

Gender

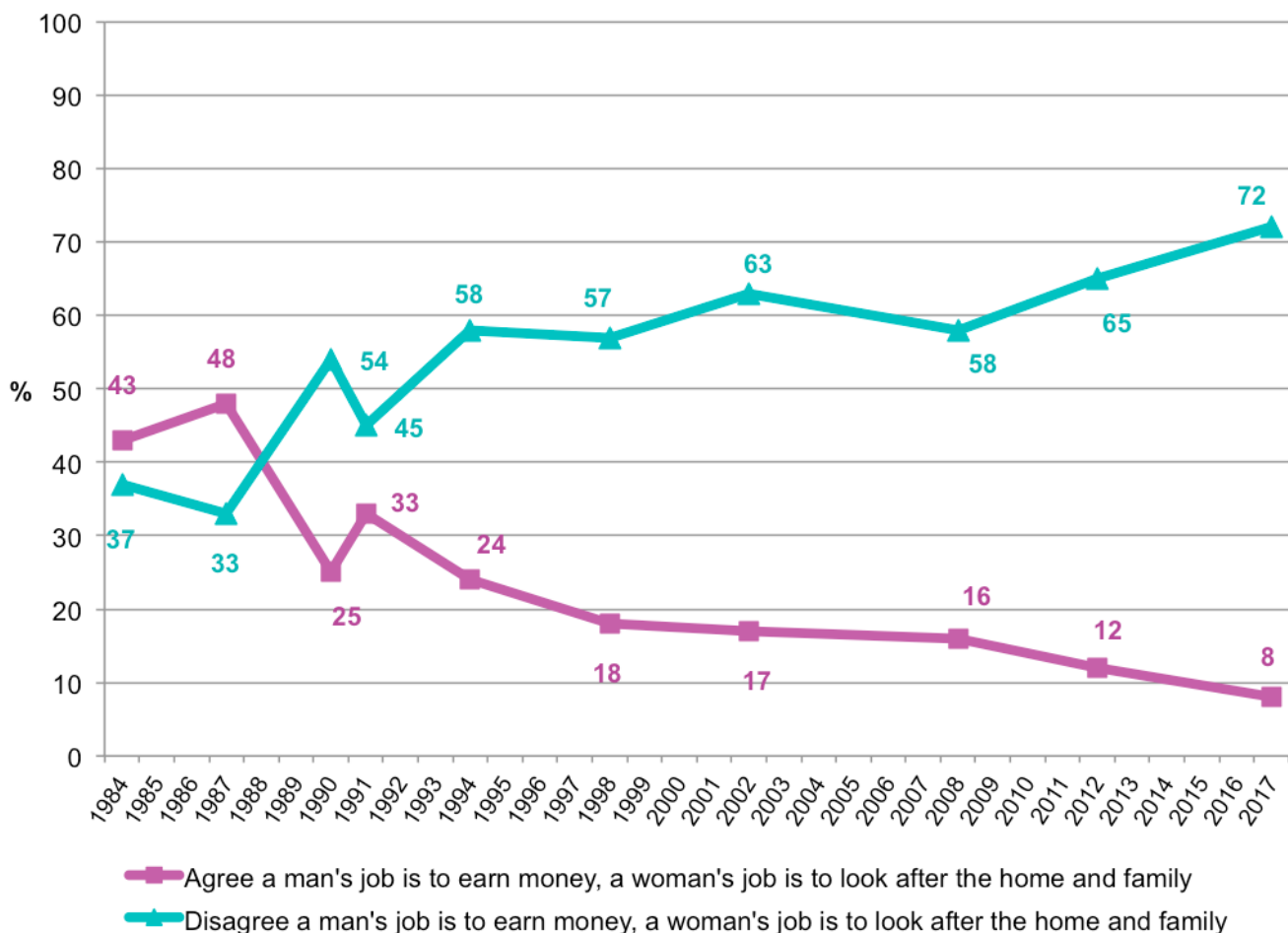
New consensus or continuing battleground?

In this chapter we explore changing attitudes towards gender roles in work and at home, as well as views on online sexist bullying and unsolicited comments. We find the British public continues to move away from conservative views of men as breadwinners and women as homemakers, with narrowing divides in views between different demographic and socio-economic groups. Despite this the past five years have seen little change in views of whether mothers should work. Meanwhile there is near consensus in condemning online sexist bullying, and making comments on a woman's appearance in the street is widely seen as wrong.

Spotlight

Views on gender roles have become less traditional over the past three decades, including a notable change in attitudes since 2008.

Views on traditional gender roles, 1984-2017



Overview

Traditional views of gender roles continue to decline

Views on gender roles continue to become more progressive, and this is particularly true of traditionally conservative groups.

- 72% disagree with the view that a man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family, up from 58% in 2008.
 - Older people, people with no formal qualifications and people with lower incomes are more likely than other groups to hold traditional gender role views.
 - But these divisions are narrowing; for example while in 2012 only 30% of people aged 75+ disagreed with this statement, now nearly half do (47%). This corresponds with a 46 percentage point gap in 2012 between the oldest (75+) and youngest (18-34) age groups, that has now reduced to 27 points.
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Divisions on working mothers

There is now little public consensus on whether mothers of young children should work or stay at home, representing a shift away from a preference for mothers to stay at home.

- While a third (33%) say mothers of pre-school children should stay at home, 38% say mothers should work part-time, and 7% full-time.
 - There has been substantial change in this area since 1989, when 64% said mothers of pre-school children should stay at home. But much of this change happened leading up to 2012, and views have remained relatively static over the past five years.
 - Notably a fifth (20%) do not choose an option, up from just 6% in 1989.
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Comments on a stranger's appearance on the street widely seen as wrong

A majority see unsolicited comments towards women as wrong, and there is near consensus against online sexist bullying of women.

- 57% say it is "always" or "usually" wrong for a man to comment on a woman's appearance in the street. This view is more common among men (61%) than women (52%).
 - Fewer (45%) think it is wrong for a woman to comment on a man's appearance in the street, but conversely this view is more common among women (54%) than men (35%).
 - An overwhelming majority (93%) say sexist online bullying towards women is wrong, while 85% say the same about sexist online bullying directed at men.
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Women now represent just under half of the total UK labour force

Introduction

Debates surrounding gender roles and equality have been a feature of British society since at least the eighteenth century but have gained renewed prominence in British public debate during recent months and years. In February 2018 we celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Representation of the People Act 1918, which gave some women over the age of 30 the right to vote for the first time. December 2018 marks 100 years since the first general election in which women voted in the UK. Such anniversaries, together with other high-profile news events, have focused attention afresh on the roles and experiences of men and women in contemporary society.

British society has, in many ways, made substantial progress towards greater gender equality. More women are in paid employment than ever before: 71% of women aged 16-64 are in paid work, the highest employment rate since records began (Office for National Statistics, 2018). Increasing rates of employment for women are attributed to anti-discrimination legislation (Equal Pay Act, 1970, Sex Discrimination Act and Employment Protection Act, 1975), changes to support for lone parents and the increase in state pension age for women. At the same time, wider changes in the British labour market have seen the growth in services, where women are more likely to work than men, and the decline of the traditionally male-dominated manufacturing sector (Office for National Statistics, 2013). As a result of these changes, including an increase in mothers in work and a decline in male employment, women now represent just under half of the total UK labour force.

Despite men and women now having the same rights under UK law, women still experience significant inequalities in many different areas of life (Baker, 2014). Women with low or no qualifications have much lower employment levels than men with equivalent backgrounds. Women are also more likely than men to be in low paid jobs: 25% of employed women have low pay compared with 15% of employed men (Tinson et. al., 2016). Recently, increasing attention has been paid to the 'gender pay gap', with publication for the first time of figures showing the extent of pay differences between men and women in the UK. Analysis of these figures gives a measure of the difference in men's and women's working patterns which underlie disparities in pay: different occupations, part-time roles being predominantly female and the lack of women in senior roles (Jones, 2018). Campaigners maintain that these inequalities are damaging the quality of people's lives, harming relationships, limiting the effectiveness of businesses and institutions and restricting the potential of our children to reach their full potential.

Over the last decade, there has also been a marked increase in the public spotlight on issues of behaviour, how men treat women including so called 'mansplaining' (Solnit, 2014) and what is or is not appropriate sexual behaviour. Exposés of sexual harassment have resulted in high profile scandals in media, business, and charity

sectors, including resignations of government ministers. The #MeToo social media campaign, which spread virally in October 2017, helped demonstrate the widespread prevalence of sexual assault and harassment, especially in the workplace.

However, what is perceived by some as progress is often met by a backlash from others. Some have claimed that the ‘cultural wars’, that have long been part-and-parcel of American civic and political life, have become an increasingly important part of the British social landscape (Bagehot, 2017). Mary Beard (2017), an academic who was a victim of online abuse, talks of this as the ‘silencing’ of women, which she claims can be tracked back to ancient civilizations and is still manifest in modern Britain. Opinion seems divided on what the real issues are, and whether responses are proportionate or appropriate.

This chapter examines three potential fault lines of gender politics. First, attitudes towards gender roles in the home and in the labour market, including attitudes towards parental leave. Second, whether there are ‘essential’ differences between men and women in terms of skills and job suitability. And third, attitudes to the treatment of women and men, in terms of unsolicited comments in the street and online bullying.

Across all these topic areas, the aim is to find out whether there is increasing consensus or an ongoing divergence of opinion. In other words, we want to examine how far the language of ‘culture wars’ and ‘lines of battle’ is an appropriate description of how the British public views a range of gender issues. We also seek to go beyond this to unpack who thinks what across different demographic divides. Existing research suggests that persisting cultural differences are found along key social stratification divides: gender, age and class (Esping-Andersen, 2009, Scott et al., 2010). Moreover, these divides remain important even when other relevant factors, including religion, marital status and women’s employment are taken into account (Braun and Scott, 2009). Therefore, in order to explore key divides among the British public, we address the following questions: do attitudes towards gender politics differ between men and women? If so how and by how much? Is this affected by age? And are there differences according to education and/or income?

Gender roles – at home and in the labour market

In this section, we consider three aspects of attitudes towards men and women’s roles in the home and in employment: first, attitudes to the division of labour, within and outside the home; second, views on mothers’ employment in different circumstances; and third, how the public thinks a dual earner couple should divide parental leave.

Scott and Clery's (2013) analysis of almost 30 years of British attitudes to gender roles, found considerable changes in the way the public viewed the gender role divide. They predicted that while we might expect to see further reductions in support for a gender division of labour in subsequent years, the speed of change in attitudes would slow down. This is because the attitudinal gap between different generations was narrowing, as it became increasingly acceptable and economically necessary for women and mothers to be employed.

Here, we extend their analysis by looking particularly at how attitudes have changed since 2012: have we seen a continuing revolution in gender role attitudes or has the pace of change slowed or stalled? And to what extent are British attitudes in consensus or divided on such important and timely issues? And what are the differences between different groups?

During this time, there have been several policy changes aiming to support working families to balance work and childcare. In 2015, Shared Parental Leave was introduced to give greater childcare flexibility for parents in the first year after their baby is born (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, and Department for Education, 2013). Then, in 2017, the government increased the free hours of childcare for three- and four-year-olds available for working parents from 15 to 30 hours (Department for Education, 2015). How do such initiatives relate to public opinion?

How have views on gender roles in the home and workplace changed over time?

Since the mid-1980s, British Social Attitudes (BSA) has included attitudinal questions asking about the role of men and women within the family, in particular around providing an income from work versus a caring role at home. In 2017, we continue this time-series by asking respondents whether they agree or disagree with the following two statements:

A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family

Both the man and woman should contribute to the household income

Given that these questions were first asked more than three decades ago, the fact that the questions focus only on heterosexual couples is no surprise. An additional challenge for interpretation is that the questions are designed to tap into 'agreement' with 'traditional' gender roles, but the reasons for rejecting these strict divisions is far less clear. An individual's personal reasons for selecting a particular response might include endorsement of the right of both men and women to participate in the labour market and/or supporting greater gender equality in the home, but also might reflect the view that such decisions should be a matter of individual choice. We must keep this in mind when reviewing these findings.

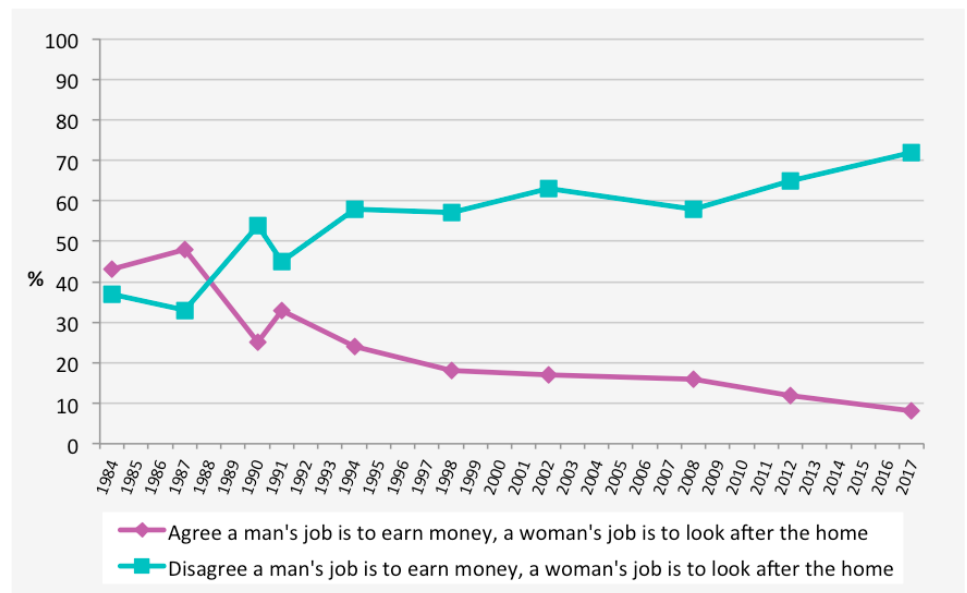
A traditional view of gender roles in a household for men and women is now relatively rare

What is clear is that a traditional view of gender roles in a household for men and women is now relatively rare; less than one in ten (8%) agree that “a man’s job is to earn money”, and “a woman’s job is to look after the home and family”, while over seven in ten (72%) disagree with this statement (Figure 1). Similarly, 72% agree that “both the man and the woman should contribute to the household income”, while only 4% disagree.¹

By contrast, when the gender roles question was first asked in 1984, 43% of the British public agreed that a man should be the breadwinner and a woman the homemaker, while just 37% disagreed with this view. By the early 1990s traditional views of gender roles were in swift decline, and while this stabilised somewhat during the 2000s, the decrease has continued steadily since. This trend has been mirrored by increasing agreement that both men and women should contribute to the household income; from 53% in 1989 to 72% in 2017.

Given the scale of societal change in the number of women participating in the labour market over the past three decades, it is unsurprising that the long-term trend has been towards more progressive (less traditional) views. But even looking to the short-term, the past five years have seen a further shift away from traditional views. Agreement that men and women should contribute to the household income rose from 62% in 2012 to 72% in 2017, and in the same time period disagreement with the male breadwinner-female housewife model increased from 65% to 72%.

Figure 1 Views of traditional gender roles, 1984-2017



The data on which Figure 1 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

1 The full data for this question from 1989 to 2017 can be found in the appendix to this chapter.

A key question then is does the continued liberalisation of views of gender roles over the past five years reflect a cross-societal change, or have we seen differential rates of change among particular groups? In Table 1 we present the proportion of people disagreeing with a gendered separation of roles, indicating a non-traditional view of gender roles within the household, by a number of demographic variables.

Overall, there is a broad consensus between the sexes in rejecting the traditional gender role divide, although women are a little more likely than men to disagree with traditional gender roles (74% compared with 69% for men). Unsurprisingly, there is a significant age gap in views of gender roles: older people are more likely to hold more traditional views than younger people - around half (47%) of those in the oldest age group (75 or older) disagree with the statement “a man’s job is to earn money and a woman’s job is to look after the home”, compared with three-quarters (75%) of the youngest age group (18-34). However, the past five years have seen a convergence of the views of older and younger people (illustrated by the fall from a 46 percentage point difference between oldest and youngest groups in 2012 to 27 points in 2017). This has been driven largely by an increase in progressive views among those in the older age groups.



 **The past five years have seen a convergence of the views of older and younger people** 

Table 1 View of gender roles, by demographics, 1991-2017

% disagree a man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family	1991	2002	2012	2017
Sex				
Men	41	58	66	69
Women	47	67	64	74
Difference Men-Women	-6	-9	+2	-6
Age				
18-34	67	78	76	75
35-44	54	73	72	77
45-54	44	69	64	79
55-64	25	52	67	72
65-74	16	41	50	67
75+	11	24	30	47
Difference youngest group-oldest group	+55	+54	+46	+27
Highest educational qualification				
Degree	67	78	81	82
Higher education or A-level	54	70	72	79
GCSE, O level, CSE or equivalent	46	64	60	62
No qualifications	31	44	42	55
Difference degree-no qualifications	+36	+34	+39	+28
Household income group				
£3,701 or more per month	53	74	72	84
£2,201 to £3,700 per month	50	71	68	73
£1,201 to £2,200 per month	30	57	57	64
Less than £1,200 per month	23	44	57	60
Difference highest-lowest income group	+30	+30	+15	+24
All	44	63	65	72

The bases for this table can be found in the appendix to this chapter

Figures showing differences between groups in this table are calculated from the unrounded data, rather than the data rounded to the nearest whole number that are reported in the table. As a result they will sometimes vary from the difference between the rounded figures by +/-1 point

As well as a difference between age groups, there is also a clear divide between those with different levels of education; with 82% of graduates disagreeing that men should be breadwinners and women housewives, compared with 55% of those with no formal qualifications. Here we also see a narrowing of the gap between groups; since 2012 the difference between those with no formal qualifications and graduates has reduced from 39 points to 28 points, with those with no qualifications, in particular, becoming more progressive over time.

Analysis by income shows a similar pattern, with those in the higher income quartiles being more likely to disagree with the traditional view than those with lower income, but with the gap fluctuating over time. This finding is difficult to interpret. On one hand, those on higher incomes, who might be thought to have greater ability to choose to have one parent stay at home, are less likely to support traditional gender roles, indicating that the view goes beyond economic necessity. On the other, higher income families will, typically, be more likely to be dual-earner households and have the resources to employ alternative help for housework and/or childcare.

Gender, age, education and income are all correlated with views on gender roles. They are, of course, themselves linked; for example, younger people are more likely than older people to be graduates and those with higher education (of any age), are typically more likely to have higher income. Regression analysis confirms that the oldest age group and those with lower educational levels are more traditional in their gender role attitudes compared with younger people and those with higher educational levels, even when controlling for gender and income. In addition, women and higher income groups are more progressive (less traditional) than are men and low income groups, controlling for both age and education (full results for the multivariate analysis can be found in the appendix to this chapter).

While there are clear differences in attitudes between different demographic groups, these differences do seem to have narrowed over time, particularly in terms of reduced differences by age and education. However, as we indicated above, it is impossible to know whether disagreeing with the traditional gender-role divide indicates overall support for a principle of gender equality or greater endorsement of couples' right to decide their division of labour for themselves. In addition, we have seen that society as a whole has become less traditional in gender role attitudes over time, with seven in ten disagreeing that a man's job is to earn money and a woman's job is to look after the home and family in 2017. Will this progressive trend continue in the future? It seems likely that it will; because, as Scott and Clery (2013) suggested, the increasing rejection of traditional gender-roles is in line with changing social norms, including the greater acceptance of maternal employment.

Should mothers of young children work outside the home?

One specific change that has led to an increase in the proportion of women in the labour market has been an increase in the number of mothers working. In 2017 almost three-quarters (74%) of mothers² in England were employed, an increase of 12 percentage points over the last 20 years (Office for National Statistics, 2017). However, mothers aged 16-49 are still less likely to be in employment than

² This refers to mothers of working age with dependent children (living with their parent(s) and aged under 16, or 16-18 and in full-time education).

women of the same age without dependent children. At the beginning of September 2017, the government's 30 hours free childcare offer for working parents in England was launched (Department for Education, 2015). This is one of a raft of family-friendly initiatives, including flexible working and improved childcare provision, designed to support parents who wish to work or to work more hours.

Previous analyses of BSA data found that while very few believed there should be a clear gender divide in roles between male breadwinners and female home-keepers, there remained a substantial minority who believed mothers of young children should stay at home rather than take on paid work (Scott and Clery, 2013). But are these views changing over time? And do attitudes differ between different social groups?

On BSA we ask two questions on views about working mothers:

Do you think that women should work outside the home full-time, part-time or not at all under the following circumstances?

When there is a child under school age

After the youngest child starts school

When we ask about a mother of a child under school age, the most common view is that she should work part-time (38%), closely followed by the view she should stay at home (33%) (Table 2). Only a small minority (7%) think she should work full-time. However, once the youngest child has started school, a majority believe a mother should work either part-time (49%) or full-time (27%), with only 2% saying she should stay at home. For both scenarios a fifth of respondents cannot choose a response.

Table 2 Attitudes to mothers' employment in different circumstances, 1989-2017

	When there is a child under school age				When the youngest child has started school			
	1989	2002	2012	2017	1989	2002	2012	2017
A woman should:	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Stay at home	64	48	33	33	11	5	2	2
Work part-time	26	34	43	38	68	66	52	49
Work full-time	2	3	5	7	13	15	28	27
Can't choose	6	12	17	20	7	12	16	19
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1307</i>	<i>1960</i>	<i>950</i>	<i>2474</i>	<i>1307</i>	<i>1960</i>	<i>950</i>	<i>2474</i>

Answer options are presented in the table in reverse order to how they were presented to respondents

There has been a decline in the view that women should stay at home if they have a child under school age – from 64% in 1989, to 33% now

Over time there has been a decline in the view that women should stay at home if they have a child under school age – down from almost two-thirds (64%) in 1989, to a third (33%) now, coinciding with an increased view that women with a child under school age should work part-time (from 26% in 1989, to 38% now). However

much of this change happened leading up to 2012, and the past five years have seen little change.

Views on whether a mother should work when her youngest child has started school have seen a different pattern of changes, although again little has changed since 2012. The view that a mother of a school-age child should work part-time has reduced over time, from 68% in 1989 to 49% in 2017. This has coincided with an increase in the proportion favouring full-time work (rising from 13% in 1989 to 27% now). Very few people now say that mothers of school-age children should stay at home – 2% down from 11% in 1989.

For both questions, the proportion of people who cannot choose from the available options has increased over time; in 1989, 6%-7% said they could not choose an option, compared with 19%-20% now. One interpretation of this increased “can’t choose” selection is that people’s view of the question is now more nuanced; either that their response would depend on the situation, or that a mother’s work status should not be prescribed by others. While men and women are similarly likely to say they “can’t choose”, being unable to choose appears to be related to age (younger and middle-age groups aged under 55), being more highly educated, and having a higher income.

In general, men and women have comparable views on mothers returning to work; although women are slightly more likely than men to favour a mother working part-time, both for mothers of pre-school children (41% of women, compared with 36% of men) and mothers of school-age children (52% of women, compared with 46% of men). On the other hand, men (36%) are more likely than women (30%) to favour a mother of pre-school children staying at home.

Not surprisingly, the oldest age group’s views on mothers working reflect the more traditional view of gender roles among older groups that we saw in the previous section. Around half (49%) of the oldest age group (75+) say a mother of a pre-school child should stay at home, compared with 30% of those aged 18-34. When asked about a mother working with school-age children, the oldest group (75+) show a strong preference for part-time work (64%) over full-time (14%), while similar proportions of young people aged 18-34 favour full-time (37%) and part-time (42%) work.

Similarly, those with lower educational qualifications hold more traditional views on mothers’ employment than graduates, which is the same pattern we saw with views regarding gender roles. For example, those with no formal qualifications are twice as likely as graduates (40% versus 21%) to say a mother of a pre-school child should stay at home. In the same way, those on lowest household incomes (less than £1,200 per month) are most likely to say that mothers of pre-school children should stay at home, with the proportion saying this reducing as income increases. However, it is impossible to tease out cause and effect in this analysis: those who have made the decision to be a single-earner family (now or in the past) may be more likely to have lower household incomes.

How should mothers and fathers share parental leave?

In April 2015, the government introduced new Shared Parental Leave (SPL) legislation to allow both parents to share up to 50 weeks of leave, 37 weeks of which is paid, to look after their new child. In practice this means that while the mother must take the first two weeks after birth, the rest of the leave can be shared as the parents want, within certain limits (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, and Department for Education, 2013).

The government estimates that around 285,000 couples every year are eligible for SPL. An official estimate of take-up levels is not yet available; however forecasted take-up is relatively low at 2%-8%. Similarly there is little available evidence around awareness, although according to the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy research only around half of the general public have heard of SPL (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, 2018). There is some evidence that even when new fathers want to spend more time with their baby, many families can't afford for the father to take time off work (Working Families, 2017).

To assess what the public thinks about shared parental leave for new parents, we asked the following question:

Consider a couple who both work full-time and earn roughly the same amount, and now have a new born child. Both are eligible for paid leave if they stop working for some time to care for their child. How should the mother and father divide the paid leave period between them?

Table 3 shows that the majority of the public thinks new parents should share their parental leave to some degree – that is that both the mother and father should take at least some time off to look after the baby. While around four in ten (39%) say the mother should take most of the paid leave and the father some, a further three in ten (30%) think the mother and father should each take half of the paid leave. Only 15% think the mother should take the entire paid parental leave period and the father none.

A relatively high proportion of people – 14% – say they “can’t choose” an option. As with the maternal work questions, this may reflect a view that it would depend on the situation, although this can’t be unpicked from other possible reasons for answering “can’t choose” (for example, believing families should make their own decisions).

Four in ten (39%) say the mother should take most of the paid leave and the father some, a further three in ten (30%) think the mother and father should each take half of the paid leave

Table 3 How should a full-time working couple with a new baby divide the paid leave period between them?

	%
Mother should take entire paid leave period, father none	15
Mother should take most of paid leave, father some	39
The mother and the father should each take half	30
Father should take most of paid leave, mother some	*
Father should take entire paid leave, mother none	*
Can't choose	14
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>2474</i>

Men and women alike most commonly choose an option with some element of shared parental leave. We might expect men to show more support for a shared approach to parental leave than women, given this policy offers greater paternal choice. However, we find that men (19%) are more likely to say the mother should take the entire leave period than women (11%), although it is worth noting that this difference is not large.

The age difference in views on shared parental leave, however, is stark; 34% of those aged 75 or more say mothers should take all of the leave, compared with only 10% of 18-34 year-olds. Similarly, just 17% of the older age group (75+) thinks the leave should be shared equally between the parents, compared with 38% of the youngest group (18-34 year-olds). Again, this reflects the higher levels of traditional gender role beliefs among the oldest age group.

Those with no educational qualifications, or on lower incomes, are more likely to say that the mother should take the entire leave period, compared with graduates, and those with the highest incomes. Interestingly, as with the questions on mothers returning to work, those with higher educational qualifications and in the highest income bracket are much more likely to say they "can't choose", compared with those with no qualifications or in the lowest income group (both 18% compared with 10% respectively). Again, this may indicate a more prevalent view among higher income, more educated people that parental leave allocation should be for the couple to choose, depending on circumstances.

In conclusion, this analysis has shown that the pattern of increasing consensus towards more progressive, equitable roles for men and women has largely continued. There remain distinct minorities who support more traditional division of labour and working patterns for mothers, and views around shared parental leave are more divided. More traditional views are most common among older people and those with lower education and/or lower income, although these groups have become more progressive over time. The other significant shift is in the proportion of people, particularly in higher educated, higher income groups, who 'cannot say' in response to the

maternal employment questions. It is not clear whether this indicates growing uncertainty in views, or a growing reluctance to dictate what might be the ‘right’ decision for other people.

Having explored attitudes to gender roles, our focus now shifts to beliefs about differences between men and women.

Differences between men and women

One of the big debates in gender equality is the extent to which men and women are essentially the same, or fundamentally different from each other. While there are clear biological differences between the sexes, the term ‘gender’ refers to social roles based on the sex of the person. The extent of, and link between, inherent differences by sex and gender are disputed. There are gender differences in employment: for example, men markedly outnumber women in programming and software development, while women dominate employment within caring and leisure occupations (Office for National Statistics, 2013). Moreover, these occupational differences are linked to the gender pay gap. However, there is an ongoing debate as to whether these differences reflect ‘essential’ differences in terms of male and female abilities or preferences, or whether they reflect socially-constructed gender inequalities.

In this section we examine two issues surrounding the public’s beliefs as to whether there are differences between men and women: in terms of job suitability; and between girls’ and boys’ natural abilities in maths and computing.

Are there gender differences in job suitability?

For the first time this year, BSA asked:

Would you say that in general, men and women are equally suited to doing all jobs, almost all jobs, most jobs, some jobs, a few jobs or are there no jobs to which men and women are equally suited?

Table 4 shows that overall, the consensus is in favour of there being few gender differences in job suitability: around half (47%) of people think men and women are equally suited to “all” or “almost all jobs”, with a further 31% saying men and women are equally suited to “most jobs”. However, around a fifth (20%) say men and women are only equally suited to “some” or “a few jobs”, indicating a substantial minority of the population who do hold reservations about gender neutrality.

Women (50%) are more likely than men (44%) to say men and women are equally suited to “all” or “almost all jobs”. However, as we have found with other questions on women and work above, there is a more pronounced divide by age and education. Those in the youngest age group are particularly likely to say men and women are equally suited to “all” or “almost all” jobs. Sixty per cent of 18-34

One of the big debates in gender equality is the extent to which men and women are essentially the same, or fundamentally different from each other

Around half (47%) of people think men and women are equally suited to “all” or “almost all jobs”

year olds are of this opinion, compared with only 28% of those aged 75 or older.

Table 4 Job suitability for men and women, by age

	Age group						All
	18-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+	
Men and women are equally suited to ...	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
... all jobs	20	17	13	9	9	7	14
... almost all jobs	40	36	35	27	29	21	33
... most jobs	26	28	33	38	31	29	31
... some jobs	11	13	16	21	27	37	18
... a few jobs	1	3	2	3	2	3	2
... no jobs	-	-	-	-	*	1	*
<i>Unweighted base</i>	484	398	445	424	413	309	2474

Graduates are more likely to think men and women are equally suited to “all” or “almost all jobs” (59%), than those with A-levels or higher education qualifications (48%), those with GCSE or equivalent qualifications (40%) as their highest educational qualification, and those with no formal qualifications (36%). This may be due to more egalitarian gender views among those with higher qualifications, but also to the types of jobs available to different educational groups.

Are there gender differences in school subject ability?

Women are underrepresented in science, technology, engineering and maths (known as STEM) occupations (WISE, 2015). Traditionally, it might have been held that boys and girls differed in their ability to do technical subjects such as maths and computing. This stereotype is often held to explain the differences in rates of boys and girls studying at university and so going on to work in those careers. However, in recent years there have been considerable attempts to discourage this view and encourage more girls to engage in STEM subjects.

To gauge attitudes to differing abilities according to gender, we asked respondents to say whether girls or boys were naturally better in ability at maths and computing. The question about maths ability is as follows:

Which of the following statements comes closest to your view?

Girls are naturally much better at maths than boys

Girls are naturally a little better at maths than boys

Neither girls nor boys are naturally better at maths

Boys are naturally a little better at maths than girls

Boys are naturally much better at maths than girls

Three-quarters of the public think neither girls nor boys are naturally better at maths or at computing

Table 5 shows that overall, around three-quarters of the public think neither girls nor boys are naturally better at maths or at computing (72% and 73% respectively). There is some evidence, however, of computing being seen as a more 'male' subject than maths; while equal proportions think girls (8%) and boys (8%) are naturally better at maths, a markedly higher proportion think boys are naturally better at computing (12%) than think girls are (3%). Nevertheless, for both subjects only minorities believe one sex to be naturally better at the subject than the other.

When asked about gender differences in mathematical abilities, there are differences between sub-groups in terms of the overall proportion saying neither girls nor boys are better, but no clear picture in terms of whether different groups thought girls or boys were better. For example, women (76%) are more likely than men (67%) to say neither girls nor boys are naturally better at maths. However, the remaining men are equally likely to choose either girls or boys instead of this option.

Comparing between age groups, the youngest age group (18-34) is more likely than the oldest group to say neither girls nor boys are naturally better at maths (78% versus 57%, respectively). But older groups are more likely to be unable to select a response (17% of those aged 75 or older say they cannot choose, compared with only 6% of 18-34-year olds). Similarly, higher education levels are associated with saying neither sex is better at maths; people with a degree (76%) are more likely than those with no formal qualifications (58%) to say neither sex is better at maths, while those with no formal qualifications (20%) are more likely to be unable to choose an option (compared with 8% of those with a degree).

When asked about computing, all groups regardless of gender, age or education are more likely to view boys as naturally better than girls. However, this view is more common among some groups than others, for example, men (16%) are more likely than women (9%) to say boys are naturally better and, somewhat surprisingly, younger people aged 18-34 (19%) are more likely than all older age groups to take this view.

Table 5 Perceived ability of girls and boys at maths and computing, by sex and age

		Girls are naturally better	Neither girls nor boys are naturally better	Boys are naturally better	Can't choose	Unweighted base
View on whether girls or boys are naturally better at maths						
All	%	8	72	8	11	2474
Sex						
Men	%	11	67	10	12	1198
Women	%	6	76	7	10	1252
Age						
18-34	%	7	78	9	6	484
35-44	%	5	76	7	11	398
45-54	%	9	72	7	11	445
55-64	%	9	68	8	13	424
65-74	%	8	67	10	14	413
75+	%	13	57	11	17	309
View on whether girls or boys are naturally better at computing						
All	%	3	73	12	11	2474
Sex						
Men	%	5	67	16	12	1198
Women	%	2	79	9	10	1252
Age						
18-34	%	1	75	19	5	484
35-44	%	3	77	8	10	398
45-54	%	3	74	11	11	445
55-64	%	5	71	9	13	424
65-74	%	4	73	9	13	413
75+	%	6	61	13	18	309

Perceptions of gender differences in aptitudes are interesting, particularly as they might explain the perpetuation of 'traditional views' (for example, if women were seen as being better suited to childcare while men are better suited as earners). This analysis shows that the majority of the British public does not perceive substantial differences between men and women in terms of the jobs they can do or abilities in maths and computing, but that there are a distinct

minority who disagree. Further, more detailed, questions and analysis would be needed to understand the nature of these perceived differences and relationship to beliefs about gender divisions of labour.

In our final section, attention turns to how men and women behave towards members of the opposite sex.

Unsolicited comments and online sexist bullying

Sexual harassment and online bullying have come to prominence in public debate over the last decade, reaching a tipping point with the #MeToo campaign in October 2017. Much of the present focus has been explicitly concerned with the behaviour of men towards women. Connection is often made between perceived misogyny and the wider power imbalance in society that affects women disproportionately (Beard, 2017). Laura Bates (2014), the founder of the social media campaign “everyday sexism”, views such issues as reflecting gender inequalities and the social disadvantages faced by women, not just in the labour force but in everyday life.

However, the issue is not without controversy. Although the Equality and Human Rights Commission (2017) provides clear guidelines concerning an employer’s duty to take sexual harassment seriously, it is far less clear as to what constitutes sexual harassment outside of the workplace and at what point flirtatious behaviour becomes harassment. In addition, there are also those who feel uncomfortable about what they perceive as the ‘demonization’ of men. Over a hundred French women (including the French film star Catherine Deneuve) made world headlines with an open letter, offering an alternative view of the #MeToo campaign and drawing attention to what they regard as rampant censorship and as a hatred of men and of sexuality (Collins, 2018). When the British parliament addressed the issue of misogyny as a hate crime (Hansard online, 2018), one female MP felt the need to state that this is #NotAllMen and a male MP asked whether misandry as well as misogyny should also be a hate crime.

In this section we explore these differences in opinion by examining responses to questions regarding perceptions of unsolicited comments and online bullying. What do people think about comments about another person’s appearance made by a stranger in the street, or sexual comments made online? Does it matter whether the comments are made by a man towards a woman, or vice-versa? And are there differences in opinion regarding these matters between different social groups, by sex, age or education?

Is it wrong to comment on a stranger's appearance on the street?

For the first time in 2017, we assessed opinions about comments about a person's appearance, made by a stranger in the street. To minimise the risk that respondents would give what they felt were socially acceptable answers, rather than their genuine opinion, the following question was included in the self-completion questionnaire:

Imagine a woman is walking down the street. She passes a man who she does not know, and he comments loudly that she looks gorgeous today. Which of the following best describes what you think about the man's behaviour?

Never wrong, Rarely wrong, Sometimes wrong, Usually wrong, Always wrong

This scenario was purposefully chosen to gauge the public's reaction to an unsolicited comment, but not one which is inherently offensive or rude. Although comments on the person's appearance has the potential to make them uncomfortable, individuals may or may not construe this as 'street harassment'. Respondents are therefore likely to view the rights or wrongs of the behaviour in different ways. The scenario might be interpreted as involving a compliment that is less likely to be seen as wrong. Others might not want to judge the behaviour without knowing whether the remark caused discomfort to the person to whom it was addressed. Still others might feel that, regardless of the person's reaction, such comments are wrong.

We also wanted to examine whether gender influenced these opinions. Would the British public take different views depending on whether the behaviour was directed at a woman by a man, or vice versa? To do this we used a 'split ballot' experiment, involving asking a randomly-selected two-thirds of our respondents to envisage a man making comments about a woman, and the remaining third to envisage a woman making comments about a man. The exact same wording was used except in terms of switching the gender of the people involved in the scenario.

Overall, uninvited male comments about a woman's appearance are widely thought to be wrong (Table 6): 57% say that a man commenting on a woman's appearance in the street is "always" or "usually wrong" and around a quarter of respondents (27%) think such comments are "sometimes" wrong, leaving only a minority believing unsolicited comments towards a woman are "rarely" or "never" wrong (7% and 2% respectively).

Many also believe that unsolicited comments directed at men (by women) are wrong, but to a lesser extent: 45% say this is "always" or "usually" wrong. Moreover while only 9% say an unsolicited comment made about the appearance of a woman (by a man) is "rarely" or "never wrong", 16% say this about a comment directed at a man (by a woman). This difference is unsurprising given the higher prevalence of comments directed to women by men on the

57% say that a man commenting on a woman's appearance in the street is "always" or "usually wrong"

street, and a perception that comments could make women feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

Table 6 Views about an unsolicited comment about appearance directed at women and men

	If a man comments that a woman on the street looks gorgeous	If a woman comments that a man on the street looks gorgeous
	%	%
Never wrong	2	7
Rarely wrong	7	9
Sometimes wrong	27	24
Usually wrong	27	23
Always wrong	30	22
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1642	808

When we ask about a man commenting on a woman on the street, around six in ten men say it is “always” or “usually” wrong (61%), compared with five in ten (52%) women (see the top row of Table 7). The opposite pattern occurs when we ask about a comment directed towards a man; 54% of women say this is “always”/“usually” wrong, compared with 35% of men. So, looking across the two scenarios, women are equally likely to see comments directed at women and men as wrong, while men are considerably more likely to think that comments directed at a woman (by a man) are wrong.

However, the pattern varies by sex and age: younger women (aged under 55, and particularly those under 35) are more likely to think comments directed at a woman are wrong, compared with older women. We don’t see the same pattern among women by age when we ask about comments directed at a man (and it should be noted that age groups 18-34 and 55-64 have small base sizes for this question, so these figures should be interpreted with caution). For both these questions the pattern is less clear when we compare men in different age groups.

Women are equally likely to see comments directed at women and men as wrong, while men are considerably more likely to think that comments directed at a woman (by a man) are wrong

Table 7 Views about an unsolicited comment directed at women and men, by age and sex

% saying behaviour is wrong	Man comments that a woman looks gorgeous			Woman comments that a man looks gorgeous		
	Respondent sex			Respondent sex		
	Men	Women	All	Men	Women	All
All	61	52	57	35	54	45
Age group						
18-34	59	63	61	32	58	44
35-54	63	54	58	39	47	43
55-64	66	48	56	38	53	45
65+	58	43	49	33	59	47

Bases for this table can be found in the appendix to this chapter

In analysis (not shown) those with higher educational levels are more likely to see unsolicited comments about appearance as wrong, whether directed towards a man or woman. Sixty-seven per cent of graduates say a man commenting on a woman is “always” or “usually” wrong, compared with 47% of people with no formal qualifications. Similarly, around half (50%) of graduates say a woman commenting on a man is wrong, compared with 37% of people with no qualifications.

Majority opinion, therefore, is that unsolicited comments are at least sometimes wrong, whether directed towards a man or woman. In general people are more strongly opposed to comments about women’s appearance than comments about men’s, and this is particularly true of men and younger women. This may reflect women’s more frequent exposure to remarks about their appearance, especially for young women. It might also be indicative of heightened awareness of the issues among men and/or a view that women are more likely to feel threatened and so to deserve protection.

What about crude, sexual comments online?

Another issue gaining considerable media attention is the level of online or cyber-bullying, particularly the apparently increasing level of internet trolling – commenting negatively to provoke a reaction – and cyberstalking which is targeted at women. While online abuse can affect anyone, women often experience abuse because of their sex. This is often taken as another ongoing example of misogyny and gender inequality (for example Hansard online, 2018).

In a similar way to unsolicited comments in the street, in the BSA 2017 survey’s self-completion questionnaire, we asked people’s perceptions of online sexist bullying using the following question:

Imagine a man writes a crude, sexual comment on the internet about a woman he does not know. The comment can be seen by anyone. Which of the following best describes what you think about the man's behaviour?

Never wrong, Rarely wrong, Sometimes wrong, Usually wrong, Always wrong

Again, two-thirds of the sample were asked about a man directing a sexist comment towards a woman, and one third of the sample were presented with the same scenario but with the sexes reversed (a woman writing a sexist comment towards a man). In this example, however, the behaviour in question was specifically referred to as “crude” and “sexual” (compared with the ambiguous nature of the street comments).

Overwhelmingly, the public believes this type of online bullying to be wrong, although this is more strongly expressed when we ask about bullying directed at a woman. Nearly nine in ten (87%) say this is “always wrong” when directed towards a woman, with a further 6% saying it is “usually wrong”, while seven in ten (70%) say it is “always wrong” when directed at men, with a further 15% saying this is “usually wrong”.

There is little difference between men and women in their view of online sexist bullying of women. Women are, however, more likely than men to say online sexist bullying of *men* is “always wrong”; 76% of women say this compared with 64% of men.

Unlike with unsolicited street comments, older people are more likely to disapprove of online bullying of women than their younger counterparts; 93% of people over the age of 65 say this is “always wrong”, compared with 82% of 18-34 year-olds. (There was no significant difference found by age in attitudes to online bullying directed at men, but this may be due to reduced sample size.) Perhaps younger people are more exposed to this sort of behaviour, and thus it holds less ‘shock’ value than for older people. In addition, older people, although less familiar with online bullying, may be far more likely than the young to condemn crude sexual comments, regardless of where they appear.

Again, we see greater disapproval for online sexist bullying among the more highly educated, both for comments directed at women, and men. While 89% of graduates say sexist online bullying of a woman is “always wrong”, 78% of those with no formal qualifications say the same. Similarly, 77% of graduates say online sexist bullying of a man is “always wrong”, compared with 63% of those without qualifications.

Overwhelmingly, the public believes this type of online bullying to be wrong, although this is more strongly expressed when we ask about bullying directed at a woman

Conclusions

Gender equality is a complex and disputed subject. Based on the assertion that all people have the same value, regardless of gender, it encompasses the aim of eliminating discrimination and disadvantage, including removal of barriers to opportunity. As a result, 'success' can be seen as the extent to which men and women are free to choose the direction their life takes, rather than being constrained by stereotypes or cultural convention. As well as tackling the tricky subject of whether men and women are fundamentally different, whether through biology and/or social differences, debates in modern gender politics extend to misogynistic attitudes as expressed in the treatment of women as sex objects or fair game for harassment.

Analysis presented in this chapter demonstrates clearly that public attitudes towards gender issues depend on the topic under question. Looking at issues around roles in the home and labour market, we find that there is a marked reduction of support for traditional gender roles of the man working and the woman looking after the home, mirrored by increasing agreement that both men and women should contribute to household income. However, when it comes to maternal employment, the majority of people still think either mothers should stay at home or work part-time, particularly when there is a child under school age. In addition, regarding parental leave there is little difference between the sexes with a majority feeling the mother should take all or most of the leave.

Age, education and income are strongly (and independently) correlated with views of gender roles. But both the age and education divides have narrowed over time. It seems that regardless of sex, age, education or income, people are more likely to endorse views that suggest that fixed gender roles of the past are no longer suited to family life in the 21st century. This suggests there is a growing consensus in views across the different social groups.

However, although most people reject the traditional division of roles according to gender, it is not clear why they do so. Is this because they are in favour of greater gender equality, because they recognise more fluidity in gender roles, or because they regard it as a matter of each couple's choice as to how they allocate work and family roles? For many questions, the proportion saying they "can't choose" has risen over time, particularly among younger and more educated groups. This may point to increasingly liberal views regarding individuals' and couples' rights to choose, but we cannot say for certain that it reflects increasing belief in gender parity. It is also not clear how far changing opinion is motivated by ideology and/or driven by pragmatism.

In 2017, new questions on BSA reveal considerable consensus of opinion that men and women are equally suited to all jobs, and that neither girls nor boys are "naturally" better at maths. Interestingly, it is the young who are more 'unisex' when it comes to both job suitability

and maths aptitude. This could be that the young are less likely than their elders to endorse any divides along gender lines, or it could be a result of societal changes in both education and technology, that has helped produce a less gendered 'knowledge economy' (Scott et al., 2018).

Online sexist bullying of either men or women is widely thought to be wrong, and a majority also condemn commenting on a woman's appearance in the street, even when this comment could be construed by some as 'complimentary'. Our split-sample experiment reveals some interesting insights into gender differences concerning attitudes to unsolicited comments and online bullying, with evidence of men holding men to higher standards in their behaviour towards women in the street than they would apply to women's behaviour towards men. This somewhat surprising finding may well have something to do with men wanting to be particularly harsh on anything that could be conceived as 'inappropriate sexual behaviour' by other men – a topic that has attracted considerable media interest since our survey was conducted in summer 2017, including the extensive coverage of the #Metoo movement.

So, in conclusion, in our examination of a range of views concerning different gender issues, we have found little evidence to support the notion of a clearly delineated 'culture war' between traditionalist/conservative values and progressive/socially liberal values being played out in gender politics. Our analysis suggests views differ according to the topic in question and are in flux. This is an area where there appears to be ongoing social change. Although the language of 'gender wars' might be over-stated, gender equality remains a challenging and disputed area, with implications for the government, employers and wider society.

We have found little evidence to support the notion of a clearly delineated 'culture war' between traditionalist/conservative values and progressive/socially liberal values being played out in gender politics

Acknowledgements

The National Centre for Social Research is grateful to the Government Equalities Office for their financial support which enabled us to ask the questions reported in this chapter. The views expressed are those of the authors alone.

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Appendix

The data on which Figure 1 is based are shown below.

Table A.1 Views of traditional gender roles, 1984–2017

	1984	1987	1990	1991	1994
A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family	%	%	%	%	%
Agree	43	48	25	33	24
Disagree	37	33	54	44	58
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1562	1281	2430	1257	984

	1998	2002	2008	2012	2017
A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family	%	%	%	%	%
Agree	18	17	16	12	8
Disagree	57	63	58	65	72
<i>Unweighted base</i>	807	1960	1986	950	2474

The data for the statement “Both the man and woman should contribute to the household income” are shown below.

Table A.2 Views of men and women contributing to the household income, 1989-2017

	1989	1994	2002	2012	2017
Both the man and woman should contribute to the household income	%	%	%	%	%
Agree	53	60	59	62	72
Disagree	20	13	14	11	4
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1307	984	1960	950	2474

The bases for Table 1 can be found below.

	1991	2002	2012	2017
	<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>Unweighted base</i>
Sex				
Men	573	852	438	1126
Women	684	1108	512	1348
Age				
18-34	370	498	184	484
35-44	223	417	166	398
45-54	203	311	153	445
55-64	172	310	159	424
65-74	182	221	172	413
75+	105	200	115	309
Highest educational qualification				
Degree	120	304	178	673
Higher education or A-level	335	558	272	693
GCSE, O level, CSE or equivalent	327	573	207	659
No qualifications	462	475	197	404
Household income				
Highest quartile	113	453	236	460
3 rd quartile	319	430	179	528
2 nd quartile	390	513	197	497
Lowest quartile	435	386	185	608
All	1257	1960	950	2474

The bases for Table 7 can be found below.

	Man comments that a woman looks gorgeous			Woman comments that a man looks gorgeous		
	Respondent sex		All	Respondent sex		All
	Men	Women		Men	Women	
	<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>Unweighted base</i>
All	748	914	1662	378	434	812
Age group						
18-34	139	185	324	71	89	160
35-54	248	322	570	119	154	273
55-64	141	155	296	63	65	128
65+	220	251	471	125	126	251

The multivariate analysis technique used is logistic regression (for more information see Technical Details chapter of the report). The dependent variable is whether the respondent disagrees that “A man’s job is to earn money; a woman’s job is to look after the home and family”. A significant positive coefficient indicates that the group are more likely than the reference group (shown in brackets) to have disagreed with this statement whilst a significant negative coefficient indicates the group are less likely than the reference group to have disagreed with this statement.

Table A.5 Disagree with traditional gender roles, logistic regression

	Coefficient	Standard error	p value
Sex (male)	**0.497	0.107	0.000
Age (18–34)			0.008
35–44	0.013	0.171	0.939
45–54	0.227	0.168	0.177
55–64	0.177	0.169	0.297
65–74	-0.028	0.171	0.872
75+	** -0.562	0.200	0.005
Education (degree)			0.000
Higher education or A level	-0.071	0.153	0.643
GCSE or equivalent	** -0.804	0.150	0.000
No qualifications	** -0.731	0.190	0.000
Household Income (less than £1,200 p.m.)			0.000
£1,200-£2,200 p.m.	0.041	0.161	0.797
£2,201-£3,700 p.m.	0.240	0.168	0.153
£3,701 or more p.m.	**0.854	0.181	0.000
Refusal	0.031	0.201	0.879
Constant	**0.936	0.199	0.000
R2 (adjusted)	.078		
<i>Unweighted base: 2162</i>			

*=significant at 95% level **=significant at 99% level

Publication details

Phillips, D., Curtice, J., Phillips, M. and Perry, J. (eds.) (2018), *British Social Attitudes: The 35th Report*, London: The National Centre for Social Research

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First published 2018

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ISBN: 978-1-5272-2591-6