskett & Hemsley-Brown, 1997).

More research is needed to establish how to support the role of parents in the careers education and guidance process. Friends and peers are also important – more research is needed to illuminate the influences of this group.

We need more information about how Vocational Education and Training (VET) practices contribute to on-going gender segregation. How can VET practices contribute to reducing gender barriers?

Research is needed into the role of career professionals and barriers to young people's use of services.

Research will be needed to establish the extent to which the work of Connexions and Learning and Skills Councils is informed by an awareness of gender and other equity issues.

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