

Even in modern societies, women's views are often still overlooked. Policy-makers and social scientists concerned with family policy and social policy will in future have to take greater account of women's values, preferences and life goals.



Competing family models, competing social policies

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Listening to women

In 1998 and 1999, the British Cabinet Office's Women's Unit organised a major research program entitled *Listening to Women*. The research used focus groups, social attitude surveys and opinion polls to collect information on women's values and priorities, what women saw as the policy priorities, and women's perceptions of the main barriers to achieving their goals, including the difficulties of combining paid work and family life.

The results provided a rich portrait of the diversity of women's views on jobs, children and family policy (Bryson et al. 1999; Worcester et al. 1999). For example, the studies found that one-third of women believe home and family are women's main focus in life, and that women should not try to combine a career and children. Even in the youngest age group of women who had not yet had children, one-fifth still believed women cannot combine a career and children. On the other hand, two-thirds of women agreed that having a job is the best way for a woman to be an independent person. Women were evenly divided on whether being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay: half agreed, half disagreed.

Many women with paid jobs did not see themselves as career women. Rather, they felt obliged to contribute to household finances because of housing costs and the riskiness of relying on a single breadwinner, given job insecurity. Paid work was often regarded as an unfortunate financial necessity or insurance policy, while being eagerly welcomed as an avenue for self-development and independence by others.

Women were clear that the full-time mother role is undervalued by society nowadays, and that all the social pressures are towards mothers returning to work quickly, and certainly after children start school:

"People always say, 'Oh, how do you cope staying at home?' ... You shouldn't be made to feel guilty, but I think sometimes you are, as though you're a cabbage because you're at home." (Mother not in paid work)

"I've found since my youngest started school that the pressure's been there from everybody around. You know: 'Now both of yours are at school, what are you doing with all these hours?'" (Mother not in paid work)

Women noted that some families valued material possessions, or career development, more than their children:

"I find it strange when people want to have a family and have two or three children and then leave them forever with a nanny. Why have them? It defeats the object." (Young woman without children)

In the absence of financial need, only 5 per cent of mothers would choose to work full-time hours, three-quarters would prefer a part-time job, and one-fifth would prefer not to work at all. These results are in line with European Union surveys showing that, across all countries, the majority of mothers would prefer not to work, or to work part-time only, while their children were young. Full-time mothers said that child care problems were *not* important; the reason they were at home full-time was because motherhood and parenting took a central place in their lives until their children had grown up and left home. One in ten said they would not do paid work or use child care in any circumstances.

Only one-third of women (and one-quarter of mothers) thought employers should have to offer special arrangements to help women combine jobs and child care. The most popular family-friendly arrangement was special leave for sick children (paid or unpaid), but women were evenly divided as to whether employers should have to offer such a scheme or not. Otherwise, the most popular



family-friendly policies were those offering time flexibility, which was generally maximised in part-time jobs.

The *Listening to Women* research program concluded that we should stop thinking of women as a homogeneous group; that women want *choices* in their lives; that most women have jobs rather than careers; that full-time mothers want their role as mother to be valued and respected; that most women were prepared to take any job that fitted in with their family and child care commitments; that women thought greater societal value should be attached to the role of housewife; and that women saw themselves as secondary earners, with male partners regarded as having ultimate responsibility for household income. One-quarter of men and women still thought complete role segregation in the family worked best.

The diversity of women's perspectives is highlighted by the contrasting comments received. For example, there was recognition that social pressures had changed:

"I know from my mum's point of view, when she had children there was some kind of social stigma about having to send your wife out to work – people didn't. But now lots of wives work, don't they, and I think it's the other way round, isn't it. You're very lucky if you can afford to be at home full-time. Whereas I think we managed on a lot less perhaps, and we want a lot more now." (Mother in paid work)

Some mothers were clear that they were happier in a job and, as a result, so too were their families:

"I feel that it's good for the mother to have an outside interest, because the time that the family has together is much better quality time ... You have more to talk about. I think that, for myself, I'm a much better person when I'm out working than when I'm at home all the time." (Older mother not in paid work)

"I think some children are better off being looked after by someone else. A lot of people haven't got the patience or the life skills to look after their children." (Older middle class woman)

Other mothers were clear that they themselves could never have left their children with other carers:

"The thought of somebody else looking after my babies – I couldn't have coped. I have to say I would have found it very difficult to miss all of that – they're only little for such a short time, and to miss that – you can't go back and get that." (Mother in paid work)

Overall, mothers were clear that a choice usually had to be made, that competing life interests were too stressful:

"I mean, something's got to give in the end, hasn't it. Either you, or work, or the family and the home." (Mother not in paid work)

"It seems to me you have either got to keep the career going and not have kids, or have the kids and lose your career, and you have got to make a choice." (Young middle-class woman)

"I had quite a good job in a local authority and I felt I was ready to be promoted to a decent position. But it was a choice between a decent position or looking after my baby, and I chose my baby." (Older middle-class woman)

They were also clear that women now have choices and opportunities:

"I think if a woman puts her mind to doing something she can do it. Nothing's impossible now." (Older woman)

"It is important for women to work if they want to. I think there should be a choice. If they want to stay at home with their children, then I think they should be able to." (Older working class mother)

Younger women consciously planned their careers around family life:

"It is really important to me to have a family. I am only 19, I know, but even when I was at school the decision I made to be a teacher was partly because it was important for me to have children, and what with the holidays being the same and everything, you know ... I think it does greatly influence you, children." (Young working class woman)

Occupations that would be treated as a career by men were often regarded as short-term jobs by women:

"I knew from a very young age that I was going to get married and have children, that was my career in life. It was purely a job. I went to work in a bank for four or five years. And I always knew it was just a job until I had children." (Older middle class woman)

Some women looked enviously at policies supporting mothers in Scandinavian countries:

"In several of the Scandinavian countries, including Finland, mothers do get paid a low salary for being at home with their children. It is a poorly paid job, bringing up children, but it is paid." (Older middle class woman)

Did the New Labour Government of Tony Blair take any notice of the results of the *Listening to Women* research program? Of course not. The studies revealed more diversity of values and complexity of opinion than was politically useful. So the findings were used selectively to support the government's predetermined policy positions – in particular, policies promoting paid

work as women's central life activity.¹ The reason this is surprising is that this government proclaims repeatedly that it pursues evidence-based policies.

Why is it so hard for governments and politicians to listen to women? The main reason is that they want to treat women as a single-issue constituency, on a level with other issues. Yet women form over half the population in most modern societies, so we might expect them to display substantial diversity in values, preferences and life goals.

So far, social scientists have also treated women as a homogeneous group, slightly different from men, with a single set of preferences and political interests. We now need to break away from this simplistic perspective to develop theories and research that recognise women's diversity and conflicting interests. At present, preference theory is the only theory to do this. Some demographers have focused on changing attitudes and values as the driving force in contemporary developments (Lesthaeghe and Meekers 1986; Lesthaeghe 1995; Mason and Jensen 1995), but more commonly the focus is on institutional factors and macro-level policy analysis (for example, McDonald 2000) without any real understanding of how these impact on women's choices and behaviour.

Preference theory

Preference theory is a new theory for explaining and predicting women's choices between market work and family work, a theory that is historically-informed, empirically-based, multidisciplinary, prospective rather than retrospective in orientation, and applicable in all rich modern societies (Hakim 2000). Lifestyle preferences are defined as causal factors which thus need to be monitored in modern societies. In contrast, other social attitudes (such as patriarchal values) are either unimportant as predictors of behaviour, or else have only a very small marginal impact in creating a particular climate of public opinion on women's roles (Hakim 2003b).

Preference theory specifies the historical context in which lifestyle preferences become important predictors of behaviour. It notes that five historical changes collectively produce a qualitatively new scenario for women in rich modern societies in the 21st century, giving them options that were not previously available. Small elites of women born into wealthy families, or prosperous families with liberal ideas sometimes had real choices in the past, just as their brothers did. Today, genuine choices are open to women in the sense that the vast majority of women have choices, not only particular subgroups in the population.

The five social and economic changes started in the late 20th century and are now producing a qualitatively different and new scenario of options and opportunities for women in the 21st century. The five conditions that create a new scenario are: the contraceptive revolution; the equal opportunities revolution; the expansion of white-collar occupations; the creation of jobs for secondary earners; and the increasing importance of attitudes, values and personal preferences in lifestyle choices.

The two revolutions (contraception and equal opportunities) constitute the core of the social revolution for women. Collectively, the five changes are necessary to create a new scenario in which women have genuine choices and female heterogeneity is revealed to its full extent.

Table 1 Classification of women's work–lifestyle preferences in the 21st century

Home-centred 20% of women (varies 10%-30%)	Adaptive 60% of women (varies 40%-80%)	Work-centred 20% of women (varies 10%-30%)
Family life and children are the main priorities throughout life	This group is most diverse and includes women who want to combine work and family, plus drifters and unplanned careers	Childless women are concentrated here. Main priority in life is employment or equivalent activities in the public arena: politics, sport, art, etc.
Prefer <i>not</i> to work.	Want to work, but <i>not</i> totally committed to work career	Committed to work or equivalent activities
Qualifications obtained as cultural capital	Qualifications obtained with the intention of working	Large investment in qualifications/training for employment or other activities
Number of children is affected by government social policy, family wealth, etc.	This group is <i>very responsive</i> to government social policy, employment policy, equal opportunities policy/propaganda, economic cycle/recession/growth, etc.	Responsive to economic opportunity political opportunity artistic opportunity etc.
Not responsive to employment policy	Such as: income tax and social welfare benefits educational policies school timetables child care services public attitude towards working women legislation promoting female employment trade union attitudes to working women availability of part-time work and similar work flexibility economic growth and prosperity and institutional factors generally	Not responsive to social/family policy

Source: Hakim (2000).

With rare exceptions (Cleland 1985; Murphy 1993; Castles 2002), male demographers have generally overlooked the social and psychological significance for women of the contraceptive revolution (Westoff and Ryder 1977). Demographers discuss the use of contraception without distinguishing between the methods controlled by men and those controlled by women. Modern forms of contraception (the pill, IUD and sterilisation) are thus defined primarily by their greater reliability, overlooking the crucial fact that they transfer control over reproduction from men to women.

Control over her fertility produces a change of perspective among women, even a psychological change, creating a sense of autonomy, responsibility and personal freedom that is not achieved with contraception controlled by men. Qualitative studies of contraceptive practice using the old methods clearly show that women did not feel they had any control over their childbearing, and had fatalistic rather than calculating attitudes (Fisher 2000). The contraceptive revolution is thus an essential precondition for the equal opportunities revolution and other changes to have any substantial effect on women's lives.

In western Europe, the United States, Australia and other modern societies, these five changes only took place from the 1960s onwards. The timing and pace of change has varied, even between countries in Europe. However, the strong social, cultural, economic and political links between modern countries suggests that no country will lag behind on any of the changes indefinitely. All five changes were completed early in America and Britain, so that the new scenario was well established by the last two decades of the 20th century in these two countries. Thus they provide the main illustration of the consequences of the new scenario for women.

Three life choices for women

Reviews of recent research evidence (Hakim 1996, 2000) show that once genuine choices are open to them, women at all levels of education and in all social classes choose one of three different lifestyles – work-centred, home-centred, or adaptive (Table 1).



Work-centred women are in a minority, despite the massive influx of women into higher education and into professional and managerial occupations in the last three decades. Work-centred people (men and women) are focused on competitive activities in the public sphere — in careers, sport, politics, or the arts. Family life is fitted around their work, and many of these women remain childless, even when married. Qualifications and training are obtained as a career investment rather than as an insurance policy, as in the adaptive group (below). The majority of men are work-centred, compared to only a minority of women, even in professional occupations (Hakim 1998: 221-34). Preference theory predicts that men will retain their dominance in the labour market, politics and other competitive activities, because only a minority of women are prepared to prioritise their jobs (or other activities in the public sphere) in the same way as men. This is unwelcome news to many feminists, who have assumed that women would be just as likely as men to be work-centred once opportunities were opened to them, and that sex discrimination alone has so far held women back from the top jobs in any society.



Home-centred women are also a minority group, and a relatively invisible one, given the current political and media focus on working women and high achievers. Home-centred women prefer to give priority to private life and family life after they

marry. They are most inclined to have larger families, and these women avoid paid work after marriage unless the family is experiencing financial problems. They do not necessarily invest less in qualifications, because the educational system functions as a marriage market as well as a training institution. Despite the elimination of the sex differential in educational attainment, an increasing proportion of wives in America and Europe are now marrying men with substantially better qualifications, and the likelihood of marrying a graduate spouse is hugely increased if the woman herself has obtained a degree (Hakim 2000: 193-222). This may be why women remain less likely to choose vocational courses with a direct economic value, and are more likely to take courses in the arts, humanities or languages, which provide cultural capital but have lower earnings potential.



Adaptive women prefer to combine employment and family work without giving a fixed priority to either. They want to enjoy the best of both worlds. Adaptive women are generally the largest group among women, and will be found in

substantial numbers in most occupations. Certain occupations, such as school teaching, are attractive to women because they facilitate an even work-family balance. The great majority of women who transfer to part-time work after they have children are adaptive women, who seek to devote as much time and effort to their family work as to their jobs. In some countries (such as the United States and southern European countries), and in certain occupations, part-time jobs are still rare, so other types of job are chosen. For example, seasonal jobs, temporary work, or school-term-time jobs all offer a better work-family balance than the typical full-time job, especially if commuting is also involved. *Faute de mieux*, adaptive women sometimes take ordinary full-time jobs.

The three preference groups are set out as sociological ideal-types in Table 1, with estimates of the relative sizes of the three groups in societies where public policy does not bias the distribution. In this case, the distribution of women across the three groups corresponds to a “normal” distribution of responses to the family-work conflict. In practice, in most societies, public policy is biased towards one group or another, by accident or by design, so that the exact percentages vary between modern societies, with a bias towards work-centred women or towards home-centred women.

The three lifestyle preference groups are not merely different. Each has a substantively different value system, as well as differing life goals. These differences sometimes bring women into conflict with each other – for example, on whether public child care services are necessary or not, or whether positive discrimination in favour of women for promotion to top jobs is a good thing or not. In a sense, there is no single, representative group of women in modern society, but three contrasting, even conflicting groups with sharply differentiated work and lifestyle preferences. In the

United States, the conflict between work-centred and home-centred women has been expressed through the two women's movements: the feminist "women's liberation" movement and the maternalist movement, with conflict often focused on the issues of abortion and the Equal Rights Amendment.

Achieving the new scenario for women does not mean that sex discrimination has been entirely eliminated. As definitions of sex discrimination keep expanding, from direct discrimination to increasingly arcane forms of indirect discrimination, this battle is arguably never won. However, it is important that trenchant equal opportunities legislation is backed up by a system of labour courts, equality agencies and other tangible public support for converting the letter of the law into reality.

Choices are not made in a vacuum. Social and economic factors still matter, and will produce national variations in employment patterns and lifestyle choices.

Equally important is the heterogeneity of national cultures. Britain, America and Australia have large and diverse populations, ensuring that cultural diversity and differences in values become accepted and even welcomed. Some European countries (notably the Scandinavian countries) have not yet come to terms with the ethnic, religious and cultural diversity that generally ensues from decades of immigration, and they have low acceptance of diversity in values and lifestyles.

We do not expect convergence in work rates and lifestyle choices in new scenario countries. Even the most liberal society and laissez faire polity still has institutions, laws, customs, national policies and cultures that shape and structure behaviour. Choices are not made in a vacuum. Social and economic factors still matter, and will produce national variations in employment patterns and lifestyle choices. In addition, the choices people make are moulded by an unpredictable circus of events: economic recessions and booms, wars, changes of government, as well as events in private lives, individual ability, accidents or ill health, "disastrous" marriages and "brilliant" marriages. As a result, there will always be differences between new scenario countries in patterns of fertility and employment.

In sum, lifestyle preferences help to determine:

- women's fertility – the incidence of childlessness and, for the majority who do have children, family sizes;
- women's employment pattern over the lifecycle – choices between careers and jobs, full-time and part-time work, and associated job values; and
- women's responsiveness – to public policies, employer policies, economic and social circumstances.

Preferences do not predict outcomes with complete certainty, even when women have genuine choices, because of variations in individual abilities and factors in the social and economic environment. However, in prosperous modern societies, preferences become a much more important determinant, maybe even the primary determinant of women's behaviour.

The three lifestyle preference groups differ in values,

goals and aspirations. That is, they are defined by their contrasting lifestyle preferences rather than by behavioural outcomes. The three groups also differ in consistency of aspirations and values, not by strong versus weak preferences.

People who argue that women's choices are always shaped by external events and the situation around them are describing *adaptive* women, who are in the majority. The distinctive feature of the two extreme groups of women (and equivalent men) is that they do not waver in their goals, even when they fail to achieve them. Work-centred people are defined by prioritising market work (or other competitive activities in the public sphere) over family work and family life, not by exceptional success in the public sphere.



The 1999 British survey

Preference theory is empirically-based in that it was built up from a review and synthesis of hundreds of social science studies in several disciplines using a variety of research methods (Hakim 1996, 2000). To test the impact of lifestyle preferences on fertility and employment, a new survey was carried out in 1999.

The aim of the new study was to pick out the smallest possible number of survey questions and indicators appropriate to a structured interview survey that could be used to identify the three lifestyle preference groups among women. This had previously been done most effectively by qualitative studies based on depth interviews, as illustrated by Gerson's brilliant study of how women decide about motherhood and careers (Gerson 1985: Table C22; Hakim 2000: 149-154). The aim of the new study was to identify classificatory questions and variables that might be included in any large survey.

The survey was carried out as one of 27 projects selected for an Economic and Social Research Council Research Program on the Future of Work running over five years (1998–2003) in Britain. The interview survey was carried out for the author by the Office of National Statistics in Britain, in January and February 1999.

The survey was based on a probability random sample of households, and face-to-face interviews with one person aged 16 and over chosen randomly within each household. The proportion of households in which the selected informant was the head of household or spouse was 81 per cent in this sample. From a sample of 5388 eligible addresses, an overall response rate of 68 per cent was achieved, producing data for a nationally representative sample of 3651 people aged 16 and over in Britain. The final sample included 1691 men and 1960 women. Excluding the pensioners aged 65 and over reduced the sample for the population of working age to 2900, including 2345 married and cohabiting couples.

The survey was used to operationalise the identification of lifestyle preferences in the context of a large scale structured interview survey, to test the classification against women's lifestyle choices and behaviour, and to explore further applications of the taxonomy in sociological research on women's employment.² Tables 2-4 report key findings from the 1999 British survey. The analysis is person-centred rather than variable-centred (Magnusson 1998).

Preferences and lifestyle choices

Three questions were used to operationalise lifestyle preferences. Two questions were taken from the Eurobarometer series.³ The third, a question on work commitment, has been widely used, in slightly different versions, in research on work orientations in America and Britain.

A question on ideal family models identifies home-centred women: women who prefer to focus their time and energy on home and family work, and thus seek a marriage with complete role segregation. Just under one-fifth of the sample fell into this category.

Two questions on work orientations identify people for whom market work is central to their identities and lifestyle. A question on work commitment identifies people who claim they would continue with paid work (not necessarily in the same job) in the absence of economic necessity. The introduction of a national lottery in Britain in the 1990s made this hypothetical situation more realistic than previously. Primary and secondary earners were identified by a question asking about the main income-earner(s) in the household. People who classified themselves as sole or joint main earner(s) were classified as primary earners; all others were classified as secondary earners.

The question was treated as an opinion question, and analyses of responses show clearly that that is what it is. For example, married men adopt the identity of primary (co)earner irrespective of income level, and even when they are not in employment. In contrast, women who regard themselves as primary earners when single switch immediately to the secondary earner identity after marriage, almost irrespective of their income level. Work centrality is defined as a combination of adopting a primary earner identity and having non-financial commitment to one's paid work. For married women, this means in practice those who regard themselves as joint main earner as well as being committed to their employment activities. Less than one-fifth of married women passed this test, and overall only one-quarter of women (compared to half of men) were classified as work-centred. The residual

group of women with more complex, or contradictory, values were classified as adaptive.

The distribution of lifestyle preferences among women of working age (Table 2) and wives of working age (Table 3) is close to that predicted by preference theory (Table 1). The distribution varies slightly according to the population base. For example, among wives and cohabitantes aged 20-59 years, the distribution becomes 13 per cent home-centred, 77 per cent adaptive, and only 10 per cent work-centred.

In line with preference theory, Table 2 shows that lifestyle choices differ very substantially between the three preference groups. Two-thirds of work-centred women are in full-time employment. In contrast, two-thirds of adaptive women work part-time or not at all. Almost half of the home-centred women are not in employment, and a small minority have never had a job. A relatively high 40 per cent of home-centred women have full-time jobs. The reasons for this unexpected result are explored in the full report, and show that in certain circumstances, economic necessity can override personal preferences (Hakim 2003a: 141-143, 211-233).

Home-centred and adaptive women are most likely to marry or cohabit, and to stay married. This is not surprising, as their preferred lifestyle is heavily dependent on having a breadwinner spouse who is in regular employment. Work-centred women are least likely to marry, and most likely to be separated or divorced. Women who regard themselves as financially independent anyway have less motive to marry and to stay married.⁴ Most important, home-centred women have twice as many children as work-centred women, many of whom seem to be childless. The fertility measure here is the "own child" measure: the average number of children aged less than 16 years living at home per woman aged 20-54 years. It does not include older children (who may no longer live at home anyway), so it understates total fertility. The measure shows clearly that fertility levels vary dramatically between the three preference groups, along with marriage rates and employment patterns.

Educational standards differ between the three preference groups, but not by enormous amounts. Work-centred women are slightly more likely to have higher education - 26 per cent compared to 18 per cent in the

Table 2 Characteristics of women in the three lifestyle preference groups

	Home-centred	Adaptive	Work-centred
Employed			
full-time	40%	35%	63%
part-time	16%	37%	15%
Not in employment	44%	28%	22%
Married/cohabiting	71%	80%	45%
Average number of children aged <16 at home	1.28	1.02	0.61
Left full-time education			
by age 16 years	54%	55%	42%
by age 17-20 years	28%	28%	32%
by age 21 years and over	18%	17%	26%
Base=100%	171	870	194
National distribution of the three groups	14%	70%	16%

Notes: Women aged 20-59 who have completed their full-time education. The fertility indicator is shown for married and cohabiting women aged 20-55 years. *Source:* Hakim (2003a).

other two groups. The difference is small enough to be explained by differential self-selection into higher education. As predicted by preference theory, lifestyle preferences cut across education groups, as well as socio-economic and income groups. Overall, the key features of the three lifestyle preference groups are in line with preference theory. In broad terms, preferences predict outcomes. Further analysis (Hakim 2003a) shows that attitudes predict behaviour, but that behaviour does not predict attitudes. That is, attitudes are not a *post hoc* rationalisation for decisions already taken.

Careers and fertility

Further analysis of the 1999 British survey shows that lifestyle preferences are even more important than educational qualifications in shaping women's choice between market work and a life centred on family life and children. The theses that women's fertility declines with increasing social status, and that higher education invariably leads women to become career-oriented, are shown to be unsupported.

The analysis in Tables 3 and 4 is restricted to wives because women's choices only become sharply defined, and can only be implemented, after marriage to a breadwinner spouse.⁵ The analysis is also restricted to wives aged 20-54 years because women aged 55 and over almost never have children aged under 16 at home, and because many women (and men) quit the labour market from age 55 onwards. The analysis focuses on the choice between a career, as indicated by full-time employment (Table 3), compared to a life centred on family work, as indicated by the fertility measure (Table 4).

The possession of higher education qualifications is a good general indicator of women's social status. It is an indicator of women's self-confidence and self-assertiveness; of women's potential earnings if they choose to work; and a rough indicator of their socio-economic status, either through their own job or their husband's status. Tables 3 and 4 show virtually no impact of education, or social status, on wives' career orientation and fertility levels.

Education does have an impact on employment: full-time work rates are 24 percentage points higher among highly qualified women. However, lifestyle preferences are far more important – as a determinant of both employment and fertility levels. Work-centred wives have much higher full-time work rates than home-centred (or adaptive) wives, whether they are highly educated or not. Small base numbers mean the results for family-centred women in the highly qualified group

are not absolutely reliable, but the pattern is consistent, and strong, in both groups of women.

Fertility among home-centred women is double the level among work-centred women. Again the differences are even larger among highly qualified women, with fertility rates almost trebled compared with work-centred wives. Overall, lifestyle preferences are more important than the variables more commonly measured in surveys, such as education or social status. It appears that lifestyle preferences are the hidden, unmeasured factor that determines women's behaviour to a very large extent.

Competing social policies

Preference theory offers a new approach to policy development, one that takes account of the diversity of lifestyle preferences instead of adopting the usual one-size-fits-all approach. As Gauthier (1996) has pointed out, the heterogeneity of individual and household employment strategies within modern societies makes it impossible to get accurate measures of the impact of family policies. Policies that treat women as a homogeneous group are bound to fail, or to work poorly. Policies that are designed to be neutral between the three preference groups, offering each of them a flexible benefit, will be hugely successful in terms of take-up rates and political popularity.

These arguments are set out more fully elsewhere (Hakim 2000: 223-253). In practice, however, politicians have tended to develop policies that favour one group at the expense of the others, because they rely (sometimes implicitly) on a single model of the ideal family rather than accepting the diversity of fully effective family models implied by the typology in Table 1. The analytical framework of preference theory helps us to identify such biased policies.

At present, social policy and family policy generally focus on the *working* mother and ignore home-centred women. It is often argued that maternity leave (unpaid or paid) helps women to combine paid work with having children. However, a preference theory perspective clarifies that it is mainly work-centred women (and to a lesser extent adaptive women who lean towards careers) who benefit from maternity leave and related job rights – that is, women who have the lowest fertility and are least likely to increase it.

This helps to explain why maternity leave rights have relatively low take-up rates. In Britain, studies of maternity leave rights have concluded that “two-thirds of mothers now return to work after childbirth”. In fact, two-thirds of all mothers are at home full-time caring

Table 3 Relative importance of lifestyle preferences and education: full-time work rates

	Working full-time		Distribution	
	Highly qualified women %	Other women %	Highly qualified women %	Other women %
<i>Lifestyle preferences</i>				
work-centred	93	65	18	8
adaptive	48	26	71	78
family-centred	(28)	34	11	14
All wives 20-54	54	30	100	100
Base=100%	119	589	119	589

Notes: Married women aged 20-54 who have completed their full-time education. In the absence of information on educational qualifications, the highly qualified are defined as those completing their full-time education at age 21 and over, because in Britain first degrees are normally completed by age 21. People completing full-time education at age 20 or earlier are assumed to have qualifications below tertiary education level.
Source: Hakim (2003a).

for their baby, as a matter of choice. For the minority who do return to work, this return is usually short-lived. And promises to return to work are routinely broken: only about half of working women who promise to return to their jobs after the birth actually do so in Britain – a likelihood that is no better than chance (Hakim 1996: 127-129, 2000: 120-122).



focus instead on policies to support home-centred women, who have the highest fertility rates and can most easily be persuaded to increase their family size. Such policies would also benefit those adaptive women who lean towards the family, rather than market work, as their main priority. In practice, the focus of social and family policy in most modern societies has swung so far towards the working mother that there is now a systematic policy bias *against* non-working mothers, most obviously in relation to lone mothers.

Until recently, policy makers accepted that it was in children's best interest for the sole parent to be a full-time parent, even if this meant long-term dependence on welfare, social housing and other benefits. Policy has now swung against full-time mothers, and lone mothers are forced into low-paid and unrewarding jobs in Welfare to Work schemes in the United States. In Britain, there are similar pressures pushing lone mothers into jobs on the grounds that they are "better off" psychologically and financially. Publicity for such schemes underlines the low public esteem accorded to full-time mothers and parenting work generally, and reinforces the idea that citizenship is dependent on gainful employment, however low-status and low-paid. In the United

The focus of social and family policy in most modern societies has swung so far towards the working mother that there is now a systematic policy bias against non-working mothers, most obviously in relation to lone mothers.

An Australian study produced broadly similar results (Glezer 1988). Only half of all Australian women eligible for maternity leave took it. The other half did not take it because they did not intend returning to the same job, or any job, after the birth. Two-thirds of those who did return to work chose part-time or marginal hours rather than full-time work. Eligibility for maternity rights made no difference to the likelihood of being back in a job of some sort 18 months after the birth. Glezer found that attitudes towards motherhood versus paid work was the most important determinant of the decision to return to work, or not. However, women always said they returned to work because they "needed the money", a response given across all categories of family income. In sum, maternity leave rights seem to make virtually no difference to women's behaviour.

Governments that are serious about raising fertility rates (and few are, as Demeny 1987 points out) should

States, Crittenden (2001: 2) maintains that full-time parenting tends to be equated with "doing nothing".

For some reason, governments find it difficult to accord reproductive work the same status, dignity and value as productive work. This is probably because governments, and public policy, are still male-dominated, even in modern societies, and men insist on treating women's unpaid reproductive work as taken-for-granted, "natural" women's work that does not merit the same valuation and rewards as male-style productive work. The bottom line in public policy is that women should provide reproductive services for free. Unfortunately, many women have absorbed this phallogocentric thesis, leading them to support policies that deny professional fees to surrogate mothers, denigrate sex workers, deride couples who pay to adopt children, and disdain other activities involved in the industrialisation of sexual and reproductive work.⁶

Table 4 Relative importance of lifestyle preferences and education: fertility

	Average number of children <16 at home			No children at home		
	Highly qualified women n	Other women n	All women n	Highly qualified women %	Other women %	All women %
<i>Lifestyle preferences</i>						
family-centred	(2.0)	1.18	1.29	(8)	42	37
adaptive	1.0	1.09	1.08	39	42	42
work-centred	0.71	0.62	0.65	68	64	65
All wives 20-54	1.08	1.08	1.08	41	44	44
Base=100%	119	589	708	119	589	708

Notes: Married women aged 20-54 who have completed their full-time education. See notes to Table 3.
Source: Hakim (2003a).

Similarly, many governments have fiscal policies that discriminate against single-earner families, including Britain, Sweden and Australia (Hakim 2000: 230).

Child care services provide another example of policies that are presented as being beneficial to women generally but in fact favour one particular group. Like maternity leave, public child care services (free or subsidised) are primarily of benefit to work-centred women who choose to return to work shortly after a birth. They are of less value to adaptive women, who either drop out of the labour market while their children are young, or else work part-time hours if at all possible. Public child care services are of no value at all to home-centred women who choose to care for their children themselves. Indeed, many home-centred women resent their husband's taxes being used to subsidise child care for women who "cannot be bothered" to look after their own children.

Preference theory exposes the bias against full-time motherhood in current fiscal, social and family policies in many modern societies. It also helps us to identify policies that are neutral between the three preference groups. One example is the home care allowance introduced in various forms in the 1990s in Finland, Norway and France (Hakim 2000: 232-235). The home care allowance is a salary paid to the mother (or any parent) who stays at home to care for children without using public day care nurseries. It is quite separate from financial benefits paid for dependent children, which are intended to help parents with the extra costs of children's food, clothing and education.

overturned by the contraceptive revolution, and the other social and economic changes it made possible.

The first distinctive feature of preference theory is the recognition that the contraceptive revolution of the 1960s, and several other recent social and economic changes create a new scenario of opportunities and options for women. This is a fundamental and radical change in women's position in society and the lifestyle choices open to them. Male demographers (and many other social scientists) have tended to assume that motherhood was a natural, even biologically determined destiny for women, and that the high levels of fertility seen in the past were "normal". They have failed to



When women control their own fertility, it is their preferences and values which shape responses to public policy – and public policy has not, in practice, paid much attention to women's wishes so far.

The home care allowance can be regarded as a wage for child care at home, as a partial replacement for earnings foregone, or it can be used as a subsidy for purchased child care services which enable the parent to return to work, full-time or part-time. The scheme has been hugely popular wherever it is introduced, with take-up rates close to 100 per cent even in the early years, unlike the much-publicised parental leave rights. The value of the home care allowance varies between countries and schemes, but is never nominal. For example, in Finland the home care allowance for one child amounts to 40 per cent of the average monthly earnings of female employees. The allowance is a public statement of the social value accorded to full-time parenting and the dignity of motherhood. By raising the social status of motherhood as compared with paid jobs, it redresses the bias against motherhood as an activity, and can also impact on fertility rates.

Conclusions

Most research seeks to identify central tendencies: what the average woman does, or wants. The implicit assumption is that women and men form homogeneous groups, with the differences between them steadily shrinking in modern societies. This was a reasonably accurate picture in the past. However, this picture was

recognise that sexually active heterosexual women had no control over their fertility, and had little or no choice about the shape of their lives, prior to the introduction of modern methods of contraception.

The contraceptive revolution gave women independent control of their fertility, if necessary without the agreement or cooperation of male partners, for the first time in history. When women control their own fertility, it is their preferences and values which shape responses to public policy – and public policy has not, in practice, paid much attention to women's wishes so far.

The second distinctive feature of preference theory is the recognition of female heterogeneity in preferences for a life centred, like men, on employment or other competitive activities in the public sphere or else a life centred on the non-competitive activities of private life. It is this heterogeneity of lifestyle preferences that impedes attempts to predict fertility and employment *after* the contraceptive revolution and the new scenario give women genuine choices over the shape of their lives, for the first time in history.

The diversity of women's lifestyle preferences corresponds to three distinct models of the family, each of them effective and rewarding in different ways for those who choose them. The 1999 *Listening to Women* survey confirms that it is lifestyle preferences, rather than level of education, that predict whether women's lives will be

focused on careers and jobs, or on children and family life. The more highly educated a woman is the greater the impact of her preferences on her lifestyle choices.

Two conclusions follow from this. First, it is necessary to collect information on women's (and men's) lifestyle preferences as well as on all the other factors routinely covered by surveys, such as education, income and so forth. An ideal opportunity presents itself in HILDA (the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia survey), the new longitudinal study of 7700 Australian households being carried out by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economics and Social Research in conjunction with the Australian Institute of Family Studies and others (Weston and Wooden 2002). The survey already collects data on attitudes and values, through interviews and self-completion questionnaires, so it would be easy to add the handful of questions required to identify lifestyle preferences. This would allow all the HILDA research topics to be analysed in the context of people's ideal family model, including employment patterns, fertility decisions, voluntary childlessness, and responses to policy interventions.

Second, we have to recognise that one-size-fits-all policies will no longer suffice. Policy-making must become a more complex enterprise, recognising that competing family models require diversified social policies that offer different types of support to each preference group. At best, we should be developing flexible and neutral policies, such as the home care allowance, that leave people free to choose how to spend their benefits.

Most important, we need to redress the current bias towards policies supporting working women exclusively, at the expense of policies supporting full-time homemakers and full-time parents.

Endnotes

1. This is very obvious in the summaries published in the October 1999 magazine-style report *Voices: Turning listening into action*. The emphasis in this report is on education and training, access to paid work, job segregation, the pay gap, and child care services for working mothers. There is virtually no mention of full-time homemakers and full-time parents, and there are no policies listed to support this group.
2. A full report on the 1999 British survey and an equivalent 1999 Spanish survey is given in Hakim (2003a).
3. The Eurobarometer series of surveys is run by the European Commission to inform European Union policy-making. They cover all EU member states, and focus on social and political attitudes.
4. There is a substantial literature debating whether increased economic independence reduces women's interest in marriage (Oppenheimer 1994, 1997; Oppenheimer and Lew 1995). It appears that this effect operates only among work-centred women, who are a small minority.
5. The analysis was repeated for women who were not married and not cohabiting. In this sub-group, there is little variation in full-time work rates and fertility between preference groups. It is only after marriage that the three preference groups show differentiated behaviour patterns.
6. One reason why women resist the industrialisation and commercialisation of sexual and reproductive work is because this introduces competitive values into an area of social life currently dominated by cooperative and caring values. These contrasting value systems are features of the market economy and the domestic economy respectively and not, as Parsons and Bales (1955) assumed, characteristics of men and women *per se*.

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