

GENDERED POVERTY and WELL-BEING



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Gendered Poverty and Well-being: Introduction

Shahra Razavi

After more than a decade of preoccupation with 'stabilization' and growth, by the early 1990s mainstream policy institutions pronounced a renewed interest in attending to the problems of global poverty. These concerns were given greater voice and urgency through the series of global summits that inscribed the early part of the decade and signalled, at the very least, a discursive shift in development policy. One outcome has been the 'New Poverty Agenda'¹ of multilateral development agencies which identifies 'labour-intensive growth' as its central tenet. Another is the extension of the social exclusion approach from French and European social policy debates into development thinking as a way of reconceptualizing and understanding social disadvantage.

Recently there has been some apprehension about the way women and their needs are being addressed in anti-poverty analyses and policies, and concern that gender subordination — an equity issue — is being collapsed into an agenda about increasing welfare (Jackson, 1996).² Notwithstanding the relatively wide-ranging bodies of literature on gender and on poverty, it is argued that the interlinkages between the two have escaped careful analytical scrutiny.

At one level, the relationship between gender disadvantage and poverty appears to be quite straightforward, as in the tendency to equate women or female-headed households with the vulnerable or the poor. In fact, one frequently-made link between gender and poverty is the equation of women-headed households with the poor (Jazairy et al., 1992). A second approach,

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1. The 'New Poverty Agenda' (Lipton and Maxwell, 1992) refers to the poverty-oriented policy agenda articulated in *World Development Report 1990* (World Bank, 1990).
2. A similar concern was voiced by Buvinic (1983) in relation to the poverty focus of development agencies in the 1970s.

more instrumental in tone, is the 'win-win' scenario whereby 'investing in women', their education in particular, is seen as an effective means for increasing welfare or reducing fertility (World Bank, 1994). The links between gender and poverty have also been captured through the gender-disaggregation of well-being *outcomes*, which has served to highlight significant female disadvantage (UNDP, 1995).

While all of these arguments provide some insight into the relationship between gender and poverty and have some empirical validity, although to varying degrees in different contexts, they tend to be invoked in a highly generalized manner. Thus generalizations have tended to replace contextualized social analyses of how poverty is created and reproduced. The gender analysis of poverty also needs to unravel *how* gender differentiates the social processes leading to poverty. This is an important consideration which has received relatively little attention in recent policy debates.

The question that arises with some urgency is: Why does gender appear in policy discussions of poverty in such generalized and problematic forms? One of the arguments of this volume is that there are both methodological and political reasons for this which need to be clearly understood because of their implications for future poverty measurement and analysis, as well as for policy formulation aimed at gender-sensitive poverty reduction. At the same time some new ways of understanding the relationship between gender and poverty need to be elaborated which can illuminate the ways in which both the trajectories leading to poverty, and the escape from destitution, are gendered. A gendered understanding of poverty also raises some difficult questions about whether it can be assumed, as is often done, that the kinds of asset interventions that can strengthen the position of poor men are going to have much the same impact on poor women.

To take this project forward, the present volume makes contributions at two inter-related levels. First, it provides a critical and selective assessment of the attempts to measure gender disadvantage through a wide range of indicators. It considers how reliable these indicators are in identifying gender bias. It also asks questions about what these indicators mean in different social contexts, what kinds of contextual information would be needed to facilitate their interpretation, and how well they are able to reveal the social processes creating poverty. An enquiry into these causal mechanisms in turn leads to a second set of questions about how women and men, in particular social contexts, relate differently to important assets such as land and labour, given the ways in which their livelihood strategies are distinct. To explore these issues, the social institutions within which production and distribution take place, and their 'unruly'³ practices are scrutinized.

One of the main themes emerging from this volume is that gender analysis can illuminate the diverse processes leading to poverty, and thereby enrich its

3. The term 'unruly practice' is taken from Fraser (1989).

analysis. But at the same time, without a contextualized understanding of how poverty is created and reproduced, it is difficult to capture the ways in which gender shapes, and differentiates, those causal processes.

MAKING GENDER VISIBLE: SOME METHODOLOGICAL TRAPS

At the conceptual level, poverty is increasingly seen as a multi-dimensional phenomenon, which includes market-based consumption (or income), as well as the public provision of goods and services, access to common property resources and the intangible dimensions of a good life such as clean air, dignity, autonomy, and low levels of disease and crime. The proponents of the conventional approach argue that the income/consumption measure is still the best single proxy for poverty since it can incorporate non-market goods and services and a wide range of other utilities (clean air, democracy) and disutilities (noise, pollution), through 'shadow prices', into a monetary equivalent that is easy to compare over time and across contexts. Their critics argue that common property resources and state-provided commodities have usually been ignored in practice, and the consumption of non-traded goods has been under-estimated (Baulch, 1996). It is also questionable whether 'shadow prices' can meaningfully translate the different kinds of values that are embodied in non-market goods and services into monetary equivalents that are comparable.

A telling illustration of the methodological bias appears from Whitehead and Lockwood's analysis in this volume of some of the Poverty Assessments (PAs) for sub-Saharan Africa carried out by the World Bank.⁴ The relevance of their argument, however, extends to the technocratic circles of other donor agencies as well as recipient states engaged in the measurement and analysis of poverty.

While most PAs begin by asserting the multi-dimensionality of poverty, ultimately it seems, all give priority to an income and/or consumption definition, a poverty line measure and a quantitative estimate of the percentage of people in poverty. At the same time, many of the potential insights about the nature of impoverishment, or poverty processes, which emerge from the qualitative and 'participatory' research are either marginalized or dropped from the analysis. Whitehead and Lockwood see this as a fundamental methodological choice, since it locks the PAs into reliance on expenditure data from household surveys, which in addition to being narrow, also tend to be unreliable and non-comparable.

4. These Poverty Assessments (PAs) are country studies about poverty carried out by the World Bank as part of the New Poverty Agenda. By 1996 almost fifty PAs had been carried out; for some countries there is more than one Assessment.

In most African and Latin American countries, household budget surveys are one-off (non-repetitive) exercises, which makes them unsuited as a device for monitoring poverty.⁵ There is also little consistency in how the poverty line is established, even for the same country: some of the PAs define the poverty line in absolute terms and others in relative terms; some deflate household expenditure by average household size while others use expenditure per adult equivalent. Such methodological inconsistency effectively defeats the purpose of collecting quantitative data, since one of the rationales for using quantitative data is precisely that they are comparable over time and across context.

Kandiyoti (this volume) points to some of the specific problems that plague standard household surveys in transitional economies such as Uzbekistan. In this context, with the collapse of public sector employment and the precipitous drops in wages, what used to be 'subsidiary' activities and incomes have now become the mainstay of household budgets. However, for the purposes of surveys — an official activity *par excellence* — many respondents still report the place where their workbook is registered, and the 'official' salary that goes with it. This makes the calculation of income quite problematic. The issue of whether salaries are actually received or not, at what intervals, and the calculation of money equivalents of in-kind payments are all pertinent but difficult to capture within the formal context of the household survey.

More significantly, though, the reliance on poverty lines and household expenditure data has profound implications for how gender issues are analysed. Measuring poverty on the basis of household expenditure data effectively ignores the long-standing feminist concerns about intra-household distribution. It is very rare to find standard surveys, such as those carried out in the context of the PAs, embarking on a quantitative exploration of intra-household poverty. Per capita and adult equivalent measures make assumptions about *equal* intra-household distribution of resources. Hart's (1995) interrogation of the claims made by those using collective models of the household to be able to recover intra-household distributional patterns from household surveys using sophisticated econometric techniques also reveals that they are for the most part exaggerated. In other words, if household surveys are to become useful tools for capturing and monitoring gender differentials in poverty, then intra-household distribution issues need to be addressed at the very early stage and specifically built into questionnaire design.

The reliance on household expenditure data also means that one of the easier ways to make gender visible is by dividing the households into male-headed and female-headed ones, given that the characteristics of household heads (their gender, age, etc.) are invariably collected through these surveys and form a ready basis for sorting the data.

5. See for example, Appleton (1996) on Uganda, and Lustig (1993) for Latin America.

The tendency to equate female headship with poverty has, however, been queried on both empirical and methodological grounds. The trajectories leading to female headship are clearly divergent, and the category of households labelled 'female-headed' is a highly heterogeneous one. It includes lone female units, households of single women wage earners with young dependants, households in which women earners receive significant remittances from absent males, and so on. Some of these conditions may constitute what can be reasonably thought of as poverty risk factors, such as households with young children maintained by women alone (Folbre, 1990). But by aggregating these distinct categories of households generated through different social processes (e.g. migration, widowhood, divorce), and constructing a simple dualism between male-headed and female-headed households, it becomes impossible to interpret the evidence in a meaningful way.

At the same time, the identification of certain types of female-headed households as poorer, such as lone widows, begs the question of why some widows end up living alone while others do not. As Whitehead and Lockwood (this volume) put it, the characteristics of the poor say very little about the reasons why they have become impoverished, and it is methodologically incorrect to treat these characteristics as independent variables. In this particular case, they argue, the chain of causation may run the other way: it may very well be that it is poor widows whose children leave the household (through labour migration, for example) and that when more economically secure women are widowed they do not end up living alone. In practice, causes and effects always interact and do so differently in diverse contexts of time and place. In the case of Uzbekistan described by Kandiyoti (this volume) a likely poverty risk factor may be the gender composition of a widow's offspring. Widowed women are less likely to be taken into a married daughter's household, and often end up living alone sometimes in a state of destitution, whereas widowed mothers of sons are routinely to be found living with their sons and also in control of household finances.

In short, the contributions to this volume document persisting reticence on the part of administrative and governmental structures responsible for data collection exercises to probe the intra-household arena. This is surprising in view of the significant body of evidence and argument that has been brought to bear on this issue over the past two decades. This has effectively shaken the micro foundations of the conventional economic approach, and yet few national level surveys attempt to collect data at a more disaggregated level.

Social Indicators, Functionings and Capabilities

One of the more positive responses to the conceptual shortcomings of the 'money-metric' approach has been to look more directly at what people can do or be — indicators of the physical quality of life (Morris, 1979) or functionings (Sen, 1985a). Ironically, the work on social indicators seems to meet

the requirements of neo-classical micro-economic analysis, individualism, far more easily than the poverty line measures. Given that these beings and doings are directly measurable on the individual, gender inequalities can be made more readily visible. The framework has inspired a large body of feminist research on well-being outcomes, documenting significant and sometimes alarming incidence of female disadvantage. The contributions to this volume explore this issue from a number of different perspectives and at different levels of aggregation. As might be expected from the large body of literature on 'missing females' in South and East Asia, life and death questions take up considerable space in this volume too.

Das Gupta and Li's broadbrush historical account (this volume) traces the patterns of female disadvantage in child survival during the twentieth century for three countries which show the highest levels of 'missing girls' in the world: India, China and South Korea. One of the hypotheses they explore is the extent to which levels of discrimination against daughters, in these particular cultural contexts, may intensify when people experience a tightening of circumstances relative to *their own* previous position.⁶ These stresses could be experienced when people are caught up in a war, a famine, or during periods of fertility decline when the number of opportunities to have a son is effectively reduced.

The impact of major national crises, in particular the Japanese invasion of China in the 1930s, the Korean War (1950–3) and the large-scale Chinese famine (1959–61), on girls is evident in the juvenile sex ratios (i.e. number of males to females in the 0–4 year age group) which reflect the *excess* mortality of girls, over and above the fact that children of both sexes undoubtedly suffered during these crises. Fertility decline, which has taken place in all three countries in recent decades, has also been accompanied by rising female disadvantage in survival (and more masculine sex ratios for children) as parents manipulate the gender composition of their desired family size. The main rise in sex ratios in all three countries, however, has taken place after 1980 and seems to suggest that the impact of fertility decline on sex ratios is substantially raised by the spread of pre-natal sex-selection techniques.

This last point is the subject of Sudha and Irudaya Rajan's contribution to this volume, which presents both demographic and qualitative evidence on the incidence of prenatal sex selection and female infanticide in India. Their analysis of sex ratios *at birth* for the period 1981–91 suggests that in some parts of the country parents may be adding pre-natal sex selection techniques to traditional post-natal ones to create a 'double jeopardy' for their daughters. The excess masculinity of sex ratios at birth is concentrated especially in the north and north-west of the sub-continent, and in the urban

6. As the authors note, the hypothesis that the poor discriminate against their daughters more than the non-poor in these countries does not seem to find empirical support; a similar conclusion emerges from Saith and Harriss-White's contribution to this volume.

areas of some central states, while the southern states appear to have on the whole normal sex ratios at birth — a regional contrast with some historical precedence that has been the subject of intense debate and theorizing.

While sex ratios at birth show the most masculinity in the north and north-west, and this increasing masculinity is not a nationwide phenomenon, Sudha and Irudaya Rajan also show that sex ratios of child mortality definitely indicate increasing female disadvantage *over all of India*. Only one or two very small areas of the country show less female disadvantage in 1991 than they did in 1981, while areas in the south that had normal mortality ratios in 1981 show female disadvantage in 1991. This pattern is consistent with recent micro-level studies documenting excess female child mortality in parts of south India where such extreme forms of discrimination have been hitherto unknown, and where it has appeared in a class-specific form among landed households (Harriss-White, forthcoming; Miller, 1997).

The evidence on female disadvantage in early age survivorship does not, however, imply a consistent pattern of anti-female bias in food intake and nutritional status as is often assumed. Even in north and north-western India, where the evidence on discrimination against young girls in terms of survivorship is most compelling, findings from nutritional surveys not infrequently show that adult women fare better than their male counterparts (Harriss, 1990). Confirming the problematic nature of these generalized assumptions of female disadvantage, Saith and Harriss-White's comprehensive review (this volume) of the micro-level literature for South Asia reaches the conclusion that the evidence on gender differentials in nutritional status is inconclusive, showing no *consistent* indication of gender bias.

An interesting instance of the inconsistency is captured in a village-level study of nutritional status in the north-western Indian state of Uttar Pradesh (Kynch and McGuire, 1994). Here age and gender interact in complex ways over the life cycles of men and women. Starting with female nutritional disadvantage during childhood, the pattern is reversed among child-bearing couples where adult men seem to be the ones at greater risk of illness or low working ability, because of thinness. Male disadvantage in this particular context is explained by the compulsions on husbands to 'provision' their families, which among the agricultural households means undertaking effort-intensive farm work (ploughing and digging).

This analysis, in particular, echoes the point made by Jackson and Palmer-Jones (this volume) that while time use studies have been of great value in making women's work visible, it is important to recognize how male gender roles in divisions of labour can also involve vulnerabilities for specific groups of men. They argue that an explicit concern with the *physical arduousness* of work may better illuminate how work and well-being are connected for women and men. In poor South Asian households effort-intensive work (high energy expenditure) can, more often than inequitable food intake, be the cause of differences in adult anthropometry. In these cases, after adjusting for energy expenditures, energy intakes are often equitable. In some

cases, however, the greater calorie consumption of men might not even compensate for their greater average daily energy expenditure.

The contributions to this volume also raise some thorny methodological questions about gender-disaggregation, and the difficulties of making meaningful comparisons between male and female well-being when men's and women's bodies are different in form and function. One problematic area, highlighted by Saith and Harriss-White (this volume), is that of morbidity, where a significant proportion of the conditions that cause morbidity are sex-specific and defy simple male/female comparisons — reproductive health problems being the most glaring example. Other diseases may be sex-specific due to genetic predispositions. Somewhat similar questions can be raised about life expectancy data. While it is misleading to conclude from the overall increase in female life expectancy that there has been an improvement in female health in younger, especially reproductive, ages (Saith and Harriss-White, this volume), it may be equally misleading to attribute male disadvantage to biological factors alone (Jackson and Palmer-Jones, this volume). The life expectancy disadvantage of men may suggest that in addition to 'natural' biological disadvantage there are also *social processes* which disadvantage men in health and longevity terms.

Another controversial area is nutrition monitoring where meaningful comparisons between men's and women's nutritional status can only be made once 'norms' and 'cut-off points' have been adjusted for gender difference — a process that is fraught with difficulty (Saith and Harriss-White, this volume). As Harriss-White (1997) recently showed, the conclusions of studies carried out using even the *same data set* can differ depending on the assumptions made about norms and cut-off points as well as the use of gendered or ungendered standards.

The point of raising these issues here is to highlight the methodological controversies (and arbitrariness) involved in making well-being comparisons between men and women — issues that tend to be overlooked when global comparisons are made. In the broader scheme of things these technical problems are merely the tip of the iceberg. As those familiar with this field have repeatedly argued, data problems to do with reliability and comparability are as debilitating in the area of social indicators as they are in the case of economic data.

Very few developing countries, for example, have comprehensive and reliable vital registration systems from which demographic data can be obtained — India being perhaps an exception. And even for those with complete vital registration systems the estimates of mortality and life expectancy produced by international agencies may not be accurate because of the overuse of model life tables (Murray, 1991). UNICEF (1993: 8) admits that many of the statistics used for estimating under-five mortality are based on mathematical models rather than recent measurements. Even for an apparently straightforward indicator like literacy there are few up-to-date estimates; for 19 of the 145 (including developed) countries there are no data

on adult literacy since 1970, and for 41 more the data relate to a year in the decade 1970–9 (Srinivasan, 1994).

Moreover, social indicators while useful in revealing gender differences in well-being *outcomes*, are limited in the kind of *causal* analysis they can generate. This is a very important qualification, and is discussed at some length later. Data users thus need to be realistic about the extent to which findings and policy recommendations that rely on correlations and regressions, without enough complementary contextual information, can be trusted (see below on ‘triangulation’). A pertinent example is the human capital argument for investing in education — especially female education.

According to Whitehead and Lockwood (this volume) the World Bank’s analyses of gender gaps in primary education in sub-Saharan Africa provide an extremely partial and misleading picture of the causal dynamics behind low levels of female education. The analysis of female education in the PAs is based exclusively on efficiency arguments — about how female education will increase child and household welfare. It does not shed any light on the reproduction of structural gender inequalities, or say anything substantive about how gender inequalities underlie educational outcomes. It is also stated widely in the PAs that education is intimately related to agricultural productivity and thus to the escape from poverty. According to Whitehead and Lockwood, besides the weak evidence documented in the PAs to support this hypothesis, there are also serious problems in how the weak association between education and income is being interpreted. The relationship between the two variables, they argue, may be being read spuriously as causal when both income and education may be affected by underlying patterns of wealth organized through families.

Ironically, such over-reliance on simple econometric techniques also marks some of the emerging micro-level feminist research, which uses interview techniques to capture different aspects of female autonomy such as intra-household decision making, mobility in the public sphere and domestic violence. As Kabeer (this volume) usefully illustrates, here too the results can be uncontextualized, single-stranded and difficult to interpret, with a heavy reliance on simple correlations and regressions using a few variables.

Power, Freedom and Agency

From a gender perspective, broader concepts of poverty are more useful than a focus purely on household income levels because they allow a better grasp of the multi-dimensional aspects of gender disadvantage, such as lack of power to control important decisions that affect one’s life (Sen, this volume). Along somewhat similar lines, it can also be argued that confining the analysis of gender inequality to basic well-being outcomes alone serves to convey the impression that female disadvantage is largely a matter of poverty (Kabeer, this volume). This is misleading for two reasons. On the one hand,

prosperity within a society may help to reduce gender inequalities in basic well-being outcomes, but intensify social restrictions on women's autonomy. On the other hand, a focus on basic needs failures such as child mortality misses out on other dimensions of gender disadvantage among the poor which do not take such extreme forms, such as women's heavier workloads.

In recent years, issues of empowerment and autonomy have entered poverty debates through a number of different channels. The capability framework, in particular, embraces both basic functionings, such as longevity, as well as more complex capabilities such as freedom to which intrinsic value is attached (Sen, 1985b). In practice, however, the proponents of this approach have tended to concentrate on the first set of functionings, which lend themselves to measurement.⁷ At the same time certain strands of policy discourse have identified female empowerment as an effective means for reducing poverty. Its value here tends to be instrumental and the aim has been to establish the nature of the association between the 'degrees of autonomy' permitted to women in different contexts and certain demographic, economic or social outcomes deemed desirable — hence the search for easily quantifiable indicators of empowerment.

The methodological problems and the difficulties of interpretation which were noted above in relation to well-being outcomes become particularly daunting when we move from basic achievements, such as longevity and education, onto the difficult terrain of power, agency and choice. As Kabeer (this volume) rightly notes, indicators not only compress a great deal of information into a single statistic, but also embody assumptions about what this information means. In the case of complex and culturally embedded notions like autonomy, it is impossible to have any faith in whether or not the indicator means what it is intended to mean without contextual evidence to support the assumptions that are being made.

These issues are explored by Kabeer (this volume). She sees empowerment as being inescapably bound up with disempowerment and about the *process* by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability. She argues that it is only through grounded analyses that issues of power and disempowerment can be meaningfully assessed, because it is only at that level that the *context, content and consequences* of choice can be understood and interpreted. Statistical perspectives on intra-household

7. In his earlier writings, Sen (1985a) makes a distinction between the realms to which functionings and capabilities belong. A functioning is an achievement of a person, what he or she can be or do. In other words, functionings are constitutive of well-being, whereas a capability set is a freedom-type notion meant to assess the 'real opportunities faced by the person' (1985a: 51). But Sen is not satisfied with this separation and in his later works suggests different ways of bridging the gap, in particular by recourse to the notion of 'capability to function' whereby actual achievements (e.g. being healthy) are seen as proxies for the capabilities to function (Sen, 1987). Thus both well-being and positive freedom are inferred from the achievement.

decision-making are clearly limited. They may provide a brief glimpse of the processes of decision-making, but they say very little about the subtle negotiations that go on between men and women in their private lives.

Besides the methodological problems confronting analyses of power there are further questions to do with the interpretation of results. A case in point is the kind of behaviour on the part of women which seems to suggest that they have internalized their social status as persons of lesser value, such as women's secondary claims on household resources (their 'altruism'), or their willingness to bear children to the detriment of their own health and survival in order to satisfy their own or their husband's preferences for sons — the problem of 'physical condition neglect' as Sen (1985a) calls it. The acceptance of gender biased norms can also lead women to discriminate against other women, their daughters for example (Das Gupta and Li; Sudha and Irudaya Rajan, this volume). How can a feminist analysis of agency and power come to terms with these forms of behaviour?

One of the key points emerging from Kabeer's analysis of empowerment is the need to *cross-check* evidence on women's agency against the outcomes or consequences of the choices they make (while Sen prefers to *infer* agency from outcomes, see footnote 7). Thus according to Kabeer power relations are expressed not only through the exercise of agency and choice, but also through the *kinds* of choices people make. Her contribution also reminds us of the strong rationale that women are likely to have in certain contexts for making choices which are essentially disempowering and also detrimental to their own, or their daughters', health and well-being. Deeply entrenched rules, norms and practices help influence behaviour, define values and shape choices. Kabeer's understanding of agency is therefore qualified in two important ways: first, by being anchored within an institutional understanding of the conditions of choice (i.e. structures of constraint); second, by including the consequences of choice within her account of agency, which effectively overcomes the problem of 'physical condition neglect'.

The connections between agency and bodily well-being are also central to the argument put forward by Jackson and Palmer-Jones (this volume). They criticize both structuralist and bargaining analyses of gender divisions of work and well-being for their failure to show the 'structuring actions of women and men', i.e. agency. They argue that intra-household social processes of contestation and negotiation about work, which are significantly influenced by the *personal experiences of the pleasures and pains of work*, mediate the gendered connections between work and well-being. Bargaining models with their emphasis on structures of constraint and opportunity (generalized 'fall back positions'), they argue, have not been particularly useful for describing the actual or implicit discourses between individual members of a particular domestic group, and have thus tended to underplay women's agency.

This critique reverberates the point made by Kabeer (this volume) that the critical aspects of women's agency are often embedded in the subtle

negotiations that go on between men and women, and are thus difficult to capture. But in contrast to Kabeer's stress on how structures of constraint limit the choices that women make (as in cultures where daughter disfavour becomes a 'rational' response to social norms), Jackson and Palmer-Jones emphasize how women seek to subvert and reformulate those social norms. The ways in which a woman faced with onerous and well-being threatening work may ensure her bodily well-being (by hiring labour, or persuading a husband, child or daughter-in-law to do it) is taken as evidence of such agency.⁸ They thus ask whether the alleged high levels of work ('time famine') by poor rural women are actually reflected in well-being outcomes? And how, if one does not see patriarchy as all-determining, do women as active agents come to be the victims of such an inequitable order?

Similarly, the micro-level studies of women workers in Third World manufacturing discussed in Razavi's contribution (this volume) highlight the possibilities and the spaces for agency that entry into these labour markets has opened up for some groups of women. In some contexts, it has allowed them to re-negotiate the terms of their domestic relationships, and in some cases to walk out of, or not enter into, unsatisfactory relationships. This is not to deny the fact that the increased field of manoeuvring at home may be matched by different patriarchal controls in the factory setting which help keep the women workers poorly paid and vastly unprotected in jobs that are sometimes dangerous.

This also raises difficult methodological questions, such as the tension between objective criteria (skills, wages, health issues and bodily well-being more generally) and subjective criteria (perceptions of work and its value), for assessing the implications of this form of work for both poverty eradication and wider issues of discrimination and subordination. While reference to some objective criteria of well-being is clearly needed in order to get us away from the utilitarian insistence in taking subjective preferences as the only criteria for making judgements about values and welfare (Sen, this volume), there is also a need for women's own perceptions and values to find some space in these discussions if only because they allow us to better understand the choices that women make.

Three tentative conclusions may be taken from this section. *First*, an obvious methodological observation would be that issues of agency and informal power are difficult to capture through interview techniques (Kabeer) and problematic to represent through generalized fallback positions (Jackson and Palmer-Jones). *Second*, the question as to whether social structures of constraint limit women's choices, or alternatively whether women are able to subvert gender-biased social norms finds different answers

8. Ironically the ability of senior women to shift their onerous domestic tasks onto daughters and daughters-in-law is cited as evidence of power asymmetries (rather than agency) in Kandiyoti's contribution (this volume).