



Gender and sexuality in non-traditionally female work: an intersectional analysis of the experience of women in different occupational groups in the UK construction and transport industries

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**Gender and sexuality in non-traditionally female work: an
intersectional analysis of the experience of women in different
occupational groups in the UK construction and transport
industries**

Tessa Wright

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the of the requirements of
the University of London for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Queen Mary, University of London

October 2011

Declaration of authorship

I, Tessa Wright, declare that the thesis entitled 'Gender and sexuality in non-traditionally female work: an intersectional analysis of the experience of women in different occupational groups in the UK construction and transport industries' and the work presented in it is my own and all references are cited accordingly.

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Signed:



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Abstract

Intersectionality is a much-debated concept within gender and race studies, but there are few empirical studies that operationalise the concept in examining work organisations and occupational careers. This thesis applies an intersectional analysis to a study of the UK construction and transport sectors exploring how gender, sexuality and occupational class shape women's work experiences. Sexuality is one of the least explored intersections, in particular its interaction with class; additionally the thesis addresses gaps in research evidence concerning the experience of women in non-professional occupations in construction and transport.

In seeking to avoid prioritising either structure or agency, the research employs a multi-level framework (Layder, 1993) that addresses several dimensions of women's experience of male-dominated work: the current policy context; women's choices and identifications in relation to traditionally male occupations; gendered, sexualised and classed workplace interactions; participation in separate support networks and trade union structures; and the interaction of domestic circumstances with work participation.

The multi-strategy qualitative methodology includes 50 interviews with key experts and heterosexual and lesbian women working in professional/managerial and non-professional occupations in the construction and transport sectors, plus two focus groups with women workers in construction and observation of events to raise awareness of non-traditional work.

This intersectional approach permits consideration of both advantage and disadvantage and questions cumulative conceptions that presume, for example, that gender and sexuality compound to disadvantage lesbians at work. The contribution of this thesis is to reveal the circumstances in which sexuality, occupational class or gender is most salient in shaping work identity or experience, together with the ways they interact. Thus sexualised workplace interactions could at times be avoided by open lesbians, but all women were at risk of sexual or homophobic harassment, although it was more prevalent in the workplaces of non-professional women. Interviewees also highlighted benefits of male-dominated occupations, including increased gendered self-confidence from doing 'men's work', and material pay advantages, particularly for non-professionals, which in some cases produced a shift in the domestic division of labour within households.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Rationale for the research

This study brings together two recurrent areas of interest that have occupied my thoughts during my years as a researcher into the world of work. The first is a longstanding puzzlement over why occupational gender segregation has remained so persistent in some sectors, despite a significant increase in women's labour market participation in the UK overall (EOC, 2006) and their continued advance into professional and managerial positions (Glover and Kirton, 2006; Walby, 1997). The second is an interest in the experience of sexual minorities in the workplace, in particular lesbians and bisexual women, and the extent to which this differs from the experience of heterosexual women. This second interest thus provides a focus for the first in this study of women's experience of non-traditionally female work that examines the intersections of gender, sexuality and occupational class in the construction and transport sectors.

In theoretical terms, therefore, the thesis is concerned with how to both conceptualise and empirically research women's heterogeneity – and, in particular, to understand how gender, sexuality and occupational class intersect to shape women's working lives – without losing sight of gender as social division with significant material consequences. Heavily male-dominated¹ industrial sectors, and non-traditionally female occupations within these, provide sites of particular interest for an examination of how the social divisions of gender, sexuality and class are interrelated and intertwined in workplace experience, as well as addressing gaps in the academic literature, as summarised below.

A strong interest in the capacity of policy interventions to reduce workplace and labour market inequalities (inspired by my background as a researcher for the labour movement) also underlies my choice of research topic and interest in policy measures to reduce occupational gender segregation. The research has been carried out at a historical moment (between 2007 and 2011) when there was a focus by the Labour government in power until May 2010 on reducing the persistent gender pay gap, which included efforts to overcome occupational gender segregation, as one of the principal causes of pay

¹ I use the term 'male-dominated' throughout to refer to men's numerical dominance of occupations or industries; men may also be 'dominant' in terms of gender power relations, which will be discussed, but this is not the intended meaning here.

inequality. Indeed, although broadly aware of some activity in this area before embarking on this project, I was surprised to find during the course of the research the extent and variety of initiatives being undertaken to encourage women to enter or progress in male-dominated occupations. The study is therefore primarily concerned with the horizontal segregation of men and women into different industries and occupations, rather than vertical gender segregation across occupational hierarchies (although vertical segregation also occurs within male-dominated occupations).

My initial examination of the literature on women in non-traditionally female work, as well as previous research that I had undertaken on the fire service (Wright, 2005; 2008), confirmed that gender and sexuality were closely intertwined in women's experiences of the workplace. This may be so for women in all workplaces, but heavily male-dominated work environments offer a site where sexuality is brought into even sharper focus. Women are constantly reminded of their female embodiment when they enter traditionally male worlds of work and sexuality is used to control women workers, often through sexual harassment (Collinson and Collinson, 1996). Women are often seen only in terms of their sexual availability to men, and may be cast as a 'dyke' if they are not available (McDowell, 1997: 141). Cockburn (1991: 196) observed that lesbianism can be "used as a category with which to control heterosexual women". Thus "the lesbian" is present as a figure in organisational discourses, but I found that her experience as a real-life woman was mostly absent from studies of non-traditionally female work, one of the research gaps that this thesis seeks to address.

My review of the literature on lesbians at work gave indications that lesbians may be more attracted to male-dominated work than are heterosexual women, perhaps being more likely to reject pressure to pursue gender-traditional interests and occupations. Yet I initially found no studies of gender atypical work among lesbians here either, although during the course of the research a small number of studies from the United States were identified, as well as an equally small number of recent gender-focused studies that considered lesbian sexuality, suggesting that there may be a small but growing interest in (minority) sexuality. In the UK recent advances in legal rights for lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people gave protection from discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation at work in 2003 and the Civil Partnership Act in 2004 gave same-sex couples the right to register their relationship and acquire rights equivalent to marriage. This has contributed to a greater awareness of sexual orientation as an employment

issue, combined with increasing recognition of ‘business case’ arguments for LGB equality measures among public and private sector employers, evidenced by growing membership of Stonewall’s Diversity Champions scheme (Stonewall, 2010). This makes it a particularly interesting time to focus on intersections of gender and sexuality in the workplace, specifically in areas that have largely been male domains.

The research, though, is not solely a study of minority sexuality, but instead aims to bring insights from the growing literature on lesbians, gay men and bisexuals at work into ‘mainstream’ sociological analysis of gender and work. By exploring the heterogeneity of women’s experience and paying closer attention to how processes of dominant heterosexuality affect the lives of *all* women (Rich, [1980] 1996), I support Dunne’s (2000a: 135) contention that this can enable “more intellectually rigorous accounts of how the gender order is reproduced, sustained and importantly of how it can be changed”. My research therefore seeks to contribute to knowledge by foregrounding sexuality in considering both the experiences of women who have a majority sexual orientation (heterosexuals) and women with a minority sexuality (lesbians)² to explore the interactions of both gender and sexuality in women’s working lives.

Furthermore, women’s experience of work is shaped and differentiated by social class, and while there has been considerable attention to understanding the interaction of gender and class (for example, Acker, 2006a; Bradley, 1999; Cockburn, 1991; Crompton, 2008; Pollert, 1996; Skeggs, 1997), research on the relationship between class and sexuality in workplace experience is less developed. Studies of minority sexuality have mostly focused on professional or middle-class samples. In the non-traditional sectors examined by this thesis, it will also be shown that women’s underrepresentation in professional construction roles has attracted greater academic interest than their low participation in skilled manual trades. In transport, however, there has been little research on women workers in either professional or operational jobs.

This study therefore is addressing these gaps in the existing research and considers occupational class as a further differentiator of women’s experience of non-traditionally female work. There are extensive debates about meanings, definitions and use of class as an analytical category that are beyond the scope of this thesis (see Crompton and

² I intended to include bisexual women in the sample, but none of the women who volunteered to take part identified as bisexual. Access to interviewees is discussed in Chapter 4.

Scott, 2000) and I recognise the problematic nature of taking occupation as a measure of class (Crompton, 2008: 51-2; 2010: 11-12), including lack of attention to cultural meanings (Skeggs, 1997). However I am using occupational group as a proxy for 'class' (Crompton, 2010: 12) to examine differences in women's experience of male-dominated work by including in my sample of interviewees women in a range of professional, managerial and skilled manual occupations.

In order to grasp the heterogeneity of women's experience of male-dominated work I argue that an intersectional approach is needed. Intersectionality is a much debated, complex and 'murky' concept (Nash, 2008) as I will show, but the methodological approach that I find most useful for the aims of this study is McCall's (2005) intercategory approach. Unlike intersectional approaches that either seek to deconstruct social categories such as gender or race, or focus on neglected points of intersection, such as the experiences of black women, the intercategory approach takes the relationships of inequality among social groups as the centre of analysis and seeks to uncover the links between inequality and the categories themselves. This has the benefit of examining "both advantage and disadvantage explicitly and simultaneously" (ibid: 1787).

In considering both advantage and disadvantage, this approach avoids an additive or cumulative understanding of oppression in which combinations of forms of potential or actual disadvantage necessarily lead to double oppression. The literature suggests that the interaction of social divisions is more complex: for example, while lesbians face discrimination at work on grounds of their sexuality, and confront ongoing decisions about when, where and to whom they should be open ('out') about their sexuality, there are indications that lesbians who are out at work may experience some 'benefits' compared to heterosexual women, even if based on inaccurate stereotypes of lesbian lifestyles. Such advantages, though, may not apply equally, and factors such as class or ethnicity are also salient in the experience of work. McCall's (2005) intercategory intersectional approach enables an examination of how gender, sexuality and occupational group interact to advantage and disadvantage women in male-dominated work, without presuming the nature or direction of these relationships in advance.

Despite the theoretical interest in concepts of intersectionality, there have been few empirical analyses of working life that put these into practice. Additionally, sexuality has largely been left out of the 'intersectional turn' (Hines, 2011: 143), therefore the

frameworks for research are not well developed. This thesis, however, will extend Acker's (2006a; 2006b) conceptual framework of 'inequality regimes', devised to examine the relationship between class, gender, and racial inequalities within organisations, to include sexuality. Acker notes that sexuality, while significant in processes of inequality, is not as thoroughly embedded in organising processes as gender, race, and class. However, I argue that sexuality – and in particular dominant heterosexuality – has a central place in organisational processes and is deeply entwined with gender.

1.2 Research aims and questions

Following the aims and intersectional approach proposed above, my overarching research objective can be stated as follows: To explore the intersections of gender, sexuality and occupational class to contribute to a fuller understanding of women's experience of male-dominated work in the construction and transport sectors.

Underlying this objective is a belief that a better appreciation of the heterogeneity of women's work experience will provide insights that can assist in the recruitment and retention of women in traditionally male work. To achieve this aim, the research focuses on male-dominated occupations within two of the most heavily male-dominated industrial sectors in the UK, transport and construction. The research does not intend to be an in-depth case study of gender inequality in these two sectors, but rather takes these sectors as exemplars of the processes and practices in operation within male-dominated work.

My reviews of the literature on gender and work, focused on occupational segregation and gender atypical areas, and on sexuality and work, produced further areas for exploration. My specific research questions are:

1. What is the current policy context in which women are seeking to enter and are working in the construction and transport sectors?
2. What are the reasons women choose to enter traditionally male occupations, and do these differ for heterosexual women and lesbians?
3. How is women's experience of male-dominated work differentiated by sexual orientation and occupational group?

4. What are women's attitudes to, and experiences of, support structures and networks (particularly women's and LGBT), including those of trade unions, and how does sexuality differentiate their experience?
5. How do the domestic circumstances of lesbian and heterosexual women affect their participation in male-dominated work?

1.3 Structure of the thesis

This introductory chapter contains an initial overview of the rationale for my research and sets out the research questions. Chapter 2 introduces some explanations for occupational gender segregation, noting that economic theories alone do not offer adequate understanding without gender theories. It then examines empirical evidence from studies of gender atypical work, which highlights the importance of sexuality, but argues that there are gaps in the literature concerning the experiences of lesbians in traditionally male occupations. To redress this imbalance it examines literature on lesbian and gay sexuality at work, but finds this is centred primarily on the experiences of professional or middle-class samples, suggesting a further gap in the literature.

The theoretical and analytical framework which this research draws upon is set out in Chapter 3, describing the contributions of feminist theory and showing how black feminism has been influential in developing theories of intersectionality. Acker's framework for understanding the intersections of gender, race and class in organisations is outlined here. The chapter also highlights the importance of gendered power relations in male-dominated work and proposes that Harriet Bradley's (1999) gendered power resources offer a useful tool for probing these that can develop and deepen analysis at the level of Acker's component of organising processes.

The notion of identity is crucial to the discussion, and Jenkins's (2004) conceptualisation of the process of identification as an internal-external dialectic in which individual and collective identities are always constituted in relation to each other is a useful way of considering how gender and sexual identities impact on choice and experience of non-traditional work. Furthermore his understanding of the consequences of identification for the allocation of resources complements Acker's and Bradley's attention to power relations.

Chapter 4 examines the contribution of feminist standpoint theory to debates about epistemology, and welcomes the explicitly emancipatory aims of feminist methodology.

The chapter finds value in an approach that seeks to overcome the dualism of macro and micro, agency and structure debates and seeks to connect multiple levels of social reality, through a view of the social world as four interconnected domains: psychobiography, situated activity, social settings and contextual resources (Layder, 2006). This framework shapes both my research design and analysis, which is set out in Chapter 4, taking a qualitative approach that is most suited to answering my research questions about the meanings and interpretations that individuals give to their experiences. The empirical data collected consist of: interviews with key experts in the area of women in traditionally male work to provide contextual data; observation of events concerned with women's participation in non-traditional work; two focus groups with women seeking to enter and already working in the building trades; and interviews with women workers in the construction and transport sectors. Chapter 4 also discusses ethical issues related to researching sexuality, and reflects on the effects of the researcher's positionality on the research process.

Chapter 5 sets the scene for the findings chapters by introducing the construction and transport sectors and some recent policy measures seeking to increase women's participation in non-traditional occupations. The chapter draws on both existing literature and the range of sources of empirical evidence collected for this study. It introduces key themes that will be examined in greater depth in the analysis of the interviews with women workers in the following chapters.

Chapters 6 to 9 present the main findings from the empirical research, and are structured using Layder's (1993) multi-level model of self, situated activity, setting and context. The focus of Chapter 6 is primarily on the level of self – that of identity formation – which is necessarily entwined with its expression in the workplace, discussed further in Chapter 7, which employs Acker's and Bradley's frameworks to consider the organisational setting of workplace interactions. Chapter 8 combines concepts of identification with organisational inclusion and exclusion in considering informal and formal sources of support, including professional and staff networks, and trade union women's and LGBT structures. The crucial interrelationship of home and work lives is analysed in Chapter 9, which centres on the interaction of two elements of Layder's level of setting – family and organisation – in examining differences in how the domestic lives of lesbians and heterosexual women affect their participation in male-dominated work.

Finally, in the concluding chapter, Layder's levels are brought together in a discussion of how the empirical research findings answered the research questions set out here, together with an assessment of the adequacy of the theoretical frameworks for analysing the research data. Some contributions of this study are proposed, highlighting its originality in applying an intersectional methodology to an empirical investigation of gender, sexuality and occupation class in male-dominated work. I then reflect on the value of the research methodology chosen and discuss some limitations. Finally I consider some policy implications arising from the research findings and suggest some areas that I feel would be fruitful for further research, before offering some final remarks on the anticipated contribution of the thesis.

2 Gender and sexuality in the workplace: literature review

2.1 Introduction

The aims of this chapter are to draw out themes relevant to my investigation of gender and sexuality in male-dominated work and to identify gaps in the existing literature. It begins at the macro level with a discussion of theories that seek to explain the persistence of occupational gender segregation, a discussion which introduces a number of key issues pertinent to gender and work. Human capital and labour market segmentation explanations are found to be insufficient without gender theories that seek to understand the roots of occupational gender segregation. Furthermore, explanations at this level cannot account for the complex interaction between identity, choice and the operation of gendered and sexualised processes in the workplace. Therefore the chapter turns to empirical examinations of women and men in gender atypical work, exploring the ways in which gender is made salient for workers, but also revealing its interrelationship with sexuality in the daily experience of work. A contrasting perspective on the gendered impact of minority status is offered where men are in a minority among women at work.

While sexuality is a prominent theme in studies of gender atypical work, heterosexual presumptions prevail and I identify a gap concerning the experience of lesbian workers in studies of women in male-dominated work. To redress this imbalance, I then review research on lesbians and gay men at work, followed by a more in-depth examination of studies of lesbians at work, looking both for evidence of their experience of male-dominated work, as well as insights from studies of minority sexuality at work that might assist in understanding processes of heteronormativity that shape experience of both gender and sexuality in male-dominated work. In reviewing this literature I also identify a shortage of studies of sexuality and class, specifically in relation to working-class experience.

Finally the chapter considers the significance of the domestic division of labour for the labour market participation of women and men, but paying particular attention to the less explored area of how lesbian couples organise their domestic division of labour and parenting roles, and its relationship to participation in paid work. In addition to increasing our knowledge of lesbian experience, this emphasis can, I argue, offer insights into how processes of heterosexuality affect the working lives of *all* women.

2.2 Occupational gender segregation

Occupational segregation by gender has been identified as “one of the most important and enduring aspects of labour markets around the world” (Anker, 1997: 315).

Occupational segregation is described as both ‘horizontal’ – in which women and men are concentrated in different occupations – and ‘vertical’, in which women predominantly occupy lower positions within occupations (Hakim, 1979). This thesis is primarily concerned with horizontal segregation, by focusing on male-dominated occupations within two substantially male-dominated industries, but also takes account of the vertical segregation that exists within occupations where women and men hold different jobs (Reskin and Roos, 1990). The extent of horizontal segregation in the UK is illustrated by evidence that 60 percent of women workers are employed in just ten out of 77 occupations, concentrated in what are known as ‘the five Cs’: caring, cashiering, catering, cleaning and clerical (HMSO, 2005: 6).

2.2.1 Theories of occupational gender segregation

Explanations for occupational gender segregation broadly divide into those that emphasise labour supply and labour demand factors. Labour supply arguments tend to emphasise the factors that lead women to ‘prefer’ certain female-dominated occupations, whereas labour demand explanations focus on why employers tend to select women and men for different jobs and the barriers to progression within firms (Anker, 1997). Cross-cutting this division, Anker (1997) categorises three types of theories to explain occupational gender segregation: neo-classical and human capital theories; institutional and labour market segmentation theories; and feminist or gender theories. Neo-classical and human capital theories stress women’s lower levels of human capital, in terms of education and experience of work (due to truncated labour market participation because of childcare responsibilities) resulting, rightfully, in reduced work opportunities and pay. Anker notes the circularity of such arguments, in that decisions about girls’ education are made in relation to their expected lower levels of participation in the labour market, thus they accumulate less work experience because they do not have the same labour market opportunities as men. Human capital theories also assume that workers are rewarded in proportion to their skills, however evidence of women’s increased educational achievement is not necessarily matched by increased pay or opportunities to progress within occupations (Bagilhole, 2002: 30-31). Miller et al’s (2004a: 30) review of the evidence concludes that while human capital

theory may account for a small proportion of gendered differences in employment, when qualifications and experience are the same, there remains an advantage for men that cannot be explained by human capital differences. On the labour demand side, neo-classical and human capital theories might predict that it is rational for employers to prefer male and female workers for different jobs, given their different skills and experience, as well as women's association with domestic responsibilities, which might make them less reliable and higher cost to employ. But Anker (1997: 319) notes the paucity of evidence to suggest that women bring higher direct and indirect labour costs, and international studies find similar turnover rates for women and men.

The second group of theories categorised by Anker (1997) focus on the role of institutions in determining patterns of employment and pay and the assumption of segmented labour markets, such as dual labour market theory, which divides the labour market into primary and secondary sector jobs, in which the former attract good pay, conditions and opportunities, while the latter have little protection and poorer pay and conditions. Thus 'women's' jobs – such as cleaning and care work – are concentrated in the secondary sector – with little prospect of progression into the primary sector. However this fails to account for women's increasing participation in primary jobs, such as the professions (EHRC, 2010; EOC, 2006), as well as the indistinct boundaries between so-called primary and secondary jobs. Thus while such theories highlight patterns of gender segregation in the labour market, they fail to explain *why* occupations are segmented by gender (Anker, 1997). Anker (1997: 323) concludes that economic theories alone cannot understand the non-economic variables related to occupational gender segregation, such as why domestic work is predominantly the responsibility of women; why gender segregation persists despite considerable overlap in the abilities of men and women; and why sex stereotyping is reflected consistently in 'female' occupations. Feminist or gender theories are necessary to provide a fuller explanation.

Chapter 3 will examine the concept of patriarchy as a set of structures that maintain male domination, affecting household production, paid work, the state, male violence, patriarchal relations in sexuality and in cultural institutions (Walby, 1990). Theories of patriarchy thus emphasise the operation of male power in the gendered segregation of occupations, or as Cockburn (1988: 41) has said: "Behind occupational segregation is gender differentiation, and behind that again is male power".

Reskin and Roos (1990) locate gender as central to their conceptualisation of labour demand and supply processes of occupational segregation that stem from the operation of ‘labour queues’ in which employers rank possible workers, and ‘job queues’ – in which workers rank jobs. A matching process takes place in which the top-ranked workers get the most attractive jobs, with the lowest ranked workers ending up in jobs rejected by others. Labour queues are gendered in that employers typically select men first for the top jobs, for example following the economic rationales outlined by Anker (1997) above. Ethnicity is also a factor, with white males preferred for many jobs. However employers may favour women at certain times, for example where labour costs are under pressure and women can offer labour more cheaply. The labour-supply side of Reskin and Roos’ (1990) argument takes account of non-economic factors such as stereotypes, prejudices, custom and peer pressure that lead workers to rank jobs in a certain way, and for example may lead women to deselect themselves for certain typically male jobs.

Their analysis of the inroads that women made into some male occupations in the USA in the 1970s and 1980s highlights gendered power by illustrating the coalitions between employers and male workers to exclude women and the resistance of male workers to employer attempts to hire women (as well as resistance by unions). However their queuing theory may be somewhat inflexible in explaining the complexities of how multiple or intersecting employee identities can affect their labour market position. The theory of gender queues, as interpreted by Bagilhole (2002: 32), suggests that “if an employer cannot recruit his ideal men, he will look to the next suitably qualified white, young, single, non-disabled, heterosexual women”. Such hierarchical ranking may not allow for the possibility, for example, that lesbians are sometimes perceived by employers as more committed to work than heterosexual women of childbearing age (see 2.8). Furthermore, this theory may not adequately account for changing employer practices in relation to recruiting a more diverse workforce.

Explanations for occupational gender segregation cannot ignore the relationship between women’s participation in paid and unpaid work both in assumptions made by employers and employee choices over how to accommodate work and domestic commitments (Bagilhole, 2002) (see 2.8). However the question of choice and ‘preference’ in relation to women’s employment is a highly contested one, exemplified by the debates over Catherine Hakim’s preference theory (Hakim, 1991; 1995; 1998;

2000). In brief, Hakim (1998: 140-1) sought to explain why women “enthusiastically” seek part-time work in all societies and the widespread patterns of occupational segregation by gender, and found an answer in a categorisation of women into three types: home-centred women, for whom children and family are the main priorities throughout life (accounting for an estimated 20% of women); adaptive women who want to combine work and family (around 60% of women) and work-centred women, often childless, for whom the main priority is employment or activities such as politics, sport, art, and so on.

Her theory has attracted criticism on many grounds, including that it is too static (Bruegel, 1996) and does not reflect the heterogeneity of the part-time workforce (Walsh, 1999) or the fact that women’s orientation to paid work fluctuates over the life course as childcare and other domestic responsibilities change (Ginn et al., 1996; Walsh, 1999), making the use of fixed categories to explain women’s behaviour somewhat limited (Crompton and Harris, 1999).

Most relevant to our discussion here is Hakim’s emphasis on women’s freedom to choose the types of work that suit their preferred orientation. Although Hakim (2002: 453-4) claims not to deny the influence of social, economic, and institutional factors, she believes that equal opportunities policies and practices have given women “genuine choices” in balancing paid work and family lives. She goes so far as to say that gender is not relevant in preference theory, where men and women have free choice (Hakim, 2004). Numerous experts on gender and work have taken issue with this emphasis on free choice, preferring a notion of constrained choice in recognition of the variety of factors influencing labour market decisions, in addition to domestic and family circumstances, such as educational and class backgrounds, employer and societal norms around age, gender or ethnic suitability for particular forms of work, the availability of work etc. (Arber and Ginn, 1995; Crompton and Harris, 1999; Devine, 1994; Glover and Kirton, 2006: 16; Healy, 1999; Procter and Padfield, 1999; Walsh, 1999; Woodfield, 2007).

Devine (1994) clearly shows how gendered attitudes affect career choice for young women entering engineering professions, but argues that some predominantly middle-class women overcome these with parental encouragement. Thus the social circumstances of a privileged group of women, who had mostly attended single-sex grammar schools, enabled them to make non-traditional choices, although they still

faced discouragement from entering engineering. Devine's study thus highlights not only the gendered attitudes constraining women's work choices, but also the social class privileges that differentiate women's opportunities, countering explanations based on "free choice".

Despite seeking a theory to understand patterns of occupational segregation, Hakim finds no strong association between women's work orientations and whether they choose female- or male-oriented occupations. She says only that: "Explanations for the sex segregation of occupations will have to rely instead on benign social processes, such as the tendency for people to choose same-sex friends and hence also to prefer same-sex work groups" (Hakim, 2002: 451). The view that such social processes are 'benign' is challenged by the extensive evidence (presented in 2.3 and in my findings in Chapter 7) of processes that exclude or marginalise women in predominantly opposite-sex work groups, including practices such as sexual harassment, which are far from benign. This explanation also offers little understanding of why some women *do* choose to work in groups predominantly of the opposite sex. Indeed it reflects a major limitation in explanations for occupational segregation, according to Woodfield (2007), that emphasise individual factors but rely on statistical methods of gathering empirical data and fail to access the narrative explanations of work choices from women themselves. It also underplays how processes of gender and sexual identification are deeply intertwined with, and reinforced by, work choices and experience (see 3.5 and Chapter 6).

A further debate over the role of 'choice' that feeds into supply and demand explanations for occupational sex segregation has taken place more recently in response to Paula England's (2010) reflections on the "uneven and stalled" gender revolution. Discussing the US, England notes the far greater integration of women into middle-class, previously male-dominated professions and management jobs than into working-class manufacturing and blue-collar trades, which she says have seen little change since 1950. Her explanation is based on the continuing strength of beliefs in "gender essentialism" - that women and men are fundamentally different - which results in women only seeking to 'move up' into male-dominated fields where there are no prospects for advancement in female areas. So for middle-class women whose mothers were already teachers, nurses or social workers, moving up in status required them to enter male professions such as law, medicine or academia. But working-class women

had the option to move up into higher status female jobs through greater education, without transgressing gender boundaries. England's (2010) hypotheses have been critiqued on several grounds, but most relevant here is her emphasis on supply-side explanations for women's employment outcomes rather than demand-side barriers. Reskin and Moroto (2011) point out that workers' choices are unavoidably affected by the operation of labour markets, by the discretionary and often discriminatory hiring practices of employers and managers that they have documented through discrimination lawsuits. Similarly Bergmann (2011) highlights the resistance to women's entry into many male-dominated occupations, such as the construction trades, including the resistance of co-workers, employer beliefs that hiring a woman will reduce group cohesion and limited access to training through apprenticeships. In response, England has acknowledged the importance of demand-side explanations, but maintains that supply-side forces such as internalized preferences interact with discrimination to produce occupational sex segregation, particularly in blue-collar occupations (Prokos, 2011). Chapter 5 considers these debates further drawing on evidence from those in the UK transport and construction sectors.

2.2.2 The effects of occupational gender segregation

A further reason to be concerned about occupational gender segregation is its contribution to labour market rigidity and economic inefficiency (Anker, 1997). Indeed 'business case' arguments are commonly put forward for tackling occupational gender segregation, highlighting the skills shortages identified in many male-dominated occupations and the need to train more women to enter such occupations (EOC, 2004; Miller et al., 2004a).

The Women and Work Commission (2006: 6) stated that the productive potential of the economy could be increased by between £2 billion and £9 billion if women were to move into higher-paid occupations or higher-grade roles in their current occupations, noting the significant impact of occupational segregation on women's pay. However the fragility of using such arguments alone can be seen when economic circumstances change, such as recession during the period in which this thesis was conducted, impacting heavily on the construction sector.

Occupational gender segregation has been identified as one of the three principal causes of the persistent pay gap in the UK between men and women, alongside the unequal

impact of women's family responsibilities and pay discrimination (EOC, 2001). While it is easy to demonstrate that vertical segregation directly impacts on women's pay by highlighting men's disproportionate occupation of higher paid positions and women's concentration at lower paid levels, Glover and Kirton (2006: 31-33) point out that research evidence does not automatically indicate a link between horizontal occupational segregation and female disadvantage at work.

While some (for example, Reskin and Roos, 1990) argue that occupational segregation is clearly linked to unequal pay, Glover and Kirton (2006: 32) cite the Scandinavian case where occupational gender segregation is high, but there is a relatively small gender pay gap. The key factor here is that these female dominated occupations are not necessarily poorly paid, which suggests no *automatic* association between unequal pay and occupational gender segregation.

Table 1: Occupational segregation 2005 United Kingdom

	Average pay, £ ¹	Employees		
		% women	% men	Thousands
High-paid jobs				
Directors & chief executives of major organisations	56.33	17	83	87
Medical practitioners	33.01	37	63	176
Financial managers & chartered secretaries	29.92	32	68	259
Solicitors & lawyers, judges & coroners	25.89	47	53	94
Marketing & sales managers	22.68	29	71	513
Low-paid jobs				
Receptionists	7.07	95	5	219
Sales & retail assistants	6.16	72	28	1,170
Cleaners & domestics	6.04	76	24	590
Retail cashiers & check-out operators	5.85	67	33	221
Kitchen & catering assistants	5.74	73	27	376

1. Mean hourly pay (£) excluding overtime of all employees, full-time and part-time.

Source: Adapted from EOC (2006: 24), Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2005.

Nevertheless, in practice in the UK evidence shows a clear pattern of high-paid occupations which are dominated by men and low-paid jobs occupied primarily by women, as illustrated in Table 1, which shows five of the 10 highest and lowest paid occupations.

However, patterns of occupational segregation have altered, with a decrease in segregation by sex in the upper occupational orders as women have moved into professional and managerial occupations (Table 1 shows, for example, that the legal profession is now almost gender balanced) while lower occupational orders remain highly segregated. Thus opportunities available to women vary widely, and in Chapter 6, I explore occupational class differences in interviewees' reasons for entering male-dominated work and show how this relates to concerns about male and female pay levels.

2.3 Women in non-traditional work

Women who break into traditionally male spheres of work – either by transcending vertical segregation through rising up the management ladder or by crossing the horizontal barrier into occupations typically done by men – are of particular interest to those wishing to challenge traditional gender hierarchies and roles. The entry of women into jobs traditionally said to require “masculine” traits or attributes challenges the supposed “naturalness” of the association of these traits with men. As Reskin and Padavic (1988) argue, women's presence challenges the ideology of inherent differences that justifies male dominance, questioning how men's work can continue to serve as a rugged test of manhood if women can do it.

Many studies have considered women's participation in typically male work, which can be separated into three broad strands: women in male-dominated professional occupations (for example, Bagilhole, 2002; Martin and Jurik, 2007; Spencer and Podmore, 1987); women in male-dominated manual occupations (e.g. Clarke et al., 2004; Colgan et al., 1996; Reskin and Padavic, 1988; Weston, 1998; Whittock, 2000); and women in managerial positions traditionally dominated by men (Bagilhole, 2002; Marshall, 1984; 1995). Additionally, studies of both men and women in male-dominated corporations or industries have provided detailed analyses of gender relations in the workplace (Cockburn, 1985; Kanter, 1977; McDowell, 1997; Paap, 2006; Wajcman, 1998).

2.3.1 “One of the boys”

While the work environments discussed in each of these types of studies, as well as the class relations involved in different types of occupations, are very different, some common themes occur when women are a minority in male-dominated workplaces. A key question for much of the literature on women in non-traditional work is that posed by Barbara Bagilhole: “If women work in non-traditional, male-dominated work, are they agents for change or [have they] changed themselves?” (2002: 2). The literature shows that a common strategy for survival in a male-dominated environment is to attempt to fit in with the men and become “one of the boys”. This involves stressing sameness to, rather than difference from, male colleagues and de-emphasising any traits associated with femininity and takes many forms. Labels can be important, so women may wish to be seen as an “engineer”, not a “woman engineer” (Miller, 2004). Women commonly feel they have to be “twice as good” as male colleagues (Bradley, 1999) and in manual jobs they have to prove themselves to be physically equal to men (Weston, 1998). Physical appearance is emphasised and women expend considerable efforts adapting their hair and clothes to signal the appropriate message (McDowell, 1997), which in manual work may involve wearing male clothes to disguise the female figure (Bagilhole, 2002). While some women felt that they had succeeded in being accepted as ‘one of the lads’ (Bagilhole, 2002: 157; McDowell, 1997: 155), others were sceptical of this strategy ever succeeding. One female director in McDowell’s (1997) study of women and men in City of London investment banks had tried adapting to masculine norms, but had abandoned this approach, believing: “It’s not going to work. *I’ll never be a man as well as a man is.*” (1997: 156, emphasis in original).

The problem, though, is that however much women try to play down their differences, their male colleagues constantly seek to reassert such differences to maintain gendered power relations (Henwood, 1998). Indeed Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977), in her classic study of a US corporation, observed that the dominant group tend to exaggerate the differences between themselves and the minority group (“tokens”) when faced with a challenge to their group culture from the presence of an “outsider”. They respond by “heightening the boundary” between themselves and the token, which can take the form of exclusionary conversations, for example about football or sexual conquests, often acted out more fervently in the presence of the token woman than if the men had been alone. In Kanter’s conceptualisation, however, it is the fact of minority status rather than

gender that affects how tokens are treated, so men in a minority would suffer similar exclusion. But as we see below, studies of men in female-dominated work show very different outcomes, underlining the significance of gender.

2.3.2 *Sexuality and embodiment*

Women are constantly reminded of their physical difference from men, their possession of a female body, through comments about appearance, bodies (Cockburn, 1991; McDowell, 1997) and reminders of their reproductive capacity. Indeed, women are seen as “one of the maternal sex” even when celibate or childless (Cockburn, 1991: 76). Thus embodiment and sexuality are inevitably invoked when women are present in work organisations, particularly in heavily male-dominated and masculinised workplaces. The sexualisation of the workplace is one way in which men seek to assert and maintain their domination over women, and women are frequently seen in sexualised terms. Sexual harassment is one form of exerting power over women through sexuality (Hearn and Parkin, 2001), and research has shown that it may be more extensive and aggressive for women in male occupations than in typically female employment (Collinson and Collinson, 1996) and may consciously be employed to exclude women from better paying ‘male’ jobs (DiTomaso, 1989). But even in everyday relations, women are seen in sexualised terms, with the roles available to women fairly limited, as one of McDowell’s (1997: 141) female traders in an investment bank observes:

“If you are seen as feminine or desirable they think you’re available, and if you are not they call you a dyke”.

This occurs in both professional and non-professional occupations: in my study of the UK fire service, female firefighters were perceived as either “a fire tart or a lesbian”, in the words of a senior equality officer (Wright, 2008). Cockburn (1991) has shown how women are kept as “outsiders” by men through the sexualisation of the workplace, and observed specifically that lesbianism can be “used as a category with which to control heterosexual women” (1991: 196), a form of control also noted in other studies (Colgan et al., 1996: 265; Henwood, 1998: 45; Martin and Jurik, 2007: 44; Paap, 2006).

Furthermore in some occupations it can be presumed that a woman must be a lesbian, for example if she is working in the male-dominated trades (Denisson and Saguy, forthcoming: 17). In the US building trades, ‘dyke-baiting’ is suffered by all women, gay and straight, as an assertion of male power when women transgress traditional

gender roles (Frank, 2001). Defining women as lesbians (regardless of their actual sexual orientation) makes them less threatening to the ideologies of masculinity associated with construction work, as they can be perceived as “unnatural” women. Presumed lesbians do not “disturb the gender order” as heterosexual women might (Paap, 2006: 87). Thus we see that the “lesbian” is clearly present as a figure in organisational discourses. However as a real-life woman she is mostly absent from studies of women in the workplace, as I discuss further below.

McDowell notes that the roles available to women at work are typically either familial or sexualised ones (1997: 152) and Kanter found women confined to four “informal role traps”, that of “mother”, “seductress”, “pet” and “iron maiden” (1977: 233). The difficulty of finding a positive image of a powerful woman is recognised by McDowell, who adds a further negative role of “careerist”, with its connotations of neglect of family or even of motherhood (1997: 152).

Nevertheless, women in City of London investment banks tried to subvert the available roles offered to them, through “masquerades” or “parodies” of traditional femininity. Using Butler’s (1990) notion of gender as a ‘cultural performance’, in which women and men enact embodied performances that transgress gender boundaries and may construct ‘multiple positions’ in relation to their gender, McDowell (1997) shows how women consciously used or manipulated their femininity in relations with men. McDowell (1997) found a growing emphasis on bodies and physical appearance among men in the City of London, and noted a “feminisation” of all workers in the shift towards a service culture that lays emphasis on personal interactions with clients. However, despite these changes, one alternative version of masculinity, homosexuality, was abhorred, and a number of male respondents had decided to conceal their sexual preference at work.

Lesbian sexuality is not discussed in McDowell’s study, other than the use of ‘lesbian’ as a label for women who are seen as unfriendly to men. This suggests that she came across no women who revealed non-heterosexual sexuality to her, which may not be surprising given the highly masculinised and heterosexualised environment that she describes. Yet McDowell’s analysis raises questions about how a lesbian would experience such a work environment, and her notion of a ‘fluid gender performance’ could be extended to situations where a woman’s sexuality may be in question. In the following example, an openly lesbian firefighter (Wright, 2008) may be employing a

fluid performance of gender *and* sexuality in her enjoyment of the confusion that her sexuality presented to male colleagues:

“I think it challenges them quite a bit, to know how to treat you and where to place you, which is always good fun. You can always shift the boundaries a little bit.”

And it may not only be lesbians who are able to sow confusion around their sexuality. A heterosexual woman in the study also played with such boundaries, by joking that she was a lesbian – expecting not to be believed – but then found that the perception that she was a lesbian was beneficial in avoiding unwanted sexual attention from men.

2.3.3 *Where are the lesbians?*

We have seen that the figure of the “lesbian” is invoked in organisational discourses as a way of controlling women, regardless of their actual sexuality. Yet these same works tend to overlook the sexual orientation of the women studied and render invisible non-heterosexual experience. An intriguing example is Wajcman’s study of senior managers which examines their domestic lives to reveal very different household formations for male and female managers, but nothing about their sexual orientation (see 2.8).

A handful of exceptions include Cynthia Cockburn’s (1991: 194-5) study which finds that “careful lesbians” in senior posts were accorded loyalty in the relatively tolerant environment of the civil service, but a lesbian who was open with colleagues about her sexuality believed this would adversely affect her prospects of promotion. Lesbians also make an appearance in Chetkovich’s (1997) study of race and gender in a US fire service, which finds that a number of the women were openly lesbian and suggests that this was advantageous in some respects and disadvantageous in others. On the negative side the environment was described as socially conservative and homophobic with homosexuality a frequent topic of humour. More positively an open lesbian was able to tease and joke with her colleagues without suggesting that she was open to sexual advances. In addition, Chetkovich observed that lesbians were experienced in outsider status and the crafting of non-traditional identities, so were sometimes better prepared to adapt to the male traditions of the fire department than heterosexual women.

There are some indications that non-heterosexual sexuality is beginning to be included in research on women and work as greater attention is paid to the intersections of gender, race, class and sexual orientation. For example, the second edition of Martin and Jurik’s (2007) volume on women in legal and criminal justice occupations in the

US discusses sexual orientation, and in particular the experience of lesbian police officers, in a way that the original 1996 edition did not. Lesbian officers faced problems of homophobic attitudes from colleagues and the public, making it difficult to decide to come out. They also felt they had to make extra efforts to prove themselves as competent officers, and sought to gain acceptance by separating themselves from “typical” (heterosexual) female officers and proving themselves to be “tough crime fighters” (ibid: 74).

Additionally, two US articles specifically discuss lesbians working in construction (Denissen and Saguy, forthcoming; Frank, 2001). Both record that building sites are very difficult places in which to be openly lesbian, but also are frequently hostile places for all women, regardless of sexuality. Lesbians in the building trades face heightened visibility and constant suspicion because of the presumption that women in the trades must be gay, and that they thus engage in complex risk assessments before coming out to their co-workers (Denissen and Saguy, forthcoming). Similarly Frank (2001) observes the difficulties for lesbians in being open about their sexual identity in hostile work cultures, although notes the greater confidence of some younger lesbians as a result of late 1990s affirmative action hiring and apprenticeship policies.

In the UK, Christine Wall (2004) reflected on her experiences of the manual trades during the 1970s and 1980s, also noting the predominance of lesbians, who she believed must have made up at least 50 per cent of the organisation representing tradeswomen, *Women and Manual Trades*, at the time. However, she says:

“The prospect of being an ‘out’ lesbian in the macho world of construction was never a great ambition for any of us. In 1978 when I started at a Skillcentre on a carpentry and joinery course I had been ‘out’ and living an openly lesbian lifestyle for three years, but had absolutely no qualms about wearing conventionally feminine blouses, letting my hair grow a little longer and passing as straight while I was training at the Skillcentre (ibid: 163).”

However, lesbian experience has been missing from most studies and was remarked upon by a writer on lesbian sexuality of her own earlier work. In an introduction added to an earlier article on women in manual trades (Weston, 1998), Kath Weston points out that she made no direct references to sexuality in it, nor are there any in her earlier book on the subject (1982). Yet she acknowledges the salience of sexuality in the later introduction:

“Sexuality was critical to efforts to get women into the trades... not just in the simplistic sense that many gay-identified women have operated a cutting torch or turned a wrench for cash. No doubt substantial numbers – perhaps disproportionate numbers – of lesbians have pursued blue-collar work over the years, although there are no statistics on the subject... In the firing and hiring, ideas about bodies cannot be separated from the materiality of bodies-in-action... Reenter sexuality, intertwined with representations of age, ability and class.” (1998: 96-7)

Weston warns of the risk, however, that stereotyped assumptions and generalisations about lesbians in manual work may “collapse lesbian into mannish, masculine and butch”, noting that: “An analysis that really hopes to relate sexuality to labour and employment can’t afford to stop at stereotyping” (ibid: 97). She perhaps here provides a clue to the reasons for the minimal discussion of lesbian sexuality in typically male work: could it stem from a wariness of indulging in such stereotyping? It is possible that writers have avoided the topic of sexuality for fear of reinforcing stereotypes of “butch” lesbians in “male” jobs, concentrating instead on the difficulties all women face *as women* in such work. It is difficult to know, but further reasons relate to the methodological and ethical difficulties of discussing sexual orientation in the workplace (see 4.7).

2.4 Men in non-traditional work

The smaller but developing body of literature on men working in traditionally female areas provides an illuminating contrast to the work on female minorities in male occupations. Writers in this area (Cross and Bagilhole, 2002; Lupton, 2000; Simpson, 2004; 2005; Williams, 1993) have emphasised the need to understand how occupational gender segregation keeps men out of female jobs, as much as how women are excluded from male work, and their findings shed further light on gender relations at work.

One of the most striking features to emerge from this literature is the benefits that accrue to men, despite – or perhaps because of – their minority status, thus refuting Kanter’s (1977) notion that it is minority status alone that leads to disadvantage. Ruth Simpson’s (2004) study of men working as primary school teachers, cabin crew, librarians and nurses found many advantages to their status. In nursing and teaching men moved rapidly up the hierarchy and male teachers were assumed to have greater authority and be better at discipline than female colleagues. Men’s token status also afforded them special consideration in other ways, such as being given an ‘easier ride’ than female colleagues or getting away with more mistakes.

Thus in contrast to women's tendency to play down their femininity when in a minority and attempt to become "one of the lads", instead men find ways of reasserting and benefiting from their masculinity. As Williams (1993: 3) puts it:

"Men are rewarded for emphasizing their difference from women; women are typically penalized for any difference they (willingly or not) represent from men."

Male nurses also gain materially, and were more likely to reach higher grades than full-time female colleagues (Bradley, 1999). Williams (1993) found that men in predominantly female occupations generally receive better pay and benefits than their female counterparts. However, overall men in female occupations earn less than men in male occupations, reflecting the continuing wage discrimination in jobs typically done by women (England and Herbert, 1993) and the devaluation of women's work.

Entering work traditionally considered to be the preserve of women is a fundamental challenge to masculinity, given the centrality of work to the creation of masculine identities, and therefore men's strategies differ from those of women in male jobs. Lupton (2000: S36) finds that while women often compromise their gender identity to the demands of masculine work, "male strategies give primacy to the preservation of masculine identity."

The threat of being stigmatised as effeminate and/or homosexual emerges as a consistent theme in studies of men in female jobs, which find that men's sexuality is immediately thrown into question by their choice of occupation (Cross and Bagilhole, 2002; Lupton, 2000; Simpson, 2004; Williams, 1993). Men particularly fear what other men will think of them, and in some cases this leads them to keep secret or disguise the type of work that they do (Cross and Bagilhole, 2002) or to give out only minimal information (Simpson, 2005). Thus the question of men's sexual orientation is brought to the fore in the research on men in female jobs in a way that is more overt and immediate than for women who enter male jobs. However, as I observed in research on women in male-dominated work, we learn little of men's actual sexual orientation in these studies, with the exception of Simpson's (2005) exploration of the perceptions of men who identified as homosexual, which found that most experienced no discomfort in their non-traditional role, feeling that their career fitted well with their sense of self, in contrast to experience of many heterosexual men. Thus attention to the sexuality of the men studied reveals important variations in experience and may help understand how sexuality operates to control *all* men. Simpson concludes that: "The greater levels of

harmony experienced by many homosexual men may serve to highlight these tensions in the heterosexual context” (ibid: 377).

These studies highlight how men seek to redefine the role, rather than themselves, in contrast to the efforts of women to ‘fit in’ or accommodate themselves to a male environment. This may be explained by the greater threat posed to masculinity for men entering a female-dominated area than that posed to femininity for women entering male work – Bradley (1993) argues that a ‘compromised femininity’ is possible for women in which they can power dress or drink and swear with the boys, whereas men will immediately face the stigmatisation of male homosexuality.

2.5 Lesbians and gay men at work

This section highlights some key features of research on minority sexuality at work, which provides context for the following section which considers studies of lesbians at work in greater depth. It has been noted that earlier studies of the experiences of lesbians and gay men at work focused on discrimination in the workplace, followed by an emphasis on the individual experience of work, and a more recent interest in the impact of organisations on individuals (Ward and Winstanley, 2006). Surveys demonstrated the extent of discrimination faced by lesbians and gay men at work (Palmer, 1993; Snape et al., 1995), while other studies focused on the work experiences of individuals (Day and Schoenrade, 2000; Humphrey, 1999; Lonborg and Phillips, 1996). But more recently attention has been paid to the experiences of sexual minorities in organisations (Burke, 1993; Colgan et al., 2006; 2007a; Miller et al., 2003; Ward, 2008; Ward and Winstanley, 2003; 2004; 2005; 2006).

Before elaborating some findings of these studies, I briefly describe the developing socio-political and legal context in which the experience of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) workers in the UK is situated.

2.5.1 Socio-political and legal context

The socio-political and legal framework clearly has an effect on the experiences of lesbians and gay men at work, and has changed rapidly and significantly in the last decade in the UK. Legislation was introduced to protect individuals from discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation at work in 2003 and in provision of goods and services

in 2007³, and the Civil Partnership Act 2004 gave same-sex couples the right to register their relationship and acquire rights equivalent to marriage. However there remains no reliable estimate of the size of the LGB population in Britain (Aspinall, 2009).

While legislation alone does not change public attitudes, it may reflect societal changes: a recent report (Cowan, 2007) shows that public opinion is changing, with the great majority of those surveyed supporting legislation to protect LGB employees and believing that public expression of prejudice against lesbian and gay people should be addressed. People also held more positive attitudes towards lesbians and gay men in positions of authority, such as doctors, teachers and managers, than in a 2003 survey (Stonewall, 2003). But although more than a third of people said they had a high opinion of lesbians and gay men, there were still a quarter who had a low opinion (Cowan, 2007). Furthermore, workplace bullying was experienced by nearly one in five lesbians and gay men in the previous five years, with those in occupational groups C2DE being 50 per cent more likely to experience bullying than those in occupational groups ABC1 (Hunt and Dick, 2008), underlining class differences in the experience of lesbians and gay men (see 2.7).

Most of the studies discussed below were carried out before the introduction of the regulations that outlawed discrimination in the workplace on grounds of sexual orientation in 2003, so it should be borne in mind that the legal framework at the time was different. An examination of the experiences of LGB workers after the introduction of the 2003 regulations (Colgan et al., 2006) found that there was a widespread perception that the new law had made little impact on overall policy and practice within the “good practice” organisations of the study – primarily because they were considered to be “ahead of the game” in relation to sexual orientation. However, significantly, LGB employees felt an increased confidence as a result of having legal protection from discrimination, with over two-thirds indicating that they would be more likely to take a grievance as a result of the introduction of the regulations.

³ The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003 and the Sexual Orientation (Goods and Services) Regulations 2007, since incorporated into the Equality Act 2010.

2.5.2 *Disclosure of minority sexuality*

The question of concealing or revealing minority sexuality is a key feature that distinguishes it from gender or ethnicity. Therefore much of the literature on lesbians and gay men at work focuses on disclosure and concealment of sexual identity, the extent to which individuals are open about their sexuality or “out” at work, and the strategies that individuals use to reveal or conceal their sexuality (Colgan et al., 2007b). However, disclosure is not an “all-or-none phenomenon” (Ragins and Cornwell, 2001: 1256); it is unusual for individuals to be out to absolutely everybody at work or “closeted” (concealing their sexuality) from all colleagues, but more common for lesbians and gay men to selectively or gradually disclose information to one or more trusted colleagues. Coming out is recognised as a repetitive, iterative process that must be repeated when entering a new workplace, or with various colleagues and in a variety of work situations (Ward and Winstanley, 2005).

Stigma theory, drawing on the work of Goffman (1963), has been applied to understand the processes and dilemmas of disclosure for employees with invisible stigmas, including lesbians and gay men (Ragins, 2008; Ragins and Cornwell, 2001; Ragins et al., 2007). Evidence from a survey of 534 lesbian, gay and bisexual respondents in the US found that fear of the negative consequences of revealing a gay identity at work can adversely affect career, workplace experience and psychological well-being (Ragins et al., 2007). However these fears may be alleviated by environmental factors that assist disclosure, such as the presence of other lesbian or gay colleagues; supportive heterosexual colleagues and institutional support through symbols of recognition or policies and procedures providing protection against discrimination (Ragins, 2008). Other research concurs that the organisational context is highly significant in decisions about whether, when and how to come out, as well as to the experience of being out (Boatwright et al., 1996; Colgan et al., 2007b; Ryan-Flood, 2004).

Ethnicity may also affect decisions about coming out: Ragins et al.’s large-scale US survey found that gay people of colour were less likely than their white counterparts to be out at work, perhaps as they were in a minority and already “under a microscope at work” (Ragins et al., 2003: 67). In the UK a study of ethnic minority gay men (Keogh et al., 2004) showed that many found great difficulty in identifying as a gay man, for fear of the negative reactions of family, community and society at large, as well as

losing an extended community that provided support and contributed to their identity as Black Caribbean men.

Despite the undoubted potential for exclusion, harassment and discrimination when out at work (Levine and Leonard, 1984; Palmer, 1993; Snape et al., 1995), some studies report benefits to disclosure at the workplace for both the individual and the organisation, including higher job satisfaction, greater commitment to the organisation and less conflict between home and work (Day and Schoenrade, 2000) and greater emotional freedom and satisfaction (Schneider, 1984). Thus motivations for coming out may be a response to the stress and anxiety of remaining closeted at work. Humphrey (1999) identified three layers at which this decision is taken: the personal, revolving around an ethic of honesty and integrity; the professional, which seeks to cultivate an openness and awareness in relationships with colleagues; and the political, encompassing a desire to educate various audiences about lesbian and gay existence and empower lesbians and gay men in the process. This last point draws attention to the political context in which decisions about coming out at work take place, both in debates within lesbian and gay communities, and changing public attitudes towards homosexuality (see 2.5.1).

Disclosure of sexuality in the workplace is situated within wider political and academic debates about lesbian and gay identity formation. One end of the spectrum is represented by a view of sexual identity as something that is 'given', and can develop, through various stages such as confusion and acceptance, into a final stable identity (seen in Cass's six stage model, described in Nam Cam Trau and Härtel (2004)), while at the opposite end post-modern or 'queer' theories see sexual identity as fluid and flexible, with people having multiple and intersecting identities. While individuals mostly do not perceive their identities as unstable or fluid, this latter position, however, is more consistent with my social constructionist understanding of sexuality (see Chapter 3) than the essentialist view represented by the identity formation models.

2.5.3 Lesbian and gay sexuality in organisations

There have been few case studies of sexual minorities in specific work organisations, with exceptions being a study of the experiences of LGB workers in 16 public, private and voluntary sector organisations, known for their good practice in relation to sexual orientation (Colgan et al., 2006; 2007a; 2009) and Ward and Winstanley's (2003; 2004;

2005; 2006) and Ward's (2008) investigations of the police and fire service, civil service and banking. The male-dominated culture of the fire service (Ward and Winstanley, 2006) was characterised as one of hegemonic masculinity in which a particular form of male, sexualised "banter" is a normal part of everyday interaction (Baigent, 2001). Ward and Winstanley revealed an acceptance by heterosexual employees of gay sexuality "as long as it's not flaunted in front of them" (2006: 208), highlighting the commonly-held view that homosexuality should be a private matter.

In contrast, Fleming's (2007) study of an Australian call centre is an unusual example of an organisational culture that encouraged displays of sexuality – including gay male sexuality. 'Sunray' was known for its gay-friendly atmosphere, consistent with its general message of fun and ebullience, with many out gay men in the workforce. However, management support for overt displays of a particular form of gay sexuality had some contradictory effects: among some heterosexual employees anti-management feeling was expressed in the form of homophobia, and a view that "to 'succeed' at Sunray you are basically gay" (Fleming, 2007: 250). Thus hostility towards the management culture of fun was vocalised through negative views of extroverted gay men, who were associated with the organisational ethos. This, for Fleming, highlights the multileveled nature of power and resistance, showing that management control is identified with the encouragement of a particular form of sexuality (giving expression to a gay identity that in other organisations would be a minority or hidden form of sexuality), leading to resistance to management being expressed in homophobic terms. There were also gendered power dimensions in this culture of sexuality. Expression of both heterosexual and gay sexuality was encouraged, but some women felt uncomfortable with such a sexualised workplace, finding some of the men 'sleazy' and referring to aspects of organisational life as a 'meat market' (2007: 249). I also noted that the forms of encouraged sexuality are predominantly male – there is no mention of lesbian sexuality – and heterosexual sexuality is primarily described in terms of opportunities for men to flirt with women, rather than as an expression by women of their sexuality. Thus the gendered dimension of the expression of sexuality in this workplace is only partially explored, and further attention to gendered experience may have highlighted additional relations of power.

Similarly, Ward and Winstanley's (2006) study of the fire service suffers from a lack of explicit discussion of how gendered power relations differentiate the experience of

lesbians and gay men, despite recognising the highly masculinised organisational culture. An example of male colleagues taking bets on who would be the first to sleep with a lesbian firefighter was interpreted as “a positive example of the inclusion of a lesbian firefighter through banter” (ibid: 215), which I feel neglects the gendered power relations involved when a female firefighter joins a male-dominated watch and the accommodation she must make to this masculine environment.

A tendency within studies of lesbians and gay men to subsume or ignore lesbian experience has been noted by others (Wilton, 1995) and I suggest that greater attention to gender differences in the experiences of gay men and lesbians in such male-dominated occupations would enable, for example, examination of the view held by some that it is easier to be a lesbian than a gay man in jobs such as the fire service (Wright, 2008) and the police (Burke, 1993).

One response for work organisations wishing to become ‘gay friendly’ is the establishment of a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) network or group (Colgan et al., 2006; Stonewall, 2005). Such groups serve a range of functions, including opportunities for socialising and networking with LGBT colleagues; support for those experiencing discrimination and harassment; and influencing and monitoring organisational policy. Some in Colgan et al.’s (2006) study, though, felt that the networks were not sufficiently representative of black and ethnic minority and disabled workers and those in manual occupations, while lesbians highlighted that they were dominated by gay men and their concerns (Colgan et al., 2008). Groups were also thought to be insufficiently accessible to those not out at work, particularly those in manual and frontline occupations (Bond et al., 2009).

Some trade unions have well-established LGBT support networks (Bairstow, 2007; LRD, 2003), particularly in the public sector (Colgan, 1999; Humphrey, 1999). In some unionised employers trade union LGBT groups co-exist with networks established by employers, although trade union representatives perceived employer-organised groups to be aimed primarily towards male, professional and managerial workers (Colgan et al., 2006). My research on the fire service (Wright, 2005) examined lesbians’ and heterosexual women’s participation in trade union and other support groups for LGBT members and women, but found no clear difference between lesbian and heterosexual women in propensity to participate, instead finding that age and length of service were more likely indicators of strategies of seeking support. This raises the question of

whether differences exist in lesbian and heterosexual women's participation in support networks, about which there appears to be little research, although there is some discussion by Colgan and Ledwith (2000).

2.6 Lesbians at work

It has been noted above that lesbian experience is often overlooked or conflated with that of gay men in the literature on LGB experience at work. However a small number of studies or articles in the UK and US have focused specifically on the experiences of lesbians at work (Colgan et al., 2008; Dunne, 1997; 2000a; Hall, 1989; Levine and Leonard, 1984; Miles, 2008; Schneider, 1984); on the careers of lesbians (Boatwright et al., 1996; Driscoll et al., 1996; Fassinger, 1996); and on lesbians in a particular occupation, such as the police (Miller et al., 2004b), fire service (Wright, 2008) or building trades (Denissen and Saguy, forthcoming; Frank, 2001).

Some similar themes arise that affect all sexual minorities at work concerning disclosure and concealment of sexuality at work and its likely impact on job and career prospects. But gendered differences also emerge in how these elements are experienced, and some additional themes highlight the specific gender dimension for lesbians, such as the economic significance of work and the occurrence of sexual harassment.

2.6.1 Discrimination and disadvantage

Research has shown that lesbians commonly expect discrimination at work if their sexual orientation is known (Levine and Leonard, 1984), as well as actually experiencing discrimination in the form of loss of work, restricted promotion prospects, unequal access to workplace benefits and physical and verbal harassment (Hall, 1989; Levine and Leonard, 1984; Dunne, 1997, Schneider, 1984). It should be noted, though, that most of this research was conducted some time ago and important social and legal changes have taken place that will affect the experience of lesbian workers (see 2.5.1).

Sexual harassment was a problem for lesbians in Schneider's (1984) quantitative study of 228 lesbians in the USA in a range of occupations. High levels of sexual approaches⁴ were recorded, including being sexually propositioned, pinched or grabbed, asked for a

⁴ The author notes that it became apparent that some lesbians were referring to both women and men in reporting on requests for dates and jokes, but the gender of the initiator was not recorded in the questionnaire.

date or receiving comments about their bodies or appearance. While this finding was comparable to that of heterosexual women in the larger research project of which the lesbian study was part, lesbians were more willing to label unwanted sexual approaches as sexual harassment. This may relate to the composition of Schneider's sample, all but one of whom described herself as a feminist. She notes that it was a highly politicised sample, obtained in 1979 when there was considerable feminist activity in the US. Lesbians who were open about their sexuality were also less likely to receive such attention than closeted lesbians, indicating a possible benefit to being out at work. However, Schneider points out the difficulty of identifying the extent to which harassment may be attributed specifically to discrimination on the basis of sexual identity rather than gender. So while being openly lesbian at work may reduce the likelihood of harassment based on gender, it can introduce the possibility of anti-gay harassment. Lesbians may not always be able to identify whether harassment is due to their gender, sexuality, or both (Wright, 2008), and similarly black women may not be certain whether harassment is directed at them for being black or female (Martin and Jurik, 2007), underscoring the value of an intersectional understanding of women's experience (see Chapter 3).

Some research indicates that lesbians in professional occupations are less likely than gay men to be out at work (Friskopp and Silverstein, 1995): in comparing gay and lesbian graduates of the Harvard Business School the authors found lesbians to be more likely to be closeted about their sexuality at work than gay men, and became more closeted as they moved up the career ladder, whereas the opposite was true for gay men. Lesbians, they suggest, had encountered more negative experiences of being gay at work, and felt more strongly that being gay was not compatible with organisational pressures to fit in with dominant norms. Schneider (1984) had also found that high-income professional lesbians were likely to be closeted. These findings may be somewhat surprising, given the more privileged class position of lesbians as they move up the organisational hierarchy (class differences in LGB experience are examined in 2.7), suggesting a need to explore the intersections of gender, sexuality and class more fully. Indeed Friskopp and Silverstein (1995) comment on the levels of sexism in the business world, which was seen as a far greater problem by lesbians than attitudes to their sexual orientation, and similarly the majority of lesbians in a UK study (Miles,

2008) found gender to be of greater concern than sexuality (see discussion in 2.6.3 below).

2.6.2 A 'lesbian advantage'?

On the other hand, it is suggested that benefits might accrue to lesbians at work compared to heterosexual women workers: Peplau and Fingerhut (2004) describe the 'paradox of the lesbian worker' as one in which lesbians might be presumed to be doubly disadvantaged by both their gender and their stigmatised sexual orientation, whereas evidence instead finds some advantages for lesbian workers over their heterosexual women peers. The advantages are said to be higher earnings, more positive perceptions of lesbians' work commitment and competence and a reduction in sexual advances and harassment.

It was suggested above that lesbians who are out at work might experience reduced levels of sexual harassment (Schneider, 1984) or unwanted sexual attention, permitting greater levels of comfort with male colleagues once the heterosexual innuendos and possibility of a sexual relationship have been removed (Dunne, 1997; Wright, 2008).

Work plays a central role in the lives of the great majority of lesbians due to the economic necessity to support themselves, as they are unlikely to be financially dependent on either a male or female partner (Dunne, 1997; Schneider, 1984). Although a lesbian could be financially supported by a female partner, the reality of women's lower average earnings than men's, together with unequal access to capital resources, means that this will not be the case for most women. Lesbians within couples also tend to maintain a degree of financial independence, with emphasis on equal sharing of financial responsibilities and economic self-sufficiency (Morgan and Brown, 1991; Peplau and Fingerhut, 2004).

In the context of the need for economic self-sufficiency, there has been some discussion of whether lesbians (and gay men) have greater earnings than their heterosexual peers. In a review of US studies Peplau and Fingerhut (2004: 721) conclude that lesbians earn, on average, more than heterosexual women with similar jobs and qualifications, claimed to be up to 30 per cent more by some. However economist Mary Badgett (2001) was more cautious, noting that the sample size meant differences between lesbian and heterosexual women's earnings were not statistically significant. In the UK, there have been similar debates; using data on cohabiting couples from the Labour Force Survey,

Arabsheibani et al (2004) found that lesbians had an earnings advantage over heterosexual women, but the same authors revised this in 2009 to state that there was no statistically significant advantage for lesbians compared to childless women in couples, although lesbians were more likely to be in employment (Arabsheibani et al., 2009). Aside from the limited data available on which to assess income advantages based on sexuality, a further difficulty is that sexual orientation is not fixed, women can come out as lesbians in adulthood after pursuing heterosexual relationships that may have been associated with more traditional female work and earnings patterns.

It is said that lesbians can benefit from stereotypes about their commitment to work. Employers may perceive lesbian workers as less likely to leave their job to have children and are therefore more committed to their careers, with some lesbians feeling that they get greater support from their bosses and are given more challenging work as a result (Dunne, 1997; Hall, 1989). While there is some reason to suppose that lesbians are generally less constrained by childrearing responsibilities than heterosexual women, in fact, many lesbians do have children, and this number may be increasing (see 2.8). Nonetheless, regardless of the facts, many employers – and employees – retain a view of lesbians as childfree, which could operate to their advantage. Many lesbians also hold this view, with some believing that lesbians do well in professional environments as they do not “opt out” after children as heterosexual women do (Friskopp and Silverstein, 1995: 376).

Furthermore, lesbians may be perceived as possessing different personal characteristics from heterosexual women, for example, more independent, assertive, competitive or self-confident (Peplau and Fingerhut, 2004: 727). Additionally Friskopp and Silverstein (1995) present a range of stereotypes of lesbians that they believe provide an advantage in the world of business, saying that lesbians are perceived as: “aggressive, non-emotional, tough and reliable – in short, ideal management timber” (ibid: 372). However, it could equally be argued that *all* women who succeed in business acquire labels such as ‘tough’ or ‘aggressive’ (McDowell, 1997). Friskopp and Silverstein go further in arguing that lesbians are more emotionally reserved than heterosexual women (ibid: 378), or less likely to flirt with men and therefore seen as more professional (ibid: 378-9). However, the prevalence of such stereotypes simply highlights the gendered and heterosexualized environments experienced by heterosexual and lesbian working women. Therefore I suggest that it is necessary to be very cautious about declaring a

'lesbian advantage' based on such dominant assumptions. Rather, attention should focus on how notions such as 'commitment' to work are socially constructed, highly gendered and often also ethnicised (Bradley and Healy, 2008: 55). Therefore any stated differences in women's commitment to work based on sexuality should be carefully examined rather than simply reproduced.

2.6.3 *Male-dominated work*

The literature provides hints – but little firm evidence – that lesbians may be more attracted to male-dominated work than heterosexual women. The vocational psychology literature suggests that lesbians tend to demonstrate more non-traditional, androgynous gender roles than heterosexual women and that they are therefore more likely to reject pressure to pursue gender traditional interests and occupations (Croteau et al., 2000; Fassinger, 1996; Morgan and Brown, 1991). Thus lesbians' day-to-day experience of challenging traditional gender roles may free them to choose occupations that are atypical. As traditionally male work pays considerably more than typically female work, choosing non-traditional work may be a way for lesbians to acquire the financial independence necessary for living without a man's wages (Morgan and Brown, 1991). It is also argued that as many lesbians are feminists, this further liberalises their views of gender roles (Fassinger, 1995). This characterisation of lesbians, though, is both historically specific (as the influence of feminism declines) and subject to class and ethnic differentiation in affiliation to feminism (see 3.2.2). A psychological study of gender-related traits (Lippa, 2002) observed that, compared to heterosexual women, lesbians showed significantly more interest in a range of traditionally masculine occupations, such as carpenter, car mechanic and engineer, and less interest in traditionally feminine occupations, such as beauty consultant, interior decorator or flight attendant. The intersection, therefore, between sexuality and gendered choices deserves closer examination.

In Dunne's (1997) study of 60 lesbians, 30 per cent worked in jobs usually performed by a man (compared to eight per cent of women generally). This was divided roughly equally into women working in typically male manual occupations and women in male-dominated professions or senior positions in a hierarchy where men predominated. Two factors influenced the choices of those in non-traditionally female jobs: support and encouragement from their fathers (which is consistent with other research on women

entering engineering (Devine, 1994)) and, for those with lower educational qualifications, an understanding of the need to develop craft skills that would provide a career and the possibility of financial independence, in contrast to traditional women's work (ibid: 141-2). The better pay associated with male manual work was strongly contrasted with women's work, which offered little in the way of pay or prospects.

In male-dominated occupations or workplaces lesbians can feel that the fact of being a woman is more of a hindrance or of greater significance than their sexuality (Colgan et al., 2008; Hall, 1989; Miles, 2008; Miller et al., 2003), although some take the view that sexuality is simply an additional difficulty. In the police force, for example, it can be difficult enough for a woman to prove herself, "without the additional stigma of homosexuality to cope with" (Burke, 1993: 153), making some reluctant to come out at work. Male-dominated work teams and male supervisors were associated with greater levels of heterosexism than gender-balanced or female-dominated environments for both lesbians and gay men in Ragins et al's (2003) US survey, but this was found to be amplified for lesbians.

Lesbians may be more (Dunne, 1997) or less (Schneider, 1984) likely to come out at work in traditionally male occupations: Schneider (1984) found only 10 per cent of lesbians in male-dominated workplaces to be open about their sexual identity, compared to 55 per cent in female-dominated workplaces, whereas for Dunne (1997), lesbians working in traditionally male manual occupations were more likely to be out to co-workers than those in female employment and the professions. She attributes this to the notion that the sexuality of women in male jobs is automatically "suspect" due to their transgression of normative gender behaviour, a point noted earlier. These contradictory findings may indicate changing social attitudes towards homosexuality (Dunne's study was conducted more than a decade after Schneider's), as well as the complexity surrounding being "out" at work which can encompass very different levels of openness (Hall, 1989).

In contrast to Dunne (1997), only a few of the women in Yvette Taylor's (2007) study of working-class lesbians (discussed further below) worked in traditionally male occupations. But one of the few that did also felt that her lesbian status offered some benefits in a job that, Taylor notes, did not require a performance of heterosexual femininity. Sharon said of her job cleaning buses:

“So I found it ok working with guys but I think being a lesbian helped as well ‘cause I was quite happy to be mucking in there and I don’t think if you wanted to wear make-up and put nail varnish on you would have fitted in too well!” (Taylor, 2007: 100).

The experience of lesbians in male manual work is, therefore, very different from those in male-dominated professions, and we have seen earlier that lesbians in high positions in professions may find it harder to come out at work. This affects levels of camaraderie and interaction with male colleagues and thus the kind of “mucking in” described here by Sharon may not be achieved. It may also be the case that the performances of femininity required in male cultures such as the City (McDowell, 1997) are not appropriate in male manual work.

2.7 Class, gender and sexuality at work

The differences in the experiences of lesbians in male-dominated work, depending on whether they are employed in professional or manual occupations, indicate the significance of class as a further dimension of analysis of lesbian workers’ lives. However, the research undertaken to date on lesbian and gay working lives has focused to a very large extent on the experience of middle-class or professional lesbians and gay men, with Taylor (2004b; 2005; 2007) and McDermott (2004; 2006) providing exceptions in relation to lesbians.

Of the studies of lesbian and gay workers already discussed, where they are explicit about their sample, all acknowledge that this was made up of largely professional workers. Ragins et al (2003: 58) record that of 534 LGB respondents, 68.5% were in professional or technical jobs and 19.7% held managerial jobs, with only 4.9% in clerical or sales positions and 6.4% in service or craft jobs. Friskopp and Silverstein’s (1995) study of lesbian and gay graduates of Harvard Business School – one of most prestigious business institutes in USA – clearly have very good prospects for professional careers. Colgan et al’s (2006: 25) sample of lesbian, gay and bisexual workers in ‘good practice’ organisations in the UK contained an overrepresentation of managerial and professional respondents compared to the general population. The same is true of the LGB vocational psychology literature, according to Croteau et al (2000: 396), in which most participants have been white, formally well-educated, and employed in professional-type occupations, and at least somewhat open or connected to LGB communities.

Similarly, the studies of lesbians discussed above or in the following section are variously: of highly-educated, high-income lesbian couples (Reimann, 1997: 159); “primarily white collar, middle-class and highly educated” (Levine and Leonard, 1984: 708); have relatively advantaged positions in the employment structure, mostly professionals, managers, technicians or administrators in the public sector or are self-employed (Dunne, 1998; 2000a); or are “largely upper-middle class” working lesbian mothers (Tuten and August, 2006: 592). Additionally, in Dunne’s (1997: 39-40) study the majority are from ‘service’ or ‘intermediate’ backgrounds and just a quarter are from ‘manual’ backgrounds. With regard to the women’s current occupational position, they tended to be located in higher-level and/or male-dominated occupations (ibid: 132).

Part of the reason for the predominance of middle-class or professional LGB participants in these studies is a methodological one concerning routes used to reach participants (discussed in Chapter 4). In addition, Colgan et al (2006) – who contacted potential research participants through a range of routes – found during the study that manual, administrative, service and skilled trades workers were less likely to be open about their sexuality at work and therefore much less likely to participate in a research project on LGB issues. The authors note that:

“This is an interesting finding in itself given the research was taking place within ‘good practice’ organisations which have been striving to implement equality and diversity policies and practices in order to ensure a ‘gay-friendly’ workplace. It would seem that sections of the workforce still may not be comfortable to be out at work despite the efforts being made both by employers and trade unions to encourage a ‘gay friendly’ working environment.” (Colgan et al., 2006: 25)

This may relate to the variation in culture or attitudes across the organisation, as well as factors relating to social background of interviewees, requiring further research.

A notable exception to the studies described so far is Yvette Taylor’s (2007) account of working-class lesbian lives. Her review of the literature finds absences and silences surrounding working-class lesbian lives and she makes a strong case for the need to explore the intersections of class, sexuality and gender in order to understand the material possibilities of everyday lives. Taylor takes issue with Dunne’s (1997) claim that lesbians who questioned their sexuality while at school were facilitated in their educational and career achievements by an early recognition of the need for financial independence. This fails to acknowledge the difficulties that a working-class student may face in the education system and “ignores the reality of working-class lesbian

existence and the relevance of class in structuring educational, and employment, outcomes” (Taylor, 2007: 16). The experience at work of Taylor’s sample of 53 working-class lesbians from Scotland and the North of England also differs significantly from that of Dunne’s sample of lesbians in the South-East of England, who were mainly in higher-level and/or male-dominated occupations. Many of the lesbians in Taylor’s study had faced periods of unemployment and most had engaged in low-paid, ‘feminised’ and often insecure work. The contrast is the result of different times, locations and purposes of the two studies, and Taylor states that her aim is not to discredit Dunne’s findings, but rather to “describe the ‘difference’ that class makes to lesbians’ post-school transitions” (ibid: 89).

The effect of social class positioning on lesbians’ psychological health at work was examined by McDermott (2006) who found that working-class lesbians were more likely to be employed in places where heterosexuality was patrolled too heavily for them to risk coming out. In contrast middle-class women were most likely to work in settings where they felt secure to perform lesbian identity at work, or found it easier to leave homophobic workplaces and find less stressful environments, whereas working-class women tended to remain in their jobs or become unemployed.

2.8 The organisation of work and home lives

The domestic division of labour between men and women is widely recognised as a major constraint on women’s participation in the labour market (Walby, 1990).

However, limited attention has been paid to the personal and domestic lives of male managers – a gap that is addressed in Judy Wajcman’s (1998) study of male and female senior managers, which illustrates the gendered impact of managers’ domestic circumstances on their careers and highlights the materially different conditions under which male and female managers undertake ostensibly similar work roles. It carefully reveals the way in which “men’s careers are still contingent on the sexual contract of heterosexual marriage” (1998: 138). Wajcman observes wide differences in the domestic circumstances of men and women managers at the same levels in their organisations and concludes that “men and women generally live in different types of households” (1998: 140). Nearly all the men in her sample were married or living with a partner, compared to 73 per cent of women, and two-thirds of men had children living with them, compared to under a third of women. Men’s careers were also supported by

the domestic labour of their wives, even when their wives had a part-time job. Women senior managers may also be making sacrifices⁵ in terms of family life, as most in the study do not have children. Nevertheless, she concludes, this is in vain, as childless women managers “face the same prejudices as other women even though they have refused the mantle of mother and wife [...] the point is that all women are affected by this construction of ‘free’ workers as men.” (1998: 143).

However, despite the detailed insights that Wajcman provides into the domestic lives of managers, including their partners’ jobs, the division of labour within the family and the management of paid domestic services, she does not consider the sexual orientation of the manager, nor the sex of their partner. While identifying that the women are more likely to be unmarried or single than the men, she does not discuss whether they could, in fact, be lesbian or have a female partner. There is no evidence from her study to suggest that the female and male managers are *not* overwhelmingly heterosexual – and we do not know whether they would have been willing to discuss their sexuality if they were not heterosexual. However, I suggest that failing to ask the question about managers’ sexual orientation may have overlooked a very interesting area for analysis.

Other studies have found that women in professions or work organisations dominated by men are less likely to have partners or be married and, if married, less likely to have children than their male colleagues (Bagilhole, 2002) and also less likely to have children than the average among women (McDowell, 1997). There is further evidence from the US, Australia and the UK that the proportions of women in management without children are strikingly high, both in comparison to men in equivalent management jobs, and to average childbearing rates for women (Wood and Newton, 2006). This suggests that examining the personal and domestic lives of women can reveal more about the interaction between home and work lives and the part that sexual orientation may play.

It has been said that work may hold a greater significance for lesbians than for heterosexual women due to the need for economic independence in the absence of a male partner (Dunne, 1997). It is therefore relevant to consider whether divisions of

⁵ Wajcman describes it as a sacrifice, although we do not know that the women experience it as such, see Wood and Newton (2006) for further discussion of “choice” and childlessness in relation to women managers.

labour in lesbian partnerships differ from those in heterosexual partnerships in the extent to which they facilitate lesbians' working lives, and Dunne believes that their experiences can offer new insights:

“As divisions of labour in lesbian partnerships are negotiated by actors who occupy the same position in the gender hierarchy, they present a marvellous opportunity to see what is achievable when gender polarization as a major structuring principle of arrangements is minimal.” (Dunne, 2000a: 140)

Furthermore, explorations of the ways that lesbian couples with children negotiate their childcare and working arrangements can offer an alternative perspective on the gendered and heterosexualised division of labour. There has been talk of a 'gay baby boom' in the US, with an estimated 22 per cent of partnered lesbians living with children in the home (Peplau and Fingerhut, 2004), and it is estimated⁶ that 10 per cent of British lesbians live in households with children (Aspinall, 2009), suggesting that this is an increasingly important area to take account of in research on women's participation in work.

Studies have shown that lesbian couples parenting together share domestic work and childcare more equally, and are less likely to specialise long-term into primary carer or wage-earner roles, than heterosexual couples (Dunne, 2000a; Oerton, 1998; Reimann, 1997). Reimann (1997) studied 25 'lesbian nuclear families' in the USA – defined as lesbian couples who had had children in their relationship, rather than jointly bringing up children from prior relationships – with one or more children under the age of six. She found very little conflict over whose work or career should have primacy, and an assumption that both partners' paid work was equally important, regardless of their level of income. A variety of strategies were used in relation to leave-taking from work, with both parents taking time off together or consecutively after the birth, but with little long-term specialisation into primary carer and wage-earner roles, and most women were working full-time at the time of the study. Where both worked full-time, domestic work and childcare responsibilities were shared fairly equally, and Reimann notes that shared feminist values and a commitment to equality in motherhood contributed to the fair division of labour at home, as well as decisions about paid work, supported by a

⁶ Aspinall (2009: 116) advises caution in interpreting data derived from purposive samples, such as the Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Health Survey 2007 from which this figure is derived, as they tend to be biased towards younger populations living in areas with known concentrations of LGB populations and frequently capture only the white population. However no nationally representative samples are available.

view that both careers were equally important. However Reimann makes it clear that her sample comprised high-earning couples, who could be more flexible in their work arrangements than families with less income, and many also employed paid domestic workers to do housework, thus reducing conflict over cleaning.

A similar absence of specialisation into carer and provider roles was found by Dunne (1998; 2000a) in her UK study of 37 lesbian couples with dependent children. She found that biological motherhood was a poor predictor of differences in employment hours, as more than a third of co-parents (non-birthmothers) had shorter working hours than their partners. Or in other cases, both partners worked part-time and undertook childcare part-time. Furthermore, earning capacity did not necessarily provide the rationale for decisions about who would take greater responsibility for caring or wage-earning, and it was not unusual for higher earners in lesbian couples to reduce their hours of work to care for children. Such decisions were based on a number of factors, including the idea that higher earners often had more power over their careers. Dunne (2000) concludes that sharing the penalties associated with raising children (either by both working part-time or taking it in turns to be the main carer) may make better long-term economic sense than the specialisation typically found among heterosexual couples that results in women's downwards occupational mobility.

As in Reimann's (1997) study, Dunne's couples felt they had a fairly even division of domestic labour, with respondents feeling that the absence of gender scripts contributed to this arrangement. Such a view is supported by comparing the findings from Wajcman's (1998) study of senior managers, in which she found that even though the female managers in her sample did the same hours of paid work as the male managers, they did almost twice the amount of housework as their male colleagues. Thus despite having equivalent work roles in terms of seniority and length of working hours, gendered assumptions prevailed in the domestic sphere.

This contrast between heterosexual women's and lesbians' domestic experiences leads Dunne to suggest that much of what are seen as "gender constraints in the abstract are likely to relate to the heterosexual context which frames most women's gendered experience" (Dunne, 2000a: 145). Thus the labour market disadvantages attached to women's association with parenting may be less of a problem for women parenting together, who appear to have a greater tendency to share the employment penalties.

There are also indications that lesbian parents may suffer less from negative perceptions of working mothers than heterosexual women. A study of attitudes towards working mothers' competence and career orientation (Peplau and Fingerhut, 2004) found that heterosexual mothers were rated, by a sample of heterosexual undergraduates, as significantly lower in competence and career orientation than heterosexual non-mothers, but in contrast, perceptions of lesbians' competence and work-orientation were not diminished by motherhood. The authors suggest that:

“Like their heterosexual male counterparts, lesbians may be seen as more work oriented and, if they are parents, as having additional financial responsibilities because of being the family provider. Consequently, lesbians, including lesbian moms, may typically be viewed as competent workers.” (ibid: 733)

These findings may support the case for lesbian mothers having some form of 'advantage' over heterosexual mothers through being perceived less negatively in relation to work commitment, and in their actual forms of household and parenting arrangements that may impact less negatively on their careers than the traditional division of labour of heterosexual partnerships. However, it is necessary to sound a note of caution. Firstly, Reimann's (1997) sample was of middle-class and relatively high-income lesbians, mainly living in New York and San Francisco, and therefore not representative of the experiences of working-class, non-metropolitan or lower-income lesbian couples. Dunne's (1998) sample also occupied a relatively advantaged position in the employment structure, mostly working as professionals, managers, technicians or administrators in the public sector or were self-employed. Furthermore, feminist values were shared among Reimann's couples, which may not be representative of all lesbians given the classed and ethnicised dimensions of the feminist movement (see 3.2.2).

Taylor (2007) is also wary of such accounts, believing that the experiences of working-class lesbians are missing from much theorisation of personal relationships, which tends to gloss over inequalities “by privileging accounts of reciprocity and accountability; commonalities are said to be produced on the basis of sameness, that is shared gender, but there is little attention to the way in which differences of class can effect, enhance, disrupt and fracture relationships” (ibid: 30). A second, related point is that lesbian workers such as Dunne's (1998), who work in relatively high positions and in the public sector or as self-employed, may benefit from greater flexibility over working arrangements and provision of parental leave than lower-paid or private sector workers, or those in less secure employment. Thirdly, while some people hold stereotypes of

lesbian mothers as more committed to their work, there remain others with negative attitudes towards gay people's suitability for parenting that could affect how comfortable lesbian parents feel about discussing their home lives at work. Importantly, the extent to which a lesbian parent (particularly a non-biological parent) is open about her sexuality at work can have a significant impact on their ability to benefit from family-friendly or flexible working arrangements (Tuten and August, 2006).

Neither Reimann's (1997) nor Dunne's (1998, 2000) studies discuss in detail the working arrangements negotiated with employers by respondents, as the focus is on the couple and how they organise paid and domestic work between themselves, rather than on the work organisation. Building on Wajcman (1998), this research aims to contribute to our understanding of how lesbians *and* heterosexual women negotiate working arrangements in relation to specific work organisations *and* at home.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter has examined literature on occupational gender segregation, on women and men in gender atypical work and on minority sexuality at work, and has identified a number of gaps and areas for further exploration. It was argued that economic explanations for occupational segregation are insufficient without feminist or gender theories to explain the origins of such segregation. Furthermore, such explanations often exclude the accounts of women themselves for their choices, neglecting the complex interplay of multiple identities with work choice. Studies of women in non-traditionally female work brought into focus the processes of gender and sexuality in workplace experience, noting that sexuality is often used as a form of control, whether through sexual harassment or invocation of roles such as "seductress" or "lesbian". However, these accounts largely fail to explicitly discuss the experience of lesbians, despite some indications that lesbians may be attracted male-dominated work. In studies of men in female-dominated work, the matter of men's sexual orientation is more overt – indeed it is immediately thrown into question by their choice of 'female' occupation. Some have suggested that there is a "theoretical blind spot" (Seidman, 1996) or "theoretical heterosexism" (Dunne, 2000a) concerning the experience of lesbian and gay sexuality in mainstream sociology or feminist scholarship. Asking the question about sexuality in studies of work organisations can provide both a fuller understanding of gay and lesbian

experience, as well as knowledge about how the workings of heterosexuality in the mainstream reinforce gender hierarchies. Dunne puts it this way:

“My irritation with the lack of curiosity about lesbian and gay experience in mainstream feminist sociology is not simply about political correctness. It is about enabling more intellectually rigorous accounts of how the gender order is reproduced, sustained and importantly of how it can be changed” (Dunne, 2000a: 135).

In addition, the gendered experience of lesbians is at times overlooked in studies of lesbians and gay men at work, or conflated with that of gay men. Where studies of minority sexual identity at work fail to differentiate by gender there may be insufficient exploration of the gendered power relations that shape the experiences of all workers.

The chapter also identified a lack of attention within lesbian and gay studies of work to class differences: it showed that the great majority of studies of lesbians and gay men at work, as well as studies of lesbian family life, have drawn on samples made up of middle-class, higher-income or professional/managerial workers. Yet class position and classed experience is shown to be highly significant in differentiating the experience of lesbians (McDermott, 2006; Taylor, 2007), demonstrating the importance of examining the intersections of class, gender and sexuality to appreciate the diversity of women’s experience of non-traditional work.

A further dimension that may differentiate the working lives of lesbians and heterosexual women relates to their domestic circumstances: it was shown that (professional, middle-class) lesbians in relationships organise their domestic and parenting roles in different ways from the traditional domestic division of labour of most heterosexual couples which consequently impacts upon the extent of participation in paid work. An examination of any such differences helps us to understand the ways in which both gender *and* heterosexuality construct working patterns and opportunities.

Male-dominated work provides a particularly interesting arena in which to address these questions – not only because of the gap concerning lesbian experience highlighted above – but because issues of both gender and sexuality are immediately foregrounded when women enter as a minority into jobs traditionally seen as signifying masculinity. Being a woman in a male job throws up enough challenges even before minority sexual identity is introduced, and it is this intersection that produces many interesting questions. For women in a minority in a male world, the question of support from other

women can arise, and there may be different responses to this. There is also little evidence on the question of whether there are differences in the way that lesbians and heterosexual women use workplace support networks, which will be explored in Chapter 8. The chapter has highlighted the need for a research approach that takes account of the intersections of gender, sexuality and class in work experience: the following chapter examines theories of intersectionality and proposes a framework for examining intersecting inequalities in work organisations.

3 Theories of gender, sexuality, class and organisations

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into two sections, the first of which considers the concepts of gender and its relationship to class, sexuality, intersectionality and identity at a theoretical level, and the second looks at how these frameworks have been developed to apply to the understanding of organisations as gendered and sexualised sites. It provides background to developments in feminist theorising, in particular the influence of black feminism, which contextualises the discussions of intersectionality, and the problems in trying to find a coherent analytical approach. Different approaches within intersectional thinking are outlined and I highlight the emphasis that I believe is most useful to this thesis. I then consider the development of thinking around lesbian and gay sexuality and the growth of queer theory, showing some parallels with feminist thought.

Jenkins's (2004) framework for conceptualising identity, which is implicit in discussions of gender and sexuality, is then discussed, showing how the concept of identification provides a unifying approach that links together individual and collective processes. It also focuses attention on the different orders, or levels of society, at which identification takes place, which helps to structure the findings chapters.

The second section turns to organisations to discuss how the concepts outlined relating to gender, sexuality, class and identity may be understood and applied. It shows how organisations are gendered and sexualised, and stresses the importance of the notion of embodiment to gender relations, as well as to other power relations. Harriet Bradley's (1999) classification of gendered power resources is examined as a useful tool for analysing the interactional level of how power operates between women and men and managers and subordinates in organisations, which, I argue, complements Joan Acker's approach to understanding and uncovering the intersections between different forms of inequality in organisational processes, that of inequality regimes. This framework for intersectional analysis, expounded as a means of primarily exploring inequalities of gender, race and class, is valuable in understanding how sexuality also intersects with gender and occupational class in this empirical study of non-traditionally female work. Although my research design (see 4.5) does not use an organisational case study approach, organisations are where individuals work, thus shaping their everyday experience of workplace processes and interactions.

3.2 Theories of gender, sexuality and class

3.2.1 *Defining sex, gender and sexuality*

Gender has been described as “a busy term” (by Glover and Kaplan, 2000, cited in Bradley, 2007: 1), used in a variety of contexts and with varying meanings. It is now a widely-used concept in the social sciences, but Ann Oakley (1972) is generally credited with having first introduced it in feminist debates to make a distinction between biological ‘sex’ (male and female) and the socio-cultural constructs attributed to ‘gender’ (i.e. masculinity and femininity). This distinction was a vital element of feminist arguments that challenged the supposed ‘naturalness’ of gender differences and roles ascribed to men and women.

Developing the notion of gender as a social construct, Bradley (2007: 4) proposes that:

“Gender is at the same time both a material and a cultural phenomenon. It refers both to the lived experiences of men and women in relation to each other and to the ideas we develop to make sense of these relations and to frame them. Material experiences inform cultural meanings, which in turn influence the way lived relations change and develop.”

Although the sex/gender distinction is now in widespread use, some have argued that it is no longer sustainable, believing that sex and gender are inextricably linked, and that sex is not necessarily a given either. Judith Butler (1990) argued that if sex is divorced from gender, then taken to its logical limit, there is no reason why ‘masculinity’ should accrue exclusively to those with male bodies or ‘femininity’ to those with female bodies, and why indeed there should be only two genders. She goes further and questions the givenness of sex, suggesting that it may be as culturally constructed as gender: “Indeed, perhaps it was always already gender” (1990: 7). In this view, bodies do not have an essential pre-given sex and have to be given a “mark of their gender” (ibid: 8), becoming gendered through the continual performance of gender. Bradley (2007: 20-21) notes the fluidity of the relation between sex and gender and the performance involved in constructing the latter, and suggests that when engaging in heterosexual erotic sexual activity, individuals are also affirming their identities as men and women: “In contemporary western societies gender identities are so deeply imbued with heterosexual meanings as to be virtually indistinguishable”. However, while in her 1996 work *Fractured Identities* Bradley supported Butler’s position in rejecting the sex/gender distinction, using gender to refer to both social and biological aspects, she

now feels that it is worth preserving the sex/gender distinction, suggesting that “the obstinacy of bodies and genital difference” (Bradley, 2007: 21) is overlooked when the two are conflated. Furthermore, the sex/gender distinction acts as an important reminder of the socially constructed nature of gender, an argument that she feels is “far from won” (ibid: 21). Developing Simone de Beauvoir's (1973) comment that “one is not born, one becomes a woman”, Bradley (2007: 21) defines the sex/gender distinction:

“One is born with a body that is immediately ascribed a male or female identity (usually on the basis of fairly unambiguous physiological evidence, the possession of a penis or vagina), but one becomes a man or woman through social interactions within a set of cultural understandings about femininity or masculinity.”

The active production of gender is also emphasised by West and Zimmerman's (1987) widely-used term “doing gender” in which gender is not simply a property of individuals, but rather an accomplishment taking place in the social world.

In relation to terminology, there is a further complication involved in making a sex/gender distinction, which is the ambiguous nature of the term ‘sex’ which can refer to both biological differences and erotic relations. Stevi Jackson (2006) suggests that this difficulty can be avoided to some extent by using gender to denote all aspects of the distinction between women and men (both biological and social) and reserving ‘sex’ to denote erotic acts. Sexuality can then be defined as a broader term referring to “all erotically significant aspects of social life and social being” (ibid: 42). While I will follow Jackson's definition of sexuality, I feel there is value in retaining the sex/gender distinction as argued by Bradley to emphasise the socially constructed nature of gender, which reflects the usage in much of the literature referred to. If referring to erotic activity or relations, this will be made clear.

As sexuality will be used as a broader term to refer to all erotically significant aspects of social life, when referring to individuals' identifications as heterosexual, lesbian, bisexual etc. I shall use sexual identity or sexual orientation. However, by such usage I do not wish to suggest that such categorisations are fixed or unchanging (see 3.4).

3.2.2 Feminist approaches

3.2.2.1 Liberal, socialist and radical feminisms

The development of Western feminist thought up until the 1990s tends to be characterised as three broad strands: liberal or ‘rights’ feminism; socialist or Marxist

feminism and radical feminism (i.e. Bradley, 1996; 2007; Cockburn, 1991). The liberal feminist tradition – in which women seek to be included in areas of public life from which they have formerly been excluded, on equal terms to men - goes back to the publication in 1792 of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Cockburn, 1991: 19). During the nineteenth century 'first wave' of feminism, campaigners followed the liberal tradition based on the rights of 'man' and pressed for rights to be extended to women, including the right to vote, to hold public office, rights in marriage and to hold property. This tradition continued during the 'second wave' feminist movement of the late 1960s and 1970s, with demands for access to the labour market, and the introduction of anti-discrimination law, among many other areas. While this approach was criticised (by radical feminism, see below) for lacking ambition in only seeking equal treatment to men – rather than radical reform of systems to accommodate women based on specific needs – it remains influential today in areas of policy such as trying to increase numbers of women on public bodies.

Second-wave feminists in Britain were also strongly influenced by Marxist or socialist ideas about class oppression under capitalist systems, and feminists following this tradition began to consider women's position in the relations of production. While critical of the neglect of gender in traditional Marxism, these feminists saw capitalist relations as the framework for gender oppression and focussed on the economic aspects of gender, highlighting the importance of women's unpaid labour in the home to maintaining capitalism, women's position in the labour market and gender segregation etc (Bradley, 1996: 87). Debates ensued about whether gender inequality could be conceptualised within a single system of capitalism, or whether separate but interrelated structures of patriarchy and capitalism coexisted (see below 3.2.3). Criticism was also levelled by radical feminists for the failure to look at aspects of women's oppression that went beyond the economic, such as sexuality and male violence.

The third tradition, radical feminism, was sceptical about the aims of achieving equality with men on their terms and within the existing system, and instead emphasised women's 'difference'. This highlighted women's role in procreation, focused on sexuality and the treatment of women's bodies, and paid attention to issues of violence towards women, including rape and domestic violence. For many, this involved separate women's organising, which, at the more radical end of the spectrum, meant living, working or organising within communities separate from men. 'Separatism' became

associated with lesbian feminism. 'Political lesbianism' took a radical stand on heterosexuality, viewing it as an institution of women's oppression (Jackson, 2006: 48). The critique of heterosexuality was developed in Adrienne Rich's influential work ([1980] 1996) which argued that women are offered no choice but heterosexuality (see 3.4). Radical feminism was, however, criticised for essentialising women's difference from men by highlighting reproductive and sexual differences and tending towards a view of biology as determining women's destiny. Furthermore, its claims to a universal sisterhood among women tended to marginalize differences, particularly of class and ethnicity, between women (Bradley, 1996: 89), which will be discussed further below. This broad characterisation of strands in feminist thought can be criticised for underplaying the connections between the three strands (Bradley, 1996: 85) and indeed many feminists "are a little bit of each" (Cockburn, 1991: 28). However, it provides a context in which to view later developments in feminist thinking. Furthermore, while academic debates around feminism might have moved into other areas, as explored below, elements of the main orientations outlined here are still observable in contemporary equality policy debates and legislation.

3.2.2.2 Black feminism

During the 1970s and 1980s feminism was beset with divisions between white and black feminists, working and middle-class women, lesbians and heterosexual women, among others, leading to a theoretical questioning of the value of the category 'woman' to describe a common experience of oppression. Arguments developed by black feminism were very influential in this regard. In political terms black feminists challenged the claims of feminism (said to be represented by white, middle-class women) to speak for all women, and black women writers (many of whom were in the United States, such as bell hooks, Angela Davis and Patricia Hill Collins) accused much feminist theory of claiming to be universally applicable to all women, while in reality being based on the experiences of white, middle-class Western women (Collins, 2000: 5-6). Collins, and others, argued that black feminist thought and ideas provided an important and different perspective on women's history and experience, as well as representing a critical social theory that had the purpose of analysing and resisting institutionalised racism. Furthermore, the particular experiences of black women as a group, for example of racial segregation in housing, education or employment, encouraged the formation of a collective standpoint (Collins, 2000: 24), which has been

developed into a methodological approach – feminist standpoint – which draws on a ‘marginal’ or ‘outsider’ status to generate distinctive perspectives (which will be explored in Chapter 4).

Further developing the challenge to white feminism’s claimed universal applicability, black feminist thought showed how black women experience a distinctive set of social practices stemming from their particular history:

“within a unique matrix of domination characterized by intersecting oppressions. Race is far from being the only significant marker of group difference – class, gender, sexuality, religion, and citizenship status all matter greatly in the United States” (Collins, 2000: 23).

Supporting this critique in the UK, Beverley Skeggs (1997) pointed out that feminism was never universal, usually spoken by those with class or race privilege and often addressing concerns distant from the daily lives of working-class women. As argued later (see 3.3), black feminist thought has provided crucial understandings and conceptualisations of the nature of intersecting oppressions, going beyond gender and race and encompassing other bases of inequality.

3.2.2.3 Postmodernism

A further challenge to the universality of the notion of ‘woman’ has been the development of post-structuralist and postmodernist modes within feminist thought. One influential feature of the post-structuralist/postmodernist strand in feminist approaches to gender since the 1990s is the notion of deconstructing categories, particularly binary oppositions such as man/woman or heterosexual/homosexual. Bradley (1996) cites Derrida as a proponent of deconstructionism, which argues that such binary categorisation forces a range of experience to be polarised, thus suppressing the ‘submerged middle’ in between. In such categorisations, the ‘other’ (i.e. woman) is defined in opposition to the dominant group (man) creating the ‘other’ as inferior. Critiquing and rejecting such categorisations has been a preoccupation of postmodernist-inspired thinking, and it is easy to see why it has been influential within feminist thinking, given that the presumed universality of experience denoted by the term ‘woman’ had already been the subject of challenge by women outside of the white middle-class dominant norm, as discussed above.

Attention to discourse – defined by Fairclough (2003: 17) as “a particular way of representing some part of the (physical, social, psychological) world” – is also a key

feature of postmodernism, following Foucault's identification of discourse as one of the ways in which claims to represent truth or scientific knowledge are articulated. Foucault argued that the claim of scientific knowledge to reveal objective truth was simply one among many discursive formations, but one that had acquired a certain power (Bradley, 1996: 103). Attention to discourse, and discursive levels of analysis, has now been widely taken up within sociological study, and has been influential in analysis of gender, including by some such as Bradley (1996) or MacDowell (1997) who are sceptical of other elements of postmodernism, but believe that it may be an additional tool for analysis.

Also implicit in the postmodern approach is a rejection of the 'grand narratives' characteristic of much social theory, such as Marx's theory of capitalism, or indeed systems such as patriarchy, viewing it as an impossible task to explain societies in totality. Instead, we should turn our attention to 'local narratives' – studies of interaction in specific contexts and of actors' own accounts of how they make sense of the interaction (Bradley, 1996).

Thus, postmodernist influences are clearly important in turning our attention to how unequal relations are represented at the level of discourse and representation, or in focusing on local, contextualised interactions and processes rather than seeking grand structural explanations for society. However, there is a serious risk that such forms of analysis overlook significant material inequalities in society by failing to consider patterns and relations of oppression. Bradley (1996: 43-44) argues that traditional Marxist views certainly need to be modified to account for global changes and to incorporate a gender analysis – she prefers the concept of 'sets of relationships' rather than systems or structures. Yet she believes that the labour/capital relationship is still a central feature of modern Western societies. However, postmodernism does not take sufficient account of social structures or social divisions: it "offers the promise of a plural account of inequality which it has not yet fulfilled" (ibid: 43). Following Bradley's critique I shall take an approach that is more grounded in the material inequalities of lived relations (see 3.6).

3.2.3 Patriarchy and dual systems theories

The notion of patriarchy has been very important in explaining the persistence of male dominance in all spheres, including paid work. An influential exponent of this idea is

Sylvia Walby, whose writings (particularly *Theorizing Patriarchy*, 1990 and *Gender Transformations*, 1997) develop a theory of patriarchy as a set of structures that maintain male domination, covering household production, patriarchal relations in paid work; patriarchal relations in the state; male violence; patriarchal relations in sexuality; and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions (Walby, 1990). These six structures are described as relatively autonomous (which I contest in relation to the public and private division below), but having causal effects on each other.

Walby believes that patriarchy exists alongside capitalism, but is not derived from it: she is therefore a proponent of ‘dual systems theory’ in which the two are interconnected at various points, but can change independently of each other. This dual systems approach has been the subject of criticism, notably from those who posit that gender and class are mutually constituted and therefore there is no clear boundary between them. Anna Pollert (1996: 646) argues that “class relations are infused with gender, race and other modes of social differentiation *from the start*” (italics in original). She supports Acker’s (1989: 239) distinction between the dual systems approach of “positing analytically independent structures and then looking for the linkages between them” and the view that “social relations are constituted through processes in which the linkages are inbuilt”. For Pollert, all class relations are gendered and gender relations always have a class dimension at some level.

Theories of capitalism and patriarchy as dual structures have also been criticised for being too static, not allowing for change and variety. However, Walby’s *Gender Transformations* (1997) cannot be accused of failing to consider change, and analyses in detail the complex changes taking place in patterns of inequality between men and women in recent decades. She replaces ‘patriarchal structures’ with the concept of ‘gender regimes’ to analyse changes in gender relations. While Bradley (2007) believes that Walby abandons the use of patriarchy here, in my reading Walby simply renames her six structures of patriarchy as gender regimes without seeming to alter the underlying concepts. Walby distinguishes between a ‘domestic gender regime’, based on household production as the main structure and site of exploitation of women’s work and sexuality, and a ‘public gender regime’, based on the segregation and subordination of women within the structures of paid employment and the state, and within culture, sexuality and violence. While this distinction may serve to highlight the historical progress made by women in Western democracies from mainly private spheres to

greater, but still unequal, participation in public life, it does not seem to be a useful division when considering how gender relations are played out within organisations. The literature on gender, sexuality and work organisations (discussed below) explodes the myth that sexuality is a personal and private matter by demonstrating the extensive ways in which sexuality (and therefore also gender relations) operates to shape organisations and relations between individuals within them (see Hearn and Parkin, 1987; Hearn et al., 1989). The boundaries between public and private domains are therefore far more blurred than Walby's distinction might suggest.

Criticisms have also been levelled at Walby's work and at dual systems theories on the basis that they are "overly monolithic" and fail to take account of differences of class, ethnicity and sexuality among women, and fail to offer an account of ethnic inequality (Bradley, 1999; Bradley, 2007; Jackson and Scott, 2002). I would agree that Walby's writings (1990; 1997) do not explicitly consider the experiences of non-heterosexual women. While one of her six structures of patriarchy is 'patriarchal relations in sexuality', and the institution of heterosexuality is recognised as a central institution of patriarchy, this does not translate into an interest in the variety of experience among women who do not identify as heterosexual.

This lack of attention to the heterogeneity of women's experience results, in part, from the level at which she pitches her analysis, that of overarching social structures (or 'grand narratives' to use the postmodern critique). Other writers seeking to understand class and gender, such as Acker (1990; 2006a; 2006b), Bradley (1996; 1999), Cockburn (1991) and Pollert (1996), instead prefer modes of analysis that focus on *process* or *dynamics* which explain not just patterns of discrimination or disadvantage (which Walby does amply), but try to understand the processes that produce such inequalities. Their frameworks for doing this will be explored further later as a more fruitful approach for my research and analysis (see 3.6).

3.3 Intersectionality

I have shown that black feminism was highly influential in drawing attention to the diversity of women's experience, and challenging feminism's claims to represent a universal 'womanhood', while in reality expressing white, middle-class experience. Furthermore, the development of black feminist thought has led to crucial insights and conceptualisations of the nature of intersecting oppressions. bell hooks' (1981)

renowned work *Ain't I a Woman* argued that no other group in America had had their identity “socialized out of existence” in the way that black women had: “We are rarely recognized as a group separate and distinct from black men, or as a present part of the larger group ‘women’ in this culture” (hooks, 1981: 7). This may represent one of the starting points in the development of an analysis of the intersectionality of social divisions, focusing particularly on gender, race and class (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Brah and Phoenix (2004) show how political projects, such as the Combahee River Collective, a Boston-based black lesbian feminist organisation, were highlighting the connections between racial, sexual, heterosexual and class forms of oppression as early as 1977, and were advocating “the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking” (Combahee River Collective, 1977, cited in Brah and Phoenix, 2004: 78).

However Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) is generally credited with first using the term ‘intersectionality’ (Nash, 2008; Yuval-Davis, 2006) to highlight the ‘multidimensionality’ of the experience of marginalised subjects, with particular focus on the intersections of gender and race. Crenshaw (1991) details how structural intersectionality, which places women of colour at the intersection of race and gender, makes their experience qualitatively different from that of white women. While primarily exploring intersections of gender and race, she notes, though, that the concept of intersectionality can be expanded to include other social divisions such as class, sexuality, religion, age and citizenship. Crenshaw’s (1991: 1243) ‘intersectional sensibility’ can be a valuable tool for revealing the persistence of intersectional inequalities in women’s experiences in organisations (Healy et al., 2011).

There has been significant interest among feminist scholars in developing theoretical approaches to intersectionality, making an important contribution to women’s studies (McCall, 2005). However, its complexity, messiness and ‘murkiness’ as a concept have also been highlighted (McCall, 2005; Nash, 2008), particularly in relation to its methodology.

McCall (2005) outlines three broad methodological approaches to the study of intersecting and complex social relations which usefully illustrate some of the difficulties and differences associated with theorising and studying intersectionality. She places anticategorical complexity at one end of the spectrum, with intercategorical complexity at the other end and intracategorical complexity between the two. The

anticategorical approach is based on deconstructing analytical categories such as gender and race, seeing social life as “too irreducibly complex – overflowing with multiple and fluid determinations of both subjects and structures” (McCall, 2005: 1773) and thus rejects the use of such categories as themselves reproducing inequality in the process of producing difference. This approach is found in the poststructuralist and postmodernist forms of feminism discussed above. The methodological implications for such an approach, McCall points out, is to “render suspect” not only the process of categorisation itself, but “any research that is based on such categorization, because it inevitably leads to demarcation, and demarcation to exclusion, and exclusion to inequality” (ibid: 1777).

The second approach, intracategorical complexity, examines the experiences of multiply marginalised subjects to expose the dangers of categorisation, but does not entirely reject the categories themselves. Studies following this approach tend to focus on particular social groups at neglected points of intersection, so would include, for example, Crenshaw’s (1989; 1991) attention to the unexplored experiences of black women. A case study method may be used as the starting point for analysis of a new or invisible group, which then reveals wider social processes: the approach “begins with a unified intersectional core – a single social group, event, or concept – and works its way outward to analytically unravel one by one the influences of gender, race, class, and so on” (McCall, 2005: 1787).

The third approach, favoured by McCall (2005: 1784-5), is the intercategorical approach, which starts from the position that there exist relationships of inequality among already constituted social groups, imperfect and changing as they are, and takes those relationships as the centre of analysis. This approach then seeks to uncover these relationships, exposing the links between inequality and the categories themselves. In contrast to the single-group studies of the intracategorical approach, the intercategorical approach employs multigroup studies “to analyze the intersection of the full set of dimensions of multiple categories and thus examine both advantage and disadvantage explicitly and simultaneously” (ibid: 1787).

This third method is most useful for my study which explores the experiences of multiple groups. Although I only examine women within the category of gender, I consider how sexual identity and class intersect with gender by including within the

analysis heterosexual and lesbian women and those in more and less advantaged occupational groups within the industrial sectors of interest.

The question of who we mean by intersectional subjects and whether the focus of intersectional studies should only be on multiply disadvantaged subjects or whether all identities are intersectional has been raised by Nash (2008: 10). She notes that it is unclear whether “intersectionality is a theory of marginalized subjectivity or a generalized theory of identity”, although the majority of intersectional studies have centred on multiply marginalised subjects.

The nature and construction of such disadvantage is a further area of difference within conceptualisations of intersectionality. While theories of intersectionality have sought to challenge cumulative conceptions of identity which suggest that a black woman will necessarily face a ‘double oppression’ or ‘double jeopardy’ based on both her gender and race, and a black lesbian would experience a ‘triple oppression’ based on gender, race and sexual orientation, it has been observed that cumulative conceptions recur in Crenshaw’s writings (Bagilhole, 2010; Nash, 2008). For example, Bagilhole (2010: 267) points to Crenshaw’s (1991) image of a hatch to a basement containing all people who are disadvantaged, through which only those in a relatively privileged position can escape, leaving the multiply burdened behind. This implies that there is an additive effect of the burdens of disadvantage. Nash (2008: 7) argues that Crenshaw’s (1989) critique sees black women’s identities as constituted exclusively by race and gender and precludes an examination not only of ‘multiple burdens’ but also the intersections of privileges and burdens, beyond race or gender, paying little attention to the role of sexuality, nationality or class. This cumulative approach is also seen in definitions of intersectionality such as that of Kanyoro (2001, cited in Bradley, 2007: 190) as the way in which “multiple forms of subordination interlink and *compound* to result in a multiple burden” (my emphasis). Bradley states that “the intersection of differences may produce the most extreme cases of exploitation and discrimination” (ibid: 191). While this may certainly be true for some intersections, I suggest that the picture may be more complex in relation to other multiple positionings.

My review of the literature (see Chapter 2) on the experience of lesbians at work and in domestic and parenting arrangements suggested that it does not tell the whole of the story to presume that lesbians always face an employment disadvantage on the grounds of both their gender *and* minority sexual identity at work that is necessarily greater than

that of heterosexual women. Furthermore there was conflicting evidence about the influence of occupational class on lesbians' experience of coming out at work. This underscores the need for an approach, when considering sexual identity as a point of intersection, that is not simply cumulative or additive, but constitutive. As Yuval-Davis (2006: 195) argues:

“Being oppressed, for example, as ‘a Black person’ is always constructed and intermeshed in other social divisions (for example, gender, social class, disability status, sexuality, age, nationality, immigration status, geography, etc.). Any attempt to essentialize ‘Blackness’ or ‘womanhood’ or ‘working classness’ as specific forms of concrete oppression in additive ways inevitably conflates narratives of identity politics with descriptions of positionality.”

Such an approach reminds us of debates over patriarchy and capitalism (see 3.2.3), in which the interrelated nature of gender and class was recognised by some UK feminists. Pollert's (1996) view of class relations as always infused with gender, race and other modes of social differentiation is a constitutive approach to oppression that draws on historical materialist rather than postmodernist traditions, albeit without using the term ‘intersectionality’. Bradley (2007) also rejects a necessary association between intersectionality and “the disruption of modernist thinking produced by postcolonial and poststructuralist theoretical ideas” (Brah and Phoenix, 2004: 82), arguing that it is possible to use an intersectional approach within a modernist framework that looks for recurring patterns and regularities of intersection that constitute inequality. Similarly McCall (2005) showed that postmodernist notions of ‘anticategorical’ disruption and fragmentation are only one strand of intersectional approaches, and her favoured ‘intercategorical’ methodology offers, I believe, a way forward that continues to examine the material experience of groups, while also exploring the diversity within them.

Less attention has been paid to sexuality in intersectional analysis than other social divisions (Hines, 2011), with intersections of sexuality and class a particular absence (McDermott, 2011; Taylor, 2005), leaving the frameworks for such analysis less well defined. However a framework that I believe can be adopted (although primarily developed for analysis of gender, race and class) for operationalising such an intersectional examination of workers' experience within organizations is Acker's (2006a; 2006b) conception of “inequality regimes” which will be discussed below (see 3.6.3).

3.4 Sexuality

Feminism – particularly radical feminism – was concerned with sexuality, predominantly in terms of how dominant heterosexuality and male violence acted to control women. Work on homosexuality, lesbian and gay sexuality, and subsequently queer theory has developed to some extent separately from feminist scholarship, despite some parallels, as will be shown. Following Jackson (2006: 42), I define sexuality as referring to erotic aspects of social life and social being. Thus “sexuality is not, therefore, reducible to the heterosexual-homosexual binary – although this is an important aspect of its social organization – but in the multitude of desires and practices that exist across that divide”.

It was not until the 1950s and 60s that sociologists turned their attention to sexuality, as a ‘speciality area’, and in the 1970s and 1980s interest in the study of homosexuality grew, influenced by the lesbian and gay political movements of the time (Seidman, 1996). During this time, social constructionist theories began to suggest that “homosexuality” was not a uniform, identical phenomenon, but that its meaning varied historically. Mary McIntosh ([1968] 1996) was one of the first to challenge the naturalness of homosexuality in an article in 1968 that presented homosexuality as a social role. She drew on functionalist sociology to argue that societies create a homosexual role to distinguish acceptable from unacceptable forms of behaviour: defining homosexuality as impure or polluted allows heterosexuality to be viewed as pure and desirable. McIntosh’s work was developed by Jeffrey Weeks (1990: x) who showed how a homosexual identity was created in the nineteenth century:

“The idea of ‘the homosexual’ as a distinct sort of being has not always existed. It is an invention of the modern world. It is historically and socially constructed.”

Weeks notes that at the same time he as was developing this argument, Foucault wrote his highly influential *History of Sexuality* (1980) which argued similarly that the homosexual as a distinctive type of social identity is unique to modern Western societies, and Foucault’s ideas have remained central to much theorising on sexuality.

Lesbian feminist writers, however, had a different emphasis, and were focusing on heterosexuality as a social institution. Adrienne Rich’s important work, *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* ([1980] 1996) argued that women are offered no choice but heterosexuality. She outlined the different ways in which male power is used to control women’s sexuality, one of which she says is “the rendering invisible of the

lesbian possibility” (ibid: 135). Rich also put forward an idea of a “lesbian continuum” to signify a range of “woman-identified experience” that was not solely expressed through sexual acts, and included many forms of intense primary relationships between women. This idea was highly significant in reconsidering the relationship between gender and sexuality and blurring the boundaries between lesbians and heterosexual women, and therefore suggesting greater common cause. Thus not only did the notion of a “lesbian continuum” disrupt binary notions of heterosexuality and homosexuality (prefiguring queer theory, as we see below), it also broadened the conceptualisation of lesbianism from simply a sexual preference to a broad social category (Richardson, 2006). Rich’s work remains important in the challenge that it issued to feminist researchers and theorists in particular to examine heterosexuality as an institution that controlled all women (and, we would now argue, men, albeit in different ways) and to question the extent to which it is really a choice or a preference for all women. However, the notion of a lesbian continuum with its assumptions of a “common womanliness” can be accused of “traces of essentialism” for implying that lesbianism is an innate propensity common to all women (Jackson, 2006: 46).

Reflecting the divides within feminism, in lesbian and gay politics too differences emerged over issues of race, gender and class, with challenges to the concept of a lesbian and gay identity, and arguments that it reflected a white, middle-class experience (Seidman, 1996: 10). Steven Seidman notes that lesbian feminism was also challenged by both lesbians and feminists who felt that they were stigmatised as deviant or male-identified for not conforming to the notion of lesbianism espoused by feminists. He says:

“In the course of the feminist ‘sex wars’, a virtual parade of female and lesbian sexualities entered the public life of lesbian culture, e.g., butch-fems, sadomasochists, sexualities of all kinds mocking the idea of a unified lesbian sexual identity.” (Seidman, 1996: 10-11)

These challenges to the assumption of a unified homosexual – or lesbian – identity contributed to the development of queer politics and queer theory in the 1980s, occurring at the same time as postmodernist ideas were influencing feminist thought (see above). Queer politics was a confrontational type of activism that grew up in response to the lesbian and gay identity politics of the time, challenging its supposed universality outlined above, initially in the United States, although later in the UK. Related to these political developments, queer theory emerged in prestigious US

universities in the late 1980s to challenge the existing dominance of ‘lesbian and gay studies’ and ideas of lesbian and gay identity politics (Stein and Plummer, [1994] 1996). It was developed mainly in the humanities, although Seidman is among those who have sought to integrate its ideas into the social sciences. While queer theory has acquired multiple meanings, Seidman (1996: 11) notes that its challenge to the assumption of a unified homosexual identity is central.

“Queer theorists argue that identities are always multiple or at best composites with literally an infinite number of ways in which ‘identity- components’ (e.g. sexual orientation, race, class, nationality, gender, age, able-ness) can intersect or combine.”

Four characteristics of queer theory are delineated by Stein and Plummer ([1994] 1996: 134): a conceptualisation of sexual power as “embodied in different levels of social life, expressed discursively and enforced through boundaries and binary divides”; the problematisation of sexual and gender categories, and identities in general, as highlighted above; a rejection of civil rights (or identity) politics in favour of “a politics of carnival, transgression, and parody”; and the interrogation of areas not normally seen as belonging to sexuality and a rereading of ostensibly heterosexual texts or those assumed not to be sexualised. I find value in aspects of queer theory, such as the problematisation of sexual and gender categories and in particular the challenge to fixed or developmental notions of sexual identity formation (as seen in theories of coming out that result in stable gay identities in 2.5.2), just as some postmodern ideas provide useful challenges to feminist thinking. However, I am unconvinced that prioritising texts offers the most useful focus for analysis, as will be discussed below.

Seidman emphasises the significance of the shift in focus by queer theorists from “the oppression and liberation of the homosexual subject” to analysing institutional practices and discourses. Thus queer theory is no longer the study of a minority, but a study of knowledges and practices that organise society by “sexualising – heterosexualizing or homosexualizing – bodies, desires, acts, identities, social relations, knowledges, culture and social institutions” (1996: 13).

These ideas, however, are not unfamiliar to those engaged in the study of gender and sexuality of organisation, who, as will be shown later, were in the 1980s and 1990s identifying the ways in which sexuality – and particularly heterosexuality – construct and produce organisations and the individuals within them. As we have seen, Rich had also turned attention to the ways in which heterosexuality controlled women some years

earlier. A recognition of the importance of heterosexuality for structuring social relations, identities and institutions is therefore not new or unique to queer theory (Richardson, 2006: 32). However, the difference lies in queer theory's problematisation of heterosexuality, its challenge to it as a category and breaking down of oppositions between hetero- and homosexuality – in contrast to theories that instead try to explain the ways in which heterosexuality – as an institution, or through organisational processes – produces inequalities of gender and sexual orientation. It is possible to observe a parallel here with McCall's (2005) distinction between anticategorical and intercategorical approaches to intersectionality (see 3.3). The risk, though, in the rejection of categorisation is the loss of attention to relations of domination and subordination that continue to circumscribe these categories (Erel et al., 2011).

A related problem with queer theory is its focus on 'texts' as the site of analysis and an interest in how mass culture is involved in shaping sexuality. But this can also be seen as one of its failings by those interested in the study of society. Stein and Plummer ([1994] 1996: 137-8) argue that one of the weaknesses of queer theorists is that:

“They rarely, if ever, move beyond the text. There is a dangerous tendency for the new queer theorists to ignore 'real' queer life as it is materially experienced across the world, while they play with the free-floating signifiers of texts.”

This is a significant shortcoming of queer theory, particularly when it produces claims that heterosexuality is “perpetually at risk, that is, that it 'knows' its own possibility of being undone” (Butler 1991, cited in Stein and Plummer, [1994] 1996: 135). The idea that heterosexuality is a highly unstable system, perpetually at risk is not borne out by its remarkable persistence as the dominant form of sexuality, and is at odds with the experience of people in workplaces in the UK where heterosexuality appears alive and well as the dominant norm (as my empirical evidence in Chapter 7 will demonstrate). Indeed queer theory's lack of empirical investigation of lived experience connects to its avoidance of analysis of asymmetrical power and the privileges associated with those categories that have been deconstructed (Taylor et al., 2011).

Postmodernism and queer theory have also been criticised by feminist writers on the grounds that the gender hierarchy is replaced by heterosexuality as the primary regulatory system. Jackson (1995: 18), for example, argues that it essential to consider heterosexuality and gender together in order to understand the material conditions produced by heterosexuality:

“It is vitally important for feminism that we see heterosexuality as a gendered hierarchy and not just as a normative construction of cross-sex desire... heterosexuality is founded not only on the linkage between gender and sexuality, but on the appropriation of women’s bodies and labour.”

Jackson’s approach thus responds to both the criticism of queer theory that it loses sight of gender, as well as the lack of attention to lesbian and gay sexuality in feminist scholarship or mainstream sociology, described as “theoretical heterosexism” by Dunne (2000a) (see 2.9).

3.5 Identity

The notion of identity features prominently in conceptualisations of both gender and sexuality, and discussion so far has revolved around who we include in, or how we understand, such identities as ‘woman’ or ‘lesbian’ or ‘gay’, and their usefulness in both analytical and political terms. But equally important, according to Richard Jenkins (2004), is understanding the *process* of identification in individual and collective terms. Indeed Jenkins builds a strong case for identity, or identification, as a strategic concept that, unlike most other sociological concepts, makes as much sense individually as collectively, and avoids prioritising either structure or action by incorporating an interaction between the individual and the collective. His model of identity is one of an internal-external dialectic in which individual and collective identities are always constituted in relation to each other: they are formed in a relationship between the internal and external, self and other, and the individual and collective.

As a framework for understanding how identification takes place, Jenkins (2004) draws on the work of sociologists such as Erving Goffman and Anthony Giddens, and delineates three ‘orders’ that make up the human world: the individual order (that of embodied individuals and what goes on in their heads); the interaction order (relationships between individuals, what goes on between people); and the institutional order (the world or pattern and organisation, of established ways of doing things) (Jenkins, 2004: 17). This provides a way of looking at how different sorts of identities may be constituted in relation to these orders, although he acknowledges that the orders are deeply interconnected. Thus the individual order concerns how individual identity and selfhood is constituted, and he suggests that some identities that are established in early life are primary identities – more resilient to change than other identities formed

later in life. These can include kinship and ethnicity, and gender, which he describes as one of the most “pervasive classificatory principles” in human life (ibid: 61).

The interaction order concerns validation of our identities by other people, and reminds us that “what people think about us is no less significant than what we think about ourselves” and that “identity is never unilateral” (ibid: 19). While this may be quite a straightforward idea, it is nonetheless a significant one in relation to sexuality, which may be considered a ‘stigmatised identity’ (Ragins, 2008; Ragins et al., 2007). It differs from some other identities in that there is a necessity to either conceal or reveal a minority sexual identity in the face of presumptions of heterosexuality (see 2.5.2), thus giving identification by others a particular importance for individual lives, as well as in broader societal terms.

In relation to the institutional order, Jenkins distinguishes between categories and groups: categories are comparable to Marx’s class *in* itself (where the members are classified as having something significant in common, such as their relation to the means of production, but they do not necessarily see themselves in these terms), and groups are similar to Marx’s definition of a class *for* itself (i.e. one that has recognised its shared situation in relation to the means of production). Groups, then, have identified themselves as belonging to a collectivity of some sort, and categories are those identified by others, which those being categorised may, or may not, be aware of.

This distinction between groups and categories is helpful in thinking about the ways in which individuals vary in their sense of group membership or identity, such that being a woman, or being black or working-class, may be salient or meaningful at some times and less so at other times. Such identification can also be the shared grounds for political action, as in the forms of ‘identity politics’ mentioned above, but also in choosing to join a trade union self-organised group for women, or a networking group for black or minority ethnic professionals, for example. Bradley (1996) makes a useful third distinction: she identifies three levels of social identity: passive, active and politicised. Passive identities are comparable to Jenkins’ categories in that they are potential identities deriving from sets of lived relationships, but are not acted upon. Bradley sees class as a passive identity for most now in Britain. Active identities are those that individuals are conscious of, and may provide a base for actions: Bradley gives the example of a woman being whistled at or pestered in the street, which causes her to think of herself as a woman. Thus an active identity may be aroused as a defence

against the actions of others or in response to discrimination. It is different, though, from a politicised identity, which is when an identity becomes a more constant base for action, and provides the basis for collective organisation. These distinctions will become important in my study when considering the different ways in which women respond to working in a male-dominated environment, and the extent to which they choose to identify with and make use of available support networks for women (discussed in Chapter 8).

An important insight from Jenkins' conceptualisation of identity is that identification is *always* consequential: this means that it is implicated in the allocation of resources and power, and this occurs particularly in the way that organisations identify people and on this basis allocate resources and penalties. Thus:

“Identification and allocation are, in fact, mutually entailed in each other. Identity is consequential in terms of allocation: how you are identified may influence what, and how much, you get.” (Jenkins, 2004: 174)

In the recruitment and interview process, then, characteristics ascribed to male and female identities are drawn upon, so, for example, a male manager who ‘knows’ that women are more dextrous than men will only employ women as production workers on the assembly line, contributing to a wider pattern of women's overrepresentation in part-time semi-skilled assembly work (ibid: 155).

Jenkins' emphasis on the consequences of identification in the allocation of resources and power therefore sits well with approaches that I consider next that explore how power is exercised and resisted in organisations through divisions of gender, sexuality and class. Furthermore his division of the three orders of the social world suggests a framework that will be valuable in understanding the individual processes of identification that lead women to consider gender atypical occupations, their interactions as a minority with dominant others, as well as with others in a minority position, set within an institutional order of dominant heterosexuality that is reproduced in organisational processes and practices.

3.6 Gender, sexuality and class in organisations

This section turns to organisations to consider how some of the concepts already outlined relating to gender, sexuality and class can be applied. It will focus on the way organisations are gendered, and the importance of the notion of embodiment to gender

relations, as well as to other power relations. It also considers Harriet Bradley's framework for identifying the operation of gendered power resources, and its relationship to Joan Acker's approach to uncovering the intersections between different forms of inequality in organisational processes.

3.6.1 Gendered organisations

There is now a considerable body of literature that considers how organisations are 'gendered' and aims to explain the operation of this process (for example, Aaltio and Mills, 2002; Acker, 1990; 2006a; 2006b; Bradley, 1999; Cockburn, 1991; Halford et al., 1997; Itzin and Newman, 1995; Ledwith and Colgan, 1996; McDowell, 1997).

An influential proponent of this approach is Joan Acker (1990), who showed how organisations are "gendered processes", and are far from being gender neutral, as is claimed. She elaborates five processes that interact to 'gender' the workplace. First, the construction of divisions along the lines of gender includes the well-documented division of labour and ways in which men attain the highest positions of organisational power. Second is the construction of symbols or images that express, reinforce or oppose those divisions, including through language, dress, culture. Third, the interactions between men and women, women and women, men and men produce gendered social structures, some of which can be revealed through analysis of patterns in conversations. Fourth, the production of gendered identities occurs through all the other processes and can include choice of appropriate work, language, dress and behaviour. Finally, gender is implicated in the creation and conceptualisation of social structures that form organisations, so job evaluation schemes, for example, while claiming a neutral organisational logic, assume a gender-based division of labour and organisation of domestic roles.

3.6.1.1 Sexuality and embodiment

An important contribution to the literature on gender and work has been the introduction of sexuality, alongside gender, into the study of organisations (Hearn and Parkin, 1987; Hearn and Parkin, 2001; Hearn et al., 1989). Burrell and Hearn (1989) argued that sexuality operates in organisations in two ways: just as sexuality constructs organisations, in the rules and structures that are based on sexualised relations, so organisations construct sexuality, meaning that how individuals perceive and express their own sexuality is developed in relation to the culture of the organisations of which

they are a part. Evidence can be seen, for example in the boss-secretary relationship or in sexual harassment at work. They broaden definitions of sexuality to see it as “an ordinary and frequent public process rather than an extraordinary feature of private life” (1989: 13) and, drawing on Foucault’s term, as an all pervasive “politics of the body” rather than a set of discrete practices. They acknowledge that the focus is largely on heterosexuality and heterosexual relations in organisations, because hierarchic or patriarchal heterosexuality are the dominant forms in most organisations.

Acker (1990) draws on this work to show how the assumption that the abstract worker in fact possesses a male body is used to control and exclude women. The male body, with its minimal responsibility for procreation, pervades organisational processes, she argues, while women’s bodies – representing female sexuality and the ability to procreate – are suspect and stigmatized:

“While women’s bodies are ruled out of order, or sexualised and objectified in work organizations, men’s bodies are not” (Acker, 1990: 152).

Furthermore, it is argued that the regulation of women’s appearance at work forms part of the employment contract (Wajcman, 1998: 119), often with the expectation of a performance of a certain form of femininity, particularly in service work (Adkins, 1995). Gatrell (2008: 14) argues that “the perpetuation of male domination continues to be maintained via the body [...] women’s identities as individual agents are often subsumed by their collective identities as reproductive and sexualized bodies”.

McDowell’s (1997) examination of gender performances in City of London investment banks shows too how women’s bodies are constructed as ‘out of place’ in the workplace and marked by their bodies as ‘natural’, in contrast to male rationality and disembodiment. She shows that such processes go beyond gendered embodiment, and highlights one of Young’s (1990) five faces of oppression – cultural imperialism – to draw attention to the aversion towards those who deviate from the contemporary hegemonic version of an idealised body, and the violence done to them. Young argues:

“When the dominant discourse defines some groups as different, as the Other, the members of these groups are imprisoned in their bodies. Dominant discourse defines them in terms of bodily characteristics, and constructs those bodies as ugly, dirty, defiled, impure, contaminated or sick.” (Young, 1990: 123)

Young is not only referring to women’s bodies, but also to racialised minority groups, to old people, gay men and lesbians, disabled people and fat people. Her notion of the

“scaling of bodies” describes how nineteenth century rational thought separated reason from the body and emotions and enabled privileged groups to become disembodied, transcending materiality, while constructing other groups in relation to their bodies. Science used the “aesthetic scaling of bodies” to determine the “best” natural body types – associated with white, masculine strength and youth, so that women were identified with sexuality, and other groups such as Blacks, Jews and homosexuals scientifically classified as degenerate (ibid: 125-129). While these particular characterisations may no longer apply to twenty-first century Western societies, the continuing prominence given to presentations of the body in contemporary culture cannot be denied, and its significance for both women and men appears to have increased in the decade or so since the publication of McDowell’s 1997 book, as recent feminist analysis shows (Walter, 2010).

Thus concepts of embodiment at work and in organisational culture, particularly in relation to gender and sexuality, are important when trying to understand the experiences of women in non-traditionally female work, where women’s physical difference from men is immediately emphasised, for example in the form of assumptions about women’s lack of physical capacity to undertake “men’s work”, as well as in practices such as sexual harassment. Young’s (1990) notion of the “scaling of bodies” also suggests that it is interesting to explore how representations and expectations of lesbian bodies at work may differ, and to consider occupational class-based variations in processes of embodiment at work.

3.6.2 Gendered power resources

The importance of power relations to the dynamics of gender and sexuality has been touched on in much of the discussion so far. It has just been argued that the construction of women’s bodies as “out of place” in the workplace is used to exclude and control women, and that actual or threatened violence is part of this process. In Jenkins’ (2004) concept of identity, the allocation of power resources is demonstrated to operate in conjunction with organisational identification. Here I examine a framework for analysing gendered power within organisations.

“Gendered processes” within organisations, as expounded by Acker (1990), create and maintain gendered hierarchies, with men at the top, and women’s bodies controlled through female sexuality. However her view of hegemonic male sexuality that operates

to control women in work organisations appears to represent a one-directional view of power that does not allow for the possibility of more complex gendered power relations, which could, for example, invoke a dominant heterosexuality to control homosexual men, as well as women. It also may not allow for ways in which women may take pleasure in the expression of sexuality in workplace interactions (Halford et al., 1997; Pringle, 1989), or find ways in which to exert power through sexuality, although this is a complex and contested area (see discussion in Chapter 7). Nevertheless, women can and do find ways to challenge male domination at work, and one of the attractions of Harriet Bradley's (1999) notion of gendered power resources is that it allows an understanding of the complexity of power relations involved in relations between women and men. It also rejects a universalistic view of power – associated with the concept of patriarchy – in which men always dominate women. She gives the following definition:

“Gendered power refers to the capacity of one sex to control the behaviour of the other. Patriarchal power refers to the capacity of men to control women. Gendered power, then, is a broader concept which allows for variable relations between men and women, but does not rule out the possibility that power relations may be patriarchal.” (Bradley, 1999: 33)

Bradley develops Giddens' conceptualisation of power as differential access to and control of rules and resources, and applies this to gender, which he did not. Her framework is proposed as an empirically grounded account of the power resources involved in relations between men and women, to assist in analysing power at the micro level of organisations. Bradley defines nine dimensions of gendered power resources (ibid: 34-35): economic; positional; technical; physical; symbolic; collective; personal; sexual and domestic power⁷.

⁷ Economic power: the control of economic resources such as property, income and earnings, with men having the greater share of earnings. Positional power: gained by virtue of holding positions of authority, such as employer, manager, union leader, head of household, roles which are typically dominated by men. Technical power: the deployment of technical expertise and mechanical competence, normally monopolized by men at work and used to justify gender segregation and pay differentials. Physical power: physical strength is held to be associated with male body shape and muscularity, which has historically helped them to dominate at work. Male physical power also remains a source of male domination through the threat of violence. Symbolic power: the ability to impose one's own definitions, meanings, values and rules to give one's own experience primacy. This involves controlling how meanings are determined, including through the media of communication, such as control of 'talk' in meetings. Collective power: the mobilisation of collective resources, for example within trade unions, pressure groups or networks. Traditionally men have dominated trade unions and used management networks to maintain power, but women are starting to

Elements of this framework are useful for examining women's experience in male-dominated workplaces, where men may have an additional source of power, almost too obvious to mention, that of sheer numerical power. Clearly there is no automatic power derived from numerical majority – or workers would always dominate their bosses – but in male-dominated work there is often strength in numbers, as Kanter (1977) demonstrated in the processes by which 'tokens' are excluded by 'dominants'. However, male power may be challenged by the inclusion of women in a 'man's world' and Bradley's framework can help to investigate the ways in which men attempt to retain power or, indeed, how the power balance may shift as women enter. It also allows exploration of whether heterosexual women and lesbians experience differences in the operation of power by men, as well as the ways in which women may exercise power in relation to male colleagues. Additionally it can help to understand the ways in which women use female networks to strengthen their position at work, using collective power to mobilise collective resources. Identification is entwined with power, as the deployment of such collective resources will depend on the extent to which women choose to identify with other women, or perhaps prefer to ally themselves with other sexual minorities, for example through lesbian, gay or bisexual groups (discussed in Chapter 8).

3.6.3 Analysing intersecting inequalities

Power is also central to Joan Acker's (2006b) conceptualisation of how gender, class and race operate in organisational processes. Inequality in organisations takes the form of "systematic disparities between participants in power and control over goals, resources, and outcomes" (ibid: 443) and is, for example, observable in decisions over how to organize work and who gets promotion, levels of pay and other monetary rewards, respect and treatment at work, and workplace relations.

Acker (2006a) starts from the position that class matters at the start of the 21st century, perhaps even more than in the past as new forms of global inequality become evident.

use such networks to challenge male power. Personal power: the utilisation of personal resources, such as character, knowledge, experience, ability to get on with people, articulacy etc. Such resources may be used by women in the family to establish influence over men, children and other women, but may also be used in the workplace. Sexual power: an aspect of personal power, but also an important way in which women can assert themselves against men. However it is also used by men at work, for example in sexual harassment. Domestic power: derives from the control of household goods and materials, and domestic skills and experience. Control of domestic resources can give women considerable power in the home.

But she also wishes to comprehend and analyse its interaction with gender and race in a way that does not prioritise any one over the other, but recognises the interweaving of race, gender, class and other axes. She argues that race, gender and class are:

“simultaneous processes, socially constructed, historically and geographically specific, and involving material, ideological and psychological elements which create and recreate unequal economic and power distributions. These differences must be analysed together if we are to understand the complex lived realities of women (and men) and the social/economic processes that set the conditions for their/our lives.” (Acker, 2006a: 39)

Recognising the difficulties of understanding class, race and gender in one conceptual frame, and of what the metaphors of ‘mutually constituting’, ‘interweaving’ and ‘intersecting’ actually mean in terms of concrete analysis of social practice (2006a: 40), Acker focuses instead on racialised and gendered class *practices*. An example would be recruitment practices of employers in which only young, attractive, white women were hired as waitresses in restaurants (and in this example, I would add, practices related to age and physical appearance are also incorporated). Acker notes that such practices occur in the main in organisations, and develops the notion of “inequality regimes” to explain these processes. This extends her earlier work on the gendering of organisations (1990; 1992) to include class and race. Inequality regimes are defined as:

“loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions, and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities within particular organizations” (Acker, 2006b: 443).

While organisations vary in the extent of these disparities, Acker identifies a number of characteristics of inequality regimes, which may be observed to varying degrees. These are: the bases of inequality; the shape and degree of inequality; organising processes that create and recreate inequalities; the invisibility of inequalities; the legitimacy of inequalities; and the control and compliance that maintain inequalities.

The bases of inequality refer to class, gender and race differences in access to, or control of, resources. She notes too that other differences, such as religion, age and disability, can be bases for inequality, but that the most important is sexuality, due to the presumption of heterosexuality in organising processes. These other bases of inequality, are not, she believes, as thoroughly embedded in organising processes as gender, race, and class.

The shape and degree of inequality describes forms of inequality such as the steepness of hierarchies or patterns of gender and race segregation, which are reflected in differences in pay levels and in power.

The organising processes that create and recreate inequalities are a development of the five “gendered processes” described in her 1990 article (see 3.6.1). They include organising work and working hours, which tends to suit men with little responsibility for care of dependents, the organisation of class hierarchies and the ways in which women are assigned certain jobs, including job classification systems. Recruitment and hiring is another process in which gender and race determine suitability for jobs. Informal interactions at work are also important, and while gender interactions have been studied extensively, she says that the mutually reinforcing processes in which class, race, and gender inequalities are created have been less well documented, and might cover exclusion from conversations, social events, and not having one’s opinion sought, as well as sexual harassment.

The visibility, or degree of awareness, of inequality in organisations by those in dominant positions can also vary, and lack of recognition can be intentional or not. Dominant groups often do not see their own privilege, or the disadvantage faced by others. Class is frequently invisible to those in charge – hidden by talk of management, supervision, leadership etc, and similarly minority sexuality is almost always invisible to the heterosexual majority: “Heterosexuality is simply assumed, not questioned” (Acker, 2006b: 452).

Different types of organisations vary in how they regard the legitimacy of inequalities, with some attempting to address perceived inequalities. Acker notes that different forms of inequality may be perceived as more or less justifiable, with gender and race inequality being less legitimate than class inequality. While legislation outlaws gender and race discrimination, the low pay and status of clerical work, for example, is taken for granted.

The final characteristic of inequality regimes is control and compliance. While organisational controls that are aimed at maintaining manager’s power are class controls, these are made possible by hierarchical organisational power, derived from hierarchical gender and race relations. Controls can be direct (such as rewards, coercion and violence), indirect (technological monitoring and restricting information) or

internalised (belief in the legitimacy of bureaucratic structures, that it is fruitless to challenge the nature of things, or pleasure in work).

Acker's framework of the characteristics of inequality regimes will be a valuable approach for my analysis as it recognises the complexity and interrelated nature of various forms of inequality, while also noting the variability of inequality in different organisations, at different times and on different grounds, whether gender, race or class. Furthermore I intend to apply her framework to an analysis of sexuality, in addition to gender and class, in non-traditionally female work.

3.7 Conclusion

In tracing the various strands and developments in feminist thought and theorising in the field of lesbian and gay sexuality, I have argued that both have been influenced by similar political and emancipatory movements and the 'postmodern turn' in academic thinking. Where feminist theorising has been influenced by poststructuralist and postmodernist modes of thinking, the more recent field of lesbian and gay studies has turned heavily towards queer theory. Both postmodernism and queer theory fell on fertile ground where writers and political activists were already deconstructing and de-essentialising categories such as 'woman', 'lesbian' or 'gay', prompted by calls from black women, working-class and disabled women and gay men and lesbians who had been largely left out of white and middle-class dominated movements.

The influence of postmodern/queer thought is now widespread in analyses of gender and sexuality, and is applied to the study of organisations and workplaces. Attention is paid to discourse, texts, symbols, images and representation. The notion of 'performance' of both gender and sexuality has been applied in interesting and revealing ways in studies of the workplace (for example, McDowell, 1997; Ward and Winstanley, 2005). Such modes of thinking have also usefully challenged the fixity of categories of sexual identity, emphasising the multiplicity of identities, and focusing attention on understanding intersecting identities.

However the chapter has shown that theories of intersectionality are not exclusive to postmodern ways of thinking, and we have seen that while black feminist scholars were at the forefront of developing both the concepts and terminology of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991), in other areas debates about the mutually constituting nature of gender, race and class processes drew attention to the material dimensions of experience

(see Pollert, 1996) and to the relationship between gender, heterosexuality and lesbian identities (Rich, [1980] 1996).

Intersectionality is a complex and ‘murky’ concept (McCall, 2005; Nash, 2008) but McCall delineates three methodological approaches in use under its guise, which she terms ‘anticategorical’, ‘intracategorical’ and ‘intercategorical’ complexity. This third intercategorical approach is most valuable to my aims as, by including multiple groups, it can examine both advantage and disadvantage simultaneously. Thus it retains the emphasis on “regularities and recurring patterns of intersection” (Bradley, 2007: 192) that maintain inequalities, in a way that the anticategorical approach does not, which, by rejecting categories as useful to analysis, can no longer focus on material inequalities in lived experience. While one concern of my research is that of a neglected intersection – lesbian women’s experience of male dominated work – and so could be said to demand an intracategorical approach, my research design does not only focus on a single intersection or group. Instead it examines women (although not men), to consider wider questions of how sexual identity and class intersect with gender and includes heterosexual and lesbian women and those in more and less advantaged occupational groups within the industrial sectors of interest.

Conceptualisations of how social divisions intersect to affect the experience of multiply marginalised subjects also vary: it has been noted that some approaches reflect a cumulative understanding of disadvantage (Bagilhole, 2010; Nash, 2008) in which multiple positions ‘compound to result in a multiple burden’ (Kanyoro 2001, cited in Bradley, 2007: 190). But I argue that examination of intersections of sexual identity requires a constitutive rather than cumulative or additive approach (Yuval-Davis, 2006) to reflect the different ways in which heterosexual women and lesbians experience the workplace and how occupational class intersects with this.

In order to make the complex task of intersectional analysis appear less daunting, Acker (2006a: 51) proposes that analysis of intersections can begin from different entry points, for example, from gender relations, which would focus on sexuality and family, as these are implicated in and affected by the division of labour and inequalities of race and class.

Acker’s framework of inequality regimes (2006a; 2006b) offers a useful means of probing intersecting relations of inequality in specific organisations, covering a range of

levels, including patterns of inequalities, formal hierarchies, the varied organising processes that serve to classify and allocate people to positions, and informal interactions between people. Attention to the visibility or degree of awareness in organisations may include analysis of organisational culture and interactions. Consideration of control and compliance also opens up analysis of formal hierarchies and relations, as well as informal interactions. This is particularly relevant when examining the processes that contribute to the concealment or disclosure of minority sexual identity.

Thus a contribution of this thesis will be the application of Acker's framework of inequality regimes to an analysis of gender, sexuality and occupational class in non-traditionally female work. As Acker noted (2006b: 452), non-heterosexual sexuality is almost always invisible to the heterosexual majority. In this way sexual identity is distinct from other forms of inequality, and requires specific analysis. There are also different economic relations within the social division of sexual orientation, so the analysis will consider how occupational class intersects with sexuality and gender.

Gendered power relations are omnipresent when women enter male-dominated work and Bradley's (1999: 33-4) conceptualisation of gendered power resources provides a complementary tool for analysing gendered power relations between women and men. Furthermore, the deployment of collective power through, for example women's professional networks or trade unions will be explored, alongside the obstacles to exercising such power resources. Gendered power resources are also deployed at the interactional level of workplace relationships, thus Bradley's model can develop and deepen analysis of this level of Acker's component of organising processes.

Identification is a crucial concept affecting many levels of women's experience of non-traditional work, from their individual choice of gender atypical occupation, their interactions as a minority with dominant others, as well as with others in a minority position, their decisions about participation in support networks for minorities and organisational processes and practices that include or exclude. Jenkins' (2004) conceptualisation of the three social orders at which identification takes place points to the need for analysis to take account of different levels of the social world – and can be seen as complementary to Bradley's and Acker's models. A methodological framework for multi-level analysis will be outlined in the following chapter.

4 Research methodology

4.1 Introduction

Inherent in my choice of research topic and theoretical framework (as set out in Chapter 3) is a feminist position, which influences my methodological approach and choice of methods. However, there is no one ‘feminist methodology’ and feminist researchers take a variety of positions on epistemology and methodology, and use a range of methods to carry out their investigations. But one distinctive element of feminist research is a theoretical perspective that acknowledges the pervasive influence of gender divisions on social life, although different scholars emphasise different aspects of such divisions (Maynard, 1994). For some, this means that the focus of research will be women, but for others, a concern with gender will entail researching men and masculinity. A feminist perspective, though, is not just a theoretical view that attempts to explain the world, but is a political position that implies a desire to improve the situation of women in society; it is an emancipatory project. This, however, raises some difficult questions about the relationship between politics, theory, epistemology, knowledge and power that must be considered by feminist researchers wanting to produce ‘valid’ knowledge. These questions are explored in the first part of this chapter in which I consider the value of a feminist standpoint approach, showing how this links to theories of intersectionality, discussed in Chapter 3.

I will show that how we understand the nature of social reality affects the type of research we undertake and the methods we employ, and I argue that Derek Layder’s (2006) theory of social domains offers an understanding of society that takes account of individual, interactional and contextual levels appropriate to my research questions that are concerned with women’s experience within gendered, classed and heterosexualised organisational hierarchies. This theory of domains is operationalised in Layder’s (1993) research map that provides a framework for conducting research that connects existing theories with empirical data, and offers ontological depth, without prioritising individual agency over social structures, or vice versa.

I then outline the multi-strategy research design consisting of interviews with key informants; observation of events for women in non-traditional work; focus groups with women workers and interviews with women workers and explain how I accessed

research participants. Demographic details on the sample of women worker interviewees is provided, followed by a discussion of data analysis methods used.

As my research is probing intersections of sexuality and gender, some ethical and practical issues related to researching lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) populations arise, which are discussed in the chapter. Feminists and researchers of LGB experience have drawn attention to the need for the researcher to reflect on the research process and its impact on those it is studying. Finally, I reflect on my position as a researcher and how this might have affected the research process.

4.2 Feminist research methodology

An important contribution of feminist thinking about methodology has been the questioning of traditional notions about knowledge and objectivity. Western feminist thought developed from ways of thinking deriving from the European Enlightenment, and which were influential in nineteenth and twentieth century ideas about social research (Ramazanoğlu and Holland, 2002). Feminists then began to challenge the basis of such ways of thinking, highlighting its masculinist bias and exclusion of women's experience. Enlightenment thinking, broadly speaking, employs reason as a means of acquiring knowledge, leading to the freedom and autonomy of 'mankind'. Descartes is said to have established the principles of modern scientific method in the seventeenth century by proposing that knowledge of the natural world can be gained only through the mind or reason, rather than the senses or intuition (Ramazanoğlu and Holland, 2002: 26). His dualism of mind (conscious being) and matter (objects of knowledge) has become embedded in Western ways of thinking, that employs taken-for-granted dualisms. For example, reason and rationality is pitted against emotion, mind against body, subject versus object and male against female, with the second half of the pair consistently devalued (Maynard, 1994). Feminists have shown the influence of such thinking in prevalent views that position women as mistresses of passion and emotion, and closer to nature than men, who are able to use their superior capacity for reason to master their passions and bodies (Ramazanoğlu and Holland, 2002: 29). Exposing the prevalence and political nature of such dominant modes of thought has thus been one of the tasks of feminists, particularly those seeking to reposition women as possessors of equally valid knowledge. Dorothy Smith (1988), for example, highlighted the masculinist bias in sociology in which the impersonal, objective social scientist is

detached from experience and takes a supposedly universal stance, which masks the fact that sociology is dominated by males and expresses *their* experience. She argued that the creation and dissemination of the way we think about society form part of the “relations of ruling” – the intersecting forms of social relations, based on capitalist relations and a gender subtext. Thus “positions of power are occupied by men almost exclusively, which means that our forms of thought put together a view of the world from a place women do not occupy” (Smith, 1988: 19). To redress this, Smith proposed starting from a women’s standpoint as a way of seeing, from where women actually experience their daily lives – feminist standpoint theories are explored further below.

Another influential feminist writer, Donna Haraway ([1991] 2004), also revealed the claims to neutrality and objectivity made by male science that performs “the god-trick of seeing everything from nowhere” (ibid: 86). She questioned the “illusion” that knowledge is produced from a disembodied position, and instead insists on “the particularity and embodiment of all vision” (ibid: 87). However feminists’ claims to produce a ‘better’ knowledge of society that incorporates women’s experience is also beset by epistemological difficulties in trying to define the relationship between knowledge and reality. Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002) describe four positions that can be taken by modernist feminists (as opposed to those taking a postmodernist stance) on connecting knowledge and reality and the relationship between objectivity and subjectivity.

In the first of these, objectivity is seen as separate from, and superior to, subjectivity, and to be objective, researcher’s findings must be impartial, general and free from personal and political biases. From the arguments already made, it will be clear that few feminists would argue that reason is productive of objective or unbiased knowledge, and a political commitment to research *for* women precludes claims to neutrality in any case. Sandra Harding ([1993] 2004), though, has tried to resist relativism by retaining a notion of objectivity in feminist research, arguing for a ‘strong objectivity’ that includes a critical reflection on the knowledge production process. However, Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002) argue that Harding reflects a common confusion between objectivity (referring to knowledge that is free from bias or subjectivity) and validity (telling a better story of women’s experiences and therefore making connections between ideas and reality). Harding’s steps for ‘maximising strong objectivity’ include critical reflection on the production of knowledge and grounding research questions in the

standpoint of the marginalised. But Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002: 52) argue that reframing objectivity in this way cannot escape the dualism of subject and object. Harding is trying to “strengthen objectivity in the service of validity”.

A second position on the relationship between objectivity and subjectivity sees subjectivity as separate from, and superior to, objectivity (Ramazanoğlu and Holland, 2002). Some radical feminists have been accused of reversing the duality between subjectivity and objectivity by arguing that women’s close relationship with their bodies gives women feminine powers of thought and therefore access to feminine sources of knowledge. Such views have been criticised as essentialist, although Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002: 53) point out that valuing personal experience is an important contribution of feminist thought, and is not the same as taking subjectivity as superior to objectivity.

A third position views objectivity and subjectivity as inseparable, and draws on the Marxist method of material dialectics in which subjectivity and objectivity are problematically inseparable. This view sees all efforts to describe social reality as political, but argues that it is still possible to be scientific in connecting ideas to underlying realities. Thus Marx conceptualised actual connections between observations of workers’ lives and his theories of exploitation and capitalism. Marx’s notion that political commitment is inevitably part of the process of knowledge production is shared with feminist thought, and Marxism has been influential in the development of feminist standpoint (Harding, 2004).

A fourth position, relativism, argues that valid knowledge of an external social world is neither directly nor indirectly accessible. In this view, all that can be known is interpreted within a particular language of knowing, and there is therefore no way of judging between competing claims to truth. There are only multiple and contingent truths. Ramazanoğlu and Holland, however, believe that a wholly relativist position is incompatible with feminist politics and ethics based on principles of emancipation and justice:

“It matters which accounts of reality are believed and acted on; it matters who has the power to determine what counts as authoritative knowledge; it matters how knowledge claims are expressed and what weight they carry. Feminism is politically dismembered by relativism” (2002: 57).

Outlining these broad stances on the relationship between truth and reality and feminist ideas has served to highlight some key debates within social research more generally, which connect to theories of what the social world consists of (ontology). This is discussed further below in relation to Derek Layder's ideas. I now turn to a particular version of feminist thinking, feminist standpoint theory, that has attempted to escape the constraints of specifying a relationship between feminist knowledge and truth/reality.

4.2.1 *Feminist standpoint theory*

Instead of concerning itself only with justifying the validity of truth claims, taking a feminist standpoint implies examining questions of how knowledge and power are connected. Sandra Harding, one of the foremost proponents of standpoint theory, rejects a characterisation of standpoint theory as seeking to justify the truth of feminist claims to more accurate accounts of reality, saying that "rather, it is the relations between power and knowledge that concern these thinkers" (Harding, [1997] 2004: 255). As shown above, standpoint thinkers such as Smith and Haraway have identified how male supremacy and the production of knowledge have been intertwined: they then outline ways in which knowledge drawn from women's lives can produce better accounts of society.

Standpoint theories propose that "starting off thought" from the lives of marginalized peoples will generate less partial and less distorted accounts of social life by providing clear grounds for knowledge (Harding, [1993] 2004: 128). Dorothy Smith argues for "discovering society from where people are as participants in it" in order to gain access to knowledge of "what is tacit, known in the doing" (Smith, [1997] 2004: 266). Neither Smith nor Harding argue that such an "epistemologically advantaged starting point" (Harding, [1993] 2004: 128) provides an objective grounds for knowledge on its own, but that it is a necessary starting point for accounts of social reality.

Smith believes, however, that while we must *begin* examination of society from the accounts of women's everyday experiences, they cannot be relied upon to explain the wider relations that shape and determine that everyday life: "How they are knitted into the extended social relations of a contemporary capitalist economy is not discoverable with them" (Smith, 1988: 110). Gaining such an understanding is the work of the social scientist. This reflects her ontological beliefs about how the social world is made up of

two levels of social reality: local practices and the external social relations which affect and determine them (Layder, 2006: 200).

Although not necessarily sharing Smith's views about the duality of social reality, Donna Haraway is also clear that the standpoints of the subjugated do not offer a total or unbiased perspective. She stresses that such positionings need critical re-examination and interpretation: "the standpoints of the subjugated are not innocent positions" ([1991] 2004: 88). It is precisely because they *are* situated and not attempting to perform the 'god-trick' of claiming universal knowledge that subjugated standpoints are preferred as offering more adequate accounts of the world. She argues for "situated knowledges" and seeks "partial, locatable, critical knowledges" (ibid: 89). Being explicit about the location or position from which knowledge is claimed is essential for Haraway; 'unlocatable' knowledge claims are 'irresponsible' as they cannot be called into account.

Black women writers have also employed standpoint perspectives to show how a 'marginal' or 'outsider' status can generate distinctive perspectives (Collins, [1986] 2004; hooks, [1990] 2004). bell hooks ([1990] 2004: 156) describes how those at the 'margin' can offer a radical perspective, based on the experience of Black Americans growing up in a small Kentucky town.

"Living as we did - on the edge - we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin. We understood both... This sense of wholeness, impressed upon our consciousness by the structure of our daily lives, provided us with an oppositional world-view - a mode of seeing unknown to most of our oppressors."

In this way hooks presents marginality not as a place from which to escape, but as "a space of resistance" that allows the possibility of change: "It offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds" ([1990] 2004: 157).

Critics of feminist standpoint theory have argued that it denies differences between women by prioritising the standpoint of 'women', which focuses on commonalities, and may risk essentialising 'womanhood'. Yet black feminist thinkers have played a significant role in the development of standpoint thought and in highlighting the diversity of women's experience resulting from the intersecting and interlocking forms of race, gender and class oppression. Collins ([1986] 2004) shows how attention to the

interlocking nature of oppression shifts the focus of investigation from one that prioritises one form of oppressive system, for example, class, and then tries to insert other variables, such as race or gender, into this framework. Instead an intersectional approach focuses on the *links* and *interactions* between the different forms of oppression. It thus avoids a universalistic view of the experiences of ‘women’ or ‘black people’ and looks always for interactions between forms of class, gender and race oppression, among others (see 3.3).

A feminist standpoint approach is valuable for my research in several ways. First, it raises important questions about how knowledge is produced: by whom, for whom, and about whom. It has challenged supposedly universal theories by drawing attention to the partial nature of their production, and the absences and exclusions of women and other subordinated groups. Secondly, by “starting off thought” or investigation from the position of the lives of women, the focus can be on both the meanings and interpretations that they attach to their experiences, as well as the material conditions that they experience in their daily work and home lives. This does not, however, mean that structural inequalities in society will be neglected, but a unified, structural theoretical framework will not be imposed and tested on the data (see below). Thirdly, although feminist standpoint theory has been criticised for prioritising ‘woman’ over other categories or identities, I believe that this does not have to be to the exclusion of other differences, and a feminist standpoint can be compatible with an intersectional approach that explores the links and interactions between different forms of oppression, as argued by Collins ([1986] 2004).

4.3 A multi-layered view of society

How we understand the nature of social reality is crucial to the type of research we undertake and the methods we employ. In Chapters 2 and 3 I highlight the work of several writers on gender and work (for example, Bradley, 1999; Bradley and Healy, 2008; McDowell, 1997) who pay attention to different levels of social reality, and emphasise in their research the necessity to take account of structural, organisational and individual or embodied levels of analysis in order to properly understand the operation of gendered power relations in the workplace.

Different theorists, though, conceptualise the multi-layered nature of society differently. In Chapter 3 I examined Jenkins’s (2004) use of identification as a strategic concept that

avoids prioritising either structure or action, or the individual over the collective. He suggests that identification takes place within the three ‘orders’ that make up the human world: the individual order (that of embodied individuals and what goes on in their heads); the interaction order (relationships between individuals, what goes on between people); and the institutional order (the world or pattern and organisation, of established ways of doing things) (Jenkins, 2004: 17).

Much sociological thought is characterised by the dualisms of macro and micro, agency and structure, and individual and society (Layder, 2006). Additionally, writing on gender has provoked longstanding debates about the relationship between agency and structure in understanding women’s lives (Bradley, 2007: 24). Layder provides a robust critique of social theories that prioritise one side of these dualisms over the other. For example, he is critical of both the structural theories of Talcott Parsons and varieties of Marxism that tend to neglect the individual or human agency in their accounts of systemic features, as well as the perspectives of symbolic interactionism, phenomenology and ethnomethodology which emphasise social interaction between individuals in the creation of meaning, and deny the existence of social structures or systems independent of individuals. Layder (2006) argues for the need to understand both structure and agency and their interrelationship in order to capture the variety of social experience. However he goes beyond a dualistic model of society, and views the social universe as multi-dimensional, made up of four interconnected domains: psychobiography, situated activity, social settings and contextual resources. These four dimensions offer an understanding of the social world that has ‘ontological depth’. This contrasts with theories that ‘flatten out’ the social world into a single dimension, such as Giddens’s notion of a duality of structure, which argues for the mutually constituted nature of structure and agency, but does not see them as separate entities. This precludes analysis of the impact of different social orders or explanation of how structural features may predominate in certain places or at certain times, and the activities of people may come to the fore at other times and places (Layder, 2006: 185).

In broad terms, Layder’s four domains have some parallels with Jenkins’s (2004) three orders described above. Thus Layder’s psychobiographical domain – which concerns an individual’s unique experiences, their career trajectory through time and space – represents a similar level to Jenkins’ individual order.

Layder's domain of situated activity, which concerns social interaction and the intersubjective dimension of social life, has parallels with Jenkins' interaction order. However an important difference is that Layder characterises situated activity as episodic in nature, framed by encounters that can be fleeting or last several hours, but are generally short and limited by being in another's 'response presence'.

This is therefore different from an interaction order that concerns all forms of interaction between people, including ongoing relationships. For Layder, ongoing relationships are part of the domain of social settings, which form the immediate environment of situated activity. Such settings can be formal, such as schools, hospitals, commercial firms etc, or informal, loosely patterned relationships such as friendships, partnerships and family networks. Settings such as schools and hospitals would be classified by Jenkins as belonging to the institutional order, as settings in which institutional or organisational identification takes place.

Layder defines the most encompassing social domain as that of contextual resources. These have two constituent elements: distributional and cultural. The distributional aspect concerns the way in which material resources are unevenly allocated based on class, gender, ethnicity etc, providing the socio-economic context of particular social settings, with the effects felt in social activities and the inner lives of individuals. The other element derives from cultural resources, for example, knowledge, mores, media representations, sub-cultural styles etc. Such resources shape the cultural context of social settings and individuals.

Layder's and Jenkins's categorisations have different purposes though. Jenkins's aim is understanding how identity operates in society, bringing together individual and collective processes. Layder's intention is broader, however, as he is interested in providing a conceptualisation of social reality that can be translated into framework for researching any social questions. Therefore I will use Layder's framework in the following discussion of connecting theories of society with the conduct of social research. As I see overlaps in particular between his domains of situated activity and social setting, for practical and analytical purposes these will sometimes be considered together.

4.4 Connecting theory and research

The ‘ontological depth’ provided by Layder’s theory of domains is reflected in the research map he devised as a framework for formulating and focusing a research project (1993). Layder begins from the premise that empirical research and theorising must go hand in hand, and that theorising should be a continuous process which accompanies research at all stages, not a separate stage at the beginning or end of data gathering. He draws heavily on the grounded theory approach of Glaser and Strauss (1967) that proposes the development of theory from empirical material, rather than testing pre-existing theory or hypotheses on the data, but argues that grounded theory needs to be developed to incorporate elements from general theory in order to account for structural analysis and power relations in society. Layder’s (1993) major criticism of grounded theory is that it tends to encourage the researcher to focus on ‘close-up’ features of social interaction, which misses the ‘structural’ or ‘macro’ aspects of society that can only be observed by paying attention to setting and context. My research follows Layder’s central contention that “it needs to be assumed that structural features are inextricably interlocked with social activities and that we cannot understand the one without the other” (Layder, 1993: 56).

I now discuss the elements of Layder’s research map (1993: 8) and consider how the questions he raises in relation to each have a bearing on my research topic and methodology. To assist the discussion, a version of Layder’s research map is provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Layder’s research map

	Research element	Research focus
H I S T O R Y	CONTEXT	Macro social forms (e.g. class, gender, ethnic relations)
	SETTING	Immediate environment of social activity (e.g. schools, family, organisation)
	SITUATED ACTIVITY	Dynamics of face-to-face interaction
	SELF	Biographical experience and social involvements

As my research questions centre on the experiences of women working in traditionally male occupations, the level of 'self' is highly relevant. Here the individual's sense of identity, their personality and their unique experiences are emphasised. Attention to each person's unique biography provides a counterbalance to social theories that exaggerate the socially constructed effect of the influence of social forces such as discourses, socialisation etc. (Layder, 1993: 77). This dimension is an important aspect of my study of women who take a gender atypical career path, enabling understanding of both the social factors and constraints in their career decisions, and their individual backgrounds and biography. This raises questions about how women forge and reproduce their gender and sexual identities in relation to their choice and experience of work, drawing on the internal-external dialectic of identification described by Jenkins (2004).

The element of self, though, is deeply intertwined with situated activity, which concerns interactions with others. However at the level of situated activity, the emphasis shifts from a concern with the individual's response to social situations, to a concern with the dynamics of interaction. In my research, how women experience aspects of 'self' and identity is significantly affected by their interactions with others at work. In jobs where they are in a minority as women, the dynamics of their relationships with men often require considerable effort in order to find a place where they 'fit'. Power relations and control strategies also form part of situated activity. Layder (2006: 279-280) suggests control is exercised in several ways in encounters, such as through self-control and the maintenance of self-composure during social interaction, as well as in the form of mutual benign control and influence, through which individuals acknowledge the interests of others through emotional exchange and recognition. This approach is congruent with the emphasis on gendered power relations of Bradley (1999) and Acker's (2006a; 2006b) frameworks for analysis discussed in Chapter 3.

The ways in which interactions and relations are played out is inextricably linked to their setting, the next element of Layder's framework. Setting encompasses both organisations and institutions, as well as continuing relationships with family and friends that form the background to an individual's life. Settings contain local aggregations of *reproduced* social relations, positions and practices, that embody systemic (structural) aspects of social life (Layder, 2006: 280). The structures, culture and organisation of power relations within a work organisation are all brought to bear in

how individuals interact at work (as are elements of context, which I discuss below). It is important then to look for the power and control relationships operating within the organisation, which may be the formal management structures, but also informal relations of control, that can include bullying forms of behaviour as well as more consensual relationships of power. It was seen in Chapter 3 that such relations are unavoidably infused with gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, age and other social divisions. Thus the level of context is always in some way influencing what takes place at the level of setting.

The macro social context forms the most encompassing feature of the social environment and involves the distribution of material resources, based on factors such as class, gender, ethnicity etc, as well as allocation of status, authority and power, and identification is entailed in these processes too, as Jenkins (2004) notes (see 3.5). Cultural dimensions, such as values, norms and codes of behaviour constitute part of the context. The macro context of relations of gender, class and dominant heterosexuality is explicit in my research questions, which aim to understand how these operate in specific circumstances, and in the everyday lives of women.

Layder's research map contains a historical dimension, positing that history is "the temporal dimension through which all the other elements move" (1993: 101), but each element can have different timescales and therefore a different relationship to the historical dimension. This also draws attention to the need to consider change in forms of power and domination. While my study is an investigation of the experiences of women working in two industrial sectors at a particular moment of time (rather than a longitudinal or historical examination), the specificities of the particular period are addressed through an examination of the contemporary context, as well as a brief inclusion of historical insights into the construction industry in Chapter 5. Furthermore, the perceptions of key informants and women workers concerning change in their sectors are included in the analysis.

Following the approach of standpoint theory discussed above, my research starts from the experiences of women. For Dorothy Smith (1988) the starting point must always be from the point of view of the lived experience of actual people, from micro to macro and back again. To start from the macro position would be to deny the reality of the subject. While Layder (2006: 201-2) argues that this singular starting point is unnecessarily restrictive and believes that macro theorising can complement micro

analysis, I feel that starting from the position of women working in the male-dominated worlds I wish to investigate is justified and necessary, as long as the micro context is seen to be deeply rooted in a macro context of gendered, classed and heterosexualised power relations.

4.5 Research design

My research aims and questions centre on the experiences of women in non-traditionally female occupations and thus require a qualitative approach in order to understand their own interpretations, meanings and feelings (Bryman, 2001). Following Layder's (1993) contention that social activity and structural features are inextricably linked and cannot be understood separately, I have chosen a multi-methods research approach that pays attention to the individual choices and working lives of women in relation to the broader contextual and structural dimensions that shape their experience. While Layder recommends that quantitative and qualitative data should be combined in a multi-strategy approach (1993: 108-9), I have chosen to combine different qualitative methods as the best way of meeting my research objectives (Ritchie, 2003: 37-38). Using these methods I primarily gathered generated data (interviews, focus groups) although I also analyse naturally-occurring data (observation of events) (Ritchie, 2003). Table 3 sets out each research question and lists the primary methods used to gather empirical data in response to each. It also relates each research question to one or more of Layder's interconnected research elements.

In total, 50 interviews were conducted during this study, plus two focus groups (containing 16 women workers). Empirical data was collected using the following methods:

- interviews with key informants (see 4.5.1)
- observation of events for women in non-traditional work (4.5.2)
- focus groups with women workers (4.5.3)
- interviews with women workers (4.5.4).

Fieldwork took place between October 2008 and September 2010, with the majority of interviews with women workers completed between January and September 2009.

Table 3: Research questions and data collection methods

Research question	Research methods	Layder's research element
1. What is the current policy context in which women are seeking to enter and working in the construction and transport sectors?	Key informant interviews Observation of events	CONTEXT & SETTING
2. What are the reasons women choose to enter traditionally male occupations, and do these differ for heterosexual women and lesbians?	Women worker interviews Focus groups	SELF
3. How is women's experience of male-dominated work differentiated by sexual orientation and occupational group?	Women worker interviews Focus groups	SITUATED ACTIVITY & SETTING
4. What are women's attitudes to, and experiences of, support structures and networks (particularly women's and LGBT), including those of trade unions, and how does sexuality differentiate their experience?	Women worker interviews Focus groups	SELF & SETTING
5. How do the domestic circumstances of lesbian and heterosexual women affect their participation in male-dominated work?	Women worker interviews Focus groups	SETTING

4.5.1 Key informant interviews

The inclusion of key informant interviews provides data at the levels of context and setting on the structural, organisational and policy context in which women are opting to work in typically male employment. This provides data to support and enhance the perspectives gained from interviews with women workers, offering a wider understanding of the extended social relations that shape their everyday experience (Smith, 1988).

In the first phase of fieldwork, conducted between October 2008 and March 2009, a total of 13 key informant interviews were conducted involving 15 selected experts on the employment of women in non-traditionally female work in order to provide contextual information about trends and developments in the transport and construction industries. This complements the academic literature on women in these sectors (see

5.3) by giving a contemporary picture of industry trends and current policy initiatives from the perspectives of those most closely involved. Interviewees can also provide insider perspectives on the effectiveness of initiatives and policy developments in relation to improving the proportions of women working in these sectors. Furthermore, some interviewees were ‘gatekeepers’ to groups or networks that provided routes to recruiting research participants (see 4.5.5).

The interviewees’ organisations are listed in Appendix 1 and were from industry and training bodies; employers; trade unions; women’s networks and voluntary organisations that have an interest in women working in transport and construction. In three cases interviewees were also asked about their own experiences of work in the construction or transport sectors, but they will not be identified in order to maintain confidentiality.

A flexible interview schedule was devised with core themes, (see Appendix 4). This was adapted for each interview to suit the aims and functions of the organisation represented by the interviewee.

4.5.2 Observation of events for women in non-traditional work

Through contacts made in setting up the key informant interviews and arranging access to women worker interviewees I had the opportunity to attend various events and open days for women considering or working in non-traditionally female occupations. These included an event to attract women into transport occupations, organised by the Women into Non-Traditional Work (WINTO) project, the WINTO final project event covering a range of male-dominated sectors, an Open Day at Leicester College to attract women into the manual trades and the AGM and social events held by Women and Manual Trades. A list of events attended with dates is included in Appendix 2. In addition to providing contacts with organisations and potential research participants, I made notes on these events covering speakers’ presentations, observations about types and numbers of participants, and organisations taking part in the event as organisers or stallholders. This information is analysed, in Chapter 5, alongside the interview material, to contribute additional data on the context in which women are entering non-traditional occupations, and employers’ motivations for reaching out to women.

Although I was not using observational techniques as a primary methodology for data collection, I found attending these events, particularly at the start of the fieldwork

stages, to be very valuable in gaining a short, brief immersion in the worlds of research participants, industries with which I had no personal experience or familiarity. Participation thus acted as a sensitising aspect of the fieldwork enabling me to gain some awareness of context and begin to identify themes to pick up later in interviews. Additionally, at a construction open day I was able to try my hand at plastering, fitting a lock and connecting plumbing pipes, which, as well as being good fun, offered a small glimpse of the physical and skilled nature of the work undertaken by tradeswomen that I interviewed. It also was a reminder of the embodied nature of the work. Additionally, meeting some interviewees at their worksite (at their invitation) provided some insights into work environments with which I was unfamiliar, such as construction sites and bus garages. Particularly in bus garages, I was able to observe at first hand some of the gendered and sexualised banter that interviewees described (see Chapter 7).

4.5.3 Focus groups

Focus groups complement the interviews with individual women workers by providing an opportunity to illuminate some of the research questions through group interaction in a more naturalistic setting than a one-to-one interview (in a guided conversation between women), exploring how their ideas are shaped or moderated through conversation with others (Ritchie, 2003). Thus for the focus groups the themes discussed centred on their reasons for choosing the sectors and any barriers, real or perceived to women, as well as attitudes of family, friends, teachers and wider societal expectations. This allowed exploration of the impact of both social and individual factors on women's decisions to enter male work. Additionally, in the local authority focus group, exploration of attitudes to organisational measures to support tradeswomen was possible in an interactive manner that provided fuller understanding than accessible through individual interviews.

Two focus groups were conducted in the construction sector. One (conducted in November 2008) included 10 women entering the building trades, reaching the end of the Women and Manual Trades' Building Work for Women programme (see Chapter 5), and had some experience of training college, of work placements in the manual trades and of seeking work in the sector. The second (in March 2009) included six tradeswomen working for Leicester City Council, which is unusual among local authorities in that it employs direct labour to maintain their housing stock, and

positively encourages women apprentices. The group was a mix of apprentices and women who had worked for the council in the trades for many years.

An interview schedule for the focus group for women entering construction trades is included in Appendix 4, which was adapted for the focus group among women already working in the manual trades.

4.5.4 Women worker interviews

Individual in-depth interviews with women workers were chosen as the main means of data collection for the flexibility, interactivity and depth of understanding that they offer in relation to the research questions (Legard et al., 2003). Interviews are able to cover, in greater depth than in focus groups, women's individual motivations for choosing non-traditionally female work; their experience of working in the sectors; their attitudes to and participation in support structures and networks, including trade unions; and the effect of their domestic circumstances on participation in, and experience of, typically male work. Thus questions of a more personal nature may be explored, including questions related to sexuality, relationships with work colleagues, personal strategies for coping in male-dominated work and the interaction between home and work lives.

In total 38 interviews were conducted with women workers between January 2009 and September 2010, whose demographic characteristics are outlined below (4.5.6). I encountered some difficulties in recruiting as many lesbian interviewees as originally intended (discussed in 4.7), which affects the overall sample size, so I stopped recruiting participants when I felt that a sufficient sample of heterosexual women interviewees was achieved. Overall, though, I believe that the sample obtained provides an adequate basis for analysis of my research questions. A semi-structured interview guide was devised and piloted with two personal contacts working in the sectors; minor changes were made to the guide subsequently and these pilot interviews are included in the analysis. Broad themes covered included: reasons for entering non-traditional occupations; gender and sexual identities; attitudes to and use of support networks; experience of and practices within work organisations; and the impact of domestic circumstances on work participation.

A single-page questionnaire was used at the start of the interview (or sometimes emailed to participants who completed it and returned it in advance of the interview) to collect basic demographic data. The research instruments are included in Appendix 4.

The range of male-dominated occupations within each sector is broad, so I focused on occupations where there was evidence of high levels of gender imbalance. However, as it was not a study of a particular occupation, some flexibility was available in choosing among those who volunteered. Within transport, I focused on surface and underground passenger transport and highway maintenance occupations, and excluded logistics and freight transport, as well as air and sea transport. Professional occupations among interviewees included: transport planners and highway engineers; and rail professionals (engineers, managers). Manual or operational occupations were generally bus and coach drivers; train drivers; and station staff. In construction I focused on the professional occupations of surveyor, civil engineer and project manager. Interviewees in the manual trades included plumbers and gas fitters, electricians, carpenters and joiners, painters and decorators and floor and wall tiling.

A list of women worker interviewees and their occupations is included in Appendix 3. All are given pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

4.5.5 Access to research participants

Various routes were used to reach interview participants, including employers, trade unions, professional networks, an industry skills body and a group for women in the manual trades. Several of the key informants interviewed also helped to provide access to interview participants. In construction, Women and Manual Trades (WAMT, also interviewed) introduced me to members of their Building Work for Women project, some of whom agreed to be interviewed, and several took part in a focus group (see above). Additionally WAMT circulated a request for lesbians to participate in the research, as this group was proving harder to reach (see 4.7). Other tradeswomen were also contacted via a local authority that directly employs tradespeople and makes particular efforts to recruit women to its apprenticeship scheme. Representatives of the sector skills body, ConstructionSkills, were interviewed, and also sent an email to their network of Construction Ambassadors (see Chapter 5), which produced a very good response among professional women. Efforts to contact a representative of construction union UCATT were unsuccessful.

For participants in transport, an approach to a large metropolitan transport employer proved fruitful and a key informant interview was carried out with an expert in their equality department, who also agreed to circulate details of the research to members of

their staff network groups. This yielded a useful number of replies and subsequent interviews. Trade unions TSSA (clerical and managerial workers in transport) and UNITE (general union representing transport workers) were also helpful in reaching women working in transport, and contacts were also made through their lesbian and gay networks.

A small number of interviewees were contacted through 'snowballing' from participants who came forward via the above routes and passed details of the research to their contacts.

The types of routes used to access research participants inevitably have benefits and drawbacks in relation to the sample obtained, and the methods I used meant that a fairly high proportion were either members of networks or groups aiming to offer support to women in non-traditional occupations or were members of trade unions, with a large handful being union activists or participants in women's or lesbian and gay groups. While this is likely to make the sample unrepresentative of women in these sectors overall, it does permit a discussion of use of support networks and union participation, addressing one of my research questions (see Chapter 8).

4.5.6 Demographic characteristics of women worker interviewees

Of the 38 interviewees working in the construction and transport sectors just over half (58 per cent or 22 women) were in construction and the remaining 42 per cent (16 women) were in transport occupations. Sixty-one per cent (23) identified as heterosexual and 39 per cent (15) as lesbian. I had intended the sample to be divided equally between heterosexual women and lesbians/bisexual women, but access to lesbians proved more difficult, and none of the women who volunteered to take part described their sexual orientation as bisexual (discussed in 4.7).

Based on their current occupations, I grouped the interviewees into professional/managerial and non-professional occupations using the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) (ONS, 2000). I defined the professional/managerial grouping as those with occupations in SOC major groups 1 and 2 and the non-professional occupations as all others (which covered those with occupations in SOC major groups 3, 5, 6 and 8). Half (19) worked in professional or managerial occupations and the remaining 50 per cent were in non-professional occupations.

Table 4 shows that the majority (71 per cent) identified as white, 11 per cent each as Black Caribbean and as Indian, and one (three per cent⁸) as mixed heritage, one as Black African and one did not wish to answer. Five (13 per cent) were in their 20s, 15 (39 per cent) in their 30s, 14 (37 per cent) in their forties, two were in their fifties and two over 60.

Table 4: Demographic and occupational characteristics of women worker interviewees

	Transport			Construction			Both sectors
	Hetero-sexual	Lesbian	Total	Hetero-sexual	Lesbian	Total	
Ethnicity							
White:	7	7	14	7	6	13	27 (71%)
Mixed heritage:				1		1	1 (3%)
Indian:				4		4	4 (11%)
Black Caribbean:		1	1	2	1	3	4 (11%)
Black African:	1		1				1 (3%)
Did not answer:				1		1	1 (3%)*
Age							
21-30:		3	3	2		2	5 (13%)
31-40:	4	2	6	7	2	9	15 (39%)
41-50:	2	2	4	6	4	10	14 (37%)
51-60:	1		1		1	1	2 (5%)
over 60:	1	1	2				2 (5%)
Occupational group							
Professional/managerial:	3	4	7	8	4	12	19 (50%)
Non-professional:	5	4	9	7	3	10	19 (50%)
Total	8 (21%)	8 (21%)	16	15 (39%)	7 (18%)	22	38 (100%)

⁸ Percentages add up to more than 100 due to rounding.

4.6 Data analysis

A research diary was found to be a useful tool for encouraging reflection on research processes and results, and is one that I employed both as a practical tool to assist in remembering ideas or contacts, and as a means to reflect on progress and move forward in the intellectual and practical development of the thesis. In addition, shortly after each interview I wrote a brief fieldnote, recording my impressions of how the interview went and key points that arose during it. This was part of the early stages of data analysis and developing themes that Layder (1993) and those in the tradition of grounded theory emphasise should begin at an early stage in the research and is an inherent and ongoing process of qualitative research (Spencer et al., 2003). The interviews and focus groups with women workers were recorded, with participants' permission, and transcribed in full and in the course of transcribing interviews I made notes of emerging themes and connections between the interviews that were used in later stages of analysis.

Interviews and fieldnotes were imported into the NVivo qualitative analysis software package and transcripts were coded using a set of nodes, initially drawn up from the interview topic guide, that were subject to substantial revision during the coding and analysis process. Analysis was carried out using NVivo as a tool, in combination with methods drawn from grounded theory and Layder (1993; 1998). For example, nodes were derived using grounded theory's method of open coding in which concepts emerge from the data (Corbin and Strauss, 2008), together with Layder's (1993) method of using 'sensitising' concepts that derive from prior theory. Layder's technique of writing theoretical memos (1998: 58-64) was used to develop themes and analysis, adapted for use with NVivo so that these were written using its Memo function, which can contain links to relevant selections of transcripts. A journal was also kept in NVivo which permits links to memos and transcripts, which was very useful in recording the development of concepts and themes.

4.7 Ethical issues and researching sexuality

As this research asks questions of a personal or sensitive nature, it was necessary to submit an application to the Queen Mary Research Ethics Committee. This was approved following some small clarifications and amendments to the participant information sheet and consent form (see Appendix 5). Informed consent to participate was gained from all interviewees, and I ensured that the confidentiality and anonymity

of participants is protected. Guaranteeing anonymity means that the identity of those taking part should not be known to anyone other than the researcher, but this may not always be possible to achieve if access to participants is arranged through either their work organisation or a trade union group or support network (although efforts can be made to ensure that the researcher is contacted directly by the participant, rather than through a ‘gatekeeper’). Thus the research must respect the confidentiality of the interviewees by ensuring that comments made by an individual are not attributable to them directly or indirectly, either in published material or presentations. To avoid indirect attribution, for example by reference to characteristics that might identify an individual, it might be necessary to change minor details to disguise identity or make a point in a more general way (Lewis, 2003: 67-8). Given that interviewees were frequently in a small minority in their workplaces, I also do not reveal the identity of their employers. Women worker interviewees are given pseudonyms when quoted. Assuring confidentiality and anonymity has an additional relevance for women who are in a minority at the workplace, and are potentially more identifiable. Even more crucially, my research sought to include lesbians who may not be open about their sexual orientation at work, and, even if they are, they may be even more easily identifiable because of their minority status. Therefore there are particular issues to consider when researching minority sexual orientation.

Sexual orientation has traditionally been considered a ‘private’ matter, and it has not been seen as the role of the state or other authorities to ask questions about an individual’s sexuality – indeed sexual orientation is the only equality strand not covered by the 2011 Census (Aspinall, 2009: 14). As a result there is a lack of adequate national data on the size and needs of LGB communities in the UK (Aspinall, 2009; McManus, 2003; Smallwood, 2006). However this is changing to some extent, driven in part by the introduction of the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003. Employers are increasingly monitoring the sexual orientation of their staff in an effort to review the effectiveness of their policies (Stonewall, 2008: 5). It was seen in Chapter 2 that while public attitudes towards lesbians and gay men are more accepting than a decade ago, workplace bullying is still suffered by around a fifth of lesbians and gay men (Hunt and Dick, 2008). There remains considerable sensitivity around asking questions about sexual orientation, particularly when many lesbians and gay men do not feel able to come out at work, although more recent research (ID Research, 2002)

suggested that a majority (56%) felt able to reveal their sexuality to everyone at work, an increase since earlier surveys (Palmer, 1993; Snape et al., 1995).

In Chapter 2, I suggested that the lack of attention to sexual identity in much of the writing on women or gender and male-dominated work may not only stem from a “theoretical blind spot” (Seidman, 1996), but also from methodological difficulties and sensitivities. This was reflected upon by one writer, Peter Fleming (2007: 245), whose study of a call centre did not have sexuality as a focus originally, but it emerged as having a particular resonance .

“Ethical considerations led me to tread cautiously around sexuality during the study. For example, when I was interviewing someone I presumed was gay I felt it would be an intrusion to ask about his sexuality (especially given the formidable ethics approval process in Australian universities). Upon later reflection, I realized that this lost opportunity might have been more a projective anxiety on my part.”

Fleming’s reference to the ethics approval process of universities echoes my own experience of gaining ethical approval for this research. Considerable concern was expressed by the panel to ensure that I made it clear to participants in advance that I would be asking questions of a sensitive nature about sexuality. However I felt that this overstated the intrusive nature of my questions, which were not concerned to probe the nature of participants’ sexual life, but rather the impact of sexual orientation in workplace experience or domestic arrangements. In the event, I had no indications that participants experienced these questions as intrusive. I believe my experience reflects the continuing dominant norm that sexuality is, and should be, a private matter, whereas in contrast, for many LGB people it is important that minority sexuality becomes visible. The result, as Fleming remarks above, is a lost opportunity for probing an area of interest, a case that I am making in this thesis.

The extent to which LGB individuals are open about their sexuality has significant ramifications for the sample that researchers may reach. Despite reassurances by researchers regarding confidentiality and anonymity, it is a common – and not surprising – finding that research samples tend to contain relatively high proportions of individuals who are open about their sexuality to colleagues (for example, Colgan et al., 2006). After all, people who know that their sexuality is known to colleagues have no fear of revelation by deciding to take part in research. The effect of this is that where it is important for research to try to cover a wide range of LGB experience, particular efforts need to be made to reach those who are not out at work, such as using the

snowballing method of asking those who have volunteered to take part in the research to talk to other people that they know who are not out, based on their own experience of the interview.

I too experienced difficulties in reaching lesbians to take part in interviews, particularly those who were not out at work – all interviewees were open about their sexuality to at least some colleagues (see 6.3.2). As stated earlier, I had initially hoped that the sample would be roughly evenly split between heterosexual and lesbian/bisexual women; instead it was three-fifths heterosexual, two-fifths lesbian. One difficulty was that several of the routes I used to recruit women participants, such as through ConstructionSkills, WAMT or TSSA (see 4.5.5), were far more successful in reaching heterosexual women. This is likely to be largely a question of numbers (lesbians are a small number of the population of women), as well as trust in the research process and its perceived relevance. When I asked WAMT to circulate information specifically asking for lesbians to come forward, this appeal had some success. Similarly, approaches through a staff LGBT network and contacts through a trade union LGBT network were more successful in reaching lesbian participants. I also made use of some personal contacts. I conclude from this that lesbians are often willing to share their experiences where sexuality is clearly perceived as a focus of the research (which relates to questions of the primacy given to gender or sexual identifications, explored in Chapter 6).

While my participant recruitment materials referred to heterosexual, lesbian or bisexual women, in the end no interviewees identified as bisexual. Again given the small numbers, in retrospect I can speculate that I would have needed to try more specific routes, such as bisexual women's networks, to reach this group.

Researchers of LGB populations commonly argue that access to interviewees was only possible because of the researchers' own identifications as lesbian or gay, which were crucial for gaining access and trust (Dunne, 1997; Homfray, 2008; LaSala, 2003; Taylor, 2004a). The question of 'insider'/'outsider' perspectives of researchers is not, however, a straightforward one, and questions of reflexivity and positionality are explored next.

4.8 Reflexivity and positionality

An important contribution of feminist debates about methodology (although not exclusive to feminism) has been concern with the subjective experiences of the researcher, and a desire to reflect on the research process and the power relations, for example of gender, race, class, inherent in it. The researcher and her personal history becomes part of the process of the research, and is therefore implicated in interpretations and conclusions reached (Maynard, 1994).

Explicit knowledge about the background and positioning of the author in relation to the research is important for allowing the reader to assess the effect this may have had on the research, according to Holgate et al (2006), who conducted a review of key studies in the field of industrial relations. They had expected the ‘self-reflexive researcher’ to be a common feature of feminist-influenced industrial relations research, but found that most authors had largely left themselves out of the narrative. An exception is Pollert’s (1981) account of researching workers in a tobacco factory:

“Being a woman researcher was vitally important to my study. Not only did it affect my relationships with women but it also coloured my contact with men. Class and gender were both significant here; what men—managers, supervisors, foremen and shop stewards—reported to me about the factory, and the women workers, was an interaction between my questions and their definitions of me as middle-class educated, apparently endowed with the rather threatening X-ray eyes of the ‘professional’ social scientist, but at the same time an academic ignoramus about the ‘real world’.” (Pollert, cited in Holgate et al., 2006: 323)

Such a reflexive account provides an insight into Pollert’s methodological approach that recognises how the processes of gender and class intersect, both in relations within the factory, and in relationships between the researcher and the researched.

In referring to the “rather threatening X-ray eyes” of the researcher, Pollert is recognising the power relations inherent in the researcher/researched relationship (in this case enhanced by class differences). Some feminist researchers have tried to find ways of minimising this unequal hierarchical relationship by having a more reciprocal exchange within interviews, but this approach is not without its difficulties, as answering personal questions can detract from the focus on the interviewee (Legard et al., 2003: 160-1).

Debates about the relationship between interviewer and interviewee have also been taken up by those researching lesbian and gay populations (Homfray, 2008; Kong et al.,

2002; LaSala, 2003; Meezan and Martin, 2003). Advantages for openly lesbian or gay researchers studying lesbians and gay men relate to access to participants who may not have confidence in a heterosexual researcher, as was discussed above. In addition, there are advantages of an 'insider' perspective in terms of familiarity with the lifestyles and experiences of the research subjects (LaSala, 2003). But disadvantages of insider knowledge may arise from a failure to notice the familiar or an uncritical acceptance of certain norms within the community. There may also be concerns about anonymity when the researcher is a member of the same social circle and could potentially pass on 'gossip' (LaSala, 2003-21), and it may be the case that, in studies of sensitive issues, people prefer to speak to those outside their own community or population group (Lewis, 2003: 66). There are, then, both advantages and disadvantages to the researcher "matching" the socio-demographic characteristics of the research participants, but I share Jane Lewis's (2003: 66) view that other elements are equally important in the interview relationship:

"Ultimately, matching is no substitute for developing high quality fieldwork skills, having empathy and respect for participants, being reflective about participants' social worlds as well as one's own, and being able to listen and understand."

My own situation in relation to the women that I interviewed reflected a mixture of insider and outsider positions. I shared some commonalities as a woman interviewing other women, but had no experience of working in the transport or construction sectors, although I had some understanding of male-dominated sectors from working in the IT sector. As a white, middle-class woman, I shared this social position with some interviewees, but not others. As I have had both lesbian and heterosexual relationships I feel that I am familiar with, and sensitive to, many of the issues concerning the disclosure of minority sexual identity in the workplace. However, as I am currently in a heterosexual relationship, I could not present myself as a lesbian 'insider'. As I felt that the issue of my sexuality may be important for some lesbians in terms of trust in me and the research process, I included some information about my research background in LGB issues in the publicity material about the research (see Appendix 6). I took the approach that I was willing to answer questions about my sexual orientation if asked by potential interviewees. In the event, interviewees expressed little interest in my personal life or sexuality, which was consistent with my previous experience of research with lesbian and gay interviewees (Colgan et al., 2006; Wright, 2005). This suggests, in line with Lewis (2003), that 'matching' was not particularly important for these lesbian

participants, although it is possible that some assumed I was a lesbian due to my research interests. I also cannot know whether some lesbians or bisexual women chose not to volunteer for interview because I was not perceived as an ‘insider’. Equally, an ‘insider’ may have had better access to networks that could have been used to recruit participants, overcoming access difficulties.

There also may be a relationship between my position in the research process and the fact that all lesbian participants were open about their sexuality to at least some colleagues, reflecting a group who were confident about their sexuality; lesbians who were not open might have required greater reassurance about my position. Counter to this, though, is the evidence above that most studies of LGB participants attract those who are out at work, indicating that the difficulties of reaching less visible LGB populations go beyond researcher positionality.

A further aspect of my positioning was as someone who had worked for the trade union movement for many years. Where participants were aware of this⁹, it might have given me a favourable ‘insider’ status for some (as discussed, 4.5.5, a relatively high proportion of the sample were active in their unions). Again I cannot tell the effect of this on those who did not volunteer to participate.

4.9 Conclusion

My research questions are explicitly rooted in a concern about gender inequality at work and how class position and dominant heterosexuality intersect with gender in women’s experience of work. I have therefore been influenced by feminist methodology in the design of this research study, and find value in the feminist standpoint approach that questions how knowledge is produced: by whom, for whom, and about whom. The relationship between power and knowledge is placed under scrutiny. Feminist standpoint writers propose starting from women’s, or other subordinated groups’, standpoint to produce knowledge that represents a perspective missing from ‘universalistic’ – but in reality male-dominated – theories. This position justifies my choice to empirically research only women in a study of gender, which additionally explores the intersections of sexuality and occupational class.

⁹ A sentence was included in my recruitment leaflet, see Appendix 6.

Layder's multi-layered view of society and associated research map was shown to be consistent with my theoretical framework (particularly the concepts of Jenkins, Bradley and Acker, outlined in Chapter 3) which does not prioritise either agency or structure. Instead the four interconnected levels of context, setting, situated activity and self offer a means of appreciating the complexity of women's experience of male-dominated work. Women's career decisions are rooted in interconnecting elements of personal biography and personality, affected by relationships with family and friends, influenced by social attitudes concerning suitability for work based on gender, sexuality and class, and constrained by educational and labour market opportunities, also affected by the gender division of labour, sexuality and class, among other factors. This framework also provides a structure for the analysis of findings presented in Chapters 5 to 9.

Research on sexuality raises particular ethical and practical issues, often without consensus on the best means to overcome these. I have discussed the difficulties I had in accessing lesbian and bisexual interviewees and have suggested some reasons for this, as well as raising questions about the effects of my positioning as a researcher. However, I conclude that the benefits of 'matching' characteristics of interviewee and interviewer are not clear cut, and that participants' confidence in the researcher and interest in the research topic may be of greater importance.

5 Gender segregation in construction and transport

5.1 Introduction

This chapter begins discussion of the empirical research findings, addressing the research question concerning the contemporary context in which women are entering the construction and transport sectors. Analysis is primarily at Layder's levels of context and setting (see 4.4), examining recent policy initiatives on occupational gender segregation, some characteristics of the construction and transport sectors and perceived obstacles to women's greater participation.

To set the scene for discussion of the research findings, the chapter starts by sketching the extent of gender segregation in the construction and transport workforce, as well as its trade unions. Academic and policy-oriented research literature is then discussed to highlight specific features of the sectors under consideration, which develops elements of the broader review of literature on women in male-dominated work in Chapter 2.

The chapter then examines recent initiatives to redress women's low participation in non-traditional occupations. The empirical data analysed in this chapter is drawn primarily from three sources: the interviews with key informant experts providing insights into women's under-representation in non-traditionally female work in the sectors under consideration; my observations of events held to encourage women into non-traditional occupations; and two focus groups conducted with women entering and already working in the manual trades. In addition, some perceptions from interviews with women workers in construction and transport are included where relevant to emerging themes.

While some interviewees emphasise the need for greater awareness among women and girls of non-traditional careers, others point to the structural barriers such as long working hours, shift patterns and systems of workplace training that affect women's participation, alongside persisting employer prejudice and discrimination against women. Evidence is presented of some public sector organisations using procurement processes to address workplace inequality in construction and transport. The chapter thereby introduces some key themes relating to women's employment in these sectors that will be developed in Chapters 6 to 9.

5.2 The extent of gender segregation in the UK construction and transport sectors

5.2.1 The extent of occupational segregation

The construction and transport sectors remain the two most heavily male-dominated industrial sectors in the UK – 90 per cent of construction workers are male and 76 per cent of those in transport, storage and communication are men (EOC, 2006: 21). While data from the Workplace Employee Relations Survey 2004 suggests that the degree of horizontal job segregation by gender has fallen overall (Walsh, 2007: 314), these sectors appear to be resisting trend. Construction has seen no improvement in the proportions of women in employment since 1972 (EOC, 2006). Women account for only one per cent of craft and trades occupations, nine per cent of technical occupations and 11 per cent of construction design and management occupations (excluding technical), but 33 per cent of all other occupations in transport in the UK (Labour Force Survey Spring 2009¹⁰).

Table 5 provides greater detail of employment in male-dominated construction occupations from the Labour Force Survey, April-June 2010, and shows that only two occupational groups – managers and architects, town planners and surveyors – contain more than 10,000 women and therefore enable a female employment percentage to be provided. However the figures for male employment compared to overall employment show the scale of male dominance in other occupational classifications.

Data on women working in transport occupations, shown in Table 6, follow a similar pattern, with women most likely to be found in leisure and travel service occupations (61 per cent of those employed) or in administrative roles as transport and distribution clerks (37 per cent of employees). Only five per cent of transport drivers and operatives are women, with taxi cab drivers and chauffeurs being the only occupation with over 10,000 women employed. In all other occupational categories there are fewer than 10,000 women so no data are given and therefore the female percentage of employment is not provided.

¹⁰ Figures for occupations in Standard Industrial Classification 45 provided by ConstructionSkills, email communication, 30 July 2010.

Table 5: Employment by gender in construction occupations, UK, April-June 2010

SOC Code, Occupation	Thousands			Female %
	Total employment	Male	Female	
1122 Managers in construction	231	216	15	6
2121 Civil engineers	77	72	*	
243 Architects, Town Planners, Surveyors	196	170	25	13
2431 Architects	55	47	*	
2432 Town planners	24	14	*	
2433 Quantity surveyors	47	45	*	
2434 Chartered surveyors (not quantity surveyors)	70	65	*	
5241 Electricians/electrical fitters	259	254	*	
531 Construction Trades	821	817	*	
5311 Steel erectors	11	11	*	
5312 Bricklayers masons	77	76	*	
5313 Roofers roof tilers and slaters	39	39	*	
5314 Plumbing, heating & ventilating engineers	181	178	*	
5315 Carpenters and joiners	246	246	*	
5316 Glaziers, window fabric and fitters	51	51	*	
5319 Construction trades n.e.c.	218	216	*	
532 Building Trades	235	230	*	
5321 Plasterers	59	59	*	
5322 Floorers and wall tilers	40	40	*	
5323 Painters and decorators	136	131	*	

* Less than 10,000

Source: Labour Force Survey, April-June 2010

Table 6: Employment by gender in transport occupations, UK, April-June 2010

SOC Code, Occupation	Thousands			Female %
	Total employment	Male	Female	
1161 Transport and distribution managers	81	74	*	*
351 Transport Associate Professionals	62	59	*	*
3514 Train drivers	16	15	*	*
4134 Transport and distribution clerks	63	40	23	37
621 Leisure & Travel Service Occupations	191	75	116	61
821 Transport Drivers and Operatives	911	869	42	5
8211 Heavy goods vehicle drivers	285	284	*	*
8212 Van drivers	178	171	*	*
8213 Bus and coach drivers	132	123	*	*
8214 Taxi cab drivers and chauffeurs	213	203	11	5

* Less than 10,000

Source: Labour Force Survey, April-June 2010

It has been noted that there is a lack of data to fully understand the gendered nature of employment in the transport sector (Hamilton et al., 2005), particularly in relation to professional and managerial positions, but what evidence there is indicates that male domination occurs not only in semi-skilled and manual occupations, but also in professional and managerial roles. The transport sector also employs high numbers of people from ethnic minorities, for example 12 per cent of employees in passenger and land transport are from ethnic minorities (ibid: 51).

5.2.2 Union density and gender

Trade union density for the construction industry nationally is low at 15.1 per cent, and even lower for women at 14.0 per cent, according to 2009 membership figures (Achur, 2010, table 2.1). The figure for transport, storage and communication is 38.8 per cent and only 29.3 per cent for women. These sectors show untypical patterns of union density. Across sectors, women are more likely to be in unions than men (29.5 per cent of women compared to 25.2 per cent of men). This may be explained by occupational segregation within the two sectors, with women more likely to be in administrative roles

that may be less unionised than the typically male roles where unions have traditionally organised. Furthermore, these sectors do not reflect figures for union density which show that those in professional occupations are the most unionised group at 44.9 per cent, with women professionals more likely to be in a union (58.3 per cent, compared to 33.7 per cent of men) (Achur, 2010, table 2.1). In contrast, construction professionals are rarely unionised and in transport the trade unions are most organised among operational rather than professional or managerial staff, although unions do also represent workers at these levels.

General union Unite (former TGWU section) represents workers in transport, particularly the bus industry, and some parts of construction. A breakdown of membership by sector was provided by the interviewee from the Unite London and Eastern Region. Regional data show that in September 2008, in the bus industry only nine per cent of members were women (which includes women working in administrative roles in bus garages, as well as bus drivers) and in building and construction women were three per cent of members and two per cent of those in the building craft section (carpenters and electricians, ex-local authority workers). It will be seen in Chapter 8 that a high proportion of interviewees in the transport sector are unionised, and women's attitudes towards, and participation in, trade unions will be discussed.

5.3 Research evidence on gender in construction and transport

The shortage of women workers in construction in the UK has in recent years received considerable attention from academics and policymakers, although this has focused largely on women professionals, particularly engineers and surveyors (for example, Bagilhole, 2002; Dainty and Bagilhole, 2006; Faulkner, 2009a; 2009b; Greed, 1991; 2000; 2006; Henwood, 1998; Miller, 2004; Powell et al., 2009; Watts, 2007; 2009a; 2009b), rather than on women in the manual trades (Clarke and Gribling, 2008; Clarke and Wall, 2004; Wall, 2004). The under-representation of women in science, engineering and technology (SET) has been the focus of government attention as an issue affecting economic growth and productivity (Kirkup et al., 2010: 3) and an area of skill shortages, evidenced by the government support of the UKRC, a body seeking to address the under-representation of women in SET.

While the construction industry did little to encourage women's participation until the 1990s (Bagilhole, 2002: 69), since then it has been subject to a "plethora of government initiatives for change" (Rhys Jones, 2006: 262), with the Latham Review in 1994 for the first time focusing on the low representation of women and BME people. It recommended an increase in the numbers of women and the pursuit of equal opportunities measures to address the macho and adversarial culture. Efforts by the industry to train and recruit more women (Bagilhole, 2002; Greed, 2006; Gurjao, 2006; Miller et al., 2004a) have seen some increase in the numbers of women in professional construction roles (Dainty et al., 2001: 297; Dainty and Bagilhole, 2006: 99) and women starting to enter influential positions within the industry (Watts, 2009a: 39). Men, however, have been found to be resistant to initiatives to change the industry's culture and practices, such as long hours working and geographical flexibility (Dainty et al., 2001). Furthermore women in construction are often disappointed or cynical about the superficial nature of commitment to equal opportunity measures and lack of real change (Greed, 2000). Indeed Greed (2000; 2006) has conceptualised the industry as 'Planet Construction', reflecting its self-contained separation from wider social changes, such as those affecting gender relations in other sectors. She describes the male-dominated 'tribes' that compete with one another, and further notes the class divisions, with roles strongly differentiated, where "every man knows his place and 'who' is above and below him" (Greed, 2006: 74). Both women and black male construction professionals face barriers to progression (Greed, 2000: 188).

Women have not increased their numbers in the skilled manual trades in the UK and have received less academic attention than women in construction professions, with a valuable exception being Clarke et al's (2004) international collection of analysis of women in construction trades. A historical perspective (Clarke and Wall, 2004) illustrates moments when women increased their numbers in the building trades, for example during the two world wars of the twentieth century and in the 1970s and 1980s when local authority building departments took measures to recruit women. In London this was due to a combination of feminist campaigning (in particular through Women and Manual Trades), commitment from the then Labour-led Greater London Council (GLC), women's training workshops (supported by local authorities and the European Social Fund), the support of construction union UCATT and the equal opportunities policies of Labour-run local authorities (Wall, 2004). Close links between the women's

training workshops and the Direct Labour Organisations (DLOs) of certain Inner London boroughs enabled many tradeswomen to gain work, with 266 women working in just seven Inner London DLOs in 1989 (Pyke 1989, cited in Clarke and Wall, 2004). These were exciting times, recalls Wall (2004: 167), who herself trained and worked as a carpenter during the 1970s and 1980s:

“For a few exciting years in Inner London it seemed as though women were at last gaining some foothold in the most gender-segregated industry of all time.”

However, progress was not long-lasting and Wall (2004: 168) notes that by the early 1990s the construction industry was in deep recession and redundancies had affected many in the local authority DLOs following the imposition by the Conservative government of compulsory competitive tendering (CCT). The opportunities offered by women’s training workshops and their links with the DLOs also came to an end.

The exclusion of women and ethnic minorities from skilled construction jobs has continued, as a result of structural obstacles relating to work-based training, informal methods of recruitment and employment conditions such as the requirement for long hours on site that are inflexible for those with family commitments (Byrne et al., 2005; Clarke and Gribling, 2008). Even where there was a commitment to recruit a diverse workforce, as in the building of Heathrow Terminal 5, in reality few women and local people gained work on the project, with one of the main reasons being the lack of work experience placements available to those studying in local colleges (Clarke and Gribling, 2008). The authors concluded that there was no shortage of those in the target groups for recruitment (including women and ethnic minorities) looking to train and work in the industry. Similarly, large numbers of women have registered an interest in jobs building the Olympic Park in East London, contesting the myth that women are not interested in working in construction (Foster, 2010). This indicates that supply-side explanations for occupational segregation that focus on women’s ‘choices’ alone are inadequate, and that demand-side or structural causes are also significant (see 2.2.1).

Some studies from the US have examined women’s experiences of manual construction work (Weston, 1982; 1998), also addressing issues of class and sexuality (Paap, 2006), affirmative action programmes (Price, 2004) and the experiences of lesbian workers in construction (Denisson and Saguy, forthcoming; Frank, 2001) (see 2.3.3), the equivalent of which I have not found in the UK literature. Paap (2006: 137) describes how ‘pigness’ is used on US construction sites to denote a form of working-class

masculinity. Despite the seemingly insulting nature of the term, men used it about themselves to assert their “animal” strength and physicality, associated also with a raw sexuality, that defines their masculinity and places it above femininities or more “effeminate” white-collar masculinities. Thus men who may be at the lower end of the class hierarchies of the sector attempt to assert power over both women and other men who are not considered sufficiently masculine.

Women workers in transport in the UK have received less attention from academics and policymakers than women in construction. The literature on gender in the transport sector tends to focus on gender differences in transport use (Hamilton et al., 2005) and its restrictive effect on women’s labour market participation (Dobbs, 2007); on female-dominated areas such as cabin crew (Hochschild, 1983; Simpson, 2004; 2005; Whitelegg, 2009); or on historical accounts of women transport workers (Rotondaro, 2004; Stanley, 2008; Wojtczak, 2005). Additionally a study of restructuring in the transport and logistics sector focused on its effects on women managers (Simpson et al., 2003), finding evidence of long working hours. While there is a small amount of research on women in seafaring occupations, this thesis focuses on surface and underground passenger transport (buses, railways and underground rail), so this has not been examined.

Little has been written about the experiences of UK local bus drivers, (Reynolds and Rose, 2009), and I have found no research on the specific experiences of women bus workers. Reynolds and Rose (2009) examine the emotional effects of working in what has been described as the ‘worst job in the world’, but find a more complex experience of both ‘ups’ and ‘downs’ with benefits deriving from a sense of control and job satisfaction, as well as stress from passenger behaviour. Only 10 per cent of their sample of drivers was female, so the study is primarily an analysis of the emotions of men.

A common feature of the construction and transport sectors is long working hours: using Labour Force Survey data, the TUC (2008a) showed that 22 per cent of those in construction worked more than 48 hours a week (exceeded only by mining and quarrying) as did 19.5 per cent of workers in transport, storage & communication. These figures are well above the average of 12.9 per cent of employees who work over 48 hours a week. While long working hours predominantly affect male employees, more than a fifth (22.2 per cent) of long hours workers are female (TUC, 2008a). It may

be hard for women to resist the long-hours cultures of these industries; Watts (2009a: 48) found that women engineers adapt to male work patterns, commonly working an average 50-hour week.

5.4 The policy environment and political will for change

Efforts to change the male-dominated culture of the construction industry professions since the 1990s were seen above, as well as the progress in getting women into the manual trades in the 1970s and 1980s due to concerted political efforts. Clarke and Wall (2004: 25) argue that the key factor explaining the inclusion of women at certain stages is ‘political will’:

“The gender division of labour does not change by itself but requires effective regulation and training and this is only founded on concerted political effort.”

While the political and economic context of the first decade of the 21st century differs from the 1970s and 80s, it is worth noting the role of London-wide government in both the progress reported by Wall (2004) in the 1970s to 1980s and in recent years. The Greater London Council of the time, headed by Ken Livingstone, was known for its commitment to equal opportunities, until its abolition by Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in 1986. When a city-wide level of government was restored to London in 2000 with the Greater London Authority (GLA), made up of the Mayor of London and the 25-member London Assembly, Ken Livingstone became the first elected Mayor of London. From its formation, the GLA has actively pursued equality and diversity strategies covering all the equality strands, also reflected in the policies of the London Development Agency, part of the ‘GLA family’, which is responsible to the Mayor. However since Ken Livingstone lost the Mayoral election to the Conservative Boris Johnson in 2008, some fear that the proactive policies of the GLA on reducing occupational gender segregation will not be sustained. The key informant interviewee from general union Unite had noticed a reduced interest in pursuing gender equality following the change of Mayor, and the Transport for London key informant interviewee highlighted that the staffing reductions being implemented by the new Mayor included a cut of two-thirds of staff in the Equality and Inclusion section, clearly reducing their capacity to promote equality.

The recent national political context differs however from the period of Conservative Government from 1979 discussed by Wall: under the Labour governments of 1997-

2010 a range of equality legislation was passed (Dickens, 2007), including the *Equality Act 2006* which introduced a Gender Equality Duty requiring public bodies to have ‘due regard’ to promoting equality of opportunity when exercising public functions. The public sector equality duties have been a driver for some to argue that private sector contractors that deliver services should also be required to show that they are taking steps to promote equality and diversity among their workforces, thus linking public procurement and equality, discussed later in this chapter.

Under the recent Labour government, concern about the persistent gender pay gap – full-time women's average hourly pay (excluding overtime) remains 15.5 per cent less than men's pay (National Statistics, 2010) – resulted in several high-profile reports and enquiries examining the issue of women's pay (EOC, 2001; Kingsmill, 2001; Women and Work Commission, 2006). Following the recommendations of the Women and Work Commission (2006), £40 million of government funding was made available for improving women's skill levels, with a focus on male-dominated occupations. This included £10 million through the Women and Work Sector Pathways initiative to develop projects providing women with skills, confidence and mentoring to move into or progress within male-dominated occupations (DCLG, 2007). In March 2008, a further £5 million a year for three years was awarded to this initiative, with the construction industry selected to receive continued funding and the passenger transport sector added. Additionally, funding was provided regionally through the London Development Agency to projects to support women into traditionally male work, addressing its key strategic gender priorities of reducing the gender pay gap and occupational segregation in London (LDA, 2007b). However the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government has announced plans to abolish the Regional Development Agencies and replace them with Local Enterprise Partnerships¹¹. While it is early to speculate on the impact of this change on regional priorities for equality activity, the RDAs, particularly London, were seen as having made good use of the public sector equality duties, including Equality Impact Assessments, procurement and supplier diversity (Sclater, 2009).

¹¹ RDA website <http://www.englandsrdas.com/news/qas-on-the-future-of-rdas>, accessed 29 November 2010.

5.5 Recent initiatives to increase women's participation in non-traditional work

The following sections discuss some initiatives to address women's underrepresentation in non-traditionally female occupations identified during the course of this research, analysing empirical evidence from interviews with key informants, observations of events held as part of these initiatives, and focus groups with women entering or working in the manual trades. Much of the discussion centres on projects aimed at women in non-professional occupations, which had received funding, often to provide opportunities for unemployed women. However discussion of awareness-raising initiatives aimed at professional roles too is included, alongside efforts to link equality action to public procurement activities.

5.5.1 Raising awareness of non-traditional occupations

Some key informant interviewees emphasised the need to address the 'supply' side through activities to promote non-traditional work to women and girls. The Women into Non-Traditional Occupations (WINTO) project was funded by the London Development Agency (LDA) between 2006 and 2009 as part of its commitment to addressing women's low pay (LDA, 2007b). The project was established to raise awareness among women in London about jobs in non-traditional areas (focusing on a small number of sectors, including construction and transport) by putting on events with women speakers already working in such jobs, offering 'taster days' for women to see what the work involves, and practical job-search preparation and support. Events were primarily aimed at unemployed women to meet funding criteria, but were open to employed women also. It had no difficulty in attracting women to their events, and, according to the project co-ordinator, demonstrated that many women are interested in non-traditional work. During the project around 400 women attended non-traditional occupation open days and over 1,000 women received employment support. From my observations of attending an event targeted at getting women into the transport industry and a meeting covering a range of non-traditional sectors, the project also appeared to be attracting a diverse group of women, from a range of ethnic minority backgrounds as well as women of all ages, including those returning to work after families or considering a career change. Despite appearing to be a successful project in terms of generating interest in non-traditional occupations and offering support and training for employment, the project manager expressed frustration at the difficulty in gaining

employment reported by many project participants who felt that they faced discrimination from employers when applying for non-traditional jobs. This suggests that a focus on the supply-side is insufficient on its own as a means to reduce gender segregation in employment.

WINTO events presented women speakers who gave positive and inspirational talks about their experiences of male-dominated work, with many stressing the variety, satisfaction and fun that their jobs offered (a theme that will recur in Chapter 6 in evidence from women workers). Another feature of the presentations was an emphasis on the characteristics and abilities that women can bring to typically male roles, women were variously said to be: “nurturing and caring”, which meant they cared about the community and so brought a useful approach to public highways projects; “good at working in teams”, which was helpful in large engineering projects working with a variety of parties; “listen a lot in meetings” which means they can assess what is important and move things along; “good at building relationships”, for example with external bodies that need to be involved in a project so making things run more smoothly and “excellent project managers by nature”, sometimes drawing on administrative experience. Some women workers also emphasised women’s ‘natural’ characteristics as contributing to their work performance, but the dangers in such essentialist conceptions of women’s ‘nature’ are, of course, that similar arguments are used to explain why women have been deemed unsuitable for ‘male’ work, for example on grounds of lack of physical strength, technical ability or ability to deal with conflict, arguments which many interviewees would strongly reject.

Among key informants and women workers, several felt that more should be done to educate girls about the opportunities to work in non-traditional areas. Some worker interviewees were ‘Construction Ambassadors’, a scheme run by the sector skills council ConstructionSkills to promote the industry to school students as a potential career. Although not solely aimed at girls, a high proportion of Ambassadors are women (an estimated 30-40 per cent, according to the interviewee from ConstructionSkills), some of whom are motivated by a desire to encourage girls to consider the industry, as expressed by Tanya, a senior surveyor.

“I became a Construction Ambassador a few years ago because I’m quite into just telling kids about careers within the industry, especially girls, because a lot of them just think it’s hairy-arsed builders and no women would want to do it, and it’s nice to

get them to realise it's a good role and it's a lot more professional than it used to be.”
(Heterosexual, principal quantity surveyor, construction, 30s)

While girls often lack information about training and career options in non-traditional work, an investigation by the former Equal Opportunities Commission found a much higher level of interest in non-traditional work choices among school pupils than generally thought: more than a third of girls said they definitely would consider a non-traditional job, 44 per cent said they might, and 12 per cent in England and 11 per cent in Wales expressed a specific interest in construction work (EOC, 2005: 10).

A sense of shifting attitudes among younger women to working in the manual trades was observed by an interviewee from Women and Manual Trades (WAMT), the national organisation for tradeswomen and those training in the trades:

“I think what's changing is women going in from school and from a young age... I went in when I was 30 and a lot of women of my generation went into it when they were more mature. ... Young women, I think, are starting to choose it, and being more confident.” (Key informant, WAMT)

This perception is borne out by the greater numbers of women embarking on training courses, with women accounting for nearly nine per cent of first year trainees on construction courses in Further Education colleges in London, higher than in other parts of the UK (CITB 2005 cited in GLA, 2007). Yet just 1.3 per cent of manual construction workers in London are women (GLA, 2007), suggesting that the barriers to women's non-traditional careers are not only coming from the supply side.

5.5.2 Addressing employer and industry barriers

The structural obstacles to women gaining non-traditional work were highlighted by several interviewees. The gap between formal training and gaining work experience and employment for tradeswomen is well known to WAMT. Formal qualifications achieved in college need to be complemented by practical work placements in order to complete the NVQ level 2 that assists in getting work. Colleges do not provide placements for students, but these are particularly hard for women to find, as they often do not have the same informal contacts in the industry as men, compounded by employer reluctance to 'take a chance' on a woman, as an interviewee from WAMT explained:

“They're writing to employers, who, as soon as they see a woman's name on it, especially with electricians and plumbers... What happened is, plumbing got a huge amount of publicity in the last couple of years about what you can earn and that brought a lot of people in [...] But basically we've got too many people who are

trained as plumbers and not enough plumbing placements. That's the crux of it and to get a plumbing placement is like gold dust, so is a firm that mainly employs fellas going to take a chance on a woman?" (Key informant, WAMT)

A focus group participant described the prejudice she faced in getting work following her painting and decorating course:

"A big part of it was because I was a woman actually [...] because there was another lad here who'd just finished his [course], and I phoned up for a job and they told me it was gone, and he phoned up after and he got an interview, so that just shows that the job wasn't gone in the first place." (Multi-skilled apprentice, Leicester focus group)

To provide opportunities for women to get practical experience on construction sites, WAMT established the Building Work for Women project (also funded by the London Development Agency). Like the WINTO project and research evidence discussed above, Building Work for Women (BWW) found no shortage of women interested in taking part: they approached some colleges where women were training in the trades and found it snowballed from there. The project provided support for 153 women, including work placements, help with gaining the CSCS card and first aid certificates needed to work on construction sites, and financial support for tools, protective clothing, driving lessons and childcare. It also assisted more than 30 women to gain employment. In addition to preparing the women for work, WAMT's key role was in persuading employers to give women work placements: the project manager believed that the project was very valuable in,

"Helping women to enter the industry, breaking down the barriers of employer prejudice. You have to be very determined to do this as an individual, but we can help in selling the benefits of a diverse workforce to employers." (BWW project manager, WAMT)

Focus group participants had found the project valuable in offering building site experience, particularly in becoming accustomed to male reactions, described here:

"There was 3 of us [women]. And we was the only ones they'd ever seen on site, you know, I felt like Naomi Campbell walking there, 'oh my god, they're women!'. It really was like that. [...] But it is an experience; everybody should go on site, for our sakes as well as theirs. You have to get used to it, I guess." (Trainee plumber, WAMT focus group)

Women on site were a novelty for these male workers, as several other women found, and she suggests that women need to be more visible on building sites to overcome this.

For trainee plumber Donna, the project gave her opportunities she would not have received otherwise:

“Before I found the training that I did get I had a few knockbacks where I felt like I wanted to give up ‘cos I’d hit so many barriers at the beginning, whether it was childcare, dealing with the job centre, sending me to places that didn’t have the insurance to take me on and so many barriers that I hit and they [WAMT] were really supportive and kept my spirits up, and without them, I’d be honest, I don’t know whether I’d have even found my training.” (Heterosexual, carpenter, 30s)

Donna highlights the emotional support that is an equally important part of what WAMT provides to women struggling to enter the trades, and may prevent them from abandoning their attempts (discussed further in 8.3). Although employment of tradespeople through local authority Direct Labour Organisations (DLOs) has drastically declined since the 1970s and 1980s when significant progress was made for women (Clarke and Wall, 2004; Wall, 2004), some DLOs remain and Leicester City Council provides an example of a local authority successfully recruiting and retaining tradeswomen. The apprenticeship co-ordinator reported that around 45 (eight per cent) of their 400 tradespeople are women, and the apprenticeship scheme at the time had 18 women, representing 26 per cent of the 70 apprentices. Recruitment strategies included targeted leaflets, free taster sessions for the different trades and participation of existing women employees in open days and outreach activities, including efforts to reach the large Asian community in the area. Two-week Women in Construction courses also enabled women to try out the trades in a women-only environment. Several focus group participants had joined the Council’s apprenticeship scheme after receiving leaflets aimed at women or attending the short course, indicating the importance of such measures to attract women who would not consider entering the trades otherwise.

The apprenticeship manager noted the importance of political leadership for the success of the scheme, it had started during the 1980s under a Labour-controlled council, but had been harder to operate during a period of a hung council leadership. Retention of tradeswomen was supported by flexible working policies, maternity leave and a women’s support group, of which several focus group participants were members. The importance of such policies for the retention of women with children is examined in Chapter 9.

The London Olympics 2012 is being used as an opportunity to address the underrepresentation of women and other groups in construction. Specific measures have

been established by the Olympic Development Authority, such as the Women's Project, aiming to provide work experience for 65 women on the Olympic construction site, and jobs for 15 women in manual trades. However the project manager interviewed for this research was confident that this target would be exceeded. The project has found no difficulty in recruiting women (see also Foster, 2010), who were driving diggers and dumpers as part of the early stages of the construction of the Olympic site. They received training at the site's plant training centre and, according to the project manager, "they absolutely love it". Additionally, the Women's Project has a formal role in monitoring applications for jobs on site, and is able to ask questions of contractors who fail to appoint women: "if they consistently choose men then we make a fuss about it and we want to know why". The project has also been urging companies to take on apprentices and was aiming for 50 per cent of these to be women, and had received many applications from women wanting these opportunities. The project manager believes the project has the potential to set an example to the construction industry of how they can increase the numbers of women:

"The Olympics is a high-profile site, and if we raise the profile of women on the Olympics we are raising the profile of women in construction generally, that's the idea. And also that other publicly-funded builds may follow our example of facilitating women onto site." (Project manager, ODA Women's Project)

This project is addressing the issue of women's low participation in construction work in several ways. The high public profile of the Olympics offers a chance to raise awareness of women working in construction; on a visit to the Women's Project in 2008, the then Olympic Minister Tessa Jowell said:

"Not only will this programme help more women get construction jobs working on the Games, but also make a significant contribution to breaking down gender barriers within the industry as a whole." (ODA, 2 December 2008)

Additionally, through its role in monitoring job applications for work at the site, the project can identify employers who seem resistant to employing women and challenge their recruitment practices. In this way a publicly-funded project is able to monitor and influence the actions of its contractors in terms of employment (discussed in section 5.5.3).

Construction employers are also the target of the Women and Work Sector Pathways Initiative which was established with government funding to improve women's participation in non-traditional work (see 5.4). As match-funding is required from

employers, the focus of the project is improving the position of women already in the industry, rather than providing training to new entrants, one strand of which is offering training and support for clerical and administrative workers to move into craft, technical and professional roles. This recognises the fact that many already may have such expertise acquired through years of work in the industry, but are not being paid for it. One difficulty, according to the ConstructionSkills interviewee, is that employers are sometimes reluctant to lose women from roles where they are considered very valuable in order to support them in progressing into other roles. However she sees the initiative as contributing to what she hopes will be lasting cultural change in the industry, by involving large construction employers in women's leadership programmes, diversity training and developing good practice in retention of women.

In the operational transport sector, shift patterns and long hours of work are often said to be a major barrier to women's participation. One London bus company was piloting a scheme to offer flexible rostering as part of its efforts to attract greater numbers of women drivers. Transport for London (TfL), which has overall responsibility for London bus services operated by private firms, ran a £1.2 million project from 2007-2010 aiming to recruit a minimum of 600 women into the bus industry as drivers, to meet its objective of increasing the proportion of women bus drivers from six to 12 per cent by 2012 (LDA, 2007a: 11). The interviewee managing the flexible rostering project pointed to one of the benefits of the job - bus drivers' pay is almost double that of many jobs typically done by women: "The pay you might get for working 30-40 hours in a shop, you could get for a 20-hour shift here". It is being promoted as a job with flexibility, with greater choice of shifts, so drivers could work 20 hours a week, say, to fit around their childcare commitments. Offering flexibility in choice of shifts for bus companies is complex, though, and the project manager highlighted that a system was needed that appeared fair to all staff, and did not allow those with caring responsibilities to 'cherry-pick' the best shifts (similar concerns were also expressed by women drivers, see Chapter 9). The sensitivities around introducing flexibility in the bus industry were illustrated by the reluctance of the project manager to allow me to name the bus company in a published article (Wright, 2009), despite the case being presented in a positive light. The company no longer exists as it has since been sold to another bus operator, but at the time of the interview it was owned by TfL, which would then have offered the computer system developed under the flexible rostering pilot to companies

operating buses for TfL. Consideration was also being given to introducing targets to employ a certain proportion of female drivers into the contracts of operating companies with TfL, had the pilot proved successful in attracting greater numbers of women. This example provides a further illustration of where a public body with the political drive to address equality can seek to influence the actions of private sector employers through contract compliance, although political change and privatisation thwarted this intention.

5.5.3 Linking equality to public procurement

The use of public procurement policy to drive equality activity emerged from key informant interviews as a potentially significant measure in these sectors. During the 1980s some local authorities attempted to use public sector contracts to require contractors to undertake equality measures, but these were stopped by legal changes in 1988 by the Conservative government that prevented local authorities from taking into account ‘non-commercial’ factors in the awarding of contracts (Dickens, 2007: 485). Following the election of a Labour government in 1997 there was a move away from the Thatcherite Conservative approach to procurement and a renewed interest in using procurement to achieve equality outcomes (McCrudden, 2009). Questions concerning the legality within European law of using procurement as part of the equality agenda have largely been resolved, according to McCrudden (2009). The Women and Work Commission (2006) noted the role procurement policy could play in addressing gender pay inequality and the TUC (2008b) called for greater action by government in using procurement to promote equality, particularly in relation to apprenticeships. (Measures to encourage the use of equality in procurement processes are discussed further in Wright (2011b)).

The Greater London Authority (GLA) has been actively using procurement to achieve its equality aims through its sustainable procurement policy produced in 2006 that seeks to ensure that procurement supports social, economic and environmental objectives that benefit London. The Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA – part of the GLA ‘family’) has made promoting equality and diversity a requirement on all contractors for the Olympics 2012 within its procurement policy (ODA, 2007). During the tendering process, contractors are expected to indicate their approach to equality and diversity, and that they have understood the ODA’s policies. The successful tier one contractors – those with a direct contract with the ODA, rather than subcontractors – must

demonstrate a commitment to equality and inclusion, by developing an equality action plan that is regularly monitored by the ODA, including monitoring their workforce, diversifying the supply chain and looking for opportunities to increase the numbers of women, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) and disabled people in their employment. According to the ODA key informant interviewee with an equality brief, the introduction of contractual requirements concerning equality was new to the construction industry; in the past there were requirements linked to planning concerning the recruitment of local people, but having strategic aims about recruiting women or BAME staff was a new situation for them. However she believed that the pragmatism found in the industry is helpful: “They are used to trying to fix things, and it is in their contracts, so they want help to do it.” Help is offered through a ‘collaborative’ rather than a ‘big stick’ approach, and the ODA hopes that the equality monitoring processes introduced into the construction industry will be part of the legacy of the 2012 Olympics. The interviewee was happy with progress so far, but recognised its limitations in that they had no direct influence over tier two and three contractors who employ a large part of the workforce, and with whom the ODA does not have a direct contractual relationship:

“We encourage, coax and cajole, but there is no stick that we can use, as we could with tier one contractors, although we have never had to.” (Key informant, equalities, ODA)

The procurement policies of Transport for London (TfL, part of the GLA) also appeared to be providing a spur to companies to take an interest in equality. The interviewee from the Women into Non-Traditional Occupations (WINTO) project said that the motivation for some employers to get involved in the project was because their contracts with TfL required them monitor and improve their proportions of women in employment. Companies were therefore willing to offer ‘taster days’ to allow women to try out non-traditionally female roles. The presence of several highway engineering and maintenance companies that had contracts with TfL at a WINTO event to encourage women into transport jobs that I attended confirmed this, where a manager from one firm spoke about being audited on equality by TfL, requiring them to look at underrepresented groups. Thus procurement policies containing equality requirements may support wider efforts to raise awareness of non-traditional work among women, as well as more directly contributing to employment opportunities for women.

TfL's contracting procedures for the £1 billion East London Line rail construction project also incorporated equality requirements. As part of the invitation to tender, contractors had to demonstrate that they could deliver equality and supply-chain diversity effectively before getting through to the final bidding stage (Godwin, 2009). Contractors were expected take steps to ensure that the ethnic and gender composition of the workforce was representative of the local communities in East London. However, progress was slow as women did not have the industry qualifications; only two per cent of those working on site at the end of 2007 were female (Godwin, 2009). Interviewee, Cheryl, an electrician, had gained a work placement on the project. She welcomed the experience of working on a large construction site, even though she found the placement too generic and in the end felt that she was not gaining the necessary experience to complete her NVQ level 3 qualification. She commented that the company who offered her the placement had been keen to hire women, and it seems likely that the equality requirements introduced into the procurement process were an impetus in providing the work experience that women often find so difficult to get, as shown above.

Now fully qualified and looking for work, Cheryl was hoping to benefit from the requirement for the London Olympics to employ local people. She believed, too, that being a woman might work in her favour with the larger companies who were concerned to implement their equality commitments. Participants in the WAMT focus group also believed that "it's a good time for women now" as "employers want to be seen to be diverse", and they "want to fly the flag for equality". Thus it seems that employer discourses of valuing diversity in their workforces are reaching at least one target audience, although there is some scepticism too.

Interviewee Sarah is an engineer on a station improvement project contracted by TfL, and said that her employer, a large construction company, had been required in the tendering process to produce statistics on employee diversity, noting that her firm had better figures than average for the industry. However she commented wryly on the jokes circulating within the organisation:

"If you're a girl in [employer] you are going to end up on the front cover of some publication at some point or other, and we all have been, every single woman that I know has been in the video or on the front of the annual report or in the calendar or something. They go 'Excellent, more girls, let's photograph you and make it look like we're diverse', so it looks as though there's a ridiculous proportion of ethnic minorities and women who work for us and no white men at all!" (Heterosexual, civil engineer, construction, 20s)

Such comments reflect a view that contractual requirements relating to equality may mean that companies simply get better at trying to ‘look diverse’, when the reality is very different. This concern is addressed in the LDA’s monitoring processes, according to key informant interviewee from the LDA Equalities team, who believed that commercial imperatives were a powerful tool to meet equality objectives:

“It works, it really does work. It makes a difference. When people want your money, they get interested in equality”. (Key informant, equalities, LDA)

But she noted that monitoring by the body awarding the contracts was key to successful outcomes, so that it was not simply ‘ticking boxes’.

“So even if they do just tick the right box to get the money, if we’ve got the right people in our delivery and contract management teams and we’re training them, and they have equality targets. So if they do have to have 30 per cent of their clients to be BAME or 10 per cent women, then when we’re there having monitoring meetings and asking them what they are doing, that’s where the quality comes in [...] But good project managers are saying, how are you doing it? What are you doing? Here’s a toolkit.”

Monitoring of this kind, though, requires political commitment and resources. While this was in evidence at the LDA at the time of the interview, it remains to be seen whether its successor body will give priority to equality work.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an initial framing, at the levels of context and setting (Layder, 1993), of some of the issues facing women in construction and transport discussed in the following four chapters. It draws on a range of sources of data – existing statistical and research evidence together with empirical data gathered for this research from key experts, observations of events, focus groups and women worker interviews.

Measures addressing supply-side obstacles to women’s participation emerged as important, for example attracting women and girls to consider non-traditional occupations in the first place and increasing their human capital in terms of skills and qualifications to enable them to apply for jobs. The awareness-raising projects and opportunities discussed here found many willing participants, suggesting no shortage of interest in non-traditional work among women. Of greater significance for many of the experts interviewed were demand-side barriers to entering male-dominated fields, such as difficulties of getting work placements, employer resistance to “taking a chance” on a woman, male attitudes on building sites and lack of flexibility over hours.

This research, undertaken between 2007 and 2011, started at a time when funding had been given to addressing one of the causes of gender pay inequality, occupational segregation, with projects, particularly in London, aimed at encouraging women to enter or progress in male-dominated occupations. Most key informant interviewees believed that targeted action of this kind was necessary to bring about change in the persisting gender imbalance of these occupations; change would not happen on its own. Thus the Building Work for Women project assisted women to gain practical work experience that they might not have found without it; the ODA Women's Project gave opportunities to considerable numbers of women to work on site in jobs that they would not otherwise have been employed to do; and procurement policies linked to equality outcomes required employers to monitor the composition of their workforces and give consideration to how to increase the employment of underrepresented groups.

The views of interviewees are supported by many others who argue that remedying women's underrepresentation calls for intervention at employer, industry and government levels. Radical changes to the system of training and greater regulation of employment and social relations in construction are necessary for women's integration, according to Clarke and Wall (2004: 45). Addressing non-traditional occupations more widely, Bagilhole (2002: 191-2) concludes that national government commitment is necessary and must be "demonstrated by the creation and implementation of effective, proactive legislation, and budgetary support". She highlights the use in several EU countries of affirmative action strategies that include quotas and targets to promote gender equality in non-traditional occupations. Affirmative action has been employed in the US, and was shown to drastically increase the numbers of women on a highway construction project, (Price, 2004). Such interventionist strategies were strongly supported as the solution to extensive gender segregation by Reskin and Roos (1990: 319):

"We cannot overemphasize the importance of affirmative-action programs, whose goals and timetables can open the doors of desirable male jobs. Essential also is a national commitment [...] to keep those doors open."

However, we have seen that political will to bring about change is crucial, with a historical perspective indicating the cyclical nature of progress for women in construction (Wall, 2004). I have argued that at the time when this research started, the political will to tackle the gender pay gap existed, with one remedy being increasing

women's participation in male-dominated occupations. However during the course of the research this commitment has dwindled as political power shifted from Labour to Conservative/Conservative-Liberal Democrat in London government and at Westminster. Also Britain entered a major economic recession and period of drastic reductions in public spending, with funding reduced for equality action, and the abolition of one of key bodies in London funding the initiatives discussed here.

Layder (see 4.4) highlights the importance of the historical dimension in designing and analysing research, and it seems that the political and economic context has changed radically in the relatively short period of conducting this research. This affects each of the interrelated levels of context, setting, situated activity and self. The following chapters consider women's experiences in male-dominated sectors at each of these levels (using in-depth interviews with women workers and focus groups), starting at the level of self to examine the motivations and processes of identification of women who have entered male-dominated occupations.

6 Gender, sexual and work identities

6.1 Introduction

Given the very low numbers of women who enter male-dominated occupations within the transport and construction sectors, women who do so might be considered, in statistical terms at least, ‘exceptional’ women, therefore it is pertinent to consider their motivations in making gender atypical choices and the factors that lead them to make different work choices from the majority of their sex. This chapter seeks to answer my first research question concerning the reasons women choose to enter traditionally male occupations, and whether there are differences according to sexual orientation.

Responses to this question included a considerable degree of reflection on the relationship between interviewees’ gender identity, alongside other identities, and their decisions to take up a gender atypical occupation: the relationship between work choice and identity is examined in the first part of this chapter. The second part delves further into the relationship between work and identity, drawing on notions of embodiment, to begin to address my second research question concerning the ways in which heterosexual and lesbian women articulate and experience their gender and sexual identities in the workplace (examined further in Chapter 7).

The chapter draws on Jenkins’s (2004) conceptualisation of identity as a *process* of identification in individual and collective terms, an internal-external dialectic in which individual and collective identities are always constituted in relation to each other. In line with feminist theorising, Jenkins (2004: 61) notes the significance of gender identification:

“Gender is one of the most consistent identificatory themes in human history, and one of the most pervasive classificatory principles – arguably the most pervasive – with massive consequences for the life chances and experiences of whole categories of people.”

As discussed in Chapter 3, Jenkins argues that identification is *always* consequential: it is implicated in the allocation of resources and power (2004: 174). There are, then, material consequences to gender identities, which many of my interviewees understand very well, as will be seen.

Following Jenkins’s categorisation of the ‘orders’ comprising the human world (individual, interaction and institutional – see 3.5) the first part of chapter examines the

individual order of women's decisions concerning their choice of occupation in which early identifications and notions of self are invoked to understand gender atypical decisions in later life. The second part considers identities at work, again putting the analytic focus on how individual identities are produced in relation to three themes: appearance and bodies at work; minority sexual identity; and work identity and empowerment. However it begins to consider interactional elements of identification, which will be explored further in Chapter 7. Jenkins's individual order maps onto Layder's level of self, concerning an individual's unique experiences and career trajectory, and Jenkins's interaction order has parallels with Layder's situated activity.

6.2 Choosing non-traditional occupations

The question of 'choice' of occupation is a highly contested one among sociologists seeking to understand women's labour market participation, exemplified in fervent debates over Hakim's preference theory (see 2.2.1). This theory has been widely criticised by those who emphasise the constrained nature of women's choices given their varying labour market opportunities shaped by educational and class backgrounds, as well as employer preferences and discrimination based on gender, age, ethnicity, social class and other factors. In a study of young women entering engineering, Devine (1994) demonstrated not only the gendered attitudes constraining women's choice of work, but also the social class privileges that enable some women to overcome these obstacles, and that differentiate women's opportunities.

Following those writers who argue that social, structural elements constrain women's choice of occupation, I start this section with an examination of the occupational trajectories of interviewees, highlighting differences between professional and non-professional workers, and then discuss the material and practical explanations that women gave – in the context of perceived alternatives – for entering their current occupations, which illuminates the labour market and gender contexts in which they make work choices. I then move onto a discussion of how identity and work choices are related, reflecting a view that gender identity, as well as other identities, are highly salient in women's decisions about work, and show that women's own understandings of their decisions invoke early identifications, often rooted in family or childhood.

6.2.1 Occupational trajectories

The interviewees ranged in age from their twenties to their sixties, as Table 7 shows,

therefore it is likely that some would have engaged in a variety of jobs before entering their current occupation. What was notable, though, was the greater degree of consistency of career shown by those in professional or managerial roles, compared to those in non-professional occupations. Almost half of the professional/managerial interviewees (9 out of 19) had entered a professional job straight after doing a relevant degree, and had remained in a broadly similar occupation in either engineering or surveying. Furthermore, among the others, most had taken degrees after leaving school (although not directly related to their current profession) and had entered their current professions within a few years of graduating. One had taken a degree after working in building surveying for some time, gaining professional qualifications while working. Only two of those in professional or managerial occupations had a less conventional route into their current occupations: one (in her 30s) was completing an engineering degree after many years working as a bike mechanic and another (in her 40s) had also taken a degree later in life, becoming a building surveyor after years in housing administration. Both were lesbians, and the relationship between sexuality and career trajectory will be discussed later.

Table 7: Age by occupational group and industry

	Number of interviewees				
	21-30 yrs	31-40 yrs	41-50 yrs	51-60 yrs	60+ yrs
Professional					
Construction:	1	5	6		
Transport:	3	4			
Non-professional					
Construction:	1	4	4	1	
Transport:		2	4	1	2
Total					
no = 38	5	15	14	2	2
%	13%	39%	37%	5%	5%

In total contrast, interviewees in non-managerial/professional roles in both sectors had much less linear occupational trajectories, with none entering or qualifying in their occupations straight from school and remaining in them. All of the tradeswomen had done other – mostly typically female – jobs before training in their chosen trade. The only tradeswoman who had a degree had worked in academic research before realising

that this work did not suit her, then discovered an interest in carpentry, which developed into specialist furniture-making. Those in transport had also done a variety of jobs before taking up their current occupations, including a train driver who had been a teacher in Nigeria before coming to the UK and finding work as a station assistant. A move from Scotland to England had also prompted a change of direction for another train driver (who also started in transport as a station assistant). Among the four bus drivers interviewed, three had left bus driving for various periods of time and come back to it, indicating that possession of a PCV (Passenger Carrying Vehicle) licence operates as a useful fallback when work is needed.

Table 7 shows a different age pattern in the sample among those in professional and non-professional occupations, with more younger women in professional roles and higher numbers of older women among the non-professionals, which could partly explain the different tendencies in occupational consistency, with the possibility that younger women may change careers later. However closer examination of the work histories of the older interviewees shows that in fact they changed direction when fairly young: of those in their fifties and sixties, Kath became a carpenter soon after beginning a research career following graduation, Stevie and Maureen, both bus drivers in their sixties, had started as bus conductors and moved into driving during the 1980s, when bus companies were starting to employ female drivers, and Liz, in her fifties, had become a driver in her late thirties following a career change. The evidence suggests, then, that despite some difference in age profiles between professional and non-professional interviewees, there remains an important distinction between the occupational trajectories of professional and non-professional women workers. This finding is consistent with a longitudinal study of gender and class (Walkerdine et al, 2001, cited in Woodfield, 2007, p.58-9) that found that middle-class girls were more focused on professional life than working-class girls, who were more likely to leave school younger and tended to be more vague about their futures. Walkerdine et al's research also noted both the internal and external resources required to support a successful career, which were often more available to middle-class women, thus making their choices less constrained.

Furthermore, the evidence that *none* of the 10 tradeswomen interviewed, of a range of ages, had gone into their trade straight from school, suggests that gendered assumptions were prominent in the lives of working-class young women. Even among some of the

younger tradeswomen, when there might be an expectation that career guidance had responded to changing gender attitudes and women's career patterns, schooling offered only gender-typical career options. Cheryl, an electrician in her early thirties, described an interest in fixing electrical equipment when young. But despite these early interests, she went into secretarial work after leaving school for one simple reason:

“Cos I was a girl. You know, you're a girl, you go to school, you go to college and you're a secretary, it's the subjects you do, you do admin, innit. I done administration, I got my NVQ level 2.” (Heterosexual, electrician, 30s)

Similarly Donna, a trainee plumber in her twenties, wished that she had gone into plumbing earlier. However at school,

“It was always about certain careers, and things like plumbing never came into it, it's only me, by myself, I sat down and thought about what I wanted to do and I've come up with that, but it was never really an option before. [...] When I told my family I was going into plumbing they were all really happy, so if I had known that, maybe I would have started a lot younger, but it was never really an option.” (Heterosexual, trainee plumber, 20s)

Among the 10 tradeswomen, the three lesbians had not done typically female work (other than a short stint as an office junior aged 16 for one) before entering the trades, whereas six of the seven heterosexual women had previously had traditionally female jobs, in retail, secretarial or call-centre work. Although the number of lesbians in this category was small, these indications of different patterns support findings from other research that lesbian sexuality may enable women to make gender atypical work choices, discussed further below.

Additionally it was seen above that the two professional women who had taken relevant degrees and entered construction in their 30s and 40s were lesbians. Although caution is needed with such small numbers, their experience is consistent with evidence that lesbian identity formation can sometimes delay career development while priority is given to coming out and its consequences, which can involve loss of parental support (Fassinger, 1995; 1996; Morgan and Brown, 1991). This had been the case for two lesbian interviewees: Heather described herself as “a troubled teenager” who ran away from home, sleeping on the streets for a time, partly in rejection of her parents' plans for her to go to university, as she also came to terms with her sexuality, while Frances did not run away, but said:

“Probably because of my sexuality - I didn’t run away - I disappeared for a little while and then just really had to do any jobs that were around. I worked in offices [...] just anything really.” (Lesbian, building surveyor, 40s)

Career was not a priority at that time for either Heather or Frances, now in their forties, and who grew up at a time when attitudes to lesbian and gay sexuality were less accepting than today. Their experiences contrast with the three lesbian interviewees in their twenties, who entered professional graduate jobs soon after leaving university, and were confident about expressing their sexuality openly (discussed further in Chapter 7).

6.2.2 *Choice and material realities*

Decisions about work are made in the context of perceived alternatives, and there were observable differences between the professional and non-professional interviewees, with a greater awareness of gendered divisions in employment shown by the women in non-professional occupations.

Women in non-professional roles were more likely to cite pay as the main motivation for their choice of job and looked to typically male work to provide a better income. For Karen, who had previously done bar and croupier work and was keen to get out of the casino industry, but only had a basic education, her “drive” was the £4,000 difference in starting salaries between a job in the male-dominated transport industry – working in a station ticket office – and the more traditionally female work available to her.

Several interviewees in non-professional occupations were quite explicit about their desire to earn ‘male’ wages, often having worked in female-dominated areas. Linda explains her motivations thus:

“I’d worked for the NHS for 13 years and decided that I wanted to do an occupation that was a) going to pay me enough money to sustain me well and b) give the choice of the hours I worked, so I decided to do ‘the knowledge’, which is training to be a black cab driver. [...] I wanted to earn the same amount as a man, there is no doubt about that and that was one of my driving forces. [...] it was one of the few professions where you can earn the same as a man, when the meter goes on, it’s exactly the same.” (Lesbian, examiner, transport, 40s)

Bus driving was also described as offering pay equal to men by three female drivers:

“It was better than any other job at the time, I took an office clerk job but it didn’t pay a lot [...] [Bus driving’s] good earnings, you get the same wage as a man.” (Lesbian, bus driver, 60s)

“I think it was for the money, I mean I didn’t want to go back to women’s wages, I mean other things I looked at were terrible, it was very poor. At least with a male-oriented job you get male-oriented pay.” (Heterosexual, bus driver, 50s)

“For an unskilled woman the pay is still far better than most other jobs that you would get, because, that is one thing, there is equal pay between men and women. So you’re certainly paid better than you would be in a clerical job.” (Heterosexual, PCV driver, 60s)

Working in the manual trades also provided equal pay, as one member of the Leicester focus group remarked:

“It is nice to be able to earn the same as what the men earn at work and knowing that we’re not earning any less.” (Painter and decorator, Leicester focus group)

For women with families to support, entering the manual trades was also thought to provide good earnings in the long-term, although it was recognised that pay would be low while training. This was particularly important for single parents:

“The pay was important to me, because the reason I gone into this job was that I wanted to build a future for me kids and I wanted to earn enough money to do that, because otherwise I would just be working, I don’t know, in a pie shop or something like that [...] I get a qualification at the end of it and hopefully my kids are going to be better off.” (Multi-skilled apprentice, Leicester focus group)

She notes that her alternatives were typically female shop work, and is fully aware of the labour market constraints of her situation. Half of the local authority focus group participants were single parents, as were two of the tradeswomen interviewed in London. Another tradeswoman in the local authority, although married, was the sole earner in her household as her husband’s illness meant he was unable to work. Thus they were all responsible for financially supporting their families, a position which had influenced their decisions about entering jobs usually seen as the preserve of men, associated for them, perhaps, with a ‘male breadwinner’ wage.

In contrast, few of the women in professional occupations named pay as the main reason they entered their field, more commonly giving interest as the prime motivation. Judith pursued her interest in science and maths to become an engineer working on the railways:

“I didn’t think about [pay]... I think engineers were reasonably well paid always but I think if you went into business or accountancy you could get more wages, but money never...it didn’t concern me.” (Heterosexual, railway signal engineer, 30s)

Like other professionals interviewed, Judith makes comparisons with other professional careers that she could have chosen, such as business or accountancy. Others mentioned alternative careers they had considered, such as law or medicine. Thus pay was less central in their particular choice of occupation, as they expected to have a professional career, which would, in any case, offer an equal or better standard of living. Neither did they make gendered pay comparisons between their chosen profession and other jobs, in contrast to some of the skilled or manual roles seen above.

However there were large pay differences between the women in professional and non-professional occupations as Table 8 shows. Of the 36 women who gave their annual earnings, only two worked part time, so the table shows full-time earnings, except where indicated. Women in non-professional occupations were concentrated in the lower pay bands, with the greatest number earning less than £20,000, while only one (a train driver) earned more than £40,000, in contrast to professionals, half of whom earned over this sum. Although some tradeswomen had selected their occupation on the basis of good pay, in fact none yet earned more than £20,000. Some of these worked outside of London, where salaries are lower and others were trainees so would expect their pay to increase later. Among professionals, only one part-time worker earned less than £30,000, with the greatest number earning between £30-39,000, while six earned over £50,000. The table does not show a particular difference in earnings between lesbians and heterosexual women.

Table 8: Pay bands of interviewees

Annual pay	Professional occupations			Non-professional occupations		
	Hetero-sexual	Lesbian	All	Hetero-sexual	Lesbian	All
£10-19,000		1 (part time)	1	6	2	8
£20-29,000				3 (1 part time)	2	5
£30-39,000	3	5	8	2	1	3
£40-49,000	4		4		1	1
Over £50,000	4	2	6			

Although professional women did not make gendered pay comparisons with other jobs, financial security – with its gendered implications - was cited as important by some, such as Fiona:

“I wanted to have a profession, to have something I could always fall back on, so I think it’s more security rather than money [...] being financially independent was always absolutely huge. I saw my mother being financially dependent and the inequalities that that sets up within a relationship.” (Heterosexual, associate director, construction, 50s)

Fiona expressed a clear feminist consciousness, and recognised here the connections between work choices and relationships for heterosexual women, and the effect on personal relationships that lack of individual income produces. She chose not to live with her long-term male partner, and therefore required financial independence.

Lesbians too typically expect to support themselves financially, and this was significant in Nadia’s feelings about work:

“The ability to earn a decent wage has always been in the back of my mind somewhere. I don’t know if that’s because I just assumed, maybe, yeh, I just had that kind of mentality that I needed to be able to take care of myself. [...] I mean it’s always said that women earn less than men, so if you’re a lesbian and even if you do meet somebody, you’re probably going to be on less as a household than a straight counterpart, so I think I’m a bit more driven in that sense.” (Lesbian, engineer, transport, 20s)

While research evidence (Dunne, 1997; Schneider, 1984) supports Nadia’s assumption that a lesbian will need to be able to take care of herself financially, this is not always the case. One lesbian interviewee was offered the chance of being supported by her then partner when they moved to a new city. Here Lesley recalls her reaction to her partner’s suggestion that she need not work:

“She says, ‘well I don’t really want you to work when we move down, because I’ll be doing long hours, it’s probably best if you stay at home and just look after the house [laughs]. We’ll have more than enough money, no need for you to work’. I said right OK [...] I left school when I was 16, always had my own wages, I’m not reliant or dependent on anybody, and I’m not gonna start now, I’ll find a job.” (Lesbian, train operator, 30s)

Although Lesley could have chosen not to work in this relationship, work was necessary to her sense of independence in much the same way as Fiona, and she did not want to accept a traditionally female homemaking role that would have left her dependent.

Thus while sexuality may certainly play a part in decisions about work, and lesbians' choices can be driven by a need for financial independence, every relationship will have different dynamics and in some cases lesbian partners may support each other financially. But equally, we have seen that single parents and other heterosexual women are driven by a need – or desire – to support themselves and their families. It is apparent, then, that women's domestic circumstances, such as whether single or in a relationship, together with the economic relations within that relationship, may be more salient in their work choices than simply their sexuality.

However the most significant difference observed concerning rational work choices was between the professional/managerial and non-professional groups of interviewees. Professional women tended to compare their chosen career with other professions that they might have pursued, making no particular reference to the gender breakdown of such occupations. The tendency to emphasise pursuing interests over monetary rewards was common to other research on women professionals (Devine, 1994). In contrast, several of those in non-professional occupations made specifically gendered comparisons, and had rejected options for work associated with 'women's wages' in favour of jobs paying higher 'men's wages'. In seeking to improve their economic situation and achieve pay parity with men, they are aware of an institutional order that awards higher value to jobs typically associated with male skills or 'masculinity', thus recognising that identification is consequential (Jenkins, 2004), in this case on the pay packet. But despite anticipating earning more than other women in non-professional jobs, they earned considerably less than interviewees in professional occupations, who did not make gender comparisons.

6.2.3 Work choice and identity

It is perhaps a measure of the size of the task involved in choosing a 'male' job that women often refer to early experiences when discussing why they were interested in their chosen occupation. Entering a 'male' job does not simply happen by chance, although of course women do mention chance encounters or incidents that occur to play a part in guiding them towards certain work. Even when women gave distinctly material reasons for taking up their occupations, they also reflected on aspects of their identities that was congruent with these decisions. While this may at times be a post-hoc rationalisation or telling of a consistent narrative of one's choices, as Aveling (2002)

found in a longitudinal study of women's career choices, it was clear that interviewees had asked themselves – and no doubt had frequently been asked by others – questions about influences that made them act outside of gender norms. The answers were often rooted in family background or schooldays.

6.2.3.1 Family background

Family influences mentioned by both heterosexual and lesbian interviewees almost invariably referred to fathers, sometimes to his job, but more significantly his relationship with his daughter. Other research on women engineers also found that fathers were a major influence on career choice, many of whom were in engineering or related technical jobs (Devine, 1994). In my study, only a few had fathers in a similar field, perhaps an engineer or tradesperson, and for one, her father's surveying business provided a route into a career in the construction industry. But more likely, women mentioned the support and general encouragement offered by their fathers in pursuing gender atypical interests. Rachel put it this way:

“My father's a geologist, which has probably had quite a big influence over the route I've taken and he's always pushed maths and sciences. I've always had encouragement to sort of not really conform to female roles.” (Heterosexual, manager, transport, 30s)

Jo also described the approval provided by her father:

“My dad's very positive, he's always been very positive, he used to do ‘take your daughter to work’ days when I was kid [...] I think his support and sort of approval, rather than encouragement. Yeh, definitely, I always got some strange book for Christmas about something relevant.” (Lesbian, consultant, construction, 30s)

The daughter's position in the family was also significant for some, and Deepta felt that her mother wanted a son, which influenced her feelings about her choice of career:

“I've got one sister and two brothers, but my sister is older than me and so she was my father's first child, apple of his eye, and then I came and was a girl [...] and I was bit of a tomboy, probably because my mum just wanted a boy. I think that wanting to be in a male dominated industry has actually stemmed from my childhood, to be honest, being competitive... It's quite a competitive way to have gone, it's ‘I can do as well as my brothers’.” (Heterosexual, civil engineer, construction, 30s)

Additionally Deepta felt that being from an Asian family in which “men are better respected or better regarded” had also affected her choices, and her response to feeling that her mother wanted a boy was to compete with her brothers in her choice of male-dominated work.

Ritu, an engineer also with an Asian background, who had grown up in India, thought that her family composition and cultural background had combined to direct her towards typically male professions. In the absence of brothers, all four sisters had entered professions, three of which were male-dominated (engineering and economics).

Also from India but not from a professional background, Meeta's family supported her move from sewing machinist to plumber and gas fitter, although she recognised that other Indian families, including her in-laws, would not have been as accepting of a gender atypical choice. As with Ritu, she was from a family of daughters only:

“My older sister used to help my mum in the house work and I was helping my dad. If you have to rewire, I was on the front. My dad's an electrician, that had an effect as well, they said you take after him.” (Heterosexual, plumber/gas fitter, 30s)

Others also encountered practical skills through their relationships with fathers that might more typically be the preserve of sons and helped their fathers with jobs around the house:

“He could do everything, plumbing, tiling, so anytime he had to do anything, when I was little, I always used to be there helping him.” (Heterosexual, electrician, 30s)

“I used to follow him around everywhere where he was doing DIY and I was a tomboy, as it were, but then he didn't encourage me to do anything else as a career.” (Lesbian, building surveyor, 40s)

It is not possible to determine the direction of the relationship between paternal support and developing practical skills – i.e. whether an existing close father-daughter relationship encouraged the learning of practical skills that stimulated work choices later, or whether an inclination towards practical activities led to a closer father-daughter relationship. However, what is interesting here is the explicit gendered association with these activities which are equated with being a ‘tomboy’, which will be discussed further below. Significantly, the only interviewee, plumber Stacey, who mentioned her mother specifically in connection with her choice of occupation, had grown up in a single-parent household and learned DIY from her mother who did it out of necessity.

For a small number, the political orientation of their family had influenced their choice of work. Judith had made a deliberate decision to avoid the defence industry when selecting which branch of engineering to enter, citing the influence of the socialist environment in which she was brought up. Some also expressed a preference for work

that served the public over the private sector, in line with other research highlighting the greater importance women place on social values (see Woodfield, 2007: 22-24).

6.2.3.2 Gender identity

We have seen how gender is deeply woven through family influences on decisions around work. The dissonance between women's own early self-identification and traditional gender roles is exemplified in the notion of the 'tomboy' used by several interviewees in explaining their early interests. Being a tomboy was connected to Frances's interest in DIY and to Deepta's response to the feeling that her mother wanted a boy. For Elaine it related to "instincts" that attracted her to the army and fire brigade at a young age and Karen connected it to her "action man" self. As a tomboy, Pauline always preferred climbing trees with the boys to "dress up and make up" with the girls. An interest in sport was seen as a hallmark of a tomboy for Deepta, and Rachel felt that the term still applied:

"I think I'm probably a little bit of a tomboy by nature anyway, I tend to like things that would be more things you'd expect a boy to be doing, we do lots of things like mountain biking and snowboarding and paintball." (Heterosexual, manager, transport, 30s)

Several interviewees, both professional and non-professional, connected their work choices with a preference for practical or outdoor activity, described by Karen as having "a bit of an action woman, or action man, inside me". This was contrasted with 'sitting behind a desk all day' associated with office work. The gendered nature of these preferences is clear, both in the sense that 'office work' was synonymous with typically 'female' work and that boys and men more typically engage in outdoor, physical activity.

Two interviewees had held other 'active', male-dominated jobs previously: Maureen, now a bus driver, had served in the army before being discharged in the 1960s on account of her lesbian sexuality and Annette had worked as an ambulance driver, before joining the railways.

Tomboyism may be associated with lesbianism, for example in reconstructions of childhood identifications to explain adult sexuality (Carr, 1998), as well as in academic discussion (Halberstam, 1998). However most girls labelled tomboys grow up to be heterosexual. Only two of the seven interviewees who described herself as a tomboy, currently or as a child, identified as a lesbian, so the label did not have an association

with lesbian sexuality for most interviewees. The term was also used by two other women to represent an interest in typically male activities, in the sense of “I’m not a tomboy, but I’ve always liked maths...”. It is therefore invoked to signal a contrast to typical ‘femininity’, rather than as an indicator of sexuality, and may be used by women as a more comfortable designator of this opposition than terms such as ‘masculine’ or ‘masculinity’. It is interesting to reflect on whether the tomboy label is emphasised retrospectively to explain current gender identification and work choices, as suggested by Carr (1998) and Aveling (2002), or whether the self-perception as a tomboy facilitates choice of non-traditional work either through breaking with gendered assumptions about occupational roles or in the practical sense of exposure to male worlds and contacts.

An early interest in subjects such as maths and physics led girls into classes where they were outnumbered by boys and perhaps became accustomed to male company. Deepta, now in her 30s, recalled that:

“When I did physics at school, I was the only female in the class there and it’s actually quite a large class, so you’ve got thirty kids with one female.”
(Heterosexual, civil engineer, construction, 30s)

Since Deepta’s schooldays participation by girls in sciences at school may have increased, but they remain a minority, with girls accounting for only 22 per cent of those taking physics ‘A’ level in 2009 and 10 per cent of those taking computing (UKRC, 2009).

It was common for women to describe how from a young age they had friends who were boys, or they had brothers who they played with, and were generally used to being around boys, sometimes also expressing a preference for male company over that of females. This familiarity was seen to be positive in applying for and surviving male-dominated work:

“I’ve always naturally been someone who gets on better with men and I find that other females in the industry that I’ve worked with also get on better with men, and I think that’s probably why we cope very well.” (Heterosexual, principal quantity surveyor, construction, 30s)

In an unusual, but nonetheless highly pertinent, example of the relation between work choice and gender identity, Liz revealed how her decision to become a bus driver was connected to her transition from male to female. Her previous occupation, while a man,

had been as a project manager in a telecommunications firm, also a male-dominated sector. But she felt that this was not an environment in which people would have accepted her gender transition, so she looked for a completely different job, although an equally challenging one in many ways.

“I wanted something new, something different. And I didn’t want to just be stuck in an office somewhere with two or three people, because you don’t get a good gauge of who you are, what you are. But I thought a bus driver, I’ll meet thousands of people and I’ve got to, I can’t have days where I think I don’t feel like meeting anybody, and you do your transition, you do have days like that, without a doubt. It’s fine now, 15 years on, you know what I mean. But then it’s different, so I thought if I got a job doing something like that it might be quite a good way to integrate myself back into society.” (Heterosexual, bus driver, 50s)

In her thinking, being in a public role was a greater test of her ability to pass in her new sex than hiding in a small workplace with only a few people. When asked whether she feared negative reactions from bus driver colleagues, she claimed to “like challenges”, hinting at the strength of character that has helped in her gender transition. It is a feature of several other interviewees’ descriptions that they too refer to the “toughness” or “hardness” required to survive in male-dominated work. One can speculate that Liz was less deterred by an all male environment than others, because of her previous experience as a man. Interestingly, though, her previous role as project manager in charge of constructing radio masts involved visiting male-dominated construction sites, which she felt would have been a far more hostile environment than a bus garage.

“With a load of erectors, they’re real animals, worse than bus drivers [laughs]. So I didn’t feel comfortable with that at all, at the time I didn’t think that I could do it, and I think that the decision I made at the time was the right one, because [...] I don’t think construction has changed that much.”

Thus while some interviewees dwelt on early gender atypical identifications to explain their current work, Liz, perhaps unsurprisingly given her desire to be accepted in her new sex, did not draw on her previous male identity to understand her current work choice, but rather focused on the point of transition as requiring a career change.

6.2.3.3 Minority sexual identity

Lesbian sexuality can affect women’s perceived need to earn an income to support themselves, although we saw that such concerns are not exclusive to lesbians. Some lesbian interviewees felt that their sexuality had not had an impact on their choice of occupation and that other factors were more salient (such as interests or opportunities).

However, the relationship between sexuality and selfhood is a complex one, and as Amy shows it may affect one's choices in a more diffuse way:

“In a way your sexuality does affect the way you think and does shape your life, but I think I just would have been active in different things rather than what I'm active in now. Certainly I didn't pick this job because I'm a lesbian, I picked this job, well it picked me [...] because I kind of felt like it's something that's useful.” (Lesbian, manager, transport, 30s)

Amy related her choice of job to her personal values about the sort of work she wanted to engage in. Interestingly, among interviewees, lesbians were more likely to give a preference for public sector work, which Amy connected to gender *and* sexuality:

“I think probably actually subconsciously you don't want to go into the private sector because they really seem to be absolutely diabolical to women and if you're a lesbian, forget it.” (Lesbian, manager, transport, 30s)

This, of course, reflects perceptions of the organisational cultures of public versus private sector workplaces (explored in Chapter 7).

Others connected their sexuality with an interest in “male stuff” albeit in an unconscious way. Heather recognised that her interest in practical work took a certain gendered form:

“Like for instance I will not cook, I refuse to cook, I hate cooking, but I like using my hands, but I hate cooking, I don't know why [...] It hasn't slipped my notice [laughs] that I like using my hands to do typically male stuff, [...] but I can't explain, because it's not a conscious thing, it's completely not a conscious thing. But I can't say [sexuality's] got nothing to do with it, you know.” (Lesbian, caretaker/handyperson, 40s)

Others felt that minority sexuality had an enabling or empowering effect on career choices. Jo, a consultant in an engineering firm, who had previously worked in another typically male job as a bicycle mechanic, saw her lesbian sexuality as an active choice that enabled work choices. Referring to coming out as a lesbian, she says:

“You have to actively decide to do it, don't you? You could just go along and just be what everybody else is, or you could make an active choice, and for me that active choice, whatever you choose, the fact that you've chosen to be one thing, [...] it's a choice. And to me, I think that's really powerful, that you have to do that means that you can then think, well actually I'm not going to go off and be a secretary, I'm going to think what I want, if I want to be a secretary I will, but actually, this looks really interesting, I'm gonna do it.” (Lesbian, consultant, construction, 30s)

Jo's views support the findings of the vocational psychology literature (Croteau et al., 2000; Fassinger, 1996; Lippa, 2002; Morgan and Brown, 1991), that lesbians' day-to-day experience of challenging traditional gender roles may free them to choose occupations that are non-traditional for women. Thus we see the relationship between a gender identity that is not rooted in traditional notions of femininity with sexual identity formation taking place at the level of Jenkins's (2004) individual order that concerns selfhood.

For Heather and Frances, both now in their forties, a strong dislike of the gendered options available when they were teenagers coincided with a growing awareness of their lesbian sexuality. Frances was initially pushed into a typically female role she knew was not for her:

“I was sent to a secretarial school at 16 so I agreed to go and I said that I would never, ever do that as a job, you can send me there and I will do it but [...] I didn't want that role, so at a young age I was quite aware of gender stereotypes. I didn't know what I did want to do, but I knew I didn't want to be serving a man.” (Lesbian, building surveyor, 40s)

For Heather, now a trained carpenter, the local jobcentre offered a couple of options for a 17-year-old who had not completed her 'A' levels:

“They said right we've got these courses, youth opportunities, you've got to do one of them, and you can do this, that or the other. I think there was some kind of secretarial option available, and it wouldn't have occurred to me, it just would not have occurred to me to choose that, I mean partly, I didn't wanna do reading and writing, da da da, and painting and decorating sounded fun. [...] it sounded like the least bad options.” (Lesbian, caretaker/handyperson, 40s)

Both, in retrospect at least, had strong feelings that secretarial work would not suit them, and involved a rejection of typical gender roles and relations, and a job that would involve “serving a man”, in Frances's terms. Discomfort with typically feminine roles was also associated with growing awareness of lesbian sexuality, which indicates that the interrelationship between gender, sexuality and career choices is a significant but complex one, that women may not be fully conscious of when decisions are taken.

6.3 Identity at work

The second part of this chapter keeps the focus on individual identity formation, but moves into the workplace, taking up three themes emerging from women's narratives that further highlight processes of gender identification: appearance and bodies at work;

minority sexual identity; and work identity and empowerment. As discussed above, identification is always a process involving self and others (Jenkins, 2004), but for analytical purposes, this section emphasises how women manage aspects of their identities or selves at work, while Chapter 7 moves the focus to how identities are invoked in interactions with others.

Jenkins's concept of selfhood – the starting point of individual identification – assumes that it always begins from the body and notes that “selfhood is routinely entangled with identities that are *definitively* embodied, such as gender/sex, ethnicity/‘race’” (original emphasis, 2004: 50). The significance of gendered embodiment in the workplace is explored by feminist writers who have highlighted the body as a site of gendered and sexualised processes (Acker, 1990; Adkins, 1995; Burrell and Hearn, 1989; Cockburn, 1991; Halford et al., 1997; McDowell, 1997). As we saw in Chapter 3, the male body, with its minimal responsibility for procreation, pervades organisational processes, while women's bodies – representing female sexuality and the ability to procreate – are suspect and stigmatized, are “ruled out of order” (Acker, 1990: 152).

In heavily male-dominated work the notion of women's bodies as ‘out of order’ or out of place is a powerful one, which is examined in relation to dress and appearance in the first part of this section.

6.3.1 *Gendered bodies at work*

In male-dominated work differences in male and female embodiment are often emphasised as a rationale for women's lack of suitability for the work. This is commonly the case for women in manual roles, where the job has particular physical demands. Interviewees in non-professional occupations talked about the physical aspects of the job that were commonly said to rule women as unsuitable for the work, or indeed that made it unattractive to many women. Bus driver Stevie had for many years been told that she could not drive a Routemaster bus, although she drove other buses, on account of her height which meant that she would be unable to apply sufficient brake pressure. But six years ago she joined a new company which offered her the chance to drive the Routemaster bus, which she found to be “the most comfortable bus I've ever driven”. She believed that the refusal to let her drive this bus previously had been motivated by sexism rather than a genuine belief that her height was an obstacle.

The physical aspects of male-dominated jobs can be associated with a lack of ‘femininity’, seen by interviewees as a deterrent to other women, who may mind “getting dirty”. Becoming a tradeswoman, for example, was felt by Elaine to require an element of tomboyishness:

“A lot of women I’ve met are quite butch, but that’s because of the trades they’re taking on. [...] A very feminine woman is more likely to be a hairdresser or office [worker], I’ve got really feminine friends, they have no interest in handling wood because it would rip their nails [laughs]. So I think you’ve got to have an element of tomboyish in you.” (Heterosexual, carpenter, 30s)

In these comments, gender identity is congruent with work identity, so a tomboyish identity is required to do a ‘male’ job whereas a ‘feminine’ woman would prefer more typically female, less physical work. For other interviewees, though, a woman’s work identity need not define her masculinity or femininity: Eva felt that in Germany, where she was from, tradeswomen were not necessarily viewed as less feminine.

“I don’t think you’re less feminine just because you’re a painter or an electrician, whereas here women can’t really see that. That’s just my feeling, women don’t seem to see that it’s not an issue, it’s just something that you do during the day.” (Heterosexual, design manager, construction, 40s)

This was echoed by Marsha who felt she could appear like the men at work, but this did not define her identity outside of work:

“I just come to work, throw this on in the morning, it’s all one uniform, same as the men. But when I go out in the evening with my friends I look completely different, so no, it doesn’t really bother me. ...I like the fact that I can look one way for work and look completely different when I’m going out.” (Heterosexual, apprentice maintenance technician, 40s)

Others also enjoyed the contrast between how they felt when adopting the attire associated with masculine work and their usual more feminine style:

“Because I’m more a high-heels kind of person, wearing the boots and a hard hat felt well hard, not hard but you know you just feel, I dunno, it’s like a different feeling, you do gain a lot of respect from the men because you are doing what they can do.” (Heterosexual, electrician, 30s)

However, getting uniforms and protective clothing to fit women’s body shape and size remains a difficulty, and a potent symbol of the ways in which women’s bodies are still seen as the exception, a deviation from the male norm. Several mentioned past difficulties in getting boots or protective clothing to fit, but for a small number, it was still a problem. Deepta said:

“I don’t think I have ever had site gear that fits me properly, so I’m walking around in clothes that are too big for me, with a hat that falls off every time I bend over.” (Heterosexual, quantity surveyor, construction, 30s)

For bus driver Stevie it had taken her two years to get a woman’s uniform cardigan instead of a man’s pullover, and had further trouble getting an anorak to fit:

“I tried to get a small, I needed an extra-small anorak, they couldn’t get one and in the end after a lot of hassle, they gave me one, said ‘look this’ll be alright, look it says extra small on the label’. All somebody had done in biro was write over the small an X, they’d just written it in. It was supposed to be Stevie’s making a fuss about nothing. No sorry, I just want clothes that fit me, I don’t want to look ridiculous.” (Heterosexual, PCV driver, 60s)

Through these everyday examples, women’s exceptional or marked status is reinforced, and when they try to avoid looking “ridiculous” in clothing that does not fit or comply with safety regulations, they are made to feel that they are “making a fuss”.

Some have noted how women’s appearance at work is regulated in a way that men’s is not (Adkins, 1995) and that women’s bodies form part of the employment contract (Wajcman, 1998: 119), often with the expectation of a performance of a certain form of femininity, particularly in service work (Adkins, 1995). But in male-dominated work, this may be more complex, as women seek to balance requirements of both masculinity and femininity. Particularly for professional women, and those not required to wear a uniform, considerable attention is given to managing their appearance in order to “blend in” and not stand out as female. They must appear neither too masculine nor too sexual, to be “female rather than feminine”, as Fiona put it:

“It would be considered unprofessional if you were showing too much cleavage or too much leg, that would be slightly frowned upon, because it’s slightly conservative [...] I mean if you went in something terribly male that would be slightly wrong too.” (Heterosexual, associate director, construction, 50s)

While Suzie, who had been in the building industry for almost 20 years, had a similar stance to Fiona, she thought women entering construction now were able to adopt a more feminine appearance:

“There has been a real change for the ladies coming onto site now, the way they dress and everything [...] I still like to wear a shirt, trousers and a jacket. What the ladies wear now is a lot more feminine and they’re a lot more comfortable to wear that. Whereas I was always did the dressing as if I was a man, kind of thing, because I felt like I fitted in.” (Heterosexual, director, construction, 30s)

In contrast, Tanya who had been a surveyor for some time, described how she often wears a skirt on site, but keeps trousers in her office in case she needs to go up scaffolding. She feels that her femininity goes down well with the men:

“I can be very girly on site, look, I’ve got my own nails, they are very important to me, I paint them, if I break a nail on site it’s like the end of the earth has come, the boys find it absolutely hysterical, they’re like ‘oh god here she goes, she’s going to be crying for a nail file soon’ but it’s all part of the general cheerfulness and humour that we have, I suppose, I think they like the fact that they’ve got a woman who doesn’t mind putting her boots on and going walking round in muddy stuff, but will get equally upset if she breaks a nail.” (Heterosexual, principal quantity surveyor, construction, 30s)

She appears to enjoy mixing a feminine appearance with her masculine work role. Furthermore, she gains approval from male colleagues for her attempts to retain a feminine identity in a masculine job. Thus rather than trying to fit with male styles, she may be conforming to expectations of femininity.

For others, though, a benefit of working in a male-dominated industry is not having to present a traditionally feminine image, as Eva expressed:

“You don’t have to think what to wear, I’d see it more as an advantage [...] It doesn’t matter how you look, you can run round with greasy hair and dirty fingernails, it’s not that you feel you have to dress up and wear the latest fashion or nice shoes, it makes it easier.” (Heterosexual, design manager, construction, 40s)

Frances related the appeal of a job that did not require typically feminine appearance to her lesbian sexuality, while tending to assume a homogeneity of attitudes among heterosexual women:

“You’re out in all elements, [...] I don’t know if there are many straight women that would want to go out and get drenched, have to wear a hard hat which looks...great big hob nail boots, you don’t look all that good in the howling wind [...] I don’t like getting soaked through and looking awful, but at least it does mean I don’t have to wear, although now you don’t have to wear skirts, but I remember when I first started working and I had to wear a skirt, that was just horrible. Shoes and tights and all that awful stuff, whereas at least now I can wear very practical clothes and I can feel safe, I can move around and I am not being restricted.” (Lesbian, building surveyor, 40s)

Dress can also represent a way for lesbians to signify their sexuality at work: Jo was accustomed to being open about her sexuality and her choice of clothing formed part of her lesbian identity, making clear her sexuality to others. But she thought that the professional dress required for her job as a consultant in an engineering firm may obscure her lesbian sexuality:

“When you make people dress smartly, then it’s more difficult to tell, isn’t it? [...] I usually wear something vaguely smart and try to keep my hair longer than looking like I’ve been conscripted [laughs] and not trainers and all the things that you would normally use to, that would normally make you obvious.” (Lesbian, consultant, construction, 30s)

Another lesbian, Anna, had also felt a need to adopt a more feminine style in her previous job as a surveyor by keeping her hair longer, although now that she was working for her own firm, she felt she could shave her head. Some lesbians were open about their sexuality at work, but took satisfaction from challenging heterosexual colleagues’ stereotypes of what lesbians look like: Sam pointed out: “we’re not all going to turn up with buzz cuts wearing dungarees and, you know, birkenstocks.”

This section has illustrated how, in male-dominated work, women are marked as female by their bodies and appearance – in contrast to the unmarked or default bodies of men (McDowell, 1997: 145). Both in uniformed and non-uniform jobs, appearance is a significant element in how women perform their gender identity at work, which for most interviewees involves downplaying their difference and emphasising their sameness to men, as Suzie said, dressing in shirts and trousers “as if I were a man” in order to fit in. Many have noted the pressures to become like a man, to “assimilate” (Cockburn, 1991: 164) or adopt a strategy of becoming “one of the boys” to survive in non-traditionally female work (see 2.3.1). This was expressed by engineer Judith in her concern to “not make a big song and dance about being female”. However the limitations of this strategy were highlighted by McDowell (1997: 156), whose female investment bankers were shown to “never be a man as well as a man is”, where value is placed not simply on masculinity, but on “male masculinity” (Threadgold and Cranny-Francis, 1990, cited in McDowell, 1997: 156). The impossibility of women becoming ‘honorary men’ is illustrated further in Chapter 7 in which women’s sexuality is highlighted by male colleagues in order to foreground their difference. But McDowell (1997: 156) recommends that instead of seeing men and women as already gendered when they enter the workplace, we should examine how workplace interactions gender men and women, and explore other ways of being female and male. With this recommendation in mind, I now examine an alternative way of being female in male-dominated work by investigating lesbian identity at work.

6.3.2 *Minority sexual identity at work*

I highlighted earlier that the figure of the lesbian in male-dominated work is not as invisible as in other work environments, based on the presumption that women in non-traditional work may be perceived as masculine and thus associated with lesbianism (Frank, 2001; Paap, 2006). This view was held by some interviewees: heterosexual surveyor Tanya said “most women surveyors are either lesbian and don’t really look very female, or they’re just not very feminine”, although she felt herself to be a feminine exception to this rule. Heterosexual carpenter Elaine found that her ‘tomboy’ identity associated her with lesbian sexuality in the minds of male colleagues on site: “automatically the guys think you’re gay, they all did with me.”

However, despite any possible intended negative connotations of being labelled a lesbian by male co-workers, heterosexual interviewees who mentioned having been called or mistaken for a lesbian took a relaxed attitude to it. Construction manager Suzie was aware that when she was single for a few years colleagues had wondered whether she was a lesbian. This did not trouble her at all, and recalled being flattered to be told that a lesbian (outside of work) found her attractive. Another senior manager in construction acknowledged in the interview that she had had a ‘phase’ in the past when she had sexual relations with women, although defined herself as heterosexual now. She was used to working with lesbians in the industry, and noted some commonalities in the way in which she and a lesbian colleague dealt with workplace relations with men, particularly through emphasising shared interests such as cars and sport. These findings therefore do not support Frank’s (2001) conclusion that in the building trades “dyke-baiting pressures straight women to prove themselves as ‘real’ women, and it pressures gay women to stick to the closet, thereby weakening female solidarity”. This is not to say that there was always solidarity between women in minority roles – indeed there was not, as is shown in Chapter 8 – but these divisions were not primarily along lines of sexual orientation.

All of the lesbian interviewees were open about their sexuality to at least some of their colleagues (see methodological discussion in 4.7), although the length of time before they told colleagues varied widely. Several took the approach of “not shouting about it”, but not concealing it either. This usually involved telling some of those they worked most closely with, or got on best with, often when the subject of partners arose. Jo’s approach, described here, was fairly common:

“A few people know I suppose, you know, if it comes up then I’m not going to kind of de-gender my partner, but if it doesn’t come up I’m not going to..” (Lesbian, consultant, construction, 30s)

Similarly, Alison was willing to answer questions when asked:

“I don’t publicize it as such. When I first started here I didn’t go out of my way to tell everybody [...] I have this thing, and always have done, that if you’ve got the neck to come and say to me ‘Alison are you gay?’ I’ll say yes.” (Lesbian, bus driver, 40s)

Linda, an associate professional in a transport organisation, who took a similar approach of waiting until colleagues raised the question of her sexuality, was disappointed that this then took two years. Her characterisation of the workplace as dominated by older white men who were hostile to the organisation’s equality policies was the reason she had waited until they asked and were therefore ready for her answer.

For some younger lesbians, who had grown up and come out in a period of greater acceptance of homosexuality, concealing an important part of their identity was not an option. Amy said:

“Everyone knows. I was really determined that I was never ever going to go to work and have to hide who I was. Right from the point I came out I was like, I can’t do that, I can’t lie, I’m rubbish at it.” (Lesbian, apprentice manager, transport, 30s)

Two other interviewees in the same transport organisation, both in their twenties, were out and had experienced no problems on account of their minority sexuality: Sam stated that her sexuality was a “non-issue” at work and Steph had found no problem being out in both the current and a previous transport organisation where she worked as a manager, saying she was “completely confident with who I am”. While organisational culture has an important part to play in how confident people feel about being open about their sexuality, age may have been an additional factor in their self-assurance, with younger lesbians perhaps benefitting from legal rights and greater public acceptance of gay sexuality in recent years (Cowan, 2007), particularly for those living in a metropolitan environment (see 2.5.1).

A high proportion of lesbians in the sample had registered a civil partnership (see 9.2.2), and this facilitated discussion of sexuality at work, as Lesley indicated:

“But I suppose it’s out of respect for other people that I don’t really talk about it, I mean if somebody asks me, what does your husband do, I’ll say, yes I’m married, but I don’t have a husband, I have a wife, I suppose.” (Lesbian, train operator, 30s)

By using the language of heterosexual relationships, Lesley demonstrates the commitment of her relationship, but also provides a way for heterosexual colleagues to discuss it without fearing ‘saying the wrong thing’. She gives an example of how colleagues might approach the subject of her sexuality, that relies on commonly understood heterosexual traditions:

“If somebody finds out, ‘oh I’ve heard that you’re getting married, can I see your wedding pictures?’ or whatever and I’ll say ‘oh alright’.”

A similar point was made in recent research on the impact of civil partnership (Mitchell et al., 2009: 87) which found that having a formal set of terms for talking about gay relationships was important in exchanges with heterosexual people who had, in the past, struggled “to find an appropriate ‘way in’ to talk about same-sex relationships” thus providing “an easy talking point” for discussion of same-sex relationships.

Unlike McDermott’s (2006) finding that social class positioning affected the extent to which lesbians felt safe to be open about their sexual identity at work, there was no clear distinction in my sample between those in professional and non-professional roles concerning openness about their sexuality. Other identities, though, had an impact on decisions about coming out at work, and Nadia’s reflections – as a professional, but relatively junior, engineer – suggest that ethnicity may be equally important in mediating experience. She talks here about coming out at work, taking account of her minority position as a woman and a person of colour:

“It might be that I thought, well I can leave that one [sexuality] because people have preconceptions about me because I am a person of colour, and then in some situations people will think about you in a certain [way] because you’re a woman, and then to add to that the fact that you are also gay, it’s like sometimes you feel like you are just alienating more and more people.” (Lesbian, engineer, transport, 20s)

Although Nadia here talks about her identities in a cumulative way when ‘adding’ the fact that’s she’s gay, to being a woman and a person of colour – in reality her identities cannot be separated out, and each is intermeshed in other social divisions as Yuval-Davis (2006) points out. Thus discussion about disclosure of sexuality at work needs to take account of such intersections, as well as organisational and workplace cultures (see Chapter 7).

6.3.3 *Work identity and empowerment*

A theme that emerged from the narratives of several women in non-professional occupations was the confidence and sense of empowerment that they gained from doing a practical, skilled job such as being a tradeswoman or train driver. Cheryl and Donna recounted pride in seeing their work complete:

“I like that, when you’ve done something it’s like ‘oh, I’ve done that’. Cos I drive past buildings, I went through Liverpool Street and they’ve got the bridge up and I was going ‘I’ve got something to do with that’ [...] it’s great just looking at it.”
(Heterosexual, electrician, 30s)

“Just like the flats that I was working on, anytime I pass those flats I know that I’ve installed all the radiators in half of those flats. It is a good feeling of achievement.”
(Heterosexual, trainee plumber, 20s)

Tradeswomen also noted how their skills increased their confidence in dealing with problems at home:

“If say something happens in your home that you can sort out yourself, it feels good being empowered that you can do that, that you’ve actually gone to college and you’ve gained those qualifications, yeh, it is something good.” (Heterosexual, trainee plumber, 20s)

For carpenter Elaine having a trade had substantially broadened her horizons for the future:

“It gives you confidence of, especially with a skill having a trade, I find that a lot of female friends, their ambitions is going to get a part-time job in Asda’s. My ambition before was like that, but now it’s changed to, no I want to run a company, I want to train our women, I want to change something, I think your ambition changes so it gives you that confidence that you can do something like that. It’s great. It sounds like a cliché saying it’s empowering, but it gives you a sense of purpose I suppose.”
(Heterosexual, carpenter, 30s)

The gender dimension of Elaine’s sense of empowerment is clear here – by learning a trade she has more purpose and ambition for her future than her previous expectations of typically female retail work. Train driver Lesley similarly emphasised the confidence that doing a traditionally male job gave her, and could give other women:

“I just think that it’s good for women in general [...] because I think it proves to a lot of people that women can actually do the same job as a man, sometimes better. [...] because I think they would feel better about themselves, because they’ve got a sense of achievement. It is a very hard job to get. It’s probably one of the hardest.” (Lesbian, train operator, 30s)

Kath described how becoming a carpenter and then furniture maker was a huge part of her identity, and one that had empowered her as a woman:

“That physical engagement with the world, making things. I mean it is about making things that are out there, and also having got to the point where I feel mostly really competent at what I do and I’ve done it for a long time and I’ve done lots of different things. And I’ve done you know, I think there’s something about that which is generally what men do. It’s still true, men do things in the world and they kind of tackle, they are able to tackle objects and make them different. Men still do all of that, don’t they? Everything from digging the road to engineering. [...] and it is incredibly empowering.” (Lesbian, furniture maker, 50s)

Kath’s decision to enter the trades in the 1980s was taken at a historical moment when feminism was promoting women’s engagement in the manual trades in the UK (Wall, 2004) and the US (Frank, 2001). Therefore her feeling of empowerment from doing a traditionally male job had a feminist political dimension:

“I think the feminism was a big part of it. I think actually there was a real thrill about doing a man’s job. I think it was really thrilling. And I think it was very empowering. Yes, I think it was actually that feeling of breaking ground.”

Thus her sense of personal confidence from doing a ‘man’s job’ was combined with a feminist consciousness. Furthermore, recognition of lesbian sexuality was an important part of the feminist politics of the time and so for many lesbians a non-traditional career was both a personal and a political choice. In thinking about the connection between her sexuality and her career choice, which involved a rejection of conventional hierarchical work organisations, Kath said:

“It takes you somewhere that you’re not expected to be feminine and you’re not expected to conform to all those things which you find a complete pain. [...] one of the things that kept me wanting to do it was that feeling of just being my own person and not being tied into a structure, and not being tied into a hierarchy, which is as much to do with being self-employed as being in the trades, I guess. And I think somehow for me that is tied up with my sexuality [...] it’s to do with getting away from being tied up in patriarchal structures.”

Kath is here echoing the view discussed earlier that an awareness of lesbian sexuality can support a rejection of gender hierarchies and roles and can facilitate a non-traditional career choice. Kath’s decision to enter the trades had been influenced by the lesbian feminist politics of the time, but even for women who did not frame it within a feminist worldview, doing typically male work was clearly expressed as empowering for women, with consequences that went beyond simply feeling confident in the work

that they did. It affected their gender identity and expanded their view of women's potential in the wider world.

There were also suggestions that this could be passed on to the next generation, with some women feeling that through their non-traditional occupations they could represent role models for their daughters. This was expressed humorously by plumber/gas fitter Meeta:

“We had a laugh, when my daughter born and my manager called and he said ‘what you got?’ I said I got a little girl and he said ‘oh right, another gas engineer born then!’” (Heterosexual, plumber/gas fitter, 30s)

Several women felt that if their daughter showed an interest in following in their mother's non-traditional footsteps, then they would be pleased to encourage them.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has considered how identity is implicated in choice of non-traditional work, as well as processes of gender and sexual identity construction at work. Women's decisions about work were shown at two levels: that of rational choice over, for example, pay levels or security, and at the level of individual and social identities, particularly gender identity. Jenkins's (2004) point about the *consequences* of identification is salient here. Rational choices concerning pay and conditions are made in the knowledge of an institutional order that awards higher value - and therefore pay - to jobs typically associated with male skills or 'masculinity'. We saw how the internal-external dialectic between individual and collective identities took place in the interplay of the individual order of women's atypical work choices that related to early gender identifications as a 'tomboy' or indications of minority sexuality with the interaction order of family relations and childhood friendships.

Several heterosexual women defined themselves as having been 'tomboys', an identification which may have freed them to consider entering jobs normally done by men, or at least exposed them to male company which may have facilitated later work choices. Thus both lesbian and tomboy identifications were drawn upon to explain gender atypical work decisions, suggesting the power of normative constructions of femininity to constrain the choices of most women - the assumption being that an association with masculine or alternative gender identity may be needed to drive or explain unconventional work choices.

Lesbian sexuality bore a relation to both material choices relating to financial self-sufficiency, as well as awareness of difference that enabled non-traditional gender work choices. Although not all lesbians identified their sexuality as a primary factor shaping their career choices, for some it was connected to an early rejection of gender-typical roles, even if they were not fully conscious of the interrelationship at the time. For two interviewees, leaving home young and discovering their sexuality delayed career decisions, a pattern noted in other research (Fassinger, 1995; 1996; Morgan and Brown, 1991). Both were in their forties and their experience contrasts with the confidence of younger lesbian interviewees to come out to family and colleagues, reflecting changing attitudes towards lesbian and gay sexuality, and indicating that sexual orientation and age cohort intersect to influence work choices.

The occupational group to which women belonged clearly differentiated women's career trajectories. Professional interviewees were far more likely to have had a fairly consistent career path, with some progressing fairly high in their chosen male-dominated profession, whereas those in non-managerial and professional roles in both sectors had much less linear occupational trajectories.

Another notable difference was the conscious decision to seek out 'male' work among several non-professionals who recognised the earnings advantage compared to typically female alternatives. Relative pay was not a motivation among professionals, who did not distinguish earnings in their chosen career from other professions. These findings highlight the awareness of constraints on choice among interviewees and the classed differences in perceptions of careers. This suggests that a preference theory (Hakim, 1998; 2000) that emphasises women's individual orientations to work, over material or structural constraints, is not sufficient to understand class differences in women's choices, nor does it offer explanations of why some women make gender atypical work choices.

Hakim (2004) downplays the influence of gender in women's 'free choice' of occupation, while Woodfield (2007: 68) concludes from an overview of qualitative studies asking women about their work choices, that women deny gender as a factor in their selection of a work role, and mostly do not perceive gender as an obstacle. She notes, though, that most select gender-typical work. In contrast, my interviewees are very aware of gender in their choice of atypical occupation (although other factors such as interests and background play an important role too) – and are constantly made aware

by others. How they then choose to express or manage their gender identities becomes the salient question.

This is examined in the second part of the chapter where I address the question of how heterosexual and lesbian women articulate and experience their gender and sexual identities in the workplace. Appropriate clothing for work, whether getting uniforms to fit or choosing clothes that were “female rather than feminine”, was an issue for many, and highlighted the importance of gendered embodiment at work. Gatrell (2008: 14) has argued that “the perpetuation of male domination continues to be maintained via the body” and this chapter highlighted the particular ways in which attitudes around gendered bodies seek to exclude women from male-dominated work, through attention to women’s physical (in)abilities and appearance, in contrast to the default male worker. Women, however, exercise considerable agency in modulating their appearance to reflect the various shades of ‘masculinity’ or ‘femininity’ with which they feel comfortable. Additionally, clothing and hairstyle can have a particular meaning for lesbians as a way of signifying their sexual identity.

In common with other research, lesbians in my study often came out about their sexuality to colleagues in a gradual or selective way (Colgan et al., 2007b), but a notable feature in my research was the confidence in disclosing their sexuality expressed by younger lesbians. This may be partly attributable to increasing public acceptance of gay sexuality affecting those growing up in a more tolerant climate than in the past (Cowan, 2007), but is also related to organisational culture concerning sexual orientation (see Chapter 7). There was not a clear difference between those in professional and non-professional roles in openness about their sexuality at work, in contrast to McDermott’s (2006) research. However ethnicity was found to have a potential impact on decisions about coming out at work: where a woman was already in a minority on account of her gender *and* ethnicity, revealing minority sexuality was something that could be left aside, which is consistent with the findings of Ragins et al (2003) that lesbians and gay men of colour, already subject to attention due to their race, may decide not to attract further scrutiny of their sexuality.

A relationship between work identity, gender, sexuality and empowerment was highlighted in commentaries from women in skilled manual work on their feelings about work. Several tradeswomen described the satisfaction and feeling of power gained from producing something and having the skills to deal with DIY tasks at home. While

other research has highlighted a similar sense of achievement and feeling of pride in their work among women in professional construction roles (Watts, 2007), this was not framed in explicitly gendered terms, as several of my interviewees did. Being able to “do things in the world” as men do enhanced confidence in themselves as women. Women are thus gaining the technical gendered power resources typically monopolised by men (Bradley, 1999; Cockburn, 1985). One interviewee linked her decision to enter carpentry at a time of feminist campaigns to increase women’s participation in the trades to lesbian feminist politics that rejected hierarchical work structures. But even where doing typically male work was not explicitly related to a feminist worldview, it was seen as empowering for women, further revealing how work and gender identities constitute each other in a dialectical process.

7 Workplace relations within male-dominated organisations

7.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses a research question that is central to the aims of the thesis: how is women's experience of male-dominated work differentiated by sexual orientation and occupational group? To achieve this aim I take Joan Acker's (2006a; 2006b) framework of 'inequality regimes' to analyse the processes and practices within organisations that produce and sustain gender inequality. I first set the scene for the main part of the discussion, using three components of inequality regimes – the shape and degree of inequality, the visibility of inequalities and the legitimacy of inequalities – to sketch an outline of the male-dominated work environments in which interviewees are located. I then consider in greater depth two further components of inequality regimes relating to organising processes and control and compliance. I pay particular attention to one element of the organising processes that produce gender, class and racial inequalities – the informal interactions while 'doing the work'. My evidence will suggest that informal workplace interactions that foreground gender and sexuality remain one of the key mechanisms through which women are obstructed in their efforts to succeed in male-dominated work.

Understanding the location and operation of power is central to Acker's conceptualisation of inequality regimes: I explore this further in workplace relations using Bradley's (1999) framework of gendered power resources (see 3.6.2). Discussion focuses primarily on the three I believe to be most relevant – positional, personal and sexual – to observe not only the ways in which power is exploited by men to achieve or maintain control over women, but also the resources that women may employ to resist, or at least survive, men's dominance. Bradley's framework also enables exploration of how gendered power is infused with power relations of sexuality, class, ethnicity, age and seniority.

After outlining the character of the male-dominated work environments of interviewees, the chapter turns to an analysis of a number of dimensions of workplace interactions. It examines heterosexualised interactions between women and men; interactions between openly lesbian workers and male colleagues; and supportive workplace relations between women and men. (Workplace relations between women are discussed in Chapter 8 in the context of women's attitudes towards seeking support from other

women). While Acker (2006b: 451) notes that sexual harassment takes place in informal interactions at work, she also recognises it as an element of the control and compliance that create and maintain inequality (Acker, 2006a: 123). This indicates the interrelated effects of the analytical components of inequality regimes. Following feminist arguments that it is an exercise of male power over women, interviewees' experiences of harassment on the grounds of gender and sexuality are examined as an aspect of control at work. Control is also exercised by managers, so the chapter will explore how far women managers succeed in employing their positional power in relation to men.

The discussion of workplace interactions in this chapter takes place at Layder's level of situated activity (see 4.4), but finds these interactions shaped by the settings of the organisations in which women work. Furthermore, the contextual level of gender, sexuality and class relations is always present: Acker's framework of inequality regimes seeks to understand how gender, race and class intersect without prioritising any one over another. Equally other social divisions of sexuality, age and disability can be examined within this framework. My starting point for analysis is how gender, sexuality and class (as represented by occupational group) intersect, but interconnections with ethnicity and age will be discussed where these emerge from the data as salient.

7.2 The shape, degree, visibility and legitimacy of inequality in male-dominated workplaces

This section provides an overview of women's experiences of contemporary organisational life in male-dominated workplaces, drawing on three of Acker's components of inequality regimes to highlight key features of the conditions under which women work: the shape and degree of inequality; the visibility of inequalities and the legitimacy of inequalities.

7.2.1 The shape and degree of inequality

In order to give an impression of the male-dominated environments in which interviewees work, I first examine the gender breakdown of their workplaces, as described by interviewees themselves. The data provided are not directly comparable, as some women gave figures on the gender balance of their teams, whereas for others the relevant comparison was with those at their grade or level in the organisation. However the data offer an indication of the shape and degree of the gender imbalance in their work environment.

There is no agreed definition of what constitutes a non-traditional occupation, but Bagilhole (2002: 4) found that in practice the most common cut-off point used by governments or agencies concerned with redressing women's underrepresentation is where one sex represents roughly less than one third of all workers. Taking this as a benchmark, all but two of the interviewees who gave details of the gender breakdown of their workplace (two-thirds provided some impressionistic data) were in non-traditional roles for their gender, and most were in highly gender-segregated work environments, with some being the only woman in the team or at her level in the organisation. However Acker (2006b: 446) distinguishes between occupations and jobs – an occupation is a type of work and a job is a cluster of tasks in a particular organisation – and highlights Wharton's (2005) finding that gender segregation at the job level remains more extensive than at the level of occupations, primarily because women and men belonging to the same occupation tend to work in different jobs (or specialisms within the occupation) and firms.

In my sample, in construction, the percentage of women in their team or at a comparable level of seniority, ranged from two to 25 per cent. In the transport sector, the figures ranged from 1.5 to 40 per cent. Among those in construction, an interviewee in a large building firm was one of only two women out of 150 surveyors and another was one of three engineers out of 60-70 in her firm. An interviewee in a large engineering firm estimated that in the building department in which she worked around 20 per cent of staff were women, but observed that in the infrastructure department (designing bridges and tunnels) there were far fewer women, reflecting Acker's point above that within occupations further gender segregation of jobs occurs. Nationally women occupy only one per cent of manual trades, but at Leicester City Council, where the employer had made particular efforts to recruit and train tradeswomen and employed its own direct labour force (see Chapter 5), the proportion of women in the trades was eight per cent.

In transport, one manager in a large organisation was among the four women out of 10 managers in her department and another engineer worked in a team with around 35 per cent women, but most worked in more heavily male-dominated workplaces. Among bus drivers, for example, women estimated that their garages comprised between three and 10 per cent of women at most. Women train drivers were also in a tiny minority, although one estimated that the number in her depot had increased from four per cent

when she started eight years ago to 13 per cent (20 out of 150 women) as a result of targeted efforts to recruit women.

Within horizontally gender segregated occupations, vertical segregation also exists, and this was evidenced by several interviewees. A senior rail engineer was one of three women at her level out of 200 (1.5 per cent) employed across the organisation and had frequently been the only woman in her position or team. Another transport engineer managed a team of men and was the only female, and the youngest, in the senior management team. In construction, one interviewee was the first and only woman so far to reach the level of principal surveyor in her firm and another was one of only four female directors out of the 100 top managers in her international firm – and only one of two whom she described as ‘builders’, with the other two women occupying more typically female human resources and communications positions. Among women in more junior managerial or professional positions, some observed the steepness of the gendered and racialised hierarchy (Acker, 2006b: 445) at the levels above them. Nadia, a junior engineer in a transport organisation, said that at her grade there were around 30-40 per cent women, but noted that the management levels above her lacked diversity:

“It’s like a lot of companies, at low, medium levels it’s pretty mixed but the higher up the hierarchy you go, the more European and male it gets, so by the time you get to the top there’s probably nobody of colour, there might be a woman, and if there’s a gay person, they probably aren’t out about it or you wouldn’t know about it.”
(Lesbian, engineer, transport, 20s)

7.2.2 The visibility of inequalities

The quote above draws our attention to another of Acker’s components of inequality regimes, the visibility, or degree of awareness, of inequalities. Nadia notes that while the lack of women or BME staff may be obvious at the higher levels of the organisation, it is not possible to know whether gay staff are adequately represented because they probably would not feel able to be open about their sexuality at this level (see discussion of disclosure in 6.3.2). Acker (2006b: 452) has pointed out that non-heterosexual sexuality is almost always invisible to the heterosexual majority in organisations. However, like other components of inequality regimes, there is variability across organisations, and employee network groups are a way of signalling an organisation’s commitment to increasing the visibility of minority sexuality (see Chapter 8).

Achieving visibility can be difficult for women in gender atypical occupations, often made invisible by entrenched gendered assumptions. Jo, now a consultant in an engineering firm, had previously worked as a bicycle mechanic and amusingly described the reactions of some customers:

“And you could stand there absolutely covered in grease and they would still say, ‘can I talk to the mechanic?’ And you’d wonder, ‘what d’you think this is, has my mascara run?’” (Lesbian, consultant, construction, 30s)

For Asian women professionals in construction, as a very small minority it may be even harder to be taken seriously due to both gendered and racialised stereotypes. Jasminder, a senior manager, talked about occasions when she had been invited to speak at a conference:

“Sometimes I’ve been to conferences where people have said: ‘Do you know where I hang my coat up love?’ or ‘D’you know where we can get tea and coffee?’” (Heterosexual, director, construction, 40s)

Thus in organisations it is not only through numerical or monitoring data showing the gender and ethnic occupancy of grades within the organisation that we may examine the visibility of inequality, but also in processes and assumptions that exclude or marginalise the presence of women and other minority groups.

Acker (2006b: 452) points out that class inequality tends to be invisible in organisations, “hidden by talk of management, leadership or supervision”, although non-managerial workers may be very conscious of such inequality but not necessarily relate it to class. One indicator of class position is level of formal educational attainment, and lack of higher education qualifications was strongly felt to be a limitation on progression for Karen, who despite her many years of operational experience in a transport organisation, felt that she could not progress without formal education. She pointed out that those completing the graduate scheme would start at her grade, despite not having the years of experience that she had.

7.2.3 The legitimacy of inequalities

Karen’s case illustrates a further component of inequality regimes, the legitimacy accorded to different bases of inequality and which varies between organisations. Thus inequality based on educational or class background may be considered a legitimate and taken-for-granted element of organisational hierarchies and grading systems in a way that gender or race inequalities may not be any longer. While Acker notes the wide

variability in the legitimacy afforded to inequalities *between* organisations, my research evidence suggests that the variations *within* organisations reveal evidence of attitudes supporting the legitimacy of excluding women from some roles, which contribute to the workplace culture that inhibits women's full participation at work. Although an organisation may formally in policies and practices commit itself to gender equality, individuals within organisations may not share these beliefs, expressing their views to those they consider to be illegitimately employed in certain positions.

Several women had worked with men who believed that women should not be doing what they still perceived as 'men's work'. Heather, a school caretaker, described the attitudes of a colleague:

“He thinks that women should do certain things and men should do certain things and everybody should know their place and he completely believes that I should not be doing the work I'm doing.” (Lesbian, caretaker/handyperson, 40s)

Some tradeswomen had encountered resistance from older male colleagues, putting it down to men's feeling that women challenged their status as the breadwinner:

“There still are some of the older ones that have been here 20-30 years that are still stuck in their ways and still don't think that it's the right job for, you know, wouldn't encourage their wife or daughter to take it up because it's not a woman's job.” (Painter and decorator, Leicester focus group)

Train driver Femi had been made to feel unwelcome by colleagues when she started eight years ago. Some expressed hostility to the entry of women to what they considered a male job by, for example, ignoring her when she handed over the train to them or in the staff rest room.

These instances are from women in non-professional roles, and it could be suggested that men in these positions feel less bound by the organisational policies and norms that might deter men working in professional or office environments from expressing views that are oppositional to the publicly espoused policies of their organisations. However, the research found evidence of men in professional roles also expressing their hostility to women they saw as a threat to their position, through bullying and harassment, which is explored later (7.4.1). The effect of these expressions of belief in women's illegitimacy to do 'male' work is to make it harder for women to establish their position and remain in 'male' work, of which we see further evidence in the following discussion.

7.3 Organising processes: workplace relations

Informal interactions while ‘doing the work’ are one element of the organising processes that produce gender, class and racial inequalities in Acker’s (2006b) framework, and, my evidence suggests, one of the key mechanisms by which women are marginalised in male-dominated work. Bodily differences are invoked to determine appropriate behaviour, and workplace interactions are frequently sexualised, connecting to the discussion in Chapter 6 of how gender and sexual identities are dialectically constituted in internal and external processes. This section focuses on the external processes of women’s identity formation.

7.3.1 *(Hetero)sexualised interactions*

“They’re hostile anyway and they see us as ‘you don’t belong here’, so when you come in you either get hostility or you get people hitting on you and sometimes it’s very insulting, especially if you’re married and people are hitting on you and you say ‘well I’m married’, ‘And?’ You know, you feel insulted, you don’t feel ‘oh, I must be really attractive’, you feel ‘this is an insult’, so they feel ‘well, what are you doing in a male-dominated area if you don’t want people to hit on you anyway?’”
(Heterosexual, train operator, 40s)

Femi’s description of male train drivers’ responses to female drivers clearly illustrates several themes identified in the literature on male-dominated work: the routine and expected nature of sexual attention faced by women in ‘male’ work; the opposition to women’s entry to such jobs; and the link between the two - how sexuality is used to control women or exclude them from ‘men’s jobs’ (Cockburn, 1991; Collinson and Collinson, 1996; DiTomaso, 1989; Stanko, 1988). Furthermore, Femi understands, as feminists have argued, that unwanted sexual attention is not an expression of desire, but about control over women (Hearn and Parkin, 2001).

Highly (hetero)sexualised forms of interaction have been found to characterise male-dominated environments (Bagilhole, 2002; Bagilhole et al., 2000; Cockburn, 1991; Collinson and Collinson, 1996; DiTomaso, 1989; McDowell, 1997; Paap, 2006), and were frequently mentioned by my interviewees, who described sexualised workplace relations taking various forms from ‘banter’, joking and teasing to overt verbal or physical sexual harassment.

The presumed and expected sexual potential in workplace relations between women and their male colleagues was illustrated through tales of men’s concerns about the feelings of their wives if they were to work with women. While such reasons may be given to

legitimise men's own unwillingness to work with women, one tradeswoman described the lengths a colleague went to in order to conceal from his wife that he worked with a woman. One year she received a Christmas card addressed to her in a male name:

“He didn't want to tell his wife that he was working with a female in case she got really funny about it! [laughter] So for the whole two years of me working with him, I was Gerry, this bloke who he worked with, and in any other industry, you know you work in a shop or anything, your wife just accepts that you work alongside [women].” (Painter and decorator, Leicester focus group)

She points out that particular attitudes prevail in her industry that would not be accepted elsewhere, and it seems that there is often an expectation among men themselves that they must “try it on” with women, especially new arrivals. This has been seen as one of the ways in which men establish relationships between each other and assert their masculinity using the “coinage of women” (Cockburn, 1983: 185); women thus become a “proving ground” (Paap, 2006: 142) for men to demonstrate their masculine heterosexuality. According to Paap (2006), men at the lower end of the class hierarchies in construction use sexuality to assert power over both women and other men who are considered insufficiently masculine (see 5.3).

Unsurprisingly then, when women refuse to cooperate in this process, they may face further difficulties, as Norma found:

“He fancied me, and because I didn't reciprocate his affection [...] he decided that he was gonna be horrible to me, but I didn't care because I could handle myself. And in the end he was alright, he realised that I was not going to be knocked back by them or anything, because they try everything on, you know.” (Heterosexual, trainee electrician, 40s)

Women frequently talked about *their* responsibility for controlling men's behaviour and their ability to deal with unwanted attention (Pringle, 1989: 164). This is a further aspect of identity management in that heterosexual women, in particular, are put in a position where they must consider how they present themselves in relation to their availability, or not, to men. Some drew firm lines in their relationships with male colleagues, pointing out the risks of getting sexually involved. Tanya, a senior surveyor, made it clear to all that she did not “mix business with pleasure”, fearing the consequences:

“It would be so easy to have done all that work to get where you are, and then have it ruined so quickly, because as soon as someone heard that you'd done something at

work, they'd probably all think they could have a go." (Heterosexual, principal quantity surveyor, construction, 30s)

Similarly Liz advised young women bus drivers to avoid relationships at work, based on her own experience of a difficult ending to a workplace relationship which resulted in her moving jobs. In her opinion "men are the world's worst gossips, they say women are bad, but men are worse", aware that her personal life was a topic of conversation all round the garage. In these situations, the consequences for a woman's 'reputation' of being known to have had a relationship with a man are undoubtedly very different than for the male partner, reflecting widespread gender-differentiated discourses of sexuality and double standards (Hollway, 2004). Perhaps unsurprisingly then, women also reflected these discourses and held other women responsible for men's behaviour, as seen in Femi's comments:

"I noticed that the female drivers that complain about 'oh he was chatting me up', they got drunk and they kind of lost control. And I sat there thinking, this is the reason why these drivers either slap you on the bum or put their hand through your hair or something at work, it's because when you socialise with them, you pass a boundary." (Heterosexual, train operator, 40s)

The consequences of holding this view for Femi were that she set her personal boundary to preclude all socialising with male colleagues, particularly where drinking alcohol was involved, in order not to cross a line that would be difficult to redraw in the workplace. She was aware that men would not be held to account for their own behaviour. Indeed, some saw men as unable to help their actions, expressed here by Tanya:

"If I'm filling up the photocopier I know they'll be looking at my bum for instance, that is just men, there's nothing you can do about it, but if you were in another industry you'd say 'oh he's staring at me, he's doing something wrong', and I just think it's really not worth the hassle. They do it when they walk down the street, they can't help it, if they see a big chest in front of them they're gonna stare at that, that is just men." (Heterosexual, principal quantity surveyor, construction, 30s)

Thus in these male-dominated sectors there continues to be a high level of acceptance among women of what Hollway (2004) calls the 'male-sexual drive discourse', based on the belief that male sexuality stems from a biological drive that is out of men's control. Of course the inherent contradictions are revealed in Tanya's observation that such behaviour would not be considered acceptable in other industries, implying that where organisational norms and culture are different, men can learn to 'help it'.

In the face of discourses that place women as objects of uncontrolled male sexuality, women must draw on their personal power – a dimension of Bradley’s (1999) gendered power resources – which includes character, experience, ability to get on with people etc., to find ways of managing sexualised interactions with men. Interviewees commonly referred to how they managed to ‘handle myself’, ‘give it right back’, ‘give as good as you get’, ‘stand up to them’. Some became quite adept at dealing with ‘banter’, and humour was a useful tool for Elaine:

“Even with the nice banter, it’s all to do with putting down a woman, but you’ve just got to come back and put the blokes down. [...] I’ve found that if I come back with a comment, and it makes everyone else laugh, they start going, ‘oh she’s alright’.” (Heterosexual, carpenter, 30s)

Women, however, have to deal with banter on men’s terms, responding defensively to the “patriarchal parameters of sexual banter” (Halford et al., 1997: 246). Learning to stand up for oneself can be at great personal cost: Femi described the impact of the hostility she encountered from male train drivers during the first six months in the job:

“I was scared to come to work, I was afraid to come to work because of the hostile environment [...] sometimes I’d go home and cry, it was really bad, it was awful. But when I started speaking up for myself, I felt more confident and I felt people now decided to back off, people that kind of were hostile. I think when you stick up for yourself and speak up and tell them that, even though I’m here and I’m female, I’m not taking rubbish from you, I think that kind of, it eased it off a bit.” (Heterosexual, train operator, 40s)

Despite finding ways to deal with the hostility, she felt she had become “a very aggressive person”, learning to swear, something that she never did before, and appeared to regret that she had needed to adopt behaviour with which she felt uncomfortable.

Age also intersects with gender in the sexualisation of women in the workplace, reflecting societal discourses of the decline in women’s sexual attractiveness with age. This may have benefits, for example in minimising potentially awkward situations when entertaining male clients as Fiona, pointed out:

“This is where it gets easier as you get older, you then come up against, well are they are asking me on a date or are they just asking me out in work terms? And that, as I say, goes once you get older.” (Heterosexual, associate director, construction, 50s)

Thus women's experience of the sexualised workplace changes as they age and become more experienced in dealing with male attention, but also varies according to sexuality, as we see next.

7.3.2 Minority sexuality in the workplace: reducing sexual tension?

In a context where heterosexualised work relations predominate, it is interesting to consider how lesbians experience workplace interactions with men. It has been suggested that an openly lesbian worker may avoid some of the sexual attention that heterosexual women face (Dunne, 1997; Schneider, 1984); can find it easier to fit in with a masculine work culture such as the fire service than heterosexual women (Wright, 2008); and may find greater levels of comfort with male colleagues once the possibility of a sexual relationship has been removed (Frank, 2001). On the other hand, the heterosexual, masculine work climate of building sites, for example, may be particularly hostile to lesbians (Paap, 2006). In this research, some interviewees supported the view that for lesbians the sexual tension in workplace relations could be reduced: Jo found that when male colleagues knew about her lesbian sexuality, she was:

“Able to be one of the lads, not so much in my head, but it kind of removes a sexual tension that is there if there's a possibility [...] But once you're gay as well, [...] I think it makes you easier to deal with, because you're not trying to get into bed with them. You are actually trying to get them to answer the question.” (Lesbian, consultant, construction, 30s)

However not all lesbian interviewees, even when they are open about their sexuality at work, were able to avoid unwanted attention. Bus driver Maureen described how when she was younger, male colleagues would 'try it on' and when she told them that she preferred women, they would make the often heard comment that 'you need a good man', reflecting a common response that seeks to heterosexualise lesbians by reframing them as objects of male desire (Denisson and Saguy, forthcoming). Or as bus driver Alison found: “Some men, it doesn't matter who or what you are, they will flirt with you”. Similarly Lesley's train driver colleagues could only relate to her through heterosexual norms, despite knowing that she had no sexual interest in them:

“They [male colleagues] did start paying me a lot of attention, although they knew that I wasn't interested in them and that they were wasting their time completely, but they still, not in a bad way, they were flirting, but in a nice way. They were having a joke and they knew that, you know, there was nobody crossing a line.” (Lesbian, train operator, 30s)

Lesley found their behaviour tolerable as it did not 'cross a line' for her, but as I show later, the position of the line varies for different women and in different work environments, highlighting the fluidity of the boundary between unwanted sexual harassment and acceptable workplace interactions.

Other open lesbians felt themselves to be something of a curiosity among colleagues.

Sam said:

“Once you're out everyone is very interested in your private life in a way I don't think they are with straight people at all. They all want to know.. it's much more taboo and fascinating, for obvious reasons I guess.” (Lesbian, project planner, transport, 20s)

Frances, who worked in an all-male office, also encountered considerable interest:

“It's like being in Kindergarten all the time, they're all quite harmless, but they're all quite fascinated about what I do, just generally. Because I don't behave as they do, so I sometimes have to manage that.

Interviewer: “Fascinated because you're a woman?”

“I think so, and also that I am a gay woman and, I don't know, they just seem always to want to know, what's that. Men always want to, not control women, but want to monitor them, so I'm often being monitored about what I eat or where I am going.” (Lesbian, building surveyor, 40s)

Her comments about being 'monitored' by male colleagues are typical of the experience of 'tokens' – those in a minority in corporations – according to Kanter (1977), who face higher visibility than those in the dominant group and are subject to careful scrutiny, questioning and gossip (ibid : 212). Kanter does not discuss whether those who experience difference on two dimensions, gender and sexual orientation, may face even greater attention or scrutiny, however Frances appeared to feel that her lesbian sexuality provided an additional reason for men's interest in her. She admitted, though, to having little interest in them:

“Men are a bit alien to me as a gay woman, so I don't have a great interest in them. Maybe there is something worth discovering, but they're a bit of an alien species, they will sit there and... I suppose I don't bother to find out too much.”

Frances's feeling of difference (and indifference), based on both gender and sexuality, represents an important counter to the view that lesbians may find it easier to be accepted in male-dominated environments as “one of the lads” (Wright, 2008: 107) or more “like one of the guys” based on assumed associations with masculinity,

particularly for gender transgressive or ‘butch-dyke’ lesbians (Denisson and Saguy, forthcoming). Instead Frances highlights the lack of commonality stemming from an absence of both shared gender experience and shared heterosexuality, which commonly forms the basis of workplace interactions. The potential for exclusion from workplace interactions on the basis of minority sexuality (Colgan et al., 2006) therefore exists alongside the potential benefits of avoiding unwanted sexual attention.

Given the possibility for open lesbians to sidestep the sexualised interactions common in male-dominated workplaces, section 7.4.1 considers whether they are less likely to experience sexual harassment.

7.3.3 Supportive relationships

Despite the fraught workplace interactions encountered above and the sexual harassment found in section 7.4.1, lesbians and heterosexual women also described positive and supportive workplace relations with male colleagues, and it would be an inaccurate representation of the empirical data to characterise the majority of working relations with men as problematic due to their unwanted sexual nature. Some have noted the pleasurable or playful element in heterosexual interactions that can enliven otherwise dull work (Halford et al., 1997). Rosemary Pringle (1989:165) argued that the feminist emphasis on sexual harassment as a form of coercive sexuality in organisations has overlooked the element of ‘pleasure’ in heterosexual interactions, and places women always as victims of men, rather than being able to exercise sexual power. By considering the variety of discourses of sexuality in the boss-secretary relationship, she argues that “sexual pleasure might be used to disrupt male rationality and empower women” (ibid: 166). This usefully emphasises women’s agency and the possibility for disrupting men’s dominance of gendered power relations through sexuality, as does Bradley’s (1999: 35) resource of sexual power which can be employed by women to gain advantage over men, as well as by men over women. However I share the concerns of Wajcman (1998: 117) that Pringle’s approach underestimates the gendered power relations in the labour market, and is overly voluntaristic, as Adkins warns, noting (1995: 154-5) that pleasurable, as well as coercive, sexual interactions between men and women are structured by the same heterosexual power relations.

A more nuanced approach is offered by Halford et al (1997) which recognises variable gender power relations. They define two distinct heterosexualized discourses that play

out differently in banking, nursing and local government organisations. One discourse foregrounds sexual difference in constructing authority relations and is in evidence in relations between doctors and nurses – characterised by a routine sexualisation in which the boundaries between sexualised interactions and sexual harassment were “extremely fuzzy” (Halford et al., 1997: 256). The second discourse of complementarity in relations between men and women was more common in bank and local authority offices and relied on a notion of “the ‘productive’ mobilisation of heterosexuality in mixed-sex workplaces” (ibid: 256). They distinguished between a more gender-balanced environment and one in which occupations were clearly gender segregated with a distinct power imbalance. Wajcman (ibid: 117) also notes that whether sexual commodification can be resisted depends on the degree of gender segregation.

In the sharply gender-divided settings of my research, like Halford et al’s (1997: 257) nurses for whom sexualised interactions with doctors were routine, very few of my interviewees referred to sexual pleasure in workplace interactions (although it is possible that different interview questions or emphasis might have prompted this). Instead they talked in terms of having to ‘handle’ or ‘manage’ male sexuality in the ways described above. The dangers for women of mixing work and pleasure were made plain. However, supportive relationships, friendships and in a small number of cases, meeting partners at work, were discussed, although not in terms of sexuality or pleasure.

The problems faced by women in male-dominated work were said to stem from the behaviour of a small number of men, while relations with the majority were good:

“We sound down on the men, but 99 per cent of them are great [...] they treat you the same, they don’t treat you any differently, you know, they’re really good people to work with and I wouldn’t still be here after 13 years if I didn’t enjoy working with them, most of them are great.” (Painter and decorator, Leicester focus group)

For senior railway engineer Judith the most favoured aspect of her job was her relationship with colleagues:

“It’s really the people that I work with I think, I love everyone I meet, they’re all passionate about what they do and they’re nice people, good for a laugh and will help you out, really supportive.” (Heterosexual, senior signal engineer, 30s)

And she had established firm friendships with men at work:

“I’ve had really old fashioned railway types who have never worked with girls before and were perhaps a bit wary about me from the start and we’ve had fantastic relationships and had lifelong friendships once they’ve retired from the railway.”

It has been said that there is a lack of scholarly attention to workplace friendships compared to those formed in other contexts (Rumens, 2010). In examining gay men's workplace friendships, Rumens (2010: 151) argues that cross-sexuality friendships may have "the potential for supporting gay men in their efforts to mount a challenge against the heteronormativity of contemporary organisational life". In a similar way, perhaps, friendships between women and men in male-dominated work might have the potential to challenge gender stereotypes, as Judith indicates above. However the gendered power relations, as well as the dynamics of sexuality, are clearly different when considering friendships between gay men and straight women (who were a particular, but not exclusive, source of support in Rumens's study) and between heterosexual women and heterosexual men in male-dominated work in which sexuality is prominent, as already discussed. Furthermore, the potential for cross-sexuality friendships between lesbians and heterosexual men to challenge organisational heteronormativity is severely limited, as shown in the earlier discussion of heterosexualized interactions experienced by lesbians.

Nevertheless, a workplace with a mixture of gay men and women and heterosexual male and female colleagues provided a supportive environment for Lesley when she moved to a new city and started work:

"There was a few gay men and women at the station when I joined and they took me under the wing really when I joined because I didn't know anybody." (Lesbian, train operator, 30s)

Support was provided here by other lesbians and gay men, which is examined in relation to formal networks in Chapter 8, but in this mixed sexuality environment, Lesley felt able to be open about her lesbian sexuality with heterosexual colleagues. She reported continued good relations with heterosexual male colleagues when she moved within the organisation to become a train operator, although in this more solitary occupation she has less social contact with colleagues. However she had invited several of her male driver colleagues to her recent same-sex wedding. Furthermore, Lesley had met her partner at work and had not found it problematic to be open about the relationship to colleagues (although they now work in different parts of the organisation).

One heterosexual interviewee had also met her partner at work, and another had met hers through union activity associated with work. Neither recounted difficulties at work

arising from the relationship. On the contrary, Annette had found it useful to rebut sexual advances from other coach drivers with the response that her partner “wouldn’t like it”. These examples provide a contrast to the experiences of heterosexual women we saw earlier who advised strongly against workplace relations.

Just as Lesley had received support from other lesbians and gay men in the workplace, so Femi, a Black African woman, had found solidarity with male colleagues on the basis of shared ethnicity, although this was double-edged:

“The people who were friendliest to me when I started were the black male drivers, but then [...] they were either friendly because they thought ‘well you have my support’ or they were friendly because they thought ‘mmm’ [appreciative noise] you know, so sometimes [...] they were *too* friendly. And that to me was very insulting.” (Heterosexual, train operator, 40s)

Thus we see the potential for cross-gender support and friendship on the basis of shared ethnic minority status in white-dominated workplaces, but only where women, again, are able to manage the sexuality inherent in these interactions.

Some men related to women through a ‘protector’ role, represented by efforts to minimise or tone down their swearing out of ‘respect’ for women, or by ‘looking out for’ them, as was emphasised when Judith was pregnant:

“They’re a bit more gentle towards me than they would be to others, but they’re a lot of gentlemen I would say, always happy to help out and look after me. When I was pregnant with my first daughter I always felt very supported, lads watching out for me worrying about me, joking a little bit about that kind of thing, but very sweet.” (Heterosexual, senior signal engineer, 30s)

In difficult working environments, such protection may be welcomed, but is also based on paternalistic gender roles that many women find constraining. In the building trades, power relations are inherent in the training and apprenticeship system, which requires trainees to learn their trade from experienced workers, and which gains an added dimension when the trainee or apprentice is female. So in this situation, getting along with male colleagues is not just about a comfortable working environment, but also affects career progression. Given the frequent difficulties described above in being accepted by male colleagues, women were often very relieved when they found support from men during their apprenticeships or while on work placements; carpenter Elaine described how she would latch onto a helpful guy and follow him “like a puppy”. Norma valued the support she received when on a placement as a trainee electrician:

“The guys really pushed me. [...] they really pushed me to do stuff, they said we’ll show you what to do, and then you can do it. And when I told them I was leaving, I was coming to the end of my contract, they started testing me ‘how would you wire this, how would you wire that?’ until I got it, which was quite nice as well, it really was encouraging and supportive.” (Heterosexual, trainee electrician, 40s)

In these situations women are contending with several sources of gendered power (Bradley, 1999): not only might men be employing sexual power in relation to women apprentices as discussed above, they hold positional power through being more senior, and technical power resulting from their expertise and knowledge of the job. They exercise power in deciding whether or not to share this knowledge with junior women. Situations where women hold positional power in relation to men are discussed in 7.4.2.

7.4 Control and compliance

Two aspects of the component of Acker’s inequality regimes of control and compliance will be examined here, the first relates to attempts by men to control women through sexual and homophobic harassment and the second is women’s experience of managing men, in which women have positional power in organisational hierarchies.

7.4.1 Sexual and homophobic harassment

Despite the extensive measures women took to manage and control men’s sexuality in the workplace (see 7.3.1), sexual power (Bradley, 1999) was commonly employed by men to exclude women: a third of interviewees described incidences of sexual harassment at some point during their careers in construction or transport. In some cases this had occurred several years ago, when they were younger or perhaps before harassment at work had become a matter of legal concern for employers. However there were also more recent examples. In workplaces infused with sexualised interactions, the boundary between conduct that is considered acceptable and unwanted sexual harassment is a fluid one and is drawn differently by individual women, with some tolerating activities that may be deemed unlawful by an employment tribunal¹², as Judith exemplifies:

¹² The legal definition of harassment makes it clear that conduct is unlawful if it is unwanted and violates the employee’s dignity, unless it could not reasonably be assumed that the person could be offended by the action. UK case law has established that both physical and verbal actions amount to sexual harassment, as well as ongoing harassment and single acts, and display of pornographic material, including that downloaded on a computer has been deemed unlawful (LRD, 2010).

“If they are offended by pictures of topless girls and that kind of thing, because you do see that about the place even though we have regulations in place to stop that. That sort of thing doesn’t worry me, but I can understand that it will worry some girls.” (Heterosexual, senior signal engineer, 30s)

As already indicated, sexuality is used to control women in the workplace (7.3.1) and sexual harassment is a further form. DiTomaso’s (1989) study highlighted the greater prevalence of sexual harassment and discrimination, where women were in a minority doing traditionally ‘male work’, compared to mixed or more typically female workplaces, and attributed this directly to attempts by men to exclude women from well-paid ‘male’ work. While DiTomaso’s research was conducted in 1980, and interviewees suggest that organisational responses to sexual harassment in the UK have changed in the thirty years since then, in some work environments harassment persists. Femi experienced hostility from male drivers when she began the job just eight years earlier, taking forms such as sexual intimidation during her rest break:

“There’s nowhere else to go and they were talking about women in a very derogatory way, and they only started the conversation when I got there, and they didn’t stop, they just carried on, and I just sat there. And I was like with my food, eating like a mouse, you know. And I felt so bad when I left.” (Heterosexual, train operator, 40s)

Building sites too remain hostile places for women, particularly when they are new to the job or the site. Women commonly described harassment and bullying, particularly when they started on site. For Elaine this included sexual comments and name calling as well as physical jostling, attempts to trip her up, giving her dangerous tools and “sending me on things that are dangerous, unsafe platforms, things like that”. Heather had also experienced dangerous, as well as sexually intimidating, behaviour from fellow students on her carpentry course a few years earlier, which included throwing tools very close to her head. Although Elaine had learnt to stand up to workers on her first construction site, she noted the recurrent nature of this treatment:

“I still get it to a certain degree, every time I go on a new site it starts back up again, but you just have to hope that there’s someone on that site that you know and they’ll just give you a bit of [support]”. (Heterosexual, carpenter, 30s)

Evidence from interviews indicates that sexual harassment may be less prevalent and tolerated now in environments in which professional women work, although several had suffered incidents of harassment in the past: Fiona, now in her fifties and Tanya, in her thirties, described incidents of men touching them sexually on building sites when they were much younger, and Jasminder, now in her forties, had suffered constant comments

about her “tits”, whether she had “got laid” or was “ovulating” while in her twenties from a colleague who she believed was jealous of her career success. While these experiences may reflect the common power relations of sexual harassment, in which younger or more junior women are harassed by men with greater positional power, there was certainly a feeling among some long-serving professional women that the culture of the construction industry had changed significantly, with employers no longer tolerating behaviour that women had witnessed in the past. Fiona, for example, was certain that the nude calendars she had complained about to managers 20 years ago would no longer be acceptable in the offices of construction firms. An interviewee in her twenties, Sarah, believed that harassment would not be tolerated:

“I think ten years ago it would have been harder [...]. The culture has changed that much that if I have even the slightest inkling of disrespect because of my gender then they would be in lots of trouble very quickly [laughs].” (Heterosexual, civil engineer, construction, 20s)

Sarah’s experience also reflects the occupational hierarchies within the construction industry in which as an engineer she is in charge of teams of labourers, indicating that professional women may not be subject to the same degree of harassment as those in non-professional jobs, as Fiona observed:

“If you are on the professional side as opposed to the manual trades, there is still a certain deference from the contractors to you as the professional, so I probably won’t get quite as much gyp [as tradeswomen]”. (Heterosexual, associate director, construction, 50s)

This is not to say that there has been no change for women in non-professional occupations. Some bus drivers felt gender attitudes had changed since occasions such as this, when Annette started as a coach driver 20 years ago.

“I remember arriving at Dover to do one tour which was a two-driver job and the driver basically said to me you can only come on *my* coach – *my* coach not the company’s coach – if you sleep with me.” (Heterosexual, train manager/driver, 40s)

She believed such incidents were much less likely today as “men are slightly better educated about how to approach or not to approach the other sex within the workplace.” Stevie also saw improvements in attitudes towards women in bus garages since she had taken a sex discrimination and unfair dismissal claim to tribunal several years earlier. Her case was based on losing her job after complaining that she had been prevented

from playing a full part in the required training to become a driver instructor because of the “laddish” traditions in the training environment:

“There was always a tradition that the instructors, with the male trainees, they would be eyeing up the women in the streets and so on. I think it was a way of distracting trainees so that they didn’t get stressed out, to make it a bit more convivial, but obviously when there are women around it wasn’t necessarily the best thing. [...] when you’re expected to really participate in it, it’s quite difficult.” (Heterosexual, PCV driver, 60s)

She was unsuccessful in the tribunal case, which she described as “certainly the worst experience I’ve ever had in my life”. After several years doing other sorts of work, she eventually returned to bus driving, where she found the culture had changed to some extent:

“When I came back, the instructors were all men, [...], they didn’t do the laddish thing nearly so much. I think that things probably have progressed a little bit, but not fundamentally. [...] I think the people I’ve come in contact with are quite careful not to appear sexist, people I’ve come in contact with myself, and I don’t know if that’s because I’m older or I have a reputation that I won’t stand for it, I’m not sure.”

As with other interviewees, age and experience may contribute to women’s strengthened positional (through holding positions of authority) or personal power that may reduce the potential for sexist comments or for harassment to control women. Stevie also suggests that people may now be more aware of what is considered unacceptable in the workplace.

In view of the earlier discussion about the possibility for open lesbians to sidestep some of the sexualised interactions common in male-dominated workplaces, I now consider whether they may be better able to resist men’s exercise of sexual power and be less likely to be targets of sexual harassment.

This was felt to be the case for lesbian carpenter Kath, who had cultivated a deliberately ‘tough’, unfriendly image in order to deal with the male environment of her carpentry training course some years earlier. As a result she believed she may have avoided the harassment suffered by a more ‘womanly’, heterosexual colleague at the hands of a tutor:

“[She] had a really horrible time from the instructor who basically was sexually harassing her. And he obviously really fancied her, she was a very attractive woman and I think he just didn’t quite know what to make of me because I was like trying to be very tough and would never smile. [...] I felt I got off a lot more lightly, but it

could have gone the other way. [...] I'm sure it was because he couldn't cope with the fact that she was clearly, she was very womanly." (Lesbian, furniture maker, 50s)

But as she recognised, "it could have gone the other way", with potential for harassment on the grounds of her sexuality or absence of typical femininity. Indeed another lesbian, Heather, believed that she had suffered harassment from pupils in the secondary school where she worked as a caretaker/handyperson because she was not 'womanly' enough, and did not conform to conventional expectations of femininity:

"It was all about the way I present gender-wise, you know. The school have a homophobia policy, now my sexuality was never mentioned, but all the abuse was about, you know, they'd call me like 'he/she' or 'that man/woman thing'. It was all to do with gender and not appearing either one way or the other. [...] But the abuse I was getting, it wasn't people not being able to tell, it was people wanting me to know that they didn't like it, you know. Calling me like 'Mr Janitor Lady' and all that kind of thing, just constant." (Lesbian, caretaker/handyperson, 40s)

Heather's experience illustrates how gender and sexual identity intersect for lesbians working in male-dominated spheres. The combination of her gender atypical work role and her appearance that did not conform to traditional expectations of 'femininity' resulted in constant harassment from pupils. But although she was not open about her sexuality to pupils at the school, and the harassment did not involve explicit reference to her sexuality, Heather was keen that the school dealt with the harassment under its homophobia policy. Despite the lack of overt homophobic language, she recognised the underlying heteronormative assumptions in the pupils' comments ostensibly about her gender. McDermott (2006: 199) observed workplace homophobia occurring when a woman was felt to be "transgressing the acceptable boundaries of what it is to be a woman", also noting that schools may be particular sites of homophobic harassment (Epstein, 1996).

Furthermore Heather had previously suffered harassment from fellow students on a carpentry course, including dangerous use of tools and sexually threatening gestures, again ostensibly directed at her as one of the very small number of women on the course. Interestingly, in contrast to the situation described by Kath, Heather observed that the "pretty girls" on the course did not suffer the same treatment.

"The two other women on the course were young pretty girls, basically, and had that sort of very conciliatory way with men, and also, the standard of my work was quite high, and it was well, kind of better than most in the class, and I don't think they found that easy either. I think that [...] might have been something to do with it. And

also I took it seriously, you know, I really wanted..., and they were just out of school.”

She was not open about her sexuality to the 16 and 17-year-old boys on the course, and did not receive directly homophobic comments, but again her difference from the younger, more ‘conciliatory’ women suggests that the harassment was directed at her particular form of non-typically feminine gender identity, together, perhaps, with being older, more experienced, more able and more determined to succeed. In contrast to the experience of some interviewees discussed earlier who felt that age and experience gave them greater power resources to resist unwanted male behaviour, Heather’s treatment may be understood, as seen in the literature earlier, in terms of men – or boys – seeking to put her back ‘in her place’ (Cockburn, 1991: 141; DiTomaso, 1989).

A case of serious harassment and bullying by a manager in a local authority experienced by an interviewee more than 10 years earlier further suggests that there may be differences in the *form* of harassment experienced by heterosexual women and lesbians, although not its severity or impact. Anna described “18 months of absolute nightmare” at the hands of her bullying manager, directed at her and other women in the office. The bullying suffered by Anna took the form of being shouted at, ridiculed, called into his office and made to wait until spoken to, given pointless tasks and questioned about her sexuality. It began when he learned she was a lesbian:

“He knew pretty soon I was off limits, I was actually called in and he demanded to know why I hadn’t told him I was a lesbian in the interview, because he found out. It’s not a thing I mention in an interview because it’s not applicable to my job. And he said ‘no, it is, you shouldn’t have kept that secret and I’m going to have to consider how I feel about this now’. [...] He didn’t know what to make of it, because it upset his flirting nature. And he said ‘I like to cuddle the ladies in the office’. And I said ‘well don’t cuddle me, treat me like a man’. He said ‘yes, but you’re a woman and I like to treat women in a certain way’. And I’d go ‘but just treat me like a surveyor, I’m not here to be....’ He said ‘well no, that’s why I employ women, I like to have that around me.’ [...] I’m trying to check an application for a new housing development and he’s there telling me he wants to cuddle the ladies, and I go ‘just don’t do it’. And he said ‘well what would you do if I did?’ And I remember saying to him ‘if you touch me, I’ll break your fucking arm’.” (Lesbian, building surveyor, 40s)

Anna avoided being touched by her manager, who was caught putting his hand up the skirt of another female surveyor, at which point they reported him and learned he was “systematically bullying all the staff, with the female staff it just took another edge”.

Interestingly, though, the action taken against him by the employer was on the grounds of the sexual harassment faced by Anna's colleague:

“It took about six months to get rid of him. And it wasn't from my complaint, I actually didn't make a complaint against him. It was, they said that they didn't want too many complaints because it would muddy the water. So it was just the other female surveyor, but the things he wrote about me in his defence, I was a man-hating lesbian, I lied because I hated all men. And I said ‘I work on building sites! If I hated men, I wouldn't be doing this job’.”

For this manager, intent on bullying staff, presumed heterosexual women were seen as fair game for sexual harassment, while a lesbian was harassed because her sexuality challenged his notions of the heterosexual and sexualised relations he expected to have with women, over whom he sought to exercise control. The employer chose to deal with the manager on the basis of sexual harassment, resulting in his dismissal for gross misconduct. This suggests that this course of action provided the most compelling legal case (it occurred over 10 years ago when there was no legal protection from harassment on grounds of sexual orientation) as well, perhaps, as a lesser familiarity with how to tackle a case of homophobic harassment that might “muddy the water”.

In a more recent case, Alison felt the harassment she encountered was directed at her lesbian sexuality. A bus driver and union rep, she faced a prolonged campaign against her from a fellow union member following a management disciplinary in which he felt she had not represented him adequately, despite asking her not to attend the hearing. His behaviour included shouting at her whenever he saw her and trying to get colleagues to sign a petition to get her out of the union because she was a lesbian:

“I had witnesses with written letters stating that he had actually spoken to them saying that he wanted me out of the union because I was a lesbian and because I was crap at my job. And all I wanted at the end of the day was basically somebody to turn round and say ‘hold on, the fact that she is a lesbian has nothing to do with it’”.
(Lesbian, bus driver, 40s)

Here the perpetrator was focusing on her minority sexuality (rather than her minority gender) as a way of hoping to rally support against her from colleagues. She felt that both the employer and the union had been slow to recognise and act on homophobic harassment.

“[Management] just said to me I had to speak to the union because he was a union member and the union should stop him, and the union was telling him that the company had to deal with it. They waited until it got to the point where I was signed off sick for over a month with stress. [...] That's not like me, I don't take time off,

generally things like that don't bother me, and it just got to the point where it was ridiculous. So I was signed off for over a month and then the company decided, well hold on there must be a problem here."

Both Alison and Anna's cases suggest that homophobic harassment is less visible to organisations than sexual harassment, reinforcing Acker's (2006b: 452) claim that non-heterosexual sexuality is almost always invisible to the majority.

7.4.2 *Managing men*

Several interviewees had responsibility for managing men, so on the face of it they held positional power in relation to their male staff. However, in some instances men found ways of undermining this, for example by drawing attention to the manager's sexuality as a way of minimising her power, as Jasminder experienced when she started her previous job about six years ago:

"And so when I joined it was the usual thing, there was another guy who had applied for the post and didn't get it, [...] and I remember the first day starting with them, that month I was in our professional journal for doing an article, and they were passing my picture round under the table, and the guy who was the old team leader said 'my friends think I'm going to be working for a really sexy team leader now', and they wouldn't mind a job here. And I thought, how do you answer that? I just ignored him." (Heterosexual, director, construction, 40s)

Despite her authority as a manager, she dealt with his comment by appearing to not let it affect her, an approach taken by other interviewees who did not want to give men the reaction that they were seeking, in an attempt to recover some power in the interaction.

A common strategy in male-dominated environments is to adopt a 'tough' or 'hard' approach, associated with typically male management styles (McDowell, 1997; Wajcman, 1998), exemplified by Tanya, who believes that she is known as tough but fair:

"In a construction company I think a lot of women are known as being a bitch if they're in surveying and I think that's because you do have to be very, very hard and you don't let people mess you around. But equally, they're also known as fair, I don't really know many women who aren't known as being extremely fair, so, I'd rather be called a bitch than something else. I don't mind having the hard exterior." (Heterosexual, principal quantity surveyor, construction, 30s)

Other women, though, employed a management style that relied on what are perceived as more typically 'feminine' attributes such as empathy and understanding. Sarah said

she used “emotional intelligence” in her management role. The following quotes illustrate a ‘softer’ style of management:

“It’s about getting to know them, I think, we have a lot of management walk around and the staff will come down from the other office and do a safety tour and walk past them and just go ‘put your hard hat on’ and then walk off. And that to me that’s no good, you have to go over and ask them why they aren’t wearing it and what it is that might...try and re-educate them about the importance of doing it and finding out who they are and what task it is they’re doing. It’s about understanding where people are coming from, because if you don’t you’ll never get through to them.” (Heterosexual, civil engineer, construction, 20s)

“I think I am a softie really, I am not big on discipline and laying down the law and I have always tried to approach matters of discipline or things that can be a little bit difficult to deal with, with understanding things from someone else’s point of view, so I try to empathise with people I guess and understand that they’ve done things in a certain way, to try and reason with them about how things need to be and the right way to approach things. Rather than laying down the law and saying ‘this is what the rules say, this is what you have to do and this is the punishment you get for not doing it’.” (Heterosexual, senior signal engineer, 30s)

These extracts may be representative of a shift in management theory in recent years to a more people-oriented approach, which values characteristics that women might typically bring to the role, coinciding with extensive debate about whether women and men have different management styles (summarised in Wajcman, 1998, chapter 3). However Wajcman points out the danger in these arguments of reinforcing gendered dualisms that feed into essentialist views of male and female natures, which fail to alter the structural barriers to women reaching senior management. While male managers were able to appropriate a more ‘feminine’ style to their advantage, women were seen as only offering feminine qualities (Wajcman, 1998: 77).

Age was a further dynamic in the relationship of several managers to their staff, as they were managing men who were significantly older than them:

“Here I am the youngest of my team and I am managing it, so there’s a couple of guys that we laugh about it, but Don, he’s the same age as my father”. (Heterosexual, civil engineer, transport, 30s)

“I am directing a team of maybe fifteen labourers who have been working for thirty years and are older than me and Irish and can’t see why on earth this pipsqueak upstart of a girl is telling them what to do.” (Heterosexual, civil engineer, construction, 20s)

“I think there was a certain amount of fear on my part when I joined and thought [...] that it would be harder for me to be taken seriously, regardless of gender, by people who were in their fifties and sixties, maybe have been thirty years or so and were just

going to be like ‘who’s this hot-shot, they know nothing. You can’t teach your grandmother etc. etc.’” (Lesbian, project planner, transport, 20s)

Here, not only does age intersect with gender in workplace relations, but there is also a class dimension. Sarah is managing labourers who occupy a lower position in the occupational hierarchy of the construction industry than project managers, while Sam started on the organisation’s graduate trainee scheme and was placed in a management position over staff who had many years of operational experience, but without degree-level qualifications. Similarly Jess is in her management role by virtue of her civil engineering degree. Thus through higher education, these women have acquired positional power in male-dominated work. However their minority sex and younger age means that they must engage in what Wajcman (1998: 121-125) calls ‘negotiating labour’, drawing on Hochschild’s (1983) concept of emotional labour, in order to establish respect for their position among male staff:

“I think you certainly learn very quickly that you have to really go into every conversation making them out to be the expert almost, or at least acknowledging the fact that you are the newbie and they have been there for decades and you’re not trying to presume anything.” (Lesbian, project planner, transport, 20s)

“Because I didn’t know everything, because of being new to the organisation I couldn’t just railroad it in, I had to actually take the steps to do the consultation side of things. More informally than formally, I suppose, more as finding out how it operated.” (Heterosexual, civil engineer, transport, 30s)

In a further example that introduces ethnicity into the complex power dynamics experienced by women in senior positions to men, Femi tells of the resistance she faced from a white male trainee who she was instructing in train driving: “I could see from the first day that, I don’t know what he didn’t like, like I say, was it black, was it female?”. Eventually it transpired, after some questioning from Femi, that he had assumed that she was much younger than him, when in fact she was a year older.

“So he must have looked at me and thought ‘she’s a young girl, what does she know?’ So like I say that had nothing to do with black, that had nothing to do with female, that had to do with age, because he felt ‘this little girl, what does she know?’”. (Heterosexual, train operator, 40s)

Femi had initially assumed, based on her previous difficulties being accepted as both a black and a female train operator, that the trainee’s reluctance to learn from her was rooted in gender or racial prejudice, but she interprets it here as stemming from false assumptions about her age. Clearly we cannot know the trainee’s motivation for his

behaviour, but what is significant here is the additional work – or ‘negotiating labour’ – that women must undertake in order to interpret, understand and overcome male resistance to their position. And it is not only gender that women must negotiate, but also differences of ethnicity, age and class. The data did not, though, reveal any particular differences in experiences of managing men according to sexuality: three of the interviewees with management responsibilities were lesbians, but their comments, seen above, related to aspects of gender or age in their management role.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has revealed the value of Acker’s framework of inequality regimes for understanding how women experience male-dominated organisations and analysing how gender, sexuality and class intersect. Attention to the shape and degree of inequality in organisations provided an overview of the highly gender-segregated environments in which interviewees worked, where they were often the only woman in their team or grade, in some cases in a minority of around one per cent. In such workplaces it can be difficult for women to gain visibility, and their legitimacy in ‘male’ work is frequently questioned, while ethnic minority women – an even smaller minority – can experience particular problems with recognition and acceptance. Acker notes that non-heterosexual sexuality is almost always invisible in organisations, but this depends on the interaction of organisational practices and individual decisions about identity and disclosure.

Several components of organising processes that produce inequality in organisations are outlined by Acker, but this chapter focused on the informal interactions while ‘doing the work’ as the most significant site where gender and sexuality shape women’s day-to-day experience of work, to a greater extent than formal organisational policies and practices (although these also influence the type and content of informal interactions). My findings therefore support the argument of Healy et al (2011) that while Acker seems to give the same “analytical weight” to all organising processes, informal workplace interactions and cultures play a critical role in the reproduction of inequalities, often undermining the good intentions of formal practices, for example in relation to fair recruitment.

The variability of inequality regimes between organisations is noted by Acker, and my research found that this also occurred within different parts of organisations, with the

work locations of non-professional women (such as building sites, bus garages and train depots) often more overtly sexualised environments than in the office environments of professional women. Furthermore, it was felt that professional women were protected to some extent by their class position within the sectoral hierarchy when on construction sites and were treated with greater 'respect' in terms of gendered and sexualised interactions than were tradeswomen, reflecting the class hierarchy of the UK construction industry noted by Greed (2006). Relations of class and gender were highlighted in Paap's (2006) analysis of how working-class masculinity on US construction sites is expressed through use of sexuality to assert power over both women and other men who are considered insufficiently masculine.

This is not to argue that sexuality is absent from workplaces or interactions among professional or middle-class workers, but rather that the form of expression may be modified, given different organisational constraints and occupational norms. Paap (2006: 52) noted that harassment was more likely to occur when the physical and social distance of the worksite from the corporate headquarters was greater, where it was easier to ignore formal policies, which supports the evidence from professionals in construction that the office-based organisational culture had changed significantly in recent years to make more overt forms of sex discrimination and harassment less tolerated.

Harassment, however, had been experienced by interviewees in a range of locations and on a number of grounds: we saw examples of women being harassed for being both too feminine and not feminine enough; for being young and inexperienced and for being older, experienced and (too) good at her work; for being heterosexual and for being a lesbian. Sexual – and also homophobic – harassment, then, is an assertion of men's power over women, rather than an expression of desire, as feminists have long argued (Cockburn, 1991; Hearn and Parkin, 2001), and may have complex dynamics of sexuality, class, race and age intertwined with gender. In traditionally male workplaces, men may be trying to reassert ownership of the workplace as a male domain, by making female entrants feel unwelcome.

While focusing on coercive sexuality in organisations can neglect the element of pleasure in heterosexual work interactions (Halford et al., 1997) and underplay the potential of female sexuality to empower women (Pringle, 1989), my evidence suggests that the boundary between coercive and non-coercive forms of sexuality is a fluid and

contingent one. Women accept norms of behaviour in male-dominated work that they would not tolerate in other environments, or refuse to name certain practices as sexual harassment as a survival strategy (Watts, 2007). Heterosexual power relations underpin both pleasurable and coercive sexual interactions between men and women (Adkins, 1995).

By identifying different forms of gendered power resources, Bradley (1999) assists us in appreciating the complexity of gendered workplace relations. Even where women had positional power as managers, men still tried to use sexual power to reassert control. Some women had positional power through educational or class advantage in relation to male colleagues, but equally their younger age and lesser experience for some meant deferring to men's technical power. It is unclear where age fits into Bradley's nine dimensions of gendered power, but for some interviewees age intersected with gender to disempower them, despite possessing positional power. In these cases some employed typically feminine strategies of 'negotiating labour' (Hochschild, 1983; Wajcman, 1998) in order to manage older, male staff.

In challenging additive conceptions of disadvantage, I suggested in Chapter 6 that lesbian sexuality, rather than necessarily being an additional 'burden' on top of gender in male-dominated environments, might be experienced as an advantage (discussed further in Wright, 2011a). This chapter showed that lesbians who are open about their sexuality may sidestep some of the unwanted sexual attention suffered by heterosexual women – although do not avoid sexualised banter altogether. It was not, though, necessarily easier for lesbians to bond with male colleagues by 'doing masculinity' (Denisson and Saguy, forthcoming), rather some felt their sexuality created an additional distance from heterosexual male colleagues. The forms of harassment experienced by lesbian interviewees tended to be less directly sexual, but rather directed at gender performance or sexual orientation, in one case expressing displeasure at a school caretaker's flouting of conventional 'femininity'. This illustrates how gender and sexuality intersect in the reinforcement of gender norms through institutional heterosexuality (Dunne, 2000a). The slow organisational response to two cases of homophobic harassment suggests that awareness is less developed than in relation to sexual harassment. This supports Acker's observation that the visibility and legitimacy afforded to different forms of inequalities varies widely, but that non-heterosexual sexuality remains less visible in most organisations.

8 Seeking support: attitudes to and participation in women's and LGBT networks and trade union groups

8.1 Introduction

One response of women in a small minority among men in a workplace or occupation is to seek out the company of other women in a similar situation, and several groups have been established in the construction and transport sectors for this purpose. This chapter examines my research question concerning women's attitudes towards, and experiences, of participation in support structures and networks by examining three types: women-only professional or industry networks; staff networks established by employers within organisations; and trade union structures for women and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) members. It therefore also considers whether heterosexual women and lesbians express different motivations or forms of participation.

But many women in male-dominated work do not seek out formal support from other women, and the chapter explores the reasons¹³ for this by first discussing informal relationships with other female colleagues. An examination of the attitudes of interviewees towards working with other women provides some insights into differing perceptions of the value of seeking support from other women, and relate to strategies for managing male-dominated environments.

The chapter brings together theories of identification (Bradley, 1996; Jenkins, 2004), introduced in Chapter 6, with ways of understanding inequality in organisational processes (Acker, 2006a; 2006b), examined in Chapter 7. It primarily locates the analysis at Layder's (1993) level of setting by examining the relationship between identity, participation in collective activity and organisational inclusion and exclusion. Bradley's (1999) gendered power resource of collective power may be exercised by minority or marginalised groups through women's and LGBT separate organising. The chapter traces how the prominence given to gender and sexual identities by individuals at any moment propels or shapes their interest in participating in support networks, while also showing how organisational processes of exclusion may be factors influencing the desire to seek support through alternative networks. Such processes of

¹³ There may be many factors constraining women's participation in support networks or trade unions, most notably lack of time due to domestic commitments, but this chapter is concerned with how attitudes, identity and organisational processes affect participation.

exclusion are identified as a component of the production of inequality regimes in organisations (2006a; Acker, 2006b).

Identification with a particular collectivity is key to participation: Jenkins (2004) distinguishes between categories, where members are classified by others as having something in common but may not see themselves in these terms, and groups, whose members have identified themselves as belonging to a collectivity of some sort, which helps to understand how individuals vary in group membership and participation. However Bradley's (1996: 25-6) threefold distinction offers a fuller understanding of how identity relates to group participation: she identifies three levels of social identity: passive, active and politicised (see 3.5). Passive identities derive from sets of lived relationships, but are not acted upon; while active identities are conscious, and may provide a base for actions: they can occur as a defence against the actions of others or in response to discrimination. Therefore they may be linked to processes within organisations that produce inequalities. A politicised identity is one that becomes a more constant base for action, and provides the basis for collective organisation, as the use of the term 'identity politics' to describe lesbian and gay or feminist movements reflects.

The value of this categorisation of identification is examined in relation to the empirical data analysed in this chapter from women worker interviewees, focus groups and some key informant interviews and I propose an additional categorisation of a 'counter' identity to capture the position of women seeking to downplay their femaleness or femininity, and instead associate with maleness.

As some of the routes used to access interviewees for this study were through women's organisations, staff network groups for women and LGBT employees and trade unions (described in Chapter 4), many research participants are members of such groups and thus a high proportion might be said to have either active or politicised gender identities, and a few have politicised class or labour movement identities. The sample therefore enables an examination of women's reasons for participating in women's organisations and trade unions, their perceptions of the benefits gained from membership and, in the case of trade unions, obstacles to greater participation.

The chapter starts with a discussion of women's relationships with other female colleagues, which was often minimal due to the small numbers of women in their

workplace, but which may provide informal forms of support. Furthermore, their responses to working with other women indicate some of the differences in attitudes towards seeking support from other women.

8.2 Relations with female colleagues

It was common for interviewees to have little or no experience of working with other women in their teams or work roles, given the shape and degree of gender imbalance in their organisations (see 7.2.1). Broadly speaking, women could be seen in two distinct, but similar-sized, groups in terms of their attitudes towards working with other women. One group expressed a preference for working with men, finding them easier to work with, an attitude which typically coincided with negative feelings about working with other women. The second group welcomed the few opportunities that they had to work or socialise with other women, who they found easier to relate to than male colleagues. In addition, a small number of women felt that working with women was not very different to working with men, or described neither particularly negative nor positive opinions about working with women.

Among the women who preferred working with men, they tended to hold negative views about working with women, expressed in terms of women being “bitchy”, “competitive”, “backstabbing”, or “bickering”. In some instances women contrasted their male professional colleagues with administrative teams or offices made up of predominantly women, where a lot of “bitching” about other women was said to take place. For some, such as senior surveyor Tanya, her identification was primarily with male colleagues, with whom she claimed to get on much better. Similarly lesbian transport manager Sam felt she was “not built for” working in a “bitchy” female-dominated office which she thought would require “a different way of probably communicating with people and relating to them” that she was not used to. Another lesbian manager in transport also believed she would not get on well in what she saw as typically female offices reflecting a dominant heterosexual culture, “I wouldn’t feel comfortable, because they’re not my kind of people.”

Relations between women in male-dominated roles were sometimes classed as ‘competitive’, either over work or for male attention. Lesley had experienced hostility when she started as a station assistant from a female supervisor, who was jealous about the attention Lesley was receiving from male colleagues. But as soon as the supervisor

found out that Lesley was a lesbian and “that I wasn’t any threat [...], she was still getting plenty of attention” there was no longer a problem and they became good friends. Lesbians, therefore, may avoid female competition for male attention.

However, it was suggested that men provoke competition between women: maintenance technician Marsha observed that “sometimes the men can stir it up and everything can blow up. [...] men are very, very good at doing that.” She suggests that men may be deliberately frustrating the possibility of solidarity between women. Fear of how male colleagues may react to contact between women also prevented train driver Femi from associating with the small number of female drivers while on her breaks:

“I didn’t want to be seen as having a clique of women, I didn’t want to be seen as that, I just wanted a peaceful environment, just come to work, do my job, [...] go home. I didn’t really want to be in a like a women’s organisation of fellow drivers. [...] because they just look at us and think ‘ooh look at them’ you know.”
(Heterosexual, train operator, 40s)

In male-dominated environments, negative reactions from men to women meeting together informally may also be a deterrent to women participating in formal networks for women, as I found in the fire service (Wright, 2005). Particularly among newer recruits, the priority was to become accepted as ‘one of the lads’, which meant eschewing participation in fire service or trade union women’s networks. Similarly Kanter (1977: 227-8) noted that ‘token’ women in organisations were often subjected to ‘loyalty tests’ in which the price of being “one of the boys” may be a willingness to turn against “the girls”. The pressure to dis-identify with anything associated with womanhood results for some in what I term a ‘counter’ identity – not captured by Bradley’s threefold distinction of identity as passive, active or politicised – but rather an oppositional gender identity in which women play down aspects of femaleness. This is not a fixed or unified identification, but one deployed at certain times or in certain circumstances. In the fire service I observed that once women had become more established with male colleagues, some felt confident enough to attend the Fire Brigades Union women’s meetings or networking events for women in the fire service. This suggests that women’s strategies, as well as gender consciousness, may change as material circumstances alter. Furthermore, women may select other occasions on which to network with women that are less risky than the workplace. Femi’s reluctance to be seen bonding with female colleagues in the rest room did not prevent her from attending a staff network group for women, that was held away from her workplace (see 8.4). For

a second group of women, informal support from female colleagues was important. In contrast to women who distanced themselves from predominantly female administrative workers, Jess, who managed an all-male team of highway engineers, felt that the admin women in her office kept her sane: “I think if there was no females here maybe I’d go mad”. She was able to “have a banter” and chat easily about the previous evening’s television programmes.

Some had deliberately built networks with women they encountered at work or maintained contact with former colleagues. Frances, a lesbian building surveyor, who felt she had little in common with her heterosexual male colleagues in the office, valued the small group of women she had met through work who socialised once a month. One was a female architect who shared the office sometimes:

“When she is there it’s so different and we do chat a bit, but I don’t know what it is, she is straight but we just get on well and, I don’t know, it’s just a bit more real.”
(Lesbian, building surveyor, 40s)

Engineer Deepta had always worked with mainly men, but had got on with female colleagues that she met and described the difference between relations between men and women in this way: “The females are my friends, the males are not, they are colleagues and it’s a bit of a difference.” She may be reflecting the difficulty of workplace friendships with men due to their sexualised potential, as discussed in Chapter 7.

A feminist identification informed Fiona’s conscious efforts to network with other professional women and to build links with women in the organisation across occupations. She firmly believed that such bonds were instrumental in improving the working lives of women support staff:

“The lives of the support staff got a hell of a lot better because there were women at a higher level. And that’s something that I’ve discovered over the years is that once they start employing professional women, particularly women who say ‘and what’s this sort of language?’ support staff tend to be less sexually harassed as well.”
(Heterosexual, associate director, construction, 50s)

For Fiona, then, her feminist identification and beliefs meant that she would oppose sexist male behaviour in relation both to herself and other women, which she believed resulted in improvements in the organisational gender culture and a challenge to aspects of the inequality regime in place.

A small number of interviewees were attracted to the idea of working solely or mainly with other women. Kath's feminist identity influenced her choice of occupation as a carpenter (see Chapter 6), and during the 1980s she worked in a women-only building co-operative. While exciting, she found this was not supportive, due to the class and race politics playing out in feminism at the time. She found her "happiest" work environment to be a workshop shared with other self-employed tradeswomen. Among tradeswomen who had trained recently there was also interest in working with other tradeswomen, either in a women-only team that could offer the range of trades to work on a particular project or in running a business in the future that would train tradeswomen, alongside more experienced men. These women in their twenties and thirties did not give expressly feminist reasons for their desire to work with other women, reflecting the decline in influence of feminist politics since Kath entered the trades in the 1980s, but saw benefits in terms of both social support and commercial advantages. It was suggested that women-only teams of tradeswomen might appeal to a certain market that male or mixed teams cannot, so for some, self-employment, with other women, is seen as way of achieving flexibility and control over work (see 9.5).

When lesbian couple Pauline and Anna set up their building surveying firm they considered making it a women-only firm, believing it would be "a nice environment to work in". However, the shortage of qualified women in their field meant they needed to employ "nice" men with whom they had worked in the past, alongside seeking to appoint female surveyors. While Anna had experienced harassment on account of her gender and sexuality in previous male-dominated workplaces (see 7.4.1), achieving a gay-friendly work setting was not a main motivation for establishing their business, although both felt that it gave them freedom to be themselves. Pauline commented that in relation to her sexuality there were no issues, as "it's fine when you're the boss."

The data show no clear difference according to sexual orientation in preferences about working with women or men, with some lesbians feeling more comfortable in a male-dominated office, whereas others seek out and value female company at work, and a similar split was observed between heterosexual women. The 'counter' identity discussed earlier may apply to both heterosexual women and lesbians. Indeed it may be easier for some lesbians to distance themselves from typical femininity and other women, particularly given presumptions around lesbianism and male-dominated work already noted (see 2.3.2). But equally we saw lesbians who sought out working

relationships and support from other women. What appears to have a greater significance is the early gender identifications with friends and family, explored in Chapter 6, that also influenced women's choice of male-dominated work. For those who identified more strongly with boys when young, this identification tended to be reinforced later in relations with male colleagues.

8.3 Industry and professional networks for women

Partly due to methods used to recruit interview participants (see 4.5.5), a high proportion of the sample were members of, or had attended events organised by, organisations set up to support women in non-traditionally female occupations. Seven interviewees were members of, or had been involved in projects run by, Women and Manual Trades (WAMT), a national organisation for tradeswomen and those training in the trades (see Chapter 5). Five women were members of, or had attended events organised by, the National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC), four of whom were professionals and one was a tradeswoman, reflecting its primarily professional membership. Another professional in construction was a member of Women in Property, a network for professionals in construction including architects, surveyors, lawyers and planners, and attended their events. Two women in the transport sector (one manager and one in a non-professional role) had attended events organised by the Women's Transportation Seminar, the London-based branch of WTS International, an organisation which supports and promotes women working in transport. In addition, one of the focus groups was with women taking part in the WAMT Building Work for Women project and the focus group with women working for a local authority included members of the craftswomen's support group established within the local authority (although this was a network within one employer, it is discussed here rather than in the section on employee networks because of its focus on women in a particular occupation).

Among tradeswomen, the appeal of membership of WAMT and the craftswomen's support group lay both in the practical work-related benefits as well as the social support offered. The WAMT BWW project was established to address some of the structural barriers to women gaining work in the trades, such as the difficulty in obtaining site work experience, and provided training and financial support (see 5.5.2).

But for trainee plumber Donna, the moral support provided by WAMT was equally important and helped her to persist in the face of setbacks:

“So many barriers that I hit and they [WAMT] were really supportive and kept my spirits up, and without them, I’d be honest, I don’t know whether I’d have even found my training, because I would have just put my hands up and said, look it’s impossible to try and find anything right now.” (Heterosexual, carpenter, 30s)

This example highlights the crucial role of the support offered by organisations such as WAMT in not only equipping women with the skills and requisites for gaining work that they may not be able to gain elsewhere, but also in encouraging them to pursue their aims in the face of the obstacles they are likely to encounter as women entering a male-dominated world. In a similar way, the craftswomen’s support group at Leicester City Council, when it was set up 20 years ago with only three women, campaigned for basic facilities such as female toilets and uniforms to fit women, as well as offering support to isolated women to help them stay in the job, as one of its founder members recalls:

“So you’d probably only see one female from one week to the next and so it was a good thing that we all got together [...] where there are limited women, it’s very good for the support, because, you know there were times when I had trouble with my supervisor, I didn’t know who to turn to, I’d be in tears some weeks and then you had that group to talk to and you know, guided you the right way in who to talk to, and obviously got through it because, you know, *you stay*.” (My emphasis, painter and decorator, Leicester focus group)

She suggests that, like Donna above, the support of the group helped her get through the difficult times and remain in the job. She believed that in some senses the group was “a victim of our own success” in that women entering the Council now as apprentices – where there are around 40 tradeswomen – often do not see a need for the group, as the working conditions for women have changed significantly. Instead the focus of the group has changed from addressing internal processes of exclusion and organisational inequality regimes (Acker, 2006a; 2006b) to an externally-facing role in recruitment and encouraging more women into the industry.

Women seeking to enter male-dominated work may, though, be resistant to joining a women’s support organisation, expecting not to be in sympathy with its political stance, as reflected in Elaine’s preconceptions about WAMT:

“I’ve met so many women that have come in that are anti-men and there’s a difference between being anti-men and pro-women. They’ve forgotten about being

positively pro-women and concentrate on the fact that men are horrible, I just thought it was going to be another of those groups that would be really against men and I've got no interest to sit there and put the men down, they're alright in their own way, they're not all bad." (Heterosexual, carpenter, 30s)

However a female tutor on Elaine's carpentry course encouraged her to join the BWW project, where she found the staff helpful and supportive, as well as appreciating the benefits of a driving licence and free tools. Therefore WAMT, which grew out of particular feminist politics in the 1970s aiming to get women into traditionally male work (Wall, 2004), is able, through offering practical and emotional support, to reach women with a range of views, including those whose gender identities may be active rather than politicised, in Bradley's (1996) terms. WAMT member Kath, on the other hand, had maintained a politicised identity as a feminist since she joined WAMT in the 1980s, a time she described as "very exciting, there was a real feeling of we're breaking new ground." WAMT was thus consciously seeking to exercise collective power to improve the position of women in the manual trades.

While WAMT's origins are in feminist politics, there is debate over whether networks for professional women have feminist aims, with some finding that few UK women's networks explicitly espouse feminist goals (McCarthy, 2004: 42), whereas others argue that a detailed examination of their values reveals some independent women's networks to be consistent with feminist beliefs, even though many of their members do not classify themselves thus (Avdelidou-Fischer, 2010). Among my interviewees in professional networks, only Fiona expressed a politicised gender identity and gave explicitly feminist reasons for joining a network, although she believed that the organisation, Women in Property, would not view itself in this way, indicated by their use of the terms 'chairman' and 'ladies' for its officers.

"I think it is a feminist organisation, but I don't think for a moment they would ever describe themselves as that. [...] And we've done some female stuff, which is about make-up, very entertaining [laughs]. And again nobody would ever describe themselves as feminists. [...] In other words, they enjoy working with women and so seek out female, female as opposed to feminist, networks, so that is the qualitative difference." (Heterosexual, associate director, construction, 50s)

Networks primarily for professional women in construction and transport differ from WAMT in that they do not have a role in offering training and support to unemployed women to enter work, nevertheless women may join a professional network for career development opportunities. The benefits of membership of the National Association of

Women in Construction (NAWIC) and Women in Property include Continuing Professional Development (CPD) credits and the contacts needed for accreditation to professional bodies, as well as mentoring programmes. However, reasons for participating in women's networks are not solely instrumental and can simply reflect a desire for "a giggle" with women as a respite from the male-dominated workplace:

"It's not a problem being a woman at work, but it's nice to get away from that male-dominated environment from time to time and get a bit of time off, and spend some time with some girls and talk about clothes [laughs]". (Heterosexual, civil engineer, construction, 20s)

"They'll do pink champagne all night and raffles for handbags, because women that work in the industry don't really get a chance to go and pamper themselves and do stuff, and they had make-up artists there, hairdressers and everyone had a lovely time because you were out for the evening, you were talking to women, you didn't have to worry about any of the bravado of men, you could go and get your nails done if you wanted, and it was just a bit of a giggle really, teamed up with meeting and networking with other girls in construction, and having a bit of an update on how things are going in the industry as well." (Heterosexual, principal quantity surveyor, construction, 30s)

All three quotes mention activities associated with make-up, clothes, handbags and nails, suggesting that these networks may be trying hard to counter any association with masculinity among women in these occupations, and perhaps also feminism. Some joined women's networks in response to feelings of exclusion from, or at least discomfort with, mainstream networking events, particularly in the construction industry. Chapter 7 highlighted some of the informal organisational processes sustaining inequality regimes that contribute to gender segregation at work, and exclusion from networking opportunities is an additional process. A key informant interviewee from Women in Property said the organisation was needed because women were not invited to corporate hospitality events, often centred around sport:

"Women aren't asked. While that pattern continues, there is a reason for our existence and I'm afraid that is the culture that has been there for some time. It is changing, but it's very slow." (Key informant, Women in Property)

Discomfort with the form of events held by male-dominated networks was expressed by some interviewees:

"I think a lot of women find a lot of the networking activities generally in the industry quite intimidating. I think because of the way a lot of them are set out it's quite hard to break into these sort of things, and a lot of these dos where you're stood up and enforced network. I personally believe a lot of women find those quite

difficult to break into groups. And generally they're male-dominated because on average we're about nine per cent of the industry. So most of the time we're going to be nine to one outnumbered by guys [...] It's still quite old school often these events, they're like award ceremonies. At the Grosvenor, Park Lane it will be black tie, it will be an incredibly heavy meal normally accompanied by heavy drinking and it's okay [...] but it's not my cup of tea." (Heterosexual, director, construction, 30s)

"All the activities are all very gendered. Like they had a shooting, clay pigeon shooting ...or then I am being, am making assumptions that that's... [...] Or it's, you know, dinner dance. [...] very stuffy, sort of men in brown suits, no it's not very nice." (Lesbian, building surveyor, 40s)

As a woman Frances feels that she does not fit in with male networking events.

Furthermore as a lesbian she did not feel comfortable attending formal events, where male colleagues' wives typically attend, with her female partner, to spotlight her difference from the dominant heterosexual organisational norms. But equally, single women may feel out of place at such events and socialising with male colleagues outside of work risks friendliness being misinterpreted as sexual interest, as seen in Chapter 7. Instead women's professional networks avoid some of these pitfalls and aim to offer a "friendlier, softer approach" to networking, based more on workshop-style activities than having to "stand round with a glass of wine and canapés", according to the key informant from NAWIC.

It was felt though, that the capacity of women's networks to mobilise collective power resources (Bradley, 1999) may be limited by their size and range of influence. Of NAWIC, Eva said:

"It's too small at the moment, I think it's a good idea and that's why I support it, but it's too small to really have any impact." (Heterosexual, design manager, construction, 40s)

However the interviewee from Women in Property believed that senior (male) managers in companies were starting to see the benefits of contacts their female staff gained through membership of the network, suggesting that individual members can acquire some of the personal power resources needed for professional progression.

Fewer professional interviewees in the transport sector discussed involvement in women's industry networks, perhaps reflecting the fact that most professional construction interviewees were in the private sector, where gaining business requires networking. In contrast, the professional women in transport were more likely to work for public sector transport service providers. And among non-professionals in transport,

membership and participation tended to be through trade unions. However, two women (one professional, one not) had attended events run by the Women's Transportation Seminar, which included learning to drive a bus and seeing how tube drivers are trained, described by transport manager Rachel as interesting and fun, as well as "a useful networking opportunity" with people in the transport industry outside her organisation.

While there was a balance of heterosexual women and lesbians among tradeswomen who were members of WAMT, only one of the eight women who had attended professional networks was a lesbian. To some extent this reflects the industry breakdown of the sample, as more of the professionals in construction were heterosexual, and therefore more likely to find professional networks of use than the public sector transport professionals. Pauline, a lesbian, attended NAWIC events primarily to keep in contact with female architects with whom she worked and the "nice social occasion", rather than from a strong need for support from other women, which she gained through the firm she established which employed other women. We see below that some lesbian professionals attended employee networks, but tended to favour LGBT over women's groups, indicating a greater identification with those sharing their sexuality than their gender.

8.4 Staff networks

Among interviewees, eight had attended staff networks established by their employer. Two of these were heterosexual women who had attended the women's staff group on a few occasions but were not active participants, and six were lesbians who had mostly attended LGBT networks. Rachel had attended the women's network group infrequently:

"It hasn't really sparked my enthusiasm too much, probably if I got involved more maybe it would, but nothing's jumped out at me yet that's made me think I really want to get involved in that." (Heterosexual, manager, transport, 30s)

She contrasted the staff group to the opportunities offered by the Women's Transportation Seminar (see above). Another heterosexual in transport, Karen, had been put off attending the women's network because she believed it would be mostly attended by women with children and be about improving childcare, which was not relevant to her, although admitted that she may have an incorrect perception, and was considering going along. Like Rachel, she was more attracted to the Women's Transportation Seminar events, which she had attended and found valuable.

Of the six lesbians attending a staff group, all but one worked in organisations where there was a women's network as well as an LGBT group, but most had prioritised their lesbian identity by attending the LGBT group. For Sam, this was based on a view that there were fewer issues for women within the organisation as most of the harassment was suffered by LGBT, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) or disabled staff. Similarly Nadia saw fewer issues for women, despite working in a very male-dominated organisation, and had prioritised attending the LGBT group out of a desire to meet other LGBT people:

“When I joined [the organisation] I didn't go to the women's network, I didn't really feel the need to. When I joined I was interviewed by a woman and she was the head of one of the departments I was in, so I didn't really see it as a pressing issue, whereas I didn't really know of any other gay and lesbian people in my team, so I went along to that group. [...] I think when I first joined I didn't know how people would react or respond. So at that point I wasn't really out to anybody.” (Lesbian, engineer, transport, 20s)

She anticipated that the LGBT group would offer her support in deciding how and when to disclose her lesbian identity to colleagues. In these examples lesbians felt a greater need to make their sexual identity active – possibly also politicised – than their gender identities. One of the values of an LGBT network is making minority sexual identity visible, both through offering support to individual's in coming out, and in signalling the organisation's recognition of the value of its minority sexuality employees. Such networks help to counter the usual invisibility of minority sexuality to the heterosexual majority in organizations, noted by (Acker, 2006b: 452).

However, the focus on a single identity by each staff network, whether of sexuality, gender, ethnicity or disability, may imply to some a homogeneity that can deter participation. We saw above that Karen presumed (correctly or incorrectly) that the women's network gave priority to issues concerning women with children. Nadia, who as a black lesbian could attend any or all of three staff networks for women, BAME or LGBT staff, also feared that her lesbian identity would not be accepted in all groups. She was concerned that if she raised issues related to being a lesbian in the women's or BAME group, they might feel it was not “their issue” and suggest it was more appropriately discussed in the LGBT group. This would feel “like putting little bits and pieces of yourself in a box”, and she felt most comfortable in the LGBT group where all her identities were apparent:

“I don’t have to come out about anything because they can see that I’m a person of colour, they can see that I’m a woman and they already know that I’m gay, so that’s probably one of the most comfortable spaces.”

Nadia’s concerns highlight the need for groups based on one specific form of oppression or identity to demonstrate an ‘intersectional sensibility’ (Crenshaw, 1991; Healy et al., 2011) to ensure that potential members do not feel the need to put ‘bits and pieces’ of themselves ‘in a box’.

Some were frustrated that more lesbians did not attend the LGBT staff network meetings:

“I could probably count on one hand the number of lesbians that turn up to meetings and the rest of the room is men. But I just think there are just an awful lot more out gay men out there and I think maybe because of that my view would be that it’s easier for them. Now they might argue because they’re out they’re more obvious sources of victimisation or bullying or any kind of harassment, but I would go with the safety in numbers argument.” (Lesbian, project planner, transport, 20s)

Her comments highlight both the risks and potential benefits to increased visibility of minority sexuality in the workplace, as well as gender differences, believing that lesbians’ lesser participation in the network group was in part because very few were “actively out” to everyone in the workplace. The nature of network groups, such as in Sam’s organisation, which are open to all staff, whether gay or not – and include a high-level management ‘sponsor’ – makes it difficult for people who are not open about their sexuality to attend. Thus the organisation’s attempt to give legitimacy to the needs of LGBT staff and make visible their commitment to addressing these needs – in particular by demonstrating management support - may in effect contribute to maintaining the invisibility of those who are not open at work, and therefore be in greatest need of support from lesbian and gay colleagues. The practice of opening network groups to all is in contrast to the self-organised groups of some trade unions (see below).

To attend staff network groups during the working day, when these groups were held, also requires staff to seek permission from managers to take time off, again deterring those who are not out to managers. It is also more difficult for those whose jobs involve shiftwork or spend a lot of time out on site, as Steph noted:

“There’s a disparity between operational staff, being the ones the work on the stations and train crew, and head office. I can go to a SNG [staff network group] meeting whenever I want, they have to book off special time.” (Lesbian, project manager, transport, 20s)

There was a predominance of professional staff among lesbian interviewees attending staff groups who pointed out that non-professional, operational staff often experience most problems in gaining acceptance for their sexuality at work (some evidence of this was presented in Chapter 7), and therefore have a greater need for support, but find this harder to gain through the organisation's support structures. Research has shown that it is common for frontline, administrative and manual staff to have difficulty in getting time off to attend LGBT employee networks (Bond et al., 2009: 52).

For train driver Lesley, whose shifts meant that she would need to attend the group outside of work time, an absence of problems at work and having a partner were given as reasons for not attending either the women's or LGBT groups. Had she been single, she might have wanted to attend the LGBT group, but instead preferred to spend her free time with her partner. Similarly bus driver and union rep Maureen believed that differences in the relationships of lesbians and gay men, contributed to lesbians' lower participation in networks and groups:

“Gay guys are looking out for the next flirtation, women are more stable within their relationships and they're not out looking, but the guys are out looking, even if they're with a partner [...] but I think women are more stable within a relationship therefore they're not looking. They're less likely to go to a group, they might prefer to have a dinner party at home.” (Lesbian, bus driver, 60s)

While this characterisation does not represent all gay or lesbian relationships, there may be different patterns of socialising among lesbians and gay men, which could affect propensity to join LGBT groups.

As with participation in women's industry and professional networks, another reason for non-participation in staff groups among both lesbians and heterosexual women relates to the consequences of active or politicised identities for those seeking to play down their difference. Interestingly the following reservations about identity-based groups were expressed by Steph, a lesbian who had participated in both her organisation's women's and LGBT groups, although was more active in the latter. She disliked the “element of victimhood” she had observed:

“I'm very conscious that the fight isn't over for women, gays or any minority group, but you also have to recognise that we've gone a long way and we're a fully-fledged part of the community, and if you play the victim then people will treat you as something different. Surely integration is the key, isn't it? You become an issue if you make yourself an issue is my take on it. So if you say 'oh well I can't do this because I'm a woman', of course they're going to look at you because you're causing

fuss [...] If you want to be treated the same as everybody else then you muck in.”
(Lesbian, project manager, transport, 20s)

Steph’s feelings encapsulate the tension between the ideology of separate identity-based groups, formed on the basis of difference and the specific needs of a group, and the emphasis placed on sameness and ‘integration’ by many interviewees seeking to fit in and establish their position within heteronormative and gender-segregated organisations. However Steph’s views do not prevent her from participating in the groups, as might the beliefs of those displaying a gender ‘counter’ identity (see 8.2). She also talks of the network’s value in stressing difference, but feels that this should be expressed in a more positive way:

“Why can’t we celebrate the fact that we’re women? And it’s wonderful to offer all these career progression things and workshops and training, but you don’t need to do it in a victim way, ‘oh woe is me, I’m gay I can’t do this’. It’s actually like ‘fantastic, these are the things we do as a community either collectively or singly as a separate minority group and look at what else you can do’.”

Her positive emphasis on difference reflects ‘valuing diversity’ organisational discourses (Kirton and Greene, 2005) of which employee networks are a manifestation.

A similar positive approach to diversity was expressed by lesbian manager Sam:

“I think there is a part of you that thinks it must suck a little bit to have to be a member of one of those groups, it means you’re a minority in one way or another and I think there are plenty of people out there that would view that as a negative thing and it’s about saying ‘no, these are positive things’, it’s not about getting all the ‘different’ people together to whinge about how they’re different and they’re not treated the same. It’s actually we can make a difference, we are all the same and [the organisation] recognises how diverse its staff is.” (Lesbian, project planner, transport, 20s)

For Sam and others, staff network groups were seen as positive both for employees and the organisation. ‘Business case’ arguments can be made for supporting LGBT staff at work (Guasp and Balfour, 2008), which Sam supported, “if you’ve got happy people at work and people feel safe and they feel motivated, then you get more out of them”. The existence of the LGBT group was a reason to feel positive about her employer, and she felt her participation had many benefits, including personal education about LGBT history, social contacts and professional networking. She saw it as “using your sexuality positively”:

“It’s a great formal networking tool and I personally can’t stand the word ‘networking’ but it kind of is, I’ve been able to forge relationships that I’ve used in

my professional sphere through the people I know through staff network group. It's also a great personal development tool, not just from a knowledge or a learning point of view, but from being able to say you really contributed to something that has equality and inclusion or diversity at the forefront, and not a lot of people who work here can say that. We have a set of competencies that we interview people using, and one of them is equality, diversity, inclusion and it's the one that everyone always falls down on [...] whereas I am on the events committee for the staff network group and I write a couple of articles for each of their newsletters and stuff like that, and it's not big stuff but I am there."

As with external professional networks discussed above, Sam found career advantages to participation, which included demonstrating commitment to equality which was needed for progression. In this organisation equality objectives are embedded in staff performance targets, as a proactive means of addressing its 'inequality regimes', making it untypical of most organisations. However the networking opportunities may be more likely to benefit those in professional jobs, rather than operational roles where progression opportunities are possibly more restricted and networking is less beneficial. We saw above a concern that the network groups fail to attract non-professional staff, and it might be that the emphasis on both organisational business benefits of the groups and professional networking may make them less appealing or valuable to this group. It is also interesting to note that the two managers here who expressed a desire to focus on the positive benefits of diversity, contrasted with a 'whinging' or 'victimhood' approach, were also those most opposed to trade unions (see below), seeing them as obstructive. However, the trade unions in transport are strongest amongst operational staff, who are less likely to attend network groups. Therefore there may be a risk that the employee groups are failing to attract operational staff not only due to practical considerations of shiftwork or fear of coming out at work, but are also presenting a dominant ethos that resonates more with managerial staff, and may not be fully representing the interests or needs of those in lower or more peripheral positions in the organisational hierarchy.

8.5 Trade unions

8.5.1 Union membership

Of the 38 women workers interviewed, 16 (42 per cent) were union members, a higher proportion than the union density of the two sectors (see 5.2.2). This reflects the fact that many interviewees in transport were in occupations or employers that were strongly unionised, as well as that trade unions were one of the routes used to find interviewees.

Of the 16 union members only four were in construction (18 per cent of construction interviewees), whereas 12 were in transport (75 per cent of transport interviewees). Furthermore, only four of those in professional or managerial occupations were union members (21 per cent) while 63 per cent of non-professionals were unionised. Of the professional workers in unions, three worked in the public sector (two in transport and one in construction) and one in a private rail company: the public sector has much higher rates of union density overall at 56.6 per cent (56.8 per cent for women) than the private sector at 15.1 per cent (12.4 per cent for women) (Achur, 2010, table 2.1).

Interviewees in professional construction occupations were generally not aware of union presence in their sector, with one noting that unions in the industry were “mostly aimed at the labouring level”. In transport, some managers and professionals, although in unionised public sector organisations, had not encountered or been asked to join a union representing their grade or occupation. Only two interviewees expressed anti-union opinions, both managers in transport: Sam, a project planner, described herself as holding “a very strong anti-union view”, believing that the unions in her organisation were “anti-change” and obstructed her job as a manager; project manager Steph also said she was “not a fan” and had worked to keep stations open during a strike, despite being a union member herself and recognising the support that the unions provided to staff during negotiations on organisational restructuring.

Although lesbians made up 39 per cent of worker interviewees, they account for 50 per cent of those in trade unions (which again is partly attributable to access methods as a trade union LGBT group was contacted for help in reaching lesbian workers).

To give some indication of the shape and degree (Acker, 2006b) of gender imbalance in the unions in these sectors, Table 9 lists the unions to which interviewees belonged, with the proportion of female membership. It shows that almost all interviewees were in trade unions where women were in a small minority, reflecting the gender make-up of their industries. Given the small numbers of women in most unions, names of unions will not be given when discussing individuals so that they cannot be identified.

Six interviewees – all in non-professional roles in transport – were union reps. Additionally one member of the Leicester focus group was a longstanding union rep. Another managerial interviewee was chair of the LGBT group within her transport union. These activists gave further indications of the shape and degree of gender

imbalance within their unions: Annette talked about being the only female delegate at her transport union conference, similarly Maureen had been the only female delegate of 70 at a bus conference and Liz was one of two or three women at a conference of 60 bus industry reps. Liz believed that only five of the 70-80 bus garage reps in her region were women and another was the only woman convenor in the region.

Table 9: Interviewees’ union membership

Union	Number of interviewees	% women in union*
ASLEF (train drivers)	2	3.5%
GMB (general union)	2	46%
RMT (transport)	3	12%
TSSA (transport)	3	29%
UCATT (construction)	2 (focus group participants)	2%
Unison (public sector)	1	70%
Unite (general union)	5	23%

*Source: January 2009 membership figures from TUC website¹⁴

Increasing the number of female union reps in male-dominated industries is one way of providing greater support to women members, as rep Annette identified:

“There are certain cases that a woman would prefer another woman to deal with, if it’s a sickness item [...], some people are a bit more reticent to speak to a man about things like that, so therefore it’s good to have some female reps across the board that women can use.” (Heterosexual, train manager/driver, 40s)

However, most women will not encounter female reps, who themselves faced considerable difficulties with the ‘inequality regimes’ within their male-dominated unions, discussed in a separate paper (Wright, 2010).

8.5.2 Trade unions as sources of support

Although the number of professionals in trade unions was small, some had received valuable assistance from their union. A building surveyor, Jasminder, although no longer in a union in her private sector management position, had previously received support from the union over two separate issues that arose while working in a male-dominated local authority department: one was a case of ongoing harassment by a male colleague, which lessened after intervention by the union and in another instance the

¹⁴ http://www.tuc.org.uk/tuc/unions_main.cfm, accessed 20 August 2010

union had managed to win a pay improvement for herself and two other women trainees:

“And we also had to go through the unions to get our job evaluated and we got a pay increase, otherwise they would have just left us at what we were earning, apart from the annual [pay increase].” (Heterosexual, director, construction, 40s)

Jasminder noted the gender aspect of this pay battle, as she said that the local authority had taken on three female trainees, who were given day release to gain a professional qualification, as part of an initiative to improve the number of women in an occupation in which they were underrepresented. However, without the union’s involvement in a job evaluation, they would have continued to be paid less than their work was worth.

A senior rail engineer, still a union member, had found the union helpful when she needed it:

“I’ve used the union, they’ve always been very supportive, I was involved in a train accident a few years ago and I needed union support [...] The union has always been there for me if I’ve needed them.” (Heterosexual, senior signal engineer, 30s)

Among non-professionals, interviewees were generally positive about the value of trade union membership, even if only “just in case, for emergencies” or on the grounds that “you never know when you’ll need it”. The value of unions in representing operational staff and dealing with collective issues was expressed by transport union member

Karen:

“I think the union’s really good, and especially at times like this when there’s a reorganisation and you know that unions are – OK sometimes they can dig their heels in a bit too much and chuck their toys out of the pram when there’s no real need to, be a bit obstructive – but ultimately they care about Joe Bloggs [...] I think unions have definitely got their place and I think help a lot of people, and can be supportive. And feel that you’ve got a bit of a voice as well.” (Heterosexual, contract administrator, transport, 30s)

Others valued the role that unions had played in establishing their terms and conditions:

“Everything that we’ve got is down to the union, ‘cos they’ve fought tooth and nail. You know we wouldn’t have half of what we’ve got if it wasn’t for them, and that’s why I support it.” (Lesbian, train operator, 30s)

Another had become active in her union (and was now a union rep) as a result of seeking support for a personal case. While interviewees generally felt that their unions would offer support if they had a problem at work, this was qualified in some cases depending on the nature of the problem, and some felt that the union would not be able

to help with harassment issues they were experiencing. Femi believed that her union was helpful “if you make a mistake at work and they’re trying to sack you and stuff like that, they’re quite helpful”. However as a black woman she did not believe they would offer help when she experienced hostility and harassment from male drivers:

“The people in charge are white males, aren’t they? So I felt if I go to them, they’ll just tell everyone. They probably won’t, but I just didn’t have enough confidence in them.” (Heterosexual, train operator, 40s)

Heather, a lesbian who had suffered harassment and bullying from a male colleague (see 7.4.1) had felt able to raise the problem with her employer, but feared it would “just make things worse” if she went to the union about it:

“If I report it to the union, it’s kind of like saying to my employers, well ‘you ain’t doing it’, it’s getting somebody to lean on them and antagonising this guy and everybody else is going to start feeling threatened.” (Lesbian, caretaker/handyman, 40s)

One interviewee had sought assistance from the union following harassment by a fellow union member, but this had resulted in disappointment. We saw in 7.4.1 that union rep and bus driver Alison had faced a prolonged campaign against her from a union member who felt that she had not represented him adequately, directing the harassment at her lesbian sexuality. Neither management nor her union took her complaints seriously, but in the end she was satisfied with the way her employer dealt with the case, and her harasser lost his job. However, she remained very disappointed at the lack of response from her trade union, despite their public stance against anti-homophobic harassment. Although she received support from her union convenor, backing was not forthcoming through the union structures, and, many months later, she was still waiting for a promised meeting to take place. This had left her feeling that the union could not be relied upon to support lesbian or gay members:

“There’s a little bit of me now that says [...] just suppose a man came out as gay here and said I need help from the union, I’m sorry I can’t tell him that he’s going to get it, because he won’t, I didn’t.” (Lesbian, bus driver, 40s)

Thus while trade unions were felt to be valuable in their traditional bargaining areas of pay, redundancy and restructuring, or in their role in representing members over work performance issues, they were less successful in addressing behaviour by colleagues - often fellow union members - such as sexual, racial or homophobic harassment, in part owing to the shape and degree of inequality (Acker, 2006b) in union organisations,

characterised by white, male-dominated hierarchies, and their apparent lack of response to homophobia in the workplace. Admittedly, these are also issues that management finds difficult to tackle, and employees may be reluctant to make a complaint. However in these two examples, lesbians felt that management had dealt with homophobic harassment, where, in one case, the union had not, despite being asked. This raises the question of whether this form of harassment remains less visible – or perhaps more legitimate – in union organisations, just as in employer organisations, than sexual harassment, reinforcing Acker’s (2006b: 452) argument that non-heterosexual sexuality is almost always invisible in organisations. As we saw in Chapter 7 that sexual harassment at work is a form of control over women, rather than an expression of desire, so anti-gay harassment of a fellow union member can be seen here as an attempt to control who has power and influence within the union through asserting dominant heterosexuality. However in this case it was ultimately unsuccessful as a result of employer, rather than union, action against the harasser.

8.5.3 Attitudes towards women’s and LGBT separate organising

Interviewees expressed a range of attitudes towards taking part in, and the strategy of, specific measures for women, whether women’s conferences or committees, reserved seats on union committees or self-organised groups for women and other groups facing discrimination.

These differences are exemplified in the contrasting feelings of two women bus drivers and union reps about attending a women’s conference:

“Some of the women [...] they’re fabulous, they’ve really worked hard to get women’s rights through the union and through employment and without people like that we wouldn’t be as far on as we are, even though in some ways we’re not very far, but we’re a lot further on than we would have been without people fighting the cause, and it’s quite *uplifting* going to a women’s conference, it really is, because I find that if you go to a general conference with men and women, the women just don’t get a voice.” (My emphasis, Heterosexual, bus driver, 50s)

“I did go to a women’s conference once and I found it extremely *intimidating* [laughs] [...] I find I am more easily put down by women than by men and I just found it very intimidating and didn’t particularly like it. And anyway, it’s not my view of the world, I don’t see a need really to [...] I don’t see a need to, there’s an accident of birth, you know half of us are one thing and half of us are another.” (My emphasis, Heterosexual, PCV driver, 60s)

These two examples represent very different personal experiences of women-only events: for Liz it was an ‘uplifting’ experience to be surrounded by women

campaigners, where it was easier to get a voice than at mainstream, male-dominated conferences, whereas Stevie found being with women ‘intimidating’ in contrast to the male-dominated work environment with which she was familiar. Underlying these experiences are also different gender identifications and political attitudes towards the strategy of women’s separate organising. Colgan and Ledwith (1996) have characterised trade union women’s gender consciousness as a trajectory from traditionalism to feminism. Traditionalists work within a solidaristic trade union framework which sees separatism as divisive, and argue for ‘equality’ rather than differential treatment based on sex, and Stevie’s views sit at this end of the trajectory. Despite her anger at male colleagues’ refusal to select women candidates for union positions and her willingness to challenge male-dominated union hierarchies, she does not identify with feminism: “I’m not a feminist, I’m an egalitarian”. In line with this, she viewed reserved seats on union committees for women as tokenism: “It’s a slap in the face, isn’t it? You can’t have me as proper person, you can have me as a token woman”.

In contrast, Liz’s view of the benefits of specific measures for women fits with Colgan and Ledwith’s feminist position. Trade union women display a similar range of opinion on identification with women’s groups as we saw in relation to professional networks and employee groups, but for some trade unionists there is an additional fear that women’s organisation within the union can weaken the class solidarity on which trade unionism is built.

In unions with both women’s and/or LGBT groups lesbians have a choice over participation. As with employee networks discussed above, lesbian interviewees tended to prioritise activism in LGBT over women’s structures. Bus rep Maureen was active in her union’s LGBT network, while also pursuing women’s issues vigorously in her rep role, but felt a strong commitment to supporting fellow LGBT trade unionists. Her activism as a rep was driven in part by a desire to tackle equality issues with members, as well as the employer. She had encountered homophobia among reps and members and hostility towards members who were HIV positive or transgender, which she challenged forcefully, seeing it as part of her union role to confront members’ prejudice. The influences on women’s (and men’s) participation in trade unions has been the subject of much interest (see Kirton, 2005; 2006) and commitment to addressing equality on gender, race or sexuality grounds offers one motivation for participation (Healy et al., 2004), together with the existence of self-organised groups (Colgan and

Ledwith, 2000: 250), as well as individuals' own feelings of injustice (Kelly and Breinlinger, 1996).

Amy had been active in both the women's and LGBT networks in her union, but found that the women's group had become less active. Instead she had prioritised the LGBT group, where she felt most comfortable, although she was vocal about her commitment to feminism. She believed that the women's network did not have such clear aims as the LGBT group:

“We know what our issues are as LGBT people and we know what's important to us, and whether that thing happens to be connected to transport or not, it may not be because sometimes the bigger picture and the bigger issues [...] going on everywhere, and if that's influencing your life, it's going to be influencing you at work.”
(Lesbian, manager, transport, 30s)

While the number of lesbian union activists in my study is small, other research supports a tendency to favour LGBT activism by lesbians: Colgan and Ledwith (2000: 251-2) examined the choices black, disabled and lesbian women trade unionists made about participation in self-organisation in public services union Unison and found that lesbians tended to prioritise LGBT activity, although were involved in women's structures too. Black women and lesbians felt a clearer sense of their oppression on grounds of race or sexuality than gender, and some felt it was necessary to fight to maintain lesbian and gay visibility within the union. Similarly in my research, for Amy it was important that the LGBT group maintained its presence as “a thorn in the side” of the union's executive committee. Although a small group, it was very active, and Amy believed they were “punching way above our weight”.

The strategy of separate organising within unions remains a controversial one among both men and women (Kirton, 2006) and self-organisation is regularly open to challenge within unions (Colgan and Ledwith, 2000: 245). Indeed two reps noted that their unions' separate equality groups had faced the threat of closure by the union mainstream, using the argument that the groups had done their job, a view which was seen as “absolute bullshit” by union rep Annette. Self-organisation was seen by bus rep Maureen to be vital to giving sexual minorities a voice and maintaining the visibility within the union of the discrimination that they continue to face at work and outside of it. Any threat to it would be fought by its members:

“Well I'll be there fighting to keep it as it is, trust me. To keep it strong, because we are a member union [...] we're not handing over the power to officers who dictate

and tell you what you do. Sorry, you're not gay, you can't dictate, you can't talk, you can guide us but cannot experience some of the things that we've gone through in our lives, the discrimination." (Lesbian, bus driver, 60s)

Maureen emphasises the importance of giving voice to those who have experienced discrimination, a key principle of self-organisation. She recognises that officers may "guide" LGBT members, but not "dictate". The principle of LGBT members organising separately from heterosexual members and so providing a 'safe space' from heterosexual hegemony (Bairstow, 2007: 395) is established in several trade unions and is distinct from the LGBT staff networks discussed above that are also open to heterosexual staff. There are, of course, other differences between the aims of union and employer-based LGBT groups, and political identity, as well as sexual identity, will shape individual participation. Amy has a politicised identity as a socialist, a feminist and union activist, and this is reflected in her choice to be active in the union's LGBT group rather than the LGBT staff group in her organisation:

"The union's group is more political, obviously, so there are wider issues. The [staff group] is about LGBT people in [the organisation], so I think maybe that's a bit narrow and I can do more if I'm in the union's group [...] with the union, you're there fighting and it's a different thing. Yes we are a support group and we're there to support people in the union who are LGBT, but at the same time we're there fighting for other things and pressuring the government." (Lesbian, manager, transport, 30s)

Amy was unusual among the professional/manager interviewees in my study – both heterosexual and lesbian – in that she was active in her trade union. We saw that few professional/managerial interviewees were union members, due to patterns of union organisation within the sectors, however Amy's political identity led her into union activism. Other lesbians in professional positions were more likely to participate in less politically motivated staff LGBT networks.

8.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored women's attitudes towards and experiences of seeking support from other women and LGB people, connecting theories of processes of gender and sexual identification, participation and organisational inclusion and exclusion, and drawing together themes of Chapters 6 and 7.

Women's experience of relations with female colleagues was shaped by feelings of identification with their own and the opposite sex, often rooted in childhood identifications, as well as politicised identities for a small number. But this is also

influenced by organisational culture that may deter bonding with female colleagues, particularly where women feel pressure to fit in with a male environment, thus minimising the potential for mobilising collective power (Bradley, 1999) among women. Based on the empirical data, I suggest that Bradley's (1996) threefold categorisation of identities as passive, active and politicised does not capture the position of some whose gender identity is neither passive, active nor politicised. In response to male-dominated environments some adopt, in some circumstances and on some occasions, an oppositional or 'counter' gender identity in which they play down aspects of femaleness in trying to "become one of the boys", emphasising commonalities with male colleagues. This identification may deter participation in networks for women.

Four sources of support for women in male-dominated work were examined in this chapter: informal support from female colleagues (support from male colleagues was discussed in 7.3.3); industry and professional networks; staff networks established by employers; and trade unions, in particular their separate women's and LGBT structures. While each offered different forms of support and assistance, there were common themes in interviewees' decisions about participation. Practical benefits were highlighted, such as the training, work placements and financial support on offer through the BWW project, or career development and networking opportunities through women's professional networks and staff networks. This indicates a degree of instrumentality in women's choices about participation. But in addition, support from other women in a similar situation was a strong motivation, with some suggesting that groups such as WAMT or the Leicester craftswomen's support group enabled them to continue in their male-dominated careers, without which they may have left. For a small number of interviewees, seeking support from other women was driven by an active or politicised feminist identity – and the networks themselves varied in identification with feminist aims. Only WAMT was an expressly feminist organisation, at least in its original aims. Some professional networks appeared to disassociate themselves from feminism, although it was argued by one participant that providing support for women in male-dominated careers was necessarily a feminist activity.

A politicised socialist identity was expressed by a small number of interviewees who had chosen to participate in their trade unions, whether through mainstream union structures, such as being a union rep, or in separate structures for women or LGBT

members, or both. In some cases a trade union identity based on class solidarity was seen to conflict with separate organising for women or LGBT members, reflecting the traditionalist position of Colgan and Ledwith's (1996) typology of trade union women's gender consciousness, which for some may also be connected to a counter gender identity, as a means of managing within the male-dominated work (or union) environment. However for others, their experience of discrimination or a commitment to tackling equality issues had provided a motivation for union activism, including in mainstream positions, echoing the findings of other research (Colgan and Ledwith, 2000; Healy et al., 2004; Moore, 2011).

Consistent with patterns of union organisation in the construction and transport sectors, non-professional interviewees were more likely to be members of and active in trade unions, while professional/managerial interviewees tended to participate in professional networks or staff network groups established by their employers. It was shown that non-professional or operational staff did not participate in LGBT staff networks, which were predominantly made up of professional or managerial staff. This was due in part to shift patterns of operational staff, but also to the practice of networks to permit supportive heterosexual staff and managers to attend, which can be a deterrent to staff who are not out at work. As we saw in Chapter 7, this can be more difficult for those in operational or outlying parts of the organisation. Furthermore, I pose the question of whether the emphasis on opportunities for professional networking and the organisational benefits of the network groups stressed by some participants might be indicative of a dominant ethos that is more appealing to professional staff than operational or non-professional workers. Thus while employee networks may be a way for organisations to overcome the usual invisibility of minority sexuality in organisations that Acker (2006b) noted, class differences between occupational groups may mean that such benefits are not felt equally across the organisation.

Sexual orientation was not found to be a source of differentiation in workplace relations with other women, with some lesbians feeling more comfortable in male-dominated environments, whereas others valued opportunities to socialise or work with other women. Thus aspects of a 'counter' identity were as likely to be adopted at times by lesbians as heterosexual women. A greater difference emerged in participation in staff networks: only a few heterosexual interviewees had attended women's staff networks, whereas several lesbians had participated in LGBT networks, which they had prioritised

over women's groups. This represented a more active, or in some cases politicised, identity based on sexual orientation than on gender. The need to overcome the invisibility of minority sexual identity, both in organisational as well as individual terms, was the motivation.

Single identity-based groups, however, carry the danger of implying or suggesting a homogeneity among members, identified above in relation to the greater appeal and accessibility of LGBT groups to professional staff. Additionally, women's diversity makes it unrealistic to see women as a single interest group with common concerns, presenting tensions for separate organising (Colgan and Ledwith, 2000). This was seen in a black lesbian's reservations about participating in her organisation's women's or BME groups, where she feared her lesbian identity may not be accepted. Although the LGBT group was both male and white-dominated, she had not felt out of place as all of her identities were apparent. This highlights the need for identity-based networks to develop an 'intersectional sensibility' (Crenshaw, 1991; Healy et al., 2011) to ensure the groups are inclusive, including attention to occupational class-based differences. However interview evidence suggests that it remains necessary to strategically focus on particular forms of continuing discrimination, as some were doing through their union LGBT structures, and were resisting attempts to 'mainstream', or more likely marginalise, their concerns by abolishing forms of separate or self-organisation.

This chapter has thus illustrated the connections between the dialectical process of individual and collective identification (Jenkins, 2004) in which gender, sexual orientation, class, ethnicity or the intersections of these, can be invoked in decisions to participate in formal or informal structures of support. However, informal exclusionary practices by male colleagues, or the invisibility of minority sexuality, can deter participation. Nevertheless, exclusionary or discriminatory practices of organisations – both employers and trade unions – can prompt active or politicised identities leading to the mobilisation of collective power resources (Bradley, 1999) through a range of support networks and structures.

9 The organisation of work and home life

9.1 Introduction

The continued association of women with domesticity (Cockburn, 1991) and the uneven domestic division of labour between men and women act as a major constraint on women's participation in the labour market, while at the same time facilitating male careers (Walby, 1990). In a reciprocal process, women's economically disadvantaged position in the labour market reinforces their domestic role, which in turn restricts participation in paid work (Arber and Ginn, 1995). Despite significant social change in attitudes towards allocation of domestic tasks representing a greater commitment to gender equality, in reality women still undertake the majority of unpaid domestic work (Wajcman, 1998), with women employed full-time responsible for more than 60 per cent of housework (Kan and Gershuny, 2010).

Wajcman (1998) argues that although feminists have drawn links between women's domestic and caring responsibilities and their labour market position since the 1970s, there has tended to be a separation between sociological studies examining the family and those that deal with paid work. Her careful examination of the division of labour within households of male and female senior managers reveals the crucial interrelation of work and home and shows that "men's careers are still contingent on the sexual contract of heterosexual marriage" (1998: 138), with the largest proportion having full-time housewives at home. Women managers, however, were more likely to be single than male colleagues, or to have partners also working full-time, and to take on the majority of domestic work, despite working the same long hours as male colleagues. The problem for senior women managers is summarised by an interviewee who said "We all need a wife but they only come in one sex" (Wajcman, 1998: 132). This chapter interrogates further this statement and considers two alternative stances: the first is the experience of women who do indeed have a 'wife' – or female partner – to see how lesbians' domestic relationships affect their working lives (Wajcman does not discuss the sexual orientation of her participants); and the second is the extent to which heterosexual women in traditionally male jobs get domestic, or 'wifely', support from male partners to facilitate their working lives. This chapter therefore addresses my research question: how do the domestic circumstances of lesbian and heterosexual women affect their participation in typically male work?

The chapter pays attention to the interaction of two of Layder's (2006) social settings, family and organisation: it is structured to first discuss women's personal relationships – or absence thereof – and their relation to working life, followed by discussion of decisions about having children and an exploration of how childcare is managed in the households of working parents. The other piece of the jigsaw is the work organisation, and here women's working hours and the availability of flexibility within employer policies and the industry are discussed. Concurring with Wajcman's (1998) contention that studies have typically divided into those on work *or* family, rather than their interrelation, I found that research on the organisation of domestic life within lesbian couples has tended to neglect the work organisation as a site of negotiation over flexibility (for example, Dunne, 1998; 2000b; Reimann, 1997), with the exception of Tuten and August's (2006) study, which shows that the extent to which lesbians are out at work affects their ability to benefit from flexible working (see 2.8). In the final part of the chapter, I return to Acker's (2006a; 2006b) framework of inequality regimes to consider whether organising processes within male-dominated organisations are adapting to accommodate the needs of women workers or whether women are still expected to adapt to the unencumbered male norm. This, of course, has important implications for attempts to increase the numbers of women in non-traditionally female occupations.

9.2 Personal relationships and organisation of domestic work

Of the 38 women interviewed, 28 (74 per cent) had a partner, although not all were cohabiting, and 10 (26 per cent) were single. Heterosexual women were less likely to have partners than lesbian interviewees (65 per cent compared to 87 per cent). Around half of partnered heterosexual women were married (eight of 15), while the rest were in well-established relationships. Single women spanned the age range, with the oldest in her fifties, although she described living with a male friend in a relationship where 'he looks after me' and domestic tasks are divided, indicating that the boundary between partnered and single status may not always be sharply defined. Other research finds that women managers and those in professions dominated by men are less likely to have partners or be married than male colleagues (Bagilhole, 2002: 27-8) and among senior managers in Wajcman's (1998: 139) study 27 per cent of women were single or divorced compared to only seven per cent of men. In my sample, though, three of the single women had dependent children (and a fourth had children who were young

adults). All were tradeswomen and greater numbers of non-professional women had dependent children (discussed below 9.3), suggesting that the findings of studies on women managers or professionals may not apply across occupational classes to all women in male-dominated work.

9.2.1 *Heterosexual relationships*

Among heterosexual single professional interviewees, some felt that their long working hours and commitment to career had an impact on relationships outside work.

“I used to be at work all the time and not have any life outside of work [...] I hardly spend any time at home, I don’t really have the time [for a partner] but I suppose if I met somebody I’d make the time for them but I haven’t met anyone that I like.” (Heterosexual, civil engineer, construction, 30s)

“Some men, I mean I went out with one last year, really don’t understand the working long hours thing, and they don’t appreciate how important it is to you, they sort of almost disrespect it because you’re a girl, and I find that really, really insulting and they don’t usually last very long [laughs]. [...] the sort of jobs they do, you can sort of waft out at 5 o’clock, I think they assume you can do the same, but you can’t, if things have gotta be done, they’ve gotta be done. I’m sure eventually I’ll find someone who understands that, but I don’t know when.” (Heterosexual, principal quantity surveyor, construction, 30s)

Tanya alludes to gendered attitudes towards women’s careers, noting that the men she meets do not understand that as a woman she is committed to her career and the working hours that it demands, expecting her to put life outside work above her career. Another senior construction professional Suzie felt that her commitment to her career explained why she had not married: “I am quite difficult to fit around and I can be quite single minded.” However her current partner was supportive of her demanding job that included long hours and regularly staying away from home, but she joked that she had “kissed a lot of frogs” before she found him:

“I have always wanted a partner who’s bright and intelligent and got a good job and particularly perhaps for somebody like that who’s got a good career of their own to fit in with... Most relationships perhaps might be the bread winner in there, the alpha male or whatever of the family. Find a strong, bright intelligent man like that and they’re still prepared to fit round you, I don’t think there’s probably many of them, I am very lucky.” (Heterosexual, director, construction, 30s)

Others also believed that their male partners were to some extent untypical: Fiona felt that the demands of her professional job meant that “it requires a partner who is incredibly confident in their masculinity” believing her partner to be unusual in this

respect, and others thought their partners' lack of jealousy about them working so closely with men was rare.

“He’s in the same sort of field, so he knows what the guys are like on site. A lot of people said he’ll get jealous of you being with guys, he said ‘they’re not like that, I’m more worried for her than jealous’.” (Heterosexual, carpenter, 30s)

“He’s fine about me staying away and all that sort of thing as well. Which I think it would be hard for a lot of guys, if I’ve been away for the last three nights, yes I am there with six guys in a hotel for the next three nights. [...] I am not sure I’d feel that comfortable if he was off with six women doing that.” (Heterosexual, director, construction, 30s)

There was also a feeling among many heterosexual women that their domestic arrangements were in some ways untypical. Carpenter Elaine’s partner does all the cooking at home: “we joke, he’s more like the woman”. We will see below that some women with children also had untypically gendered arrangements for sharing childcare with their partners.

More than a third¹⁵ (six out of 15) of heterosexual partnered interviewees were the main earners in the household, and another relied on the regularity of her income (and anticipated pension) as her partner was self-employed so his earnings fluctuated. Additionally surveyor Ritu had earned more than her husband in the past although now their earnings were equal, and carpenter Elaine was expecting to overtake her partner’s earnings when she received her next pay rise. This group are untypical of heterosexual couples, with research in the 1990s finding that only 11 per cent of married or cohabiting women working full-time had higher earnings than their husbands (Arber and Ginn, 1995: 34). Even if this figure has increased since the 1990s, to one in five as has been suggested¹⁶, the higher proportions in my sample suggest that women working in male-dominated occupations may manage to shift the gender balance within share of household income. Arber and Ginn (1995) argue that women’s greater contribution to household earnings has the potential to challenge the patriarchal division of domestic labour: while the evidence of change in gender roles as a result of greater female earnings may be limited, they argue that “until women have higher earnings than their

¹⁵ In fact the total may be higher as partner’s earnings were not discussed in all interviews.

¹⁶ Daily Mail, 1 February 2010, ‘Rise of female breadwinners as one in five women earn more than their partner’, cites the National Equality Panel (2010) report but I have been unable to find this figure in the report.

partners, it is unlikely that the patriarchal domestic gender ideology will be challenged” (ibid: 26). While we see later that women’s higher earnings have led to an atypical division of childcare within some households, my evidence suggests that the domestic division of labour is not necessarily altered, and normative conceptions persist in which financial dominance in the family is equated with masculinity (Arber and Ginn, 1995). Jasminder’s career success put her in the position of main earner, while her husband “put his career on the back burner”. Nonetheless, she still takes the primary responsibility for domestic life:

“My husband wasn’t brought up to be like helpful in the house, but I think I’ve turned him into, he has to help me, otherwise I’d be, something’s got to give. But he’s alright, he does his bit, the frozen food can go into the oven.” (Heterosexual, director, construction, 40s)

Ritu’s career took priority for a time while she established herself, but this led to jealousy from her husband:

“It’s always the man’s important, because at one point I was getting paid more than him, I was getting more preference than him, and he used to get jealous of me, because as a woman, how can, I’m on top a bit, by profession he’s engineer [...] and he used to get jealous of me. [...] he says to me you spend more time in the office and that’s the reason why you’re getting more opportunity than me. I could laugh, because I know he’s getting jealous, it’s a man thing comes out, isn’t it? The way they talk, ‘I’m a man I should be getting more importance’, and I said I have to establish myself, so I did, so you do need to do that. [...] Normally in Indian culture they don’t like it, the man should be always in higher position than the woman.” (Heterosexual, quantity surveyor, construction, 30s)

Despite the conventions of Indian culture she refers to, Ritu made sure that she was able to establish herself in her career, even though her husband was unhappy. Also from an Indian background, Meeta reported no conflict with her husband over their pragmatic decision for her to carry on working while he stopped work to look after their children, based on her greater earning power as a machinist than his as a cutter. This arrangement had carried on when she became a plumber/gasfitter which increased her earnings substantially.

Femi and Suzie could be said to engage in “negotiating labour” (Hochschild, 1983; Wajcman, 1998) (which we saw women managers employing in Chapter 7) to manage their partner’s feelings about their higher earnings:

“I earn more than him, which initially was, it wasn’t a problem, but you know what men are like, it was an ego thing. But as a woman I think I’ve been able to manage

that, I kind of let him feel that you're in charge of all the finances, don't worry about it, so as long as feels that he's in control I just let him get on with it. [...] And he knows that 'cos he pays all the bills anyway and my money is in savings, so what I do is I pay money into his account, so that gives him more control, so even if I need to spend money, I'm like 'can I have £100 please?' and that kind of makes him feel 'I'm the man', does that make sense? So even though it's my money, it's 'can I have it please?' [laughs]" (Heterosexual, train operator, 40s)

"For example when we go to dinner most of the time I am paying, but he pays for it all on a joint credit card and then when the bill comes in I pay it. [...] I think from his perspective he would feel a bit embarrassed if I was always the one getting the card out. I have to be sensitive to that sort of thing." (Heterosexual, director, construction, 30s)

9.2.2 *Lesbian relationships*

Among lesbian couples, who did not have to negotiate heterosexual masculinity, earnings differences tended not to be an issue, or had been discussed to ensure that they would not become so. Tradeswoman Hannah had been used to being financially independent, but her partner earned twice as much as her, so tended to buy more of "the luxuries". They had discussed the earnings difference to avoid it becoming a problem:

"That's something that came up very early on in the relationship as well, we've always communicated about everything instead of ... because otherwise it just ends up dramas, dramas, dramas, so we've always tried to just be straight about everything and it's working." (Lesbian, maintenance worker, 30s)

Jo, who was earning less than her partner since going part-time, said they were "quite independent" and shared bills and expenses equally. Kath had never lived with a partner, despite having long-term relationships and was in a committed relationship with a woman from whom she lived separately, saying she would "find it very hard to be financially dependent on someone else". The importance of financial independence within several lesbian relationships reflected the findings of other research (Morgan and Brown, 1991; Peplau and Fingerhut, 2004). However this had been threatened when Lesley's ex-partner had offered to support them both when they moved for her job. Lesley rejected the idea of being a 'housewife' at home, having always had her own wages, and was motivated to find work (discussed in 6.2.2).

For lesbian couple Pauline and Anna, who established a business together, there has never been an issue over who earns more money, says Pauline: "I generally have, but Anna's generally done all the work at home so we've never had that 'you earn more than me so I can have this' sort of thing." They are somewhat unusual in being a lesbian

couple running a business in the male-dominated world of surveying, however their division of labour replicates a traditional heterosexual pattern. Pauline describes their intentions when they started the business:

“The idea was that Anna would only work part-time and basically facilitate me in doing the work. Cook me my lunch, have a nice dinner ready, clean the house, all lovely, lovely and that only lasted about a week and then she started getting really busy.” (Lesbian, building surveyor, 40s)

With the unexpected success of the business, Anna’s working hours became full-time, but she retained primary responsibility for running the house in addition:

“I am the housewife, yes I do all the cleaning, shopping. Literally I will see foundations in the morning, I’ll nip to Waitrose, and I’ll see a roof, come home, do the washing. So if at all possible I like to leave here about 3 o’clock so I joke that I’m a part-time surveyor but I do work most of the time 8 till 5. If I’m passing the shops, I’ll do the shopping and I do the logistics of living, Pauline is the surveyor, she just surveys, that’s all she does. So it works alright, I enjoy it.” (Lesbian, building surveyor, 40s)

Although Pauline and Anna have a division of hours and labour that replicates patterns in many heterosexual relationships, there are, of course, no predefined gender roles and they can arrange their lives to suit their respective strengths and interests, rather than according to gendered expectations:

“I suppose being lesbians it’s quite nice, there’s no rules on who’s going to do what role. I mean [Karen] does cook and she does do a bit of ironing, but I do most of it. But equally I do all of the building stuff around the house, dealing with contractors, anything DIY, drainage, repairs, insulating the roof, equally I do all of that. So it’s nice that there’s no defined roles as to who does what.[...] But we just decide who enjoys doing what jobs more and I quite like doing the house stuff.”

What is significant in terms of women’s employment more widely is Pauline’s belief that she could not be so successful professionally without Anna ‘facilitating’ her career:

“I couldn’t work at the rate I work without Anna doing all of the background stuff really. And it’s important, it’s not a little role, it’s a big role that. And I think most men couldn’t do the work they do without their wives at home doing the domestic side.”

Thus she is supporting the view expressed by Wajcman’s senior manager above that all successful professionals – male or female – need a wife. Thus the traditional male full-time worker model of organising work requirements (Acker, 2006b) remains intact, simply replaced by a female worker (discussed further in 9.5). However Anna is no full-time wife and manages “the logistics of living” on top of her full-time job, a common

pattern among partnered heterosexual women (Kan and Gershuny, 2010; Wajcman, 1998).

We saw above that lesbian interviewees were more likely to have partners (87 per cent were in relationships) than heterosexual women. In an indication of recent legal changes that gave lesbian and gay couples the right to register a civil partnership from 2005¹⁷, six (40 per cent) of the lesbian interviewees were 'married' and another, who had been with her partner for 12 years, discussed how they would have done so, had there not been concerns about her partner's children and inheritance. This represents a more settled group than the wider lesbian population, with 19 per cent of lesbians in a recent survey having registered a civil partnership (Ellison and Gunstone, 2009: 27). It was also notable that most of the lesbians in legally-established relationships talked about being 'married' (the legislation makes a clear distinction in terminology between marriage and civil partnership, though not in rights) and some referred to their partners as their 'wife'. Such terminology can mark an important sign of recognition of lesbian and gay relationships, signifying their equivalence to heterosexual relationships and provide a way for lesbians or gay men to be open about their sexuality in the workplace (discussed in 6.3.2).

9.3 Having children

Less than a third of interviewees had dependent children (11, or 29 per cent). Of the single women, three had dependent children and another had children who were young adults. Of the partnered women, seven heterosexuals had dependent children and a further two had stepchildren, although in one case they had recently left home to go to college and in the other, they did not live with her and her partner full-time. One lesbian also had a partner with adult children and grandchildren, not living with them. None of the lesbians had children, although one had a regular commitment to caring for the daughter of friends (discussed below). It was notable that a far greater proportion of BME interviewees had children (64 per cent or seven of the 11 BME women) compared to white women (15 per cent, four out of 27), which included three of the four single parents. The BME interviewees with children followed the pattern of national data on

¹⁷ The Civil Partnership Act, which came into effect on 5 December 2005, gives same-sex couples the right to register their partnership and acquire the same rights and responsibilities as marriage.

household formation, with Asian women living in married couples, but greater numbers of Black or Black British lone parent households (ONS, 2009: 16).

Although a small and diverse sample, interviewees may reflect the trends observed in other research of higher levels of childlessness among senior women and women in non-traditional occupations (Bagilhole, 2002: 6; McDowell, 1997: 86; Wajcman, 1998: 139; Wood and Newton, 2006: 338-9) than average among women – although the literature centres on managers or professionals. Among interviewees, non-professional women were more likely to have children than professionals – 37 per cent of non-professional interviewees had children compared to only 21 per cent of professionals. This may be partly a reflection of age differences between the two groups, with professional women concentrated in the younger age bands (see Table 7), so may have children later (which is also consistent with national trends for more educated or qualified women to start families later than women with lower levels of qualifications). Untypically, none of the five women in their fifties or sixties had had children. Three were heterosexual (one of whom was transsexual, but had not fathered children previously) and two were lesbians, one of whose partner had children and grandchildren. All had been in their traditionally male jobs for some years, starting at a time, perhaps, when it might have been more difficult to combine typically male work and children, as suggested by construction professional Fiona who thought it was common for women of her generation, those in their late 40s and 50s, who had progressed to her level not to have children. However, she observed a change for women currently in their 30s, who were now more likely to stay in their jobs when they had children, which she attributed to societal changes that had impacted on workplace practices.

Several women in their twenties and thirties discussed the possibility of having children in the future, including two lesbians who had considered adoption. For both lesbians, concerns centred on financial security, with Steph feeling that she and her partner were not financially secure enough yet to have children, while Nadia related the possibility of children in the future to progression at work:

“I’d like to have a family at some point, I’d probably adopt. And that is something that’s in the mix in terms of finances, how’s that going to be financed, yeh, it needs to be paid for in some way and if you have a young child, who’s going to stay at home or nursery fees. I mean some of the guys that have children, quite a few of them, their wives are at home [...] if I was to be with somebody who was earning less

than me, there'd be no point in me staying at home, so that's even more of a reason why I'd need to be motivated about trying to get promoted and get ahead." (Lesbian, engineer, transport, 20s)

She was assuming that a female partner would earn less than her, presumably on the basis of women's average lower earnings than her typically male, better-paid job, and was comparing herself to male colleagues with children, most of whom had wives at home. In this sense she was putting herself in the typical male parenting role rather than comparing herself to the more common pattern of heterosexual women in two-parent households who work part-time (Glover and Kirton, 2006: 7). But she is also reflecting the economic necessity for the majority of lesbians to work in order to support themselves, with little likelihood of being financially reliant on a partner (Dunne, 1997; Schneider, 1984).

For heterosexual women, thoughts about having children in the future focussed on the common concerns of balancing work and childcare, and how this would be achieved within their relationship and constraints of work:

"To be honest I couldn't do this job being a mother... I suppose I could, my other half he works very local to home and he works quite short hours so he could be the one at home with the babies, but there is a sort of social attitude that the mother should probably be the one, the main carer. If he happened to be the main carer then it would probably work out alright, but then you'd never be at home to see the kids and what's the point in having them if you're always away, so I don't know. I've got no massive desire to have children at the moment, it may occur later." (Heterosexual, civil engineer, construction, 20s)

"I don't see myself giving up work if I had a family. The question is could I do this job? Yes I don't see why I couldn't because the council has flexible working, it also has the opportunity to access the server from home and that side of things. Yes I don't see why I couldn't [...] Obviously my other half would have to be supportive because if I ran out in the middle of the night for on-call or whatever then he would need to be at home, but I can't see why he wouldn't be." (Heterosexual, civil engineer, transport, 30s)

For these two professionals, Sarah (in the private sector) could not see her current construction site-based job offering the flexibility needed and suggested she would need to "retire to the office" if she had children, whereas Jess in the public sector thought flexibility would be available. Both, however, knew that they would need supportive partners, but Sarah raised the social expectations on mothers to be the main carer as a possible objection to her husband, who works shorter hours, being the primary carer.

None of the interviewees without children described having ‘sacrificed’ (Wajcman, 1998: 143) having children to their careers, although for professionals such as Sarah, Jess and Tanya, career took priority at least for the time being. Tanya, in her thirties, had not wanted to start a family when younger which had played a part in her divorce, but had not ruled out the possibility “eventually”, but also stated that “I know if I have them, there’ll be a lot of childcare involved because I’m not giving up my career for it”. Cockburn (1991: 76) has argued that all women pay the penalty of being “one of the maternal sex” even when they have no children. But such perceptions are not universally applied to women and lesbians may avoid automatic associations with childrearing, as Anna reported of a previous manager:

“He said ‘I wish I could employ just lesbians’, he says, ‘because you work harder than the men and you’re not going to get fucking pregnant’. So I said ‘well I might get pregnant’ but he says ‘yes well it’s highly unlikely’, and I thought, in his way, he thought that was the sweetest compliment he could pay, and it was a nice thing to say, he genuinely thought that having an office full of lesbians would be fantastic for him.” (Lesbian, building surveyor, 40s)

There are also suggestions¹⁸ that when lesbians do have children, they suffer less from negative perceptions than heterosexual mothers, may be seen as more work oriented and have additional financial responsibilities as the family provider (Peplau and Fingerhut, 2004). While the extent to which lesbian mothers prioritise work or family is likely to vary, it was seen above that lesbians did have concerns about financial security in relation to having children, whereas heterosexual interviewees focused on work-life balance issues.

9.4 Managing childcare

In common with most working parents, interviewees relied on a variety of forms of childcare, whether negotiated between partners, from family members or friends or paid childcare, together with whatever flexibility could be achieved within paid employment.

For the four single parents, who were all tradeswomen, flexibility of employment – whether provided by the employer or through self-employment – was crucial in terms of managing the demands of childcare (see below). In addition, some participants in the

¹⁸ However caution is needed in interpreting these results as the research was undertaken capturing the views of undergraduate students, and a different outcome may result from a study of workers.

two focus groups were single parents and relied on paid childcare; however for one apprentice this cost more than her wages:

“My childcare’s more than I actually get paid... But the government are willing to give you 70 per cent towards it, tax credit, but you’ve still got to find the rest of the money, but my childcare total a month is more than I actually earn a month. So at the moment I’m just coming to work for nothing. [...] but then I know that in the long process I’m gonna be better off in a way than I would be if I was on income support.” (Multi-skilled apprentice, Leicester focus group)

She had weighed up the long-term advantages of training in the trades and felt that it offered her better prospects for supporting her family than other more typically female work available to her (see Chapter 6), but relied on government financial help for childcare to support this decision.

Of the seven women with partners who had dependent children, all worked full time apart from one part-timer, and all shared childcare with their partners. In three cases, their husband took on a greater share of childcare. Plumber and gas fitter Meeta was able to earn more than her husband, so they decided that he would remain at home to care for their two children. Director Jasminder’s husband was able to work from home and his career had taken a back seat while hers had progressed, and railway engineer Judith and her husband had decided before they had children that he would work part-time as he “wasn’t bothered” by his job whereas she had always been “thrilled” by hers. For rail manager Rachel, care for their baby was shared equally with her husband, who was able to work one day a week at home, and had flexibility with work hours. Annette, Femi and Ritu also mentioned the flexibility that their partners had in their jobs to be able to pick up children in emergencies, which was particularly important for those with non-flexible hours and shiftwork such as train driver Femi and train manager/driver Annette. Although Annette worked only three days a week, her shifts included early starts, nights and weekends, so she relied on her partner sharing childcare.

For these mothers then, although it would be an exaggeration to say that they benefitted from a “wife” at home, they all relied, to a greater or lesser degree, on the support of their male partners in order to facilitate their working lives. Some had made the decision, whether for reasons of practicality or desire, to reject the social convention, highlighted by Sarah above, for mothers to be the main carer in favour of the father taking a primary role. It is well documented that moving from full-time to part-time work commonly results in downward occupational mobility for women (Connolly and

Gregory, 2008; Dex et al., 2008; Manning and Petrongolo, 2004) and Judith's evidence suggests there may be a parallel effect for men working part-time:

“Now he's only working three days a week his job is less interesting even than it was before because he's a little bit limited in that he can't travel about quite so much because he's got to be a bit more tied to home. They agreed that when he went to three days a week he would be doing more of a sales, pre-sales type thing, spec-ing up things and that kind of thing. I guess we could have seen that it would be less interesting and he's thinking maybe he won't work at all, so we'll see how we go.”
(Heterosexual, senior signal engineer, 30s)

In this couple, the penalty usually suffered by working mothers was being experienced by the father, who was considering giving up work. She was pregnant with their second child at the time of the interview, so, like other working parents, arrangements were subject to change and renegotiation.

While it is increasingly common for lesbians to raise children (Peplau and Fingerhut, 2004) and an estimated 10 per cent of British lesbians live in households with children (Aspinall, 2009), none of the lesbian interviewees had children. However, one lesbian, together with her partner, had made a regular commitment to care for the baby daughter of some friends, a lesbian couple:

“We have a lot of input in [the baby's] life. And we try and rest now on a Monday together so that we can both spend time with her. And as far as we're concerned, so long as we're in her life, she's in ours. [...] we're committed to her one day a week, and that's a sacrifice we've both had to make, because I need to work a Saturday to rest on a Sunday and a Monday, so that's something that I had to think about.”
(Lesbian, train operator, 30s)

While Lesley and her partner had decided not to have children, she needed to organise her shifts to accommodate the childcare commitment that she had made to friends, suggesting that lesbians may seek alternative childrearing arrangements that do not adopt the model of the nuclear family, critiqued by radical feminism.

For all working women, though, decisions about organising childcare within a couple, together with other forms of childcare arrangement, are crucially made in the context of the flexibility that is available in their employment. As seen here, several women relied on having partners whose working patterns or arrangements were more flexible than their own. This next section examines the flexibility that was available to interviewees in their employment.

9.5 Working hours and flexibility

Untypically for women workers, only two interviewees worked part time, with another two looking for work, and the rest (89 per cent) working full time. This contrasts with a part-time employment rate of 43 per cent for UK women (EHRC, 2010: 389). However part-time workers are much less likely to be found in higher level professional and managerial jobs (Warren, 2004: 104), who represent half of my sample. Of the two part timers, Annette worked part time for reasons of childcare, whereas Jo, who had no children, was completing a university degree.

The construction and transport sectors are known for long working hours, with larger than average numbers working over 48 hours a week (see 5.3). Among interviewees, six said that they regularly worked longer than 48 hours a week, all heterosexual, mostly professionals in the construction industry. However transport professional Judith previously worked 60-70 hours a week, but had cut back her hours since having a child:

“It’s about 50 hours a week which I guess is quite a lot for some people but that seems quite reasonable compared to what I used to do before I had a baby.”
(Heterosexual, senior signal engineer, 30s)

She was one of two women with children who worked over 48 hours – we see below that Ritu feels a need to work long hours to prove her worth. Among non-professional interviewees in transport, working hours varied, with train drivers working around 35 hours, whereas bus drivers worked between 38 and 47½ hours. Bus driver Stevie had refused employer requests to sign the opt-out to the Working Time Directive, which would allow her to work over 48 hours a week, as she already found her shift patterns of four 12-hour shifts “a killer, it really is exhausting”. She believed that working hours were increasing in the industry, noting the increase from a 38-hour week in her previous bus company. For others it was not the overall working hours that were problematic, but the timing and length of shifts, as train manager/driver Annette, who worked three fixed days a week since having children, found:

“I can do a shift that starts at 4am or a shift that starts at 6 o’clock at night and anything in between. [...] The shortest shift is about 8½ hours, the longest is 12, and by the time you’ve got to commute on either side, that adds another 3 hours to your day, so you can be out of home for 15 hours at a stretch.” (Heterosexual, train manager/driver, 40s)

She was about to return to work at the end of maternity leave for her second child, and was actively looking for other work with more manageable working hours. Despite her

employer's attempts to accommodate childcare responsibilities by enabling her to choose fixed days on which to work, she was still considering leaving the job. Her difficulty in reconciling the long and unsocial working hours with childcare, even though she had a partner with flexible work patterns, highlighted the challenge of not only recruiting women into non-traditionally female jobs, but also of retaining them.

Working patterns in operational transport jobs, and in particular shiftwork, were considered by several interviewees to be one of the main barriers to women's increased participation, with some accepting the hours as in the nature of the job. Bus driver Alison felt that women needed to adapt to the role, rather than the job offering greater flexibility: "you're coming into a job that doesn't allow for that, so you have to go with the job, if you want the job, you'll go with it". Alison reflects a common view that the job has certain requirements and constraints which cannot be changed and to which workers must adapt. Nevertheless, we saw in Chapter 5 that there have been limited initiatives by transport employers to accommodate more flexible working patterns in order to attract more female workers – an emphasis on changing the working environment or modifying the organising processes that establish the full-time (male) worker as the norm (Acker, 2006b). However for some, the rhetoric of attracting women drivers did not match practice: the only flexibility offered in Stevie's company as an alternative to a 48-hour week was a zero-hours contract where the company would offer work on an irregular basis.

"It's still based on a 48-hour week and it's too long. I don't think that's particularly female-friendly. My company along with all the others say that they'd like to attract more women but that certainly doesn't help." (Heterosexual, PCV driver, 60s)

Aspects of construction work are also characterised by seemingly irresolvable constraints on working hours and work location (Bagilhole et al., 2000), with the industry retaining a culture of long work hours as "part of its mythology" (Langford et al, 1995, cited in Watts, 2009a: 53). Interviewees commented on the inflexible nature of the industry:

"Flexible working, it's not an industry really where you can incorporate that and I think if you were in a role where you could, they'd be very much open to it. But if you're working on a site you work the hours of the site and you can't say 'I fancy coming in at six and working until four' because the site is open eight until six and you have to be there." (Heterosexual, civil engineer, construction, 20s)

“I genuinely believe employers do their best. The problem is it’s not the employers it’s the industry, unfortunately the nature of construction is it’s quite difficult to bring a building project home with you, the client will have to go and see it. And generally they’re not all within a ten mile radius of where you live.” (Heterosexual, director, construction, 30s)

Both Sarah and Suzie believed that their major construction firms would be amenable to flexible working where possible, but Sarah thought it would mean a move from project management on a construction site to a head office position in a role such as “business development”, indicating the processes of internal occupational segregation that often result in women occupying less prestigious or well-paid positions. Professional interviewees working for private construction firms typically started work between 7am and 8am and often worked a 10 to 12-hour day, with some also taking work home at evenings and weekends, confirming the pattern of long hours found in the industry. Women in these positions are thus adapting to the organisation of work established on the model of an unencumbered male worker (Acker, 2006b: 448).

Working long hours is a further way in which women in male-dominated work can feel they have to prove themselves to be as good as a male worker, and gain acceptance from male peers by following masculine work models (Watts, 2009a). The pressure to “not make a big song and dance about being female” as noted by Judith (see 6.3.1) may militate against requesting family-friendly working hours. Ritu, the other mother who worked more than 48 hours a week, said that her working hours had led to “family problems” with her husband over childcare, but she felt that her ethnicity and gender combined to increase pressure to work long hours to prove herself:

“I work around 12 hours a day and I come on Saturday as well, and if I’m a man, I probably should not have done that much to establish, but I’m a woman so I have to establish myself that I can achieve what they can achieve. [...] This is the other thing, because I’m from an Asian background and I came from India 11 years back, so coming from India and working in the construction industry in the UK is not very easy, you have to really establish to get there, you have to work really. I think I totally understand, without working hard you’re never going to get anywhere. [...] I haven’t had holiday for nearly three years, I take like one week off some time. That’s it, I don’t take more holidays, I work in Christmas, I work on Saturdays, because this is construction industry, you can’t say no.” (Heterosexual, quantity surveyor, construction, 30s)

Ritu hoped that once she had established her credentials sufficiently she would be able to achieve a better work-life balance. Indeed there was some evidence from other interviewees that once they had reached a certain position, greater flexibility was

possible, resulting from increased confidence and positional power. However there may be a danger that that point may always be at the “next level”; Tanya, the most senior female surveyor her organisation, hoped that at the next level there would be “more managing, less doing”, giving her more time that could facilitate starting a family.

For tradeswomen too, the early start times on construction sites, as well as the distance to travel to work, were difficult for women with children to accommodate, particularly single parents reliant on paid childcare which was not normally available so early in the morning. This presented a further obstacle to pursuing a career in the trades, as work experience on site was normally required in order to complete their qualification (see Chapter 5). In view of these constraints, interviewees found various ways to acquire and use their skills in other environments, such as maintenance roles, self-employment or working in the public sector.

The public sector is known for offering a greater range of flexible working arrangements than the private sector (Hayward et al., 2007; Kersley et al., 2004), and this was borne out by several interviewees, with professionals in the public sector reporting greater flexibility over start and finish times, ability to work part time or work from home on occasion, as well as beneficial maternity leave provision. Furthermore, flexibility was seen by tradeswomen as one of several advantages of working for a local authority that had positive policies of both employing a direct labour force to maintain their housing stock and of seeking to recruit and train women workers (see Chapter 5). This was particularly important for the single parents for whom the council’s flexible working policies enabled them to balance work and home lives in a way that other construction sector employers might not have done.

“At the moment I’ve gone onto part-time and the Council are very supportive of it and they’ve said you can either do just a couple of days a week or you can work less hours each day, so they were very understanding about childcare issues, but it is mainly if you’re qualified. As an apprentice it’s slightly more difficult. [...] Luckily, as I say, where we are, work are very understanding about [childcare responsibilities], but I think it’d be completely different if you were a sole female working out in a private firm, it’d be a lot more difficult.” (Painter and decorator, Leicester focus group)

Focus group participants also pointed out the economic benefits to the Council of offering flexibility and retaining experienced staff, as well as its feasibility in terms of organisation of work:

“I mean if the Council have paid for you to do an apprenticeship and put all that time and effort into it, and then for whatever reasons, if it is childcare, then if you couldn’t do part time then you’d have to possibly consider giving your job up and that wouldn’t be beneficial to the Council at all [..]” (Painter and decorator, Leicester focus group)

“We work on appointment systems and you generally know what work you’re gonna be doing, [...] the next day or the next week, so your boss can programme you in just for enough work for the days that you’re working, so it’s not that you’re gonna be falling behind on work, you’re just given work for the days that you’re there.” (Multi-skilled apprentice, Leicester focus group)

In contrast to the relative security offered by public sector employment, Donna had another solution to flexible working: “Self-employment, I think, is the way to go, as single parents.”

“[Self-employment] offers us flexibility and in the trades that we want to do, so we’ve got that income that we need to support our families, as well as flexibilities, [...] because you can pick and choose your own hours and you don’t have to start earlier than 8 o’clock.” (Heterosexual, trainee plumber, 20s)

Cheryl, also a single parent, had given up a general maintenance job because it offered no flexibility over the 6am start time. She too felt that self-employment provided better work-life balance:

“I don’t want to be working first and being a mum second, I’d rather be a mum first and then work second. I want to work where it’s working around my children.” (Heterosexual, electrician, 30s)

As neither had yet embarked on self-employment, they may hold a rather rosy view of the freedoms it offers. Nevertheless, Kath felt that self-employment gave her the flexibility to do other things she wanted, although she had no children and was aware that this permitted her the freedom to work late if necessary:

“I almost never work at the weekends. With the fact that I’ve been able to study part time for the last sort of five years. I mean it’s been difficult, but it does feel like a real luxury in a way to be able to do – I’m basically working three days a week more or less and then taking bits of time off to do more. So that’s pretty flexible. I do feel like I’m not a slave to work really.” (Lesbian, furniture maker, 50s)

For several tradeswomen interviewed who did not have the security of local authority employment, running their own business, often with other women (see 8.2), was their aspiration as a means of gaining control over their working conditions and income. This may be seen in part as a result of the failure of the construction industry to accommodate the working hours required by women, particularly those with children,

as well as a response to the sexualised and sometimes hostile work culture seen in Chapter 7. Self-employment may offer a profitable and flexible solution for some – it appears to suit Pauline and Anna, who established their firm in order to retain the rewards for their labour. However, as we saw earlier in this chapter, while it gives flexibility for the couple to organise their hours and domestic tasks between them, it does not avoid Pauline working long hours and travelling away from home, typical of the industry.

Little difference in working hours was found between heterosexual and lesbian interviewees, although all who worked over 48 hours were heterosexual, but this appeared to be a feature of this group's position in the occupational hierarchy rather than their sexuality.

9.6 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the domestic situations of lesbian and heterosexual women to consider the relationship between participation in male-dominated work and home life. The interviewees bear some similarities to women in other studies of male-dominated work who were less likely to have partners or children than men in equivalent roles. However the literature on this phenomenon has focused on professional or managerial positions, and my sample indicated different patterns of childrearing for non-professional and ethnic minority women, as well as a greater likelihood of partnership among lesbians. Such a small qualitative sample cannot claim to show general trends among women, but nevertheless points to the need to focus attention on the variety of women's experience according to occupational class, ethnicity and sexuality. Underlying the comment at the start of the chapter by Wajcman's (1998: 132) senior manager that "we all need a wife but they only come in one sex" was a normative presumption that, of course, this was not available to women. However lesbian surveyor Pauline did benefit from a 'housewife', as her partner Anna took responsibility for domestic tasks while also working for their firm (officially part time but in reality she did full-time hours). As lesbian partners they occupy the same position in the gender hierarchy (Dunne, 2000a: 140) and are freed from the conventional gender division of labour, although the arrangement they have chosen replicates common heterosexual patterns: indeed primary earner Pauline believes that she would be unable to commit herself fully to her work without Anna's support in

managing “the logistics of living”, comparing herself to heterosexual male colleagues who could not do their jobs without domestic support. Pauline and Anna are unusual in that they run their business together so have greater control over working arrangements, however they too were constrained by the requirements of their industry and Pauline felt that to succeed she needed to work long hours and travel away from home.

While use of the term ‘wife’ within lesbian relationships may have been critiqued by radical feminism for replicating heterosexual institutions (and there have been considerable debates with lesbian and gay/queer politics over the strategy of normalising gay relationships through ‘marriage’, see (Richardson, 2004)) several lesbian interviewees referred to their partner as their ‘wife’ and a high proportion had registered a civil partnership, giving rights equivalent to marriage. Recent civil partnership rights may reinforce the greater acceptance of minority sexuality and increased confidence among some LGB people, combined with a normalising effect in the workplace (see 6.3.2). Thus the emphasis on financial independence within lesbian relationships found in other studies (Morgan and Brown, 1991; Peplau and Fingerhut, 2004), perhaps influenced by a residual feminist politics, may be shifting as the framework of rights develops.

For most interviewees, work-life flexibility tended to be negotiated within the domestic relationship, as it was often not available from the employer. Also among heterosexual couples, particularly with children, women relied on having partners with more flexible working arrangements. My research findings indicated some male partners who shared childcare responsibilities equally and a few cases where they took on a greater share. Thus the manager’s comment above that wives “only come in one sex” was to some extent challenged by the support available to some heterosexual interviewees from their male partners. I suggested in this chapter that such arrangements were enabled by the greater earnings capacity of female interviewees, supporting Arber and Ginn’s (1995) contention that women’s higher household earnings may challenge the patriarchal division of domestic labour. Up to half of heterosexual married or partnered interviewees had earned more than their partners, which suggests that the entry of women into better paid male-dominated work could have ramifications beyond the workplace, affecting the domestic division of labour. Nevertheless gender-traditional attitudes persisted, and higher-earning female partners sometimes engaged in ‘negotiating labour’ to soothe masculinity threatened by their greater earnings. While

there was adaptation within relationships to facilitate women's non-traditional careers, there was less evidence of change in the organisation of work to accommodate anything other than the male full-time worker (Acker, 2006b), at least in private sector workplaces. While some felt that employers were willing to accommodate flexibility to retain female staff, in reality few women believed that construction site work hours or transport shift patterns could accommodate flexible working, accepting the status quo. Evidence from these interviewees suggests that the occupations and sectors in which they work are not benefitting from the wider workplace trends of increased flexible working (Walsh, 2007). Office-based work is sometimes available to accommodate demands for flexible working, but this can result in internal occupational segregation. On the other hand, interviewees in the public sector reported greater flexibility over working patterns and employer willingness to accommodate responsibilities outside work as a means of retaining trained and experienced female employees. The importance of such flexibility was evidenced by the numbers of tradeswomen working for a local authority which actively recruited – and succeeded in retaining – female apprentices and in the comments of interviewees and focus group participants, some of whom were single parents and who would have been unable to do the job without such flexibility. For other tradeswomen with children, particularly lone parents, jobs in the private sector tended not to offer hours that suited childcare responsibilities, so self-employment was seen as the most attractive option. This highlights the constrained context in which women make choices, and leads to speculation about – had they been able to achieve the flexibility that tradeswomen in the local authority enjoyed – whether self-employment, with its additional burdens of attracting work and financial and administrative management, would still be considered the best option. Furthermore, taking this route avoids the issue for employers of adapting to the need of workers who do not fit the male model of full-time dedicated work.

The evidence of this chapter supports Bagilhole's (2002) findings that there has not been a major shift in the gender order in relation to women in non-traditional employment, and that both government intervention and committed leadership in organisations is essential for change (as argued in Chapter 5). Leaving it to women to accommodate their work lives within their domestic relationships is insufficient to achieve much advance in the numbers of women in non-traditional work.

10 Conclusions

10.1 Introduction

“I think actually there was a real thrill about doing a man’s job. I think it was really thrilling. And I think it was very empowering. Yes, I think it was actually that feeling of breaking ground.” (Lesbian, furniture maker, 50s)

Kath’s comments pinpoint an important reason why I believe it matters that women gain opportunities to work in what have traditionally been regarded as ‘men’s jobs’ – the sense of empowerment derived from overcoming the constraints of typically female roles. Several interviewees used the term ‘empowerment’ or commented more widely on the sense of achievement, confidence or strength to be gained from proving that they could “do the same job as a man, sometimes better”. Significantly, all interviewees who discussed their work in these terms were in non-professional occupations (the manual trades or train driving). This is not to say that professional women in male occupations may not also gain a similar sense of gendered empowerment (many were very positive about their jobs), but their professional status already gives them a certain confidence or positional power, making any additional feeling of strength less remarkable. Thus class also matters in women’s access to male-dominated occupations.

Women interviewees, in numerical terms, however, are exceptional, or untypical of the majority of their sex who work predominantly in jobs occupied by other women, or in more gender-balanced roles. This thesis has shown some of the barriers faced by women in male-dominated occupations, operating at the interlinked levels of individual identity, interactions with others in the workplace and organisational and structural processes. But it has also indicated some material and personal benefits to be gained from working in these male-dominated occupations. Although focusing on the specificities of the experiences of this somewhat untypical group of women workers, I believe that the study also offers more widely applicable insights into the gendered, sexualised and classed organising processes affecting women’s employment. In applying theories of intersectionality to an empirical examination of the interaction of gender, sexuality and occupational class in particular sectors, I have tried to show that a fuller appreciation of women’s heterogeneous experience of work and its interface with domestic life is achieved.

Kath's quote is referring to her feelings when she entered the carpentry trade in the 1980s, a time of feminist campaigning to encourage women to take up the manual trades, which had a degree of success for a time. The proportion of women in the trades, though, has barely increased beyond one per cent since. The empirical findings of this thesis can be read both as a story of little change in some respects, but also as an indication of considerable progress in other areas. So while the numbers of women in construction have barely increased – although there has been a small increase in women in professional roles – organisational cultures of large construction firms have changed significantly. For example, sexual harassment in offices is not tolerated as it was a couple of decades ago, while it remains a common feature of construction sites. Additionally we have seen a historically important shift in the last 10 to 20 years in attitudes towards lesbian and gay sexuality, supported by strengthened legal rights, and reflected in this study in the increased confidence of younger lesbians to be open about their sexuality at work. Thus history and context are both in evidence in shaping women's everyday experience of work.

Layder's (1993; 2006) multi-dimensional conceptualisation of the social world has influenced the design and analysis of this study, with his emphasis on the historical dimension of each of the analytical levels of context, setting, situated activity and self (see the research map, 4.4). These levels helped to structure my findings, which are discussed in the first section of this concluding chapter.

The chapter then proposes some original contributions made by this research, reflects on the research process, methods used and some limitations of the study. Finally, it draws out some implications for policy and recommendations for further research, before offering some concluding remarks.

10.2 Review of findings in the light of the research questions

This section evaluates how the research findings answer my five research questions, considers how the theoretical frameworks employed stand up to the empirical data, and, where relevant, discusses the findings in the light of previous research. Finally, it reflects on the interconnections between the analysis of findings relating to each question and considers the value of the multi-level analytical framework outlined by Layder in understanding women's experiences of work.

10.2.1 The current context of the construction and transport sectors

My first research question concerned the contemporary policy context in which women were seeking to enter, and working in, the construction and transport sectors. To answer this, Chapter 5 examined existing statistical and research evidence, followed by empirical data gathered for this research from key experts, observations of events, focus groups and women worker interviews, providing details of recent initiatives to promote women's participation in non-traditional work, in some cases prompted by concern to reduce the gender pay gap.

Experts highlighted the need for both labour supply and demand strategies to address occupational gender segregation, but demonstrated no scarcity of women interested in entering non-traditional occupations, particularly the manual trades, attracted by the potential material rewards. While this thesis does not include the perceptions of those who have not chosen non-traditional work, the examination in Chapter 6 of how processes of identification are intertwined with work choices provides some insights that offer deeper understandings than labour supply explanations of occupational segregation discussed in 2.2.1. For many of the experts interviewed demand-side barriers were of greater significance, referring to the difficulties of getting work placements, employer resistance to "taking a chance" on a woman, male attitudes on building sites and lack of working-time flexibility. The effects of such barriers, on the experience and progress of those already in the industries, are clearly shown in the analysis of women worker interviews in Chapters 7 and 9. Thus my findings lend greater support to Bergmann (2011) and Reskin and Maroto's (2011) emphasis on the barriers women face in male-dominated, blue-collar work in particular, than to England's (2010) explanations relying on women's choices.

Chapter 5 presented evidence from experts that some obstacles can be addressed, where there is the political will to do so, through intervention both on the supply-side through awareness-raising, training and preparation for work, as well as demand-side measures directed at employer and industry levels. Most of the initiatives discussed benefitted from support from regional or national government, as well as political commitment at a strategic level. These findings are consistent with those who have argued for radical changes to the system of training and greater regulation of employment and social relations in the construction industry (Clarke and Wall, 2004: 45); national government commitment to encouraging women into non-traditional occupations, backed by

effective, proactive legislation and budgetary support (Bagilhole, 2002: 191-2); and affirmative action strategies including quotas and targets (Bagilhole, 2002; Bergmann, 2011; Price, 2004; Reskin and Roos, 1990).

The research has highlighted the interconnections between the historical, political and economic context and the implementation of strategies to address women's underrepresentation in non-traditional work, noting that during the period of the research, political and economic circumstances changed radically, as Britain entered a major economic recession and period of drastic reductions in public spending. Furthermore, political control shifted from left to right in national government and in London regional government, with an apparent reduction in commitment to proactive measures prioritising equality action.

10.2.2 Reasons for choosing traditionally male occupations

My second research question concerned the reasons women choose to enter traditionally male occupations and whether these differ for heterosexual and lesbian women.

Decisions reflected the interplay of rational considerations and complex processes of gender and sexual identification. The reasons offered by non-professional interviewees in particular reflected an awareness of the consequences of gender identification in choice of work, conscious that it would provide a better level of income than other typically female work available to them. Several mentioned equal pay to men as one of the attractions of entering 'male' jobs, indicating a high level of awareness of gender pay differences at skilled and manual levels. Non-professional interviewees' work choices thus sought to overcome the consequential allocation of resources based on typical gender identification, as noted by Jenkins (2004). Despite the concern to acquire better pay (particularly among single parents seeking a more secure future for their family), non-professional interviewees earned substantially less than those in professional/managerial occupations: almost half earned less than £20,000 a year, whereas over half of professional interviewees earned over £40,000. Professional women, however, did not make gender pay comparisons in explaining their work choices, as it was assumed that they would have entered a professional field anyway, offering equivalent levels of pay. So despite the concern of non-professional women to improve their gendered occupational position, in reality it seems their location in the occupational class hierarchy has a more substantial impact on their material conditions. England (2010) may be right that 'moving up' into female occupations requiring greater

education is preferable for many working-class women than moving across into male occupations, however for those without college education the better pay offered by male jobs remains an attraction, particularly for lone mothers trying to support a family (Bergmann, 2011: 89).

The different motivations of professional and non-professional groups challenges the emphasis of preference theory (Hakim, 1998; 2000; 2004) on the 'free choice' that women have over work decisions, illustrating instead the constrained nature of such choices, affected by class position, educational background, family circumstances etc, supporting the findings of Devine's (1994) study of a male-dominated profession.

Furthermore, my findings do not support Hakim's (2004) assertion that sex roles no longer matter in people's choices, and instead present evidence that gender and sexual identities are influential in choice of work, both in rational choices made by some, but also at the level of self or individual psychobiography (Layder, 1993; 2006).

Early gender identifications were called upon by women to explain their atypical work choices, with many (mostly heterosexual) describing themselves as a former 'tomboy' to indicate their interests in outdoor activities, preference for boys' company or technical interests. This identification may have freed them to consider entering jobs normally done by men, and perhaps accustomed them to male company, also leading to contact with male work worlds.

Awareness of lesbian sexuality for some affected material choices due to their anticipated need for financial self-sufficiency. While not all lesbians saw a relationship between their sexual orientation and career choice, for some an early rejection of typically feminine roles and heterosexualised relations of work was connected to a growing awareness of an alternative sexuality, thus sexual and gender identifications intertwine to play a part in occupational choice. Recognition of lesbian sexuality was found to have an enabling effect on work choice for some, as coming out as a lesbian entailed a rejection of dominant heterosexuality, which can lead to questioning of other dominant norms concerning gendered occupations. This supports findings of the vocational psychology literature (see 2.6.3). Coming to terms with a stigmatized lesbian identity (Ragins, 2008; Ragins et al., 2007) delayed the process of career development for two lesbians now in their forties, therefore their sexuality affected their work outcomes when young, although not necessarily in the enabling way experienced by

others. This suggests that age cohort or generation intersects with sexuality in shaping work choice.

Thus both lesbian and tomboy identifications contributed to explanations of gender atypical work decisions, suggesting the power of normative constructions of femininity to constrain the choices of women. To counter these, an identity associated with masculinity or an alternative sexual identity may be necessary in order to consider unconventional work choices.

Jenkins's (2004) conceptualisation of identity as a mutual constitution of individual and collective processes was valuable in exploring how gender intersects with sexuality to reinforce non-traditional work choices, taking place both in the individual and interaction orders. While the research question concerned differences related to sexual orientation, Jenkins's insight that identification is always consequential also directed the analysis towards material factors in women's choices that highlighted differential impacts stemming from occupational class position for both heterosexual women and lesbians, as well as differing domestic circumstances, playing an equally significant role in women's decisions.

10.2.3 Women's experience of male-dominated work

My third research question concerned how women's experience of male-dominated work is differentiated by their sexual orientation and occupational class. I began the analysis in Chapter 6, using Jenkins's dialectical concept of identification, which was further developed in Chapter 7 to consider the interactional level of workplace relations.

Jenkins's conceptualisation moves us from the individual order of how identity is constituted in relation to self, to the interactional order where identification by others is in focus. Here Bradley's gendered power resources come into play in interactions between women and men, which are one component of the processes that constitute inequality within organisations in Acker's framework (see 3.6.3). Jenkins (2004: 46) and Acker (2006a: 109) concur that the starting point for processes of identification and practices of inequality within organisations is the body. Notions of embodiment emerged from my data as salient in male-dominated work where women's bodies are ruled out of place, a point graphically outlined by the difficulties women encountered in getting uniforms and protective clothing to fit their female body, still considered a non-standard exception to the male norm. In non-uniformed, primarily

professional/managerial roles, women took great care over their appearance and dress in order to 'blend in' or fit as best they could, balancing masculinity and femininity. Agency was exercised in choice of appearance: some chose to dress as "if I were a man", others tried to be "female rather than feminine", whereas some enjoyed combining painted fingernails and site boots. However the gender-imbalanced emphasis on women's - not men's - bodies reinforces Gatrell's (2008: 14) case that "male domination continues to be maintained via the body", seen further below in relation to harassment.

Lesbian embodiment had an additional dimension in which appearance, clothing and hairstyle may be used to signify their sexuality to others. This may be directed at both other sexual minorities and the heterosexual majority, so could function as an indication of their unavailability to men and as part of the process of disclosure of sexual orientation. The visibility of organisational practices and culture in relation to minority sexuality interacts with individual decisions about disclosure, taking place in workplace interactions. The wider socio-political context is also significant, and my research found that younger lesbian interviewees tended to be more confident to be out at work, feeling their sexuality to be a "non-issue", a feature both of the increased social acceptance of minority sexuality and the culture of the organisations in which they worked. However an "intersectional sensibility" revealed that for BME lesbians, coming out at work has additional significance for those already in a visible minority as black and female, and is an aspect of difference that some prefer to conceal.

Five components of Acker's framework of inequality regimes were analysed in Chapter 7. Attention to the shape and degree of gender inequality in interviewees' organisations revealed the extent of women's minority status, and indicated the gendered and racialised hierarchies dominated by white, presumed heterosexual, males. This underscored that minority sexuality has traditionally been mostly invisible to the majority, although some organisational efforts have been made to make it visible, for example through employee network groups (see 10.2.4).

Class inequality on the basis of educational background was sometimes invisible in promotion processes, but was perceived as a legitimate form of inequality. While Acker has noted that gender and race inequalities tend to be considered less legitimate now than hierarchies based on class, my data found some women still encountering beliefs of colleagues that they should not be doing 'men's work'. Healy et al (2011) observe that

Acker appears to give equal “analytical weight” to all six components of inequality regimes, and argue that the sub-component of informal workplace interactions is crucial in the reproduction of inequalities, often undermining the good intentions of formal practices. My evidence supports the priority given to informal processes while ‘doing the work’, which frequently contradict formal policies and practices, in the reproduction of inequalities of gender, sexuality and occupational class. However I would add that these intertwine with the component of control and compliance, which requires equal weight. Evidence was provided of harassment of interviewees, both some years ago and more recently. Sexual harassment is described by Acker variously as an aspect of informal interactions (2006b: 451) and an element of control and compliance (2006a: 123). Extending this to include homophobic harassment, I suggest that one supports the other, as the intention of harassment is to control, while it is typically practised within informal interactions. The reluctance of those suffering harassment to complain for fear of being seen as a ‘troublemaker’ (also noted by Healy et al (2011)) maintains the contradiction between formal policies and informal practice. Informal practice is thus of greater significance in daily experience of work than formal policy statements.

Examination of informal workplace interactions revealed the heteronormative assumptions pervading the experiences of all women in male-dominated work whether in relation to; questioning about their interest in relations with men; a presumption that male advances are welcome or even flattering; assumptions that all women in such jobs must be lesbians; the expectation that lesbians who come out at work are still sexually interested in men; and presumptions around women’s reproductive role, to name just some.

While some interviewees exercised the gendered power resource of positional power (Bradley, 1999) over male colleagues by virtue of their management positions, this was not always sufficient to deter men from reasserting their dominance through deployment of sexual power. However positional power derived from class hierarchies in the construction sector was a deterrent to the harassment of professional women on building sites, whereas tradeswomen were still subject to such behaviour. Professional women noted most progress in removing sexual harassment from office environments through organisational efforts, whereas it tended to persist in locations in which non-professional women worked, such as building sites, train depots and bus garages, further from organisational headquarters where influence of corporate policies was weaker

(Paap, 2006). Furthermore, Paap's (2006) analysis of 'pigness' on construction sites was useful in understanding interactions of class and gender, showing how working-class masculinity mobilises sexuality to assert power over both women and other men who are considered insufficiently masculine.

Sexual orientation to some extent differentiated interviewees' experience of harassment. Lesbian interviewees had not faced the physical sexual harassment suffered by some heterosexual women, although three identified persistent cases of verbal harassment directed at their sexual identity or atypical gender presentation, revealing how gender *and* sexual identity may be the target of heteronormative workplace practices. Evidence of less developed organisational responses to the occurrence of homophobic harassment leads to the conclusion that homophobic discrimination may be less visible to employers than sexual harassment, lending support to Acker's view that minority sexuality remains less visible in organisations.

While some have argued that foregrounding coercive sexuality risks neglecting the element of pleasure in heterosexual work interactions and underplaying the potential for women to assert sexual power, my interviewees in settings with a high degree of gender imbalance expressed a greater concern to 'manage' male sexuality to make the workplace tolerable. Thus sexual power was primarily exercised to reinforce the existing heterosexual power relations rather than to disrupt them.

10.2.4 Experience of support structures, networks and trade unions

In addressing my fourth research question which considers women's attitudes towards and experiences of participation in support structures and networks, including trade unions, I linked theories discussed in Chapter 6, taking a broadly individual (Layder's level of self) focus on identity, and in Chapter 7, with an emphasis on organisational context (setting), to examine how participation in separate women's or lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) groups is shaped both by processes of identification and experience of organisational exclusion or marginalisation that are one component of the "inequality regimes" identified by Acker (2006a; 2006b).

While diverse forms of potential support for women in male-dominated work are discussed – informal support from other women, professional and industry networks, staff networks within work organisations and trade union women's and LGBT groups – common themes are seen to shape participation. The empirical evidence supports

Jenkins's (2004) dialectical process of individual and collective identification, but I argue that it indicates a need to expand Bradley's (1996) typology of passive, active and politicised identities to include a 'counter' identity in which women seek, in certain contexts and at certain moments, to identify with the opposite gender. This helps to explain why some women do not seek support from other women or women's groups, affected by the interplay of their own gender identifications and the male-dominated social settings in which they are located. Furthermore, single identity-based groups may seem to take insufficient account of women's heterogeneity, and Chapter 8 showed that lesbians tended to have stronger active or politicised identities leading to participation based on their sexuality than their gender. The lesser visibility of minority sexuality and the continuing discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation make this a more pressing cause for action than gender disadvantage for some. The analysis illustrated that single identity-based groups must demonstrate an 'intersectional sensibility' (Crenshaw, 1991; Healy et al., 2011) to cater for the heterogeneity of employees within an identity group, recognising, for example, the difference that ethnicity may make to disclosure of sexual orientation and participation in support networks.

In general, professional/managerial and non-professional groups tended to participate in different forms of support networks due primarily to their separate occupational structures. In construction, professionals have separate networks from women in the manual trades, which address different needs based on class differences: Women and Manual Trades offered practical support to unemployed women and others seeking to enter the trades, whereas professional networks in construction offered career development support for mainly degree-educated women. In transport, again different occupational structures tend to delineate the support available. In organisational staff networks there could have been overlap in participation, however participants were mainly professional or managerial staff, as attendance is often practically difficult for non-professionals in operational or shiftwork roles, also a finding of other research (Bond et al., 2009; Colgan et al., 2006). I suggest additionally that the emphasis on professional networking and organisational benefits of employee groups may have greater appeal to professional and managerial staff, thus limiting their attraction to those in operational roles where progression is perhaps more limited or linear. Instead many non-professional interviewees in transport participated in their trade unions, either in mainstream structures that often required them to challenge the "inequality regimes" in

male-dominated unions, or in separate union equality structures. As with employee networks, lesbians showed a greater propensity to take part in union LGBT groups than women's groups, reinforcing the priority given to raising the visibility of minority sexuality issues.

10.2.5 The impact of domestic arrangements on work

While feminist scholars have highlighted the reciprocal relationship between women's economically disadvantaged labour market position and their greater share of domestic life, which in turn restricts their capacity to participate in work outside the home, there has been a tendency for sociological studies to separately examine the family or paid work (Wajcman, 1998), which I also observed in studies of lesbian relationships. Furthermore gender studies, such as Wajcman's (1998), of the ways in which the domestic division of labour facilitates male careers usually do not examine sexuality, which pays insufficient attention to how processes of dominant heterosexuality affect the gender order (Dunne, 2000a). Drawing these perspectives together in my discussion of the research question about how the domestic circumstances of lesbian and heterosexual women affect work participation (examining two of Layder's settings, family and organisation) revealed a number of ways in which women in traditionally male work may be untypical of the majority of female workers.

Chapter 9 examined the implications of a quote from a senior woman manager in Wajcman's (1998: 132) study who commented regretfully that "we all need a wife but they only come in one sex". In my study, however, some women did have a 'wife', and I discussed the case of a lesbian couple who had chosen to replicate the traditional heterosexual division of labour of a male full-time worker and female part timer who takes primary responsibility for domestic tasks. In the absence of a gender hierarchy prescribing their roles, the couple had decided on a division of labour that facilitated the career of the primary earner, who recognised that she could not work at that level without a "housewife" to undertake "the logistics of living".

In an indication of social and legal advances on sexual orientation equality, several lesbian interviewees referred to their partner as their 'wife' and a high proportion had registered a civil partnership, acquiring rights equivalent to marriage. This was said to have a normalising effect in the workplace and facilitate coming out to heterosexual colleagues (see also Mitchell et al., 2009). My findings suggest a possible shift from the emphasis on financial independence within lesbian relationships, influenced by a

residual feminist politics, that was found in earlier studies (Morgan and Brown, 1991; Peplau and Fingerhut, 2004) towards a greater legal dependence as rights are accorded to same-sex partnerships.

My discussion also challenged the senior manager's comment that wives "only come in one sex" by highlighting evidence that some heterosexual interviewees relied on the domestic support of their male partners to facilitate their working lives, particularly among those with young children. Several depended on the flexible working patterns of their partners/husbands and in a few cases the male partner took the major responsibility for childcare. Up to half of heterosexual married or partnered interviewees had earned more than their partners, and at least a third did so at the time of interview, a situation which had been a determining factor in their childcare arrangements. Thus the entry of women into better paid male-dominated work can have ramifications beyond the workplace, and challenge the patriarchal division of domestic labour (Arber and Ginn, 1995). Although gender-traditional roles and attitudes persisted within heterosexual households, my evidence indicates that women's non-traditional career choices, which can enhance their earnings potential, may provide an opportunity for reconsideration of the patriarchal domestic division of labour once the economic rationales that justify lower-earning female partners reducing their hours to care for children are reversed.

The domestic relationship was, however, the main site of negotiation over flexibility as little variability in working patterns was available from employers, at least outside the public sector. My evidence suggests two interrelated contributory factors: the long and inflexible working hours prevalent in the construction and transport sectors and the difficulty for women who are trying to fit into these male-centred cultures to challenge existing work patterns. Several interviewees accepted the inevitability of, for example, construction site hours or transport shift patterns, with some believing that women needed to fit into these rather than expecting the job hours to change. Indeed the emphasis on 'fitting in' or 'proving oneself' required similarity to a male worker and militated against making specific demands based on needs as a woman or mother, exemplified by two professionals with young children who were working over 48 hours a week. One had adopted the strategy of not making "a big song and dance about being female", which illustrates the relationship between gender identification (or as I discussed above, efforts to 'counter' identify) and the difficulty of overcoming the

structural obstacles presented by work organisations modelled on a full-time male unencumbered worker.

The public sector offered greater flexibility, and tradeswomen explained how it operated well in practice where a local authority had a commitment to retaining the women apprentices it had trained. For others, self-employment was seen as offering, perhaps over-optimistically, the prospect of flexibility in the manual trades. But for the self-employed lesbian couple discussed above, the demands of the industry still resulted in long working hours for one partner. We saw in 5.5.2 that an initiative by a publicly-owned bus company to offer greater flexibility over choice of shifts in order to attract women drivers had floundered when the company was sold to the private sector. Without such targeted interventions it appears that the organisation of work in these sectors will continue to be largely modelled on the full-time male worker. The consequence is that women who wish to work in these sectors will continue to be the exceptions for their sex, working above average hours or unsocial shifts and may require the support of a ‘wife’ – male or female – to facilitate their demanding jobs.

10.2.6 Using multi-level analysis

Layder’s model (1993; 2006) of the interconnected levels or domains of the social world has structured the discussion of findings from different sources of data collected for this study and has proved to be a valuable way of trying to comprehend the complexity of women’s experiences, both positive and negative, in male-dominated work.

We saw that women’s choice of non-traditional work needed to be understood in terms of both material considerations and processes of gender and sexual identification, which in turn took place within individual and interactional orders (Jenkins, 2004) or at levels of self and situated activity (Layder, 1993). Identification processes continued in the institutional order (Jenkins, 2004) or setting (Layder, 1993) of the organisation as processes of inclusion or exclusion influenced women’s decisions about participating in identity-based support structures, as well as decisions about disclosure of sexual orientation. All this is set within the macro social context (Layder, 1993) of gender and class relations, as well as structural features regulating the industries, systems of training and labour market in which organisations operate that constrain the behaviour of organisations and affect the opportunities available to workers. Also at this level are

the social and cultural norms of gendered expectations and attitudes towards minority sexuality, which we saw influencing individual's choices and behaviour. Thus Layder's and Jenkins's analytical models help to both separate out, and view the interconnections between, the elements that shape everyday working life. This approach enabled us to see, for example, how institutions (schools, families) limited girls' early choices of work, how awareness of alternatives was in some cases prompted by specific initiatives discussed here, how organisational barriers and prejudice often made it difficult for women to find or remain in work, and how organisational equality practices – sometimes driven by gender equality strategies at regional government level – can filter down to provide work opportunities for women. Equally, we saw how these opportunities can be closed down once funding ends or political will to reduce gender inequality wanes.

However, such models have limitations in application to the analysis process. For example, I found it difficult in practice to separate Layder's situated activity of short interactions between individuals from the relationships and organisations within which these were set (settings). In my analysis, most of the significant situated activity, or interactions between people, took place within established relationships, whether between manager and worker, colleagues or family members that influenced the power dynamics in operation. Additionally organisational cultures, rules and norms were deeply implicated in shaping the content of workplace interactions. Therefore my analysis tended to conflate situated activity and setting, particularly when discussing workplace interactions, as it did not seem fruitful or appropriate to hold them separate.

Nevertheless, a multi-level approach to the analysis of women's experiences of work and its interaction with domestic life provided a greater depth of appreciation of the meanings and significance to women of their nonetheless constrained available choices than can the more restricted explanations offered by Hakim's preference theory and macro-level economic theories of occupational gender segregation (see 2.2.1) which tend to operate on a single dimension or level.

10.3 Original contribution of the thesis

A main contribution of this thesis has been undertaking an intersectional analysis focusing on the particular intersections of gender, sexuality and occupational class. Less attention has been paid to sexuality in intersectional analysis than other social divisions

(Hines, 2011), with intersections of sexuality and class a particular absence (McDermott, 2011; Taylor, 2005).

Moreover, while there has been much theorising over how to conceptualise intersectionality, there have been fewer empirical studies that seek to operationalise this complex concept in empirical research that aims to comprehend lived experience of work. Thus my study is making both a methodological contribution by applying and developing existing frameworks to the analysis of uninterrogated intersections, and an empirical contribution through providing data on previously neglected areas.

The study employed McCall's (2005) intercategorical approach to intersectional methodology which applies a multi-group analysis to enable consideration of both advantage and disadvantage. Thus by making comparisons across groups, the empirical data provides evidence to question cumulative conceptions of intersectionality, which, for example, place lesbians at an automatic disadvantage in comparison to heterosexual women, and black and/or working-class lesbians at further disadvantage. The findings suggest that particular organisational contexts and the workplace interactions within them shape the experiences of women workers in more complex ways, with sexuality and class intertwining with gender to produce a variety of outcomes depending on the setting. Additionally, domestic circumstances can both hinder or facilitate work opportunities, with sexuality a differentiating factor.

The challenge to heteronormativity produced by an awareness of lesbian sexuality was felt to facilitate gender atypical career choices by some lesbians, and in one case a commitment to lesbian feminist politics was associated with a move into traditionally male trades. However the difficult process of coming to terms with lesbian sexuality delayed career choices for two lesbians now in their forties, which contrasted with the confidence of some younger lesbians to express their sexuality. This suggests that age is a further significant element in intersectional comparisons considering the changes that have taken place in social attitudes and legal rights in relation to minority sexuality.

As a framework for analysing intersecting forms of inequality within work organisations, I applied Acker's components of inequality regimes, thus a further contribution of my study was to foreground sexuality, where her model prioritises gender, race and class (Acker, 2006b: 445). My analysis showed that sexuality operates in some respects differently from gendered, racialised and class practices due to shifting

processes of visibility and invisibility. The findings to some extent supported Acker's (2006b: 452) assertion that minority sexuality is "almost always invisible to the heterosexual majority" through the identification of cases of homophobic harassment that were initially unrecognised or invisible to organisations (both employers and trade unions), but this assertion was questioned by examples from organisations which had actively taken steps to address sexual identity in the workplace, such as the establishment of LGBT network groups with high-level organisational support. This suggests a process of change taking place in the espoused cultures and priorities of some organisations, driven by a combination of legislative and business demands, supported by gradually shifting social attitudes. Thus attention to historical processes is vital when examining inequality regimes.

However, by analysing the interacting processes of gender, class and sexuality, it was possible to see that both heterosexual women and lesbians in non-professional positions were at greater risk of sexual and homophobic harassment. This suggests that organisational measures to tackle harassment were more effective in changing behaviour in environments where professionals or managers worked than in locations further from the centre such as building sites and bus garages. Additionally, the analysis revealed differences in participation in staff network groups between professional and non-professional lesbian workers. By applying Acker's model, occupational class thus emerges as an additional differentiating factor in experience of harassment and support networks.

Although race or ethnicity was not one of the primary categories for analysis as I chose to focus on the neglected intersections of gender, sexuality and class, Acker's framework helped to reveal processes of differentiation by race also. My interviewees come from a range of ethnic backgrounds, and ethnicity emerged as a salient factor interacting with gender or sexuality at various points, such as in relation to disclosure of sexual orientation or participation in support networks. It also affected workplace relations, offering the potential for cross-gender solidarity, if heterosexualised interactions could be managed.

In heavily male-dominated workplaces, though, gender commonly persists as the primary category shaping experience, expressed, for example, in attitudes about women's unsuitability for 'men's jobs', in men's treatment of all women as objects of sexual interest or in exclusion of women from male professional or informal social

networks. Thus Acker's framework of inequality regimes offers a prism – admittedly a complex one to apply analytically – through which to view not only differences between women, but also the commonality of experience on the basis of gender.

The study provided new empirical evidence of how lesbians and heterosexual women make decisions concerning participation in identity-based groups, and has suggested a modification to Bradley's (1996) threefold distinction between passive, active and politicised identities to add a fourth 'counter' identity to represent the position of women who actively seek, in certain contexts and at certain moments, to identify with the opposite sex. This offers some understanding of why some women do not seek support from other women or women's groups, affected by the interplay of their own gender identifications and the male-dominated social settings in which they are located. It also supports other findings on male-dominated work that women employ a strategy of seeking to be accepted as "one of the boys". In my study this took a variety of forms, whether through appearance, joining in with banter or refusal to complain about sexist behaviour, and was encapsulated by one interviewee in the idea of not making "a big song and dance about being female". While some noted the undesirability or impossibility of achieving acceptance as an 'honorary man', as they could "never be a man as well as a man" (McDowell, 1997: 156), it remained a powerful and consistent theme in women's testimonies of working in these heavily male-dominated sectors.

Although it might be expected for lesbians to find it easier to employ strategies of 'counter' gender identification, the data found heterosexual women and lesbians adopting these at times, as well as women in both groups rejecting them in favour of active or politicised female gender identities. Thus by applying and testing Bradley's typology within a specific setting, the thesis has suggested a fuller conceptualisation of identity to take account of highly gender-imbalanced workplaces. The experience of men in female-dominated work, however, may not require an expanded typology, as the research, reviewed in 2.4, showed advantages to maintaining a distinctive male identity, with little evidence of men seeking to 'blend in' with female colleagues. It is the consequences and power resources of particular gender identifications that are key, as this thesis has demonstrated.

The thesis has addressed a "theoretical blind spot" (Seidman, 1996) or "theoretical heterosexism" (Dunne, 2000a) concerning the experience of lesbian and gay sexuality in mainstream sociology or feminist scholarship. By placing sexuality central – alongside

gender and occupational class – my study not only offers a missing perspective on lesbian experience in male-dominated work, but also pays attention to the workings of heterosexuality in the mainstream, affecting how all women (and men) experience working life. By examining, for example, how both lesbians and heterosexual women manage the interface between their domestic lives and work, lesbian experience is both brought into the sociological mainstream, and attention is paid to how heterosexuality, and not only gender, shapes all women's experience.

Thus by employing an intersectional approach in the design of the study (following McCall, 2005) and its data analysis (following Acker, 2006a; 2006b), the thesis has provided empirical data that addresses several areas of shortfall in research, identified in Chapters 2 and 5. These concern: 1) the experiences of women in non-professional or managerial occupations within the UK construction and transport industries; 2) knowledge of women workers in the transport sector in either professional or operational roles; 3) the experience of women with a minority sexual identity in traditionally male work; and 4) knowledge of the working lives of working-class or non-professional/managerial lesbians.

10.4 Reflections on the research methodology and limitations

My research questions and the research gaps I identified from the literature review required a diverse sample of women worker interviewees, differentiated on the three dimensions of sexual identity, occupational group and industrial sector (and further differentiated within the sample by age and ethnicity, although this occurred naturally rather than as a result of the research design). This inevitably limits the generalisability of the findings (an issue in relation to qualitative samples of this size more broadly) and I have suggested that women in such occupations where they are still a remarked-upon minority are in some ways an exceptional group displaying particular strengths of character (albeit sometimes learnt in response to their work environments). On the other hand, I hope that the data analysis has illuminated processes of heteronormativity that contribute to inequalities in the majority of work organisations, albeit to differing degrees and in various forms.

The small numbers of women occupying each intersectional point, i.e. working-class lesbians or professionals in transport, mean that my findings are often suggestions or indications of themes of interest to pursue in future research (some are suggested

below). A further benefit, as well as difficulty, of taking an intersectional approach is that attention was drawn to the effects of other social divisions such as ethnicity or age, which would also benefit from further exploration. However to avoid the analysis becoming too unwieldy, the focus remained primarily on interactions of gender, sexuality and class, perhaps leaving unexplored some additional areas of interest.

I had intended my sample of women workers to contain a more equal balance of heterosexual and lesbian/bisexual women, but the ‘mainstream’ routes to access participants resulted in almost entirely heterosexual interviewees. This meant that I needed to put greater effort into reaching lesbians through union or employer LGBT networks, and specific publicity, such as that circulated through WAMT. With hindsight, I would have pursued these routes more vigorously earlier in the fieldwork, before time constraints intervened, rather than over-optimistically hoping that some lesbians would be recruited via the ‘mainstream’ methods used. None of the lesbians interviewed were bringing up children, which would have provided a further dimension for analysis of the relationship between domestic organisation and work participation. Access through LGB parenting groups may have assisted with recruitment, but I judged that this would have been highly unlikely to result in participants in the required occupations and sectors. Limiting the study to two sectors, while offering some coherence of context, therefore brings further access difficulties in relation to sexual minorities.

Feminist standpoint theory was influential in my research approach and I found value in “starting off thought” (Harding, [1993] 2004) from the lives of women working in organisations and cultures formed by male understandings and presumptions. The perspectives of these ‘outsiders’ – women’s outsider status represented graphically by the male-form clothing many are still given – offers an angle on the power dynamics that create the organisational hierarchies that often go unquestioned by those with positional power. Despite criticism that feminist standpoint prioritises ‘woman’ over other categories, I hope I have succeeded in showing that it is compatible with an intersectional approach that explores links between different forms of oppression, and brings a perspective on power relations that is consistent with Acker’s framework of inequality regimes in organisations which recognises that the powerful tend not to see their privilege (2006b: 452).

While “starting off thought” from the perspectives of minority workers, the research methodology recognises their situated and partial knowledge (Haraway, [1991] 2004), as this is triangulated by perspectives from key informants who offer a wider view on processes that sustain occupational gender segregation. Interestingly, both sets of perspectives provide a remarkably consistent picture of the difficulties, as well as opportunities, for women in these male-dominated sectors, although a range of views on the most appropriate methods for increasing women’s participation were expressed.

Also influenced by principles of feminist methodology, in Chapter 4 I reflected on my position as a researcher in this study. It is commonplace for those researching LGB populations to argue that access to interviewees was only possible because of the researcher’s ‘insider’ status as lesbian or gay, which was crucial for gaining access and trust (Dunne, 1997; Homfray, 2008; LaSala, 2003; Taylor, 2004a). However my situation was somewhat different, as I did not present myself as an ‘insider’ in relation to lesbian participants: I am currently in a heterosexual relationship, but had lesbian relationships before that, which informs my research interests. Despite the difficulties I had in accessing as many lesbians for interview as I intended (see 4.7), I believe this had more to do with the challenge of finding sufficient lesbian participants in my chosen sectors through the access routes used. Of course I cannot know whether any lesbian participants were deterred from coming forward because the publicity material did not present me as an ‘insider’. Additionally a current insider position might well have assisted with access or personal contacts. However, among the 15 lesbian interviewees, none showed any interest in my personal life or sexuality (which I was willing to discuss if asked) and most, I believe, took part because they found the research subject of interest or felt it to be important. This was expressed most strongly by a participant who had come forward because she saw that the research was looking at sexuality:

“I mean no oppressed group in society is where they are because things just happened, it’s because people looked and said this is an issue and what are we going to do about it, so that’s why I thought it was kind of important to get involved.”
(Lesbian, engineer, transport, 20s)

Many heterosexual participants also volunteered because they wanted to see attention given to women’s experiences of male-dominated work, but for some lesbians greater visibility for minority sexuality was an additional reason.

In this way, the emancipatory aims of feminist research may assist in accessing research participants who also wish their experiences to be given wider attention. It also supports arguments advanced by those promoting ethical research methods for reciprocity in the research process (Lewis, 2003). Given the interest expressed by participants in the research outcomes, I intend to present the results to interested participants, for example by sending them a summary of findings, or offering to present the results to networks or organisations that have assisted with access.

10.5 Implications for policy and recommendations for further research

10.5.1 Implications for policy

The intersectional framework employed by this study has foregrounded differences in women's experience in relation to choice of male-dominated work, experience of challenging workplace discrimination, use of support networks and in relation to domestic arrangements.

This research started from an interest in the persistence of occupational gender segregation in the sectors under investigation, and identified a number of initiatives taking place, thus it has had a strong focus on policy throughout. Some themes emerge that have implications for policy in relation to gender equality in employment.

Firstly, there was evidence of continuing lack of awareness of non-traditional work options among young women and their advisors, which was being addressed through some of the programmes discussed in Chapter 5. Different career structures and opportunities exist for women entering professional or skilled manual occupations, and in relation to the latter, the research found that women who *were* interested in such work then lacked opportunities to gain work experience, either through employer unwillingness to risk employing a woman, or through difficulties in obtaining work placements required to complete training in the manual trades. This was addressed by the Building Work for Women (BWW) project which had provided valuable practical and emotional support to research participants, but whose funding ended during the period of this research. My findings indicate that funding for projects of this kind, that both prepare women for non-traditional occupations and work with employers to offer opportunities to women, is vital to overcome the real obstacles that face women seeking to improve their employment prospects by gaining work in better-paid typically male occupations. Projects such as BWW and WINTO described in this research also reach

women who may be multiply marginalised in the labour market, such as the unemployed, those without higher-level qualifications, working-class and ethnic minority women, and single parents.

The working hours in operational roles in the transport sector were seen as one of the main barriers to increasing the numbers of women. However a project addressing this through offering flexible or part-time shift patterns came to an end once the bus company concerned was privatised. The implication is that in the absence of social justice motivations to address occupational gender segregation as seen in parts of the public sector, private sector employers will not be willing to change longstanding work practices that require full-time commitment without some form of legal or contractual requirement. However the introduction of contractual obligations regarding equality monitoring and action would be possible, in London at least, where a public authority retains overall responsibility for running and contracting for bus services.

Similarly, the research revealed the public sector commitment to ensure equality considerations were taken into account in the construction of the Olympic site in East London, as well as other major construction projects, driven by regional policies to reduce occupational segregation. Evidence from interviewees suggested that linking procurement to equality actions could be a powerful lever for change and could offer opportunities to women in construction, provided that sufficient monitoring and support was available to ensure that companies were putting action plans into practice rather than simply “ticking boxes”. While the previous Labour government issued guidance encouraging public authorities to include equality objectives in procurement processes, legally supported through the public sector equality duties, this support may be less apparent under the current government, and the legal position under the new Equality Act 2010 may need clarification.

10.5.2 Recommendations for further research

The findings from this study identify three areas that would be fruitful for further examination. The first of these is the experience of women transport workers, and I suggest that a particular focus on women bus drivers, employing an intersectional approach as demonstrated in this study, would enable analysis of the ethnic and age diversity within the occupation that it was not possible to explore sufficiently here. Furthermore, it is an occupation which has seen increasing numbers of women entering recently, resulting from campaigns to recruit women due to skills shortages; thus it is

ripe for an evaluation of such measures. This research pointed to the challenge of making shift patterns more accessible to women workers, and further research could illuminate prospects for change and continuing obstacles, as well as examining the role of trade unions in effecting such change. As an occupation that provides higher levels of pay than many jobs open to women without higher-level education, it also offers small-scale prospects for improving women's pay.

A second area emerging from the thesis relates to the growing interest from equality practitioners and those wishing to improve women's participation in traditionally male-dominated work in using public sector procurement to achieve equality outcomes, particularly in the context of the public sector equality duties. While a small number of reports and articles evaluating the impact of such initiatives have been published, some of which are discussed in Wright (2011b), little academic research has been published in this area to date. I believe it is an important area for researchers concerned with equality in employment to engage with for several reasons: a) the potential contribution of such initiatives to addressing persisting occupational segregation on the grounds of gender and its links to the gender pay gap, supporting arguments advanced in this thesis that proactive measures are needed for women to progress in sectors where there has been little change; b) the need for an evaluation of the effectiveness of such public policy interventions in producing employment outcomes for women (and other underrepresented groups); and c) an opportunity to assess the potential for trade unions to engage with employers in progressing a joint equality agenda. The construction of the London Olympics 2012 offers a timely case study for examining these issues in practice, due to the Olympic Development Authority's commitment to achieving equality outcomes through its contracting process.

A third area for further investigation arises from the observations in this study of increased confidence among younger lesbians to be open about their sexuality at work. Further research could examine whether this was a feature of the particular organisations for which they worked (and if so, how this had been achieved); the metropolitan environment in which they lived; their particular classed position; or a wider reflection of social change in attitudes towards and experience of sexual minorities. This could encompass analysis of the impact of the evolving legislative framework, including further exploration of the suggestion from this research that the Civil Partnership Act 2004 is having a normalising effect on discussion of sexuality in

the workplace, making it easier for LGB employees to be open about their sexual orientation.

All three areas would, I believe, benefit from the intersectional approach employed in this thesis, and developing a more explicit focus on the intersections of gender, sexuality and ethnicity would be theoretically useful, although this may be challenging to achieve due to potential difficulties in accessing black and minority ethnic lesbian participants.

10.6 Concluding remarks

Returning to the quote at the start of this concluding chapter, the participants in this study have impressed me with their strength and determination in overcoming the difficulties associated with being a minority in a ‘man’s world’, but also with their enthusiasm for their work and the change that it has brought about in their lives. Most would recommend their occupations to their daughters and to other women. This study has shown that there are no simple solutions to increasing women’s participation in these occupations, with choices affected by the interaction of individual processes of identification, rational assessment of the opportunities available, employer and industry policies and practice, all set within shifting economic, political, legal and social contexts. However, the various perspectives presented in the thesis indicate clearly that change in these sectors has not come about without political will, supported by targeted and funded activity. Elements of this have been highlighted here, but it is to be hoped that there remains the will, and resources, to continue in this direction so that women’s choices and opportunities can be broadened.

Given the rapid and significant changes in recent years in attitudes towards lesbian and gay sexuality, and the impact of this on the experiences of younger lesbians and gay men, I hope that this thesis will be one step on the road to greater inclusion of minority sexuality in ‘mainstream’ sociological analyses of equality and inequality at work. Although the thesis raises some specific methodological issues about researching lesbians and gay men, I believe that researchers should not be deterred by these, nor by arguments that only ‘insiders’ may reach this population, but instead will be convinced of the value of gaining a more heterogeneous perspective on the processes that produce, sustain and challenge inequality regimes in organisations.

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Appendix 1: Key informant interviews

Representative and organisation	Organisation type and purpose
Non-traditional work/general	
KIS Training, Women into non-traditional work (WINTO) project	Training body, ran LDA-funded project to get women into non-traditional work
Regional Industrial Organiser, Women Race and Equalities, UNITE (TGWU)	Trade union region representing transport and construction workers
Head of Equalities and Senior equality manager, London Development Agency	Regional government
Chair, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Forum, UNITE (TGWU section)	Network group of trade union representing transport and construction workers
Transport	
Equality & Inclusion, Transport for London	Employer, responsible for running London's transport network and infrastructure
Lifestyle Friendly Rostering Project, East Thames Buses	Employer, bus company owned by Transport for London
Construction	
Women and Manual Trades	Membership organisation, championing tradeswomen through campaigning and training
Project Manager and Advisor, London & South, Women & Work Programme, ConstructionSkills	Sector Skills Council for the construction industry
Equality and Diversity, Olympic Delivery Authority	Public body responsible for delivering London Olympics 2012
Employment and Skills Manager, Women's Project, Olympic Delivery Authority	Public body responsible for delivering London Olympics 2012
Chair, National Association of Women In Construction	Network group aiming to raise the profile of professional women in the construction industry
Chief Executive, Women in Property	Network group for women in property and construction
Apprenticeship Coordinator, Housing Department, Leicester City Council	Employer, Leicester City Council employs direct labour to maintain housing stock

Appendix 2: Non-traditional work events attended and observed

Women and Manual Trades (WAMT) AGM, London, 30 October 2008

Women into non-traditional work (WINTO) project, Women Behind the Wheel, London, 13 November 2008

Women and Manual Trades (WAMT), Building Work for Women project social event, 11 December 2008

Women in Construction event, Leicester College, 9 March 2009

Women into non-traditional work (WINTO) project, Building Women's Futures, London, 31 March 2009

Appendix 3: Table of women worker interviewees

Name*	Industry	Occupation/SOC**	Sexuality	Age	Ethnicity
Fiona	Construction	Associate Director/1	Heterosexual	41-50	White
Norma	Construction	Trainee Electrician/5	Heterosexual	41-50	Did not answer
Cheryl	Construction	Electrician/5	Heterosexual	31-40	Black Caribbean
Donna	Construction	Trainee plumber/5	Heterosexual	21-30	Mixed heritage
Marsha	Construction	Apprentice maintenance technician/5	Heterosexual	41-50	Black Caribbean
Stacey	Construction	Plumber/5	Heterosexual	41-50	White
Meeta	Construction	Plumber/gas fitter/5	Heterosexual	31-40	Indian
Elaine	Construction	Carpenter/5	Heterosexual	31-40	White
Suzie	Construction	Director/1	Heterosexual	31-40	White
Jasminder	Construction	Director/1	Heterosexual	41-50	Indian
Eva	Construction	Design manager/2	Heterosexual	41-50	White
Sarah	Construction	Civil engineer/2	Heterosexual	21-30	White
Deeptha	Construction	Civil engineer/2	Heterosexual	31-40	Indian
Ritu	Construction	Quantity surveyor/2	Heterosexual	31-40	Indian
Tanya	Construction	Quantity surveyor/1	Heterosexual	31-40	White
Jo	Construction	Consultant/2	Lesbian	31-40	White
Frances	Construction	Building surveyor/2	Lesbian	41-50	White
Heather	Construction	Caretaker/handy person/6	Lesbian	41-50	White
Kath	Construction	Furniture maker/5	Lesbian	51-60	White
Hannah	Construction	Maintenance worker/8	Lesbian	31-40	Black Caribbean
Pauline	Construction	Building surveyor/2	Lesbian	41-50	White
Anna	Construction	Building surveyor/2	Lesbian	41-50	White
Karen	Transport	Contract administrator/3	Heterosexual	31-40	White
Femi	Transport	Train operator/3	Heterosexual	41-50	Black African
Rachel	Transport	Manager/1	Heterosexual	31-40	White

Jess	Transport	Civil engineer/2	Heterosexual	31-40	White
Stevie	Transport	PCV driver/8	Heterosexual	Over 60	White
Annette	Transport	Train manager/driver/3	Heterosexual	41-50	White
Judith	Transport	Signal Engineer/2	Heterosexual	31-40	White
Liz	Transport	Bus driver/8	Heterosexual	51-60	White
Nadia	Transport	Engineer/2	Lesbian	21-30	Black Caribbean
Lesley	Transport	Train operator/3	Lesbian	31-40	White
Sam	Transport	Project planner/1	Lesbian	21-30	White
Maureen	Transport	Bus driver/8	Lesbian	Over 60	White
Amy	Transport	Manager/1	Lesbian	31-40	White
Alison	Transport	Bus driver/8	Lesbian	41-50	White
Steph	Transport	Project manager/1	Lesbian	21-30	White
Linda	Transport	Examiner/3	Lesbian	41-50	White

* All names are pseudonyms

** Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) major groups: 1= Managers and senior officials; 2 = Professional occupations; 3 = Associate professional and technical occupations; 5: Skilled trades occupations; 6 = Personal service occupations; 8 = Process, plant and machine operatives.

Appendix 4: Research instruments

Flexible interview guide for key informants

Topic	Prompts
<p>Overall data on sector and women's employment, and changes (or network membership)</p>	<p>Proportions of women in sector/company/network membership</p> <p>Any other demographic data: ethnicity; age; sexuality</p> <p>Positions of women: occupations and in hierarchy (or self-employed); differences manual/non-manual positions</p> <p>Observed changes in any of these figures</p>
<p>Access to the sector for women</p>	<p>Their view on the main obstacles to women entering the sector</p> <p>What measures are there to encourage women? How effective are these?</p> <p>What role does their organisation play in this? (as employer/network/union etc)</p> <p>Have they observed changes in last ten years?</p> <p>What more would they like to see? And from whom (ie govt policy, employers, education/training providers, networks)?</p>
<p>Main issues for women in sector</p>	<p>Their view on the main difficulties for women working in sector</p> <p>Positive aspects of working in sector for women?</p> <p>What has been done to address some of difficulties by their organisation? And by other stakeholders?</p> <p>How effective have these initiatives/measures been?</p> <p>Have they observed changes for women working in</p>

	<p>sector in last ten years?</p> <p>What else would they like to see? And from whom (ie govt policy, employers, education/training providers, networks)?</p>
<p>Network and union groups (questions for union and network informants only)</p>	<p>What are the aims of the network?</p> <p>Who are its members (if not covered above)?</p> <p>(If employer/union group) How does it fit into the structure of the organisation? What role does it have in promoting women's employment/interests in the org?</p>
<p>Research access</p>	<p>Any suggestions for:</p> <p>accessing women interviewees – heterosexual and lesbian/ manual and non-manual jobs</p>

Focus group interview guide

Theme 1: Reasons for entering non-traditional occupations, and expectations

1. What were your ideas about what working in a manual trade would be like?
2. Have any of these ideas changed from your experience so far?
3. What made you want to enter a manual trade?
4. What do family and friends say about you going into a trade?
5. What qualities do you think are needed to work in a manual trade?
6. Do any of you have experience of working in male-dominated workplaces? What was this like?
7. What sort of work do you hope to get once finished BWW project? I.e. employment on site/self-employment?

Theme 4: Women's attitudes to, and experiences of, support structures and networks, including trade unions

1. What do you think that WAMT offers to women working in the trades?
2. Are any of you a member of any other women's networks or groups?
3. If yes, have you found this to be helpful (in work terms)?

Theme 6: Impact of domestic circumstances on participation in, and experience of, typically male work

1. How do you think working in a manual trade will affect your home life? I.e. more or less flexible than other work?
2. If have children, how will it fit with childcare?
3. If have partner, is partner supportive of plan to work in trades?

Interview schedule for women workers

Theme 1: Reasons for entering non-traditional occupations, and impact of sexuality

- 1.1. **Can you tell me a bit about how you came to be in this job? How long have you been in it?** Where did you work before? Was it in same type of work?
- 1.2 **What attracted you to this type of work?**
- 1.3 **How important was pay in this decision?**
- 1.4. Did you make a conscious decision to enter a male-dominated job?
- 1.5 What were the qualifications/skills/qualities needed to enter this type of work?
- 1.6. **What were your expectations of entering a male-dominated job?**
- 1.7. **What were the reactions of friends/family to your choice of job/career?** [can be asked later]
- 1.8. And what do they think now?
- 1.9 What sort of jobs did/do your family members/parents do? [mother and father]
- 1.10. [If lesbian?] Do you think your sexuality had any impact on your decision to enter this type of work? [may be better to ask later on]
- 1.11. Or your ethnicity?

Theme 2: Gender and sexual identities in the workplace, and roles in organisation

- 2.1. **Generally speaking, how do you like your present job?**
- 2.2. What are the best things about it? And the worst?
- 2.3. **What is the gender balance of your team/workplace/organization?**
- 2.4. What do you think are the difficulties about being a woman in this job? And the good things?
- 2.5 Do you feel that there are ways you are expected to behave as a woman in this job? **Are there different expectations of men and women doing same job?**
- 2.6. **How do you get on with your male colleagues?** And how has this changed?

2.7. **And female ones?** And how has this changed?

2.8. **How would you describe the culture of the workplace?** How does it compare to other places that you have worked? Were these male-dominated?

[If lesbian/bisexual] 2.9 **Are you open about your sexuality at work?** If so, to whom? How did you come out to each person/group?

[If lesbian/bisexual] 2.10. **What do you think are the difficulties about being a lesbian in this job? And the good things?**

2.11 Do you think there are differences in how lesbians and heterosexual women are treated in the organisation?

[If BME] 2.12 **Do you face any particular issues as a black/minority ethnic woman in the organisation?**

2.13 Do you have any colleagues that you know are gay men or lesbians? What are people's attitudes generally to them?

Theme 3: Impact of type of workplace – professional or manual – on how women experience and manage their identities

Mostly covered by 2. Could ask about contact with other parts of the organization, and what differences they observe?

Theme 4: Women's attitudes to, and experiences of, support structures and networks, including trade unions

4.1. **Are you a member of any women's networks** (for profession/organization)?

[If no] have you ever been? Are you aware of the existence of any networks you could join? Reasons for not joining? Do you think there are any benefits to membership? Would you describe the aims/members of the network as feminist?

[If yes] **What made you join?** What are the aims of the network? What does membership involve? **What benefits are there for you?** Personally? Professionally? Would you describe the aims of the network as feminist?

4.2 Would you describe yourself as a feminist? Or the other network members?

4.3 **What is the attitude of colleagues to the network/union group?** And your membership of it?

4.4. What do you think the network/union group has achieved?

[Check questionnaire re union membership]

[If not in union] 4.5 **Is there a union in the workplace?** If not a member, why is this?

[If there is a union] 4.6 Is there a trade union group for women or LGBT in your organisation/area? Are you a member? Reasons for joining/not? Activities and aims of the group? Your role in it?

[If both network and union group exist] 4.7. What are the differences in role? Membership? Achievement?

[If no network/group exists] 4.8. Would you like to see a group for women/LGB? Would you join? What benefits would it bring for you/the organization?

4.9 **Are you a member of any other networks/support organizations either for profession or within the organization?**

[If lesbian] 4.9 What made you choose to join the women's/LGB rather than women's/LGB group? *[If in both]* What are the differences? And for you personally?

[If BME] 4.10 Is there a group for BME staff in the organisation? Have you attended? What made you choose to join the women's/BME rather than women's/BME group? *[If in both]* What are the differences? And for you personally?

Theme 5: Practices within work organisations contribute to the successful integration of women into male-dominated work

5.1 **How supportive have you found your managers to you?** And the organization generally?

5.2 **Do they take specific measures to recruit women into the org/role?**

5.3 And to support and encourage women once employed?

5.4 **How aware are you of the organization's equality/diversity policies?**

5.5 **How effective do you think these are?**

5.6 **Have you been promoted/sought promotion within the org?** What happened? How do you feel about it?

5.7 Would you consider going for promotion in future? **Do you think you'd face any barriers?** As woman? As lesbian? As a BME person? Other reasons?

5.8 What do you think are the most successful things for recruiting/retaining women into the org?

5.9 What would you like to see the org doing for women? And for lesbians?

5.10. Do you intend to stay in this job?

5.11. **What plans do you have for your future career?**

Theme 6: Impact of domestic circumstances on participation in, and experience of, typically male work

6.1 What are your working hours? Is this above contractual hours?

6.2 **What flexibility do you have to balance work-home life?** Was this negotiated with employer? Available to everyone?

6.3 **Do you currently have a partner?** Do you live with him/her?

6.4 **What is his/her attitude to your work?**

6.5 **Is he/she in paid employment? Doing what? Full/part-time?**

6.5 Who is the main earner in your household?

6.6 **Do you have children?** Live with you? Number? Ages?

6.7 Who cares for children when you are at work? Who is primarily responsible for organizing their childcare?

6.8 Have you taken maternity leave in current job? How much leave did you get? What was attitude of employer to your pregnancy/maternity leave? And on return to work? To same job/hours?

6.9 Attitude of male/female colleagues?

[If lesbian non-birth parent] 6.10 Have you taken parental leave? Attitude of employer? Colleagues, if known?

6.11 How do you divide up domestic tasks at home? You or partner do most?

Demographic data sheet for women workers



Research on women in transport and construction

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. I would be grateful if you could complete this form providing some basic details about yourself and your employment. All information you provide on this questionnaire, as well as during the interview, will be treated in strict confidence and you will not be identified in the research.

About you

1. What is your age? Under 21: 21-30: 31-40:
(please tick one only) 41-50: 51-60: Over 60:
2. Are you? (please tick one only)
White: Mixed heritage: Indian: Bangladeshi:
Pakistani: Other Asian: Black Caribbean: Black African:
Black other: Chinese: Other (please write in):
3. Are you?
Heterosexual: Lesbian: Bisexual:
4. What is your highest level of education?
Primary: Secondary: Post-secondary, below degree:
First degree: Higher degree : Other qualification (please write in):

Your work

5. Are you currently? (tick all that apply)
In full-time employment: In part-time employment: Doing casual or temporary work:
Self-employed: On placement/training: Looking for work:
Other (please write in):
6. What is your occupation?
7. How many hours do you normally work in a week? (Please tick one only)
Less than 20: 21-40: 41-48: Over 48:
8. What is your annual average salary/earnings?
Under £10,000: £10-19,999: £20-29,999:
£30-39,999: £40-49,999: Over £50,000:

Trade unions/networks

9. Is there a union where you work in your main job? Yes: No: Don't know:
10. Are you currently a member of a trade union? Yes: No:
11. If yes, which trade union?
12. Are you a member of a staff network group? Yes: No:
13. Are you a member of any other network related to your work/profession? Yes: No:
If yes, what is it called?

Appendix 5: Participant information sheet and consent form

Research on women in transport and construction: Information for participants

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project on the experiences of women working in male-dominated occupations, which forms part of a PhD thesis that I am undertaking at Queen Mary, University of London.

Please read the following information carefully before you decide to take part; this tells you why the research is being done and what participation involves. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. You should only agree to take part if you want to, and if you choose not to take part there will be no disadvantage for you and you will hear no more about it.

If you decide to take part you will be asked to sign the attached form to say that you agree. You are still free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

The research

The aims of the research are to explore:

- the reasons women enter non-traditional occupations, and what are their experiences of working in male-dominated environments
- what policies and practices within workplaces help the integration of women into male-dominated work
- what are women's experiences of networks and trade union groups designed to support women
- whether there are differences for heterosexual, bisexual or lesbian women working in male-dominated work.

Taking part

The interview will be in person and take about one hour. This will take place during the first half of 2009, at a location and time convenient to participants. The interview will cover issues such as the reasons for entering typically male work, experiences as a woman working in a male environment, organisational responses to the employment of women, the use of support networks and the impact of sexuality and sexual orientation on the experience of work.

Confidentiality and anonymity

All data collected for this project will be anonymised. Reports and publications that emanate from this study will be presented in a way which ensures that no comments can be linked back to an individual and all personal information is concealed. If you choose to withdraw from the study, any information already obtained will not be used. This research is complying with the ethical review procedures of Queen Mary, University of London.

Contact details

Tessa Wright, Centre for Research in Equality and Diversity, School of Business and Management, Queen Mary, University of London, Mile End Road, London, E1 4NS.
Email: t.wright@qmul.ac.uk

Consent form to participate in the research project ‘Women in transport and construction: the intersections of gender, sexuality and class in non-traditionally female work’

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to take part. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

Participant’s Statement:

I agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part in the study. I have read both the notes written below and the Information Sheet about the project, and understand what the research study involves.

I understand that if I decide at any other time during the research that I no longer wish to participate in this project, I can notify the researcher involved and be withdrawn from it immediately.

I consent to the processing of my personal information, including information about sexuality, for the purposes of this research study. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Participant’s name: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Researcher’s Statement:

I, Tessa Wright, confirm that I have carefully explained the nature and demands of the proposed research to the volunteer.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Tessa Wright, Centre for Research in Equality and Diversity, School of Business and Management, Queen Mary, University of London, Mile End Road, London, E1 4NS.

Email: t.wright@qmul.ac.uk

Appendix 6: Leaflet for research participants

Are you a woman working in the transport or construction sectors?

The research

I am carrying out research into the experiences of women working in male-dominated occupations, and am looking for women to talk to me about their working lives in confidence. The research forms part of a PhD thesis that I am undertaking at Queen Mary, University of London.

The aims of the research are to explore:

- the reasons women enter non-traditional occupations, and what are their experiences of working in male-dominated environments
- what policies and practices within workplaces help the integration of women into male-dominated work
- what are women's experiences of networks and trade union groups designed to support women
- whether there are differences for heterosexual, bisexual or lesbian women working in male-dominated work.

I would like to talk to heterosexual, lesbian or bisexual women about what it is like to work in a male-dominated environment, the reasons for entering typically male work, the use of support networks and the impact of sexuality and sexual orientation on the experience of work.

Taking part

The interview would be in person and take about one hour. The identity of all women interviewed, as well as the names of their employers, will remain anonymous, and participation in the research will be confidential. This means that any comments and quotes used in the thesis and other published reports will not reveal anyone's identity. I am following the ethical guidelines set out by Queen Mary, University of London. Interviews will be at a location and time convenient to the participants.

About me

While working in the IT industry I became interested in what it is like for women in male-dominated work. Since then I have been working as a researcher and worked for many years for the trade union movement at the Labour Research Department and then moved to the Working Lives Research Institute at London Metropolitan University. I have carried out research on the experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual workers, as well as a study on women in the fire service.

If you are interested in taking part in this research, or just finding out more information, I would really like to hear from you:

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