

**“You are constantly going against the default thinking”:  
hegemonic masculinity and the gender pay gap in the  
professional services**

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## Declaration

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## Abstract

The gender pay gap is a complex inequality, made of a range of explained and unexplained inequalities in work and gender relations. Despite the introduction of mandatory reporting requirements in 2017, reductions of the gender pay gap have stagnated. This is especially true within the financial and legal services, a sector entrenched with assumptions of white, middle-class masculinity. In this thesis, I therefore utilise a theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity to problematise the power held by men in the financial and legal sectors to integrate a meaningful understanding of discrimination in the gender pay gap. Through forty-two life-history interviews, supplemented with document analysis of gender pay gap reports from leading finance and law firms, contributions are made to the gender pay gap debate in two ways: the identification of gendered wage penalties and premiums across the career span, and a visible resistance to gender pay gap initiatives to maintain structures of inequality. The culture and structure of the financial and legal professions are argued as a central practise of hegemonic masculinity in the gender pay gap. Careers are narrowly defined upon extreme working patterns, entrepreneurial skills, the accumulation of masculinised human capital, and assumptions of continuous, full-time employment. Any deviations incur direct penalties on wages and bonuses received, and indirect penalties upon restricted career trajectories. A theoretical innovation of “glass bubbles” is therefore proposed: highly skilled occupations that exist in isolation from up-or-out career paths, offering no promotion opportunities and as such incur significant pay penalties over the life-course. I further argue that the need to conform to a hegemonic masculinity obscures structures of inequalities. Current strategies to reduce the gender pay gap are ineffective in challenging underlying drivers when failed to be seen as a legitimate inequality. False narratives of equality initiatives thus obscure stagnated progress on the gender pay gap. I therefore problematise the ability of senior leaders to enact meaningful change and are centred as a significant site of resistance. When taken together, this thesis contributes to existing research on the gender pay gap and careers in the profession services by demonstrating the practises and processes which incur gendered wage penalties and premiums.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The gender pay gap is a complex inequality, made of a range of explained and unexplained factors including inequalities and discrimination in work and gender relations. Defined here as the difference in average earnings between women and men across all occupations within organisations, industries, or geographical locations, the gender pay gap remains one of the most prominent issues in gender and employment relations. It is important to distinguish the gender pay gap from equal pay early in this thesis. Although the two terms are often conflated, unequal pay describes the difference in wages between two people working in the same occupation in the same company (Petersen & Morgan, 1995). Despite its illegality, this does still occur<sup>1</sup>. The gender pay gap, in contrast, describes the difference in pay across all demographics, rather than within the same or comparative jobs. This definition therefore allows a more holistic understanding of the multifaceted, often intertwining, inequalities occurring across careers and industries.

Closing the gender pay gap remains a significant challenge. In Britain, women work the equivalent of six weeks per year for free (Fawcett Society, 2021), and at current progress it will take one hundred years to close the gap completely (PriceWaterhouseCooper, 2022). Achieving pay equality can provide multiple economic and social benefits. Closing the gender pay gap would add £600m to annual GDP (EHRC, 2017; Deloitte, 2016). Consequentially, this may reduce wider inequalities in work and private lives, mitigating problems with aging populations and the pensions gap, supporting families, reducing child poverty whilst further maximising individual capacities and talents (Elborgh-Woytek et al., 2013; Gonzales et al., 2015; Rubery & Johnson 2019). Assuming the narrowing of pay gaps is based upon the increase of women's earnings, the consequential economic empowerment of women could lead to increased family income spent on care (Rubery & Johnson, 2019). Thus, in an attempt to stimulate progress, amendments to the Equality Act (2010) now require firms of over 250 employees to report their gender pay gap across four measures:

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<sup>1</sup> Tesco & Glasgow City Council paid out a collective £4.5bn in equal pay claims since the introduction of mandatory reporting, where men and women were paid differential rate for reflective occupations that demanded the same skills, responsibilities, and experiences (Brown, 2018; Dickie, 2019).

- The average pay gap in mean *and* median terms.
- The average bonus pay gap in mean *and* median terms.
- The percentage of men and women who received a bonus.
- The percentage of men and women within four quartiles of pay hierarchies, ordered from lowest to highest.

The effectiveness of mandatory reporting in instigating progress on the gender pay gap in its current iteration is questionable. Where reporting relies upon voluntary action, with little interventions from the state on firms that do not make progress, existing legislation does little to challenge the underlying structural and cultural drivers of the gender pay gap (i.e., Cowper-Coles et al., 2021; Healy & Ahmed, 2019). In 2021, women still earn 15.4 per cent less than men across all employees: a reduction of only 4.5% in the ten-year period since 2011, and an increase of 0.5 per cent on the previous year (Office for National Statistics, 2021). Furthermore, only modest progress can be seen in firms required to report: a reduction of 1.6% in reported gender pay gaps between 2017 and 2021, although this is primarily due to declining men's wages (Blundell, 2021). Additionally, Francis-Devine & Booth (2022) demonstrate that 78 per cent of firms report a gender pay gap in favour of men, with the gender pay gap highest above the ages of 40.

The gender pay gap can be modelled upon a number of factors, although unexplained gaps persist. At a state level, Francis-Devine & Booth (2022) model the gender pay gap upon hours worked and the sections of the economy worked in: that is, women are likely to work fewer hours than men, and in less productive, lower-paid firms and industries. Internationally, Blau & Kahn (2007) argue that the gender pay gap can be understood through educational attainment, career choices and wage structures. Within a U.K. context, Grimshaw & Rubery (2001) propose that employment segregation provides the cornerstone of the gender pay gap. Furthermore, where childcare is socially and politically constructed as a female responsibility and childcare costs remain high, the ability to work without career and pay penalties are critical (Gregory & Milner, 2009; Tomlinson, 2011). Finally, motherhood

constructs wage differentials due to absences from work, reductions in working hours, perceptions of non-work priorities and the undervaluation of female work (i.e. Grimshaw & Rubery, 2015).

Although modelling these factors accounts for much of the gender pay gap, unexplained factors persist. Olsen & Walby (2004) attribute 38 per cent of the gender pay gap to discrimination and factors associated with being female without explicitly defining penalties incurred. Furthermore, Blau & Kahn (2007) describe unexplained gaps of 11 per cent when decomposing wage data to assume equal human capital between men and women, whilst Joshi et al. (2007; 2020) observe sizeable unexplained factors occurring across the life-course. Thus, this thesis responds to the calls of Grimshaw & Rubery (2015) and Lips (2013a) to explore unaccounted-for factors through the integration of wider inequalities in work and private lives. Furthermore, the role of men and masculinity remains under-researched in the gender pay gap. Empirical enquiries often rely upon the identification of economic differences of women's careers from an assumed 'normality': a normality rooted within masculinity but is rarely problematised as such. A theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity is therefore utilised in this thesis to problematise cultural and structural inequalities that incur differential privileges and penalties not currently integrated into understandings of the gender pay gap.

## 1.1 Hegemonic masculinity and the gender pay gap in the financial and legal sectors

The financial and legal sectors provide an important research setting in this thesis. The sector report two of the highest gender pay gaps across Britain's industrial sectors: 32.2% in the financial services and 24.9% in legal and accounting activities, representing minor drops of 1% and 1.4% year on year representatively<sup>2</sup>. In the finance sector, Metcalf & Rolfe (2009) explain the gender pay gap through the hours worked by and the segments of the industry worked in by women: reflective of Francis-Devine & Booth (2022), this proposes women are more likely

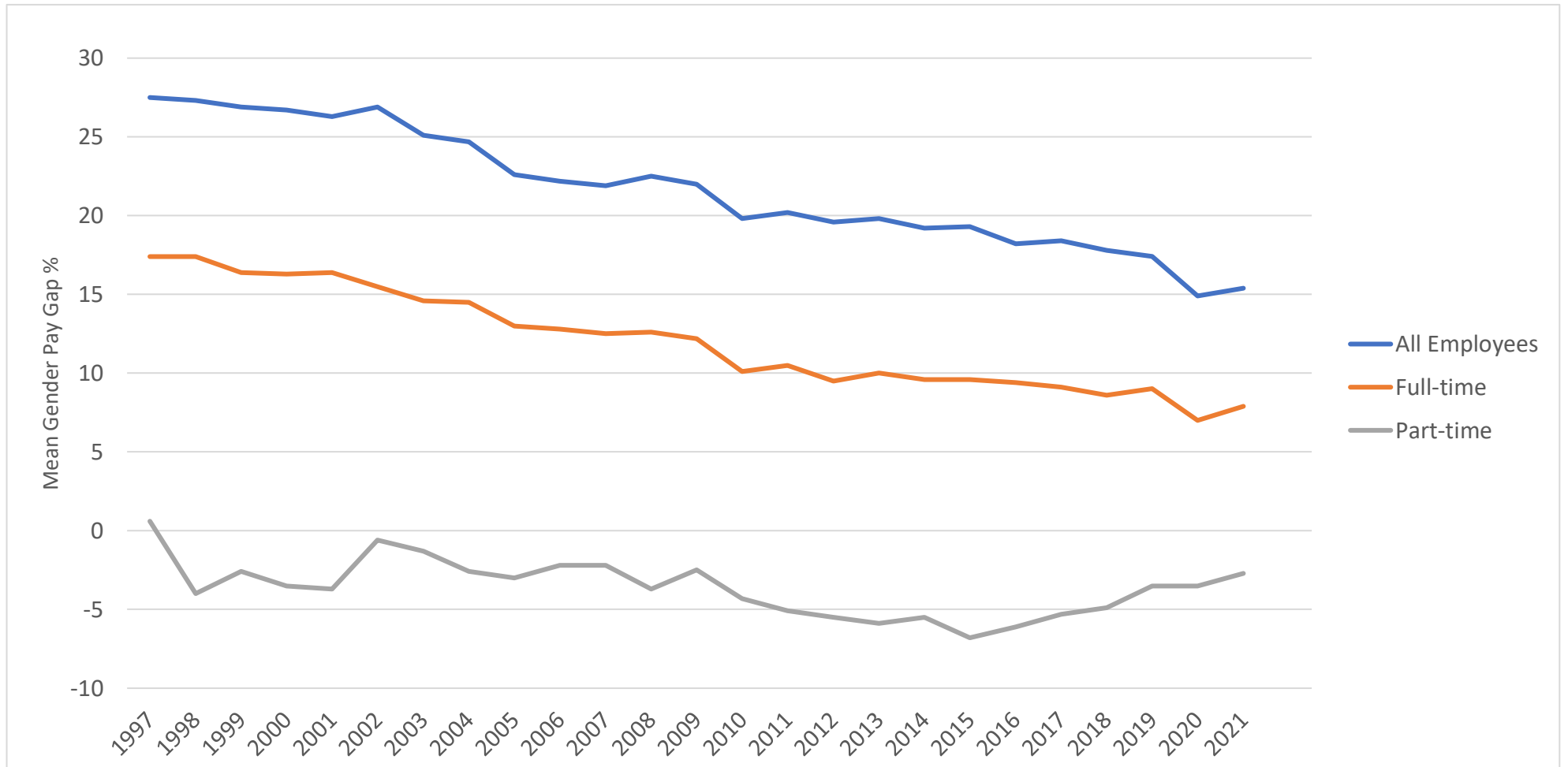
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<sup>2</sup> Figures extracted from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, Office for National Statistics.

to work in lower-paid, auxiliary, or part-time functions compared to men who are more likely to work over-time hours. Concurrently, the underrepresentation of women in senior positions across the financial and legal sectors has large implications on the gender pay gap (Deloitte, 2022; Next100 Years, 2022). Despite women now outpacing men in entry to these industries, they represent a minority of those in the most senior, highest paid roles. Across the financial and legal sectors, women represent only 27.3% of board members and 25.2% of managers (Azmat & Boring, 2020). In the financial services, women represent 43.8% of total workers (Catalyst, 2020) but only 9.7% of senior leaders (Suss et al., 2021). Similarly in the legal sector, women represent 60% of solicitors yet white women are 47.7% and BAME women 55% less likely to be promoted to partnership in large corporate firms than white males (Aulakh et al., 2017). Even when breaking the 'glass ceiling' (i.e., Albrecht et al., 2003; Bjerk, 2008; Christofides et al., 2013), women directors are likely to be paid 66% less than male directors (Fox & Partners, 2021). Furthermore, although 72% of women received financial bonuses compared to 71% of men in 2020, men still received 44% higher financial bonuses across the sector (TIC Finance, 2021).

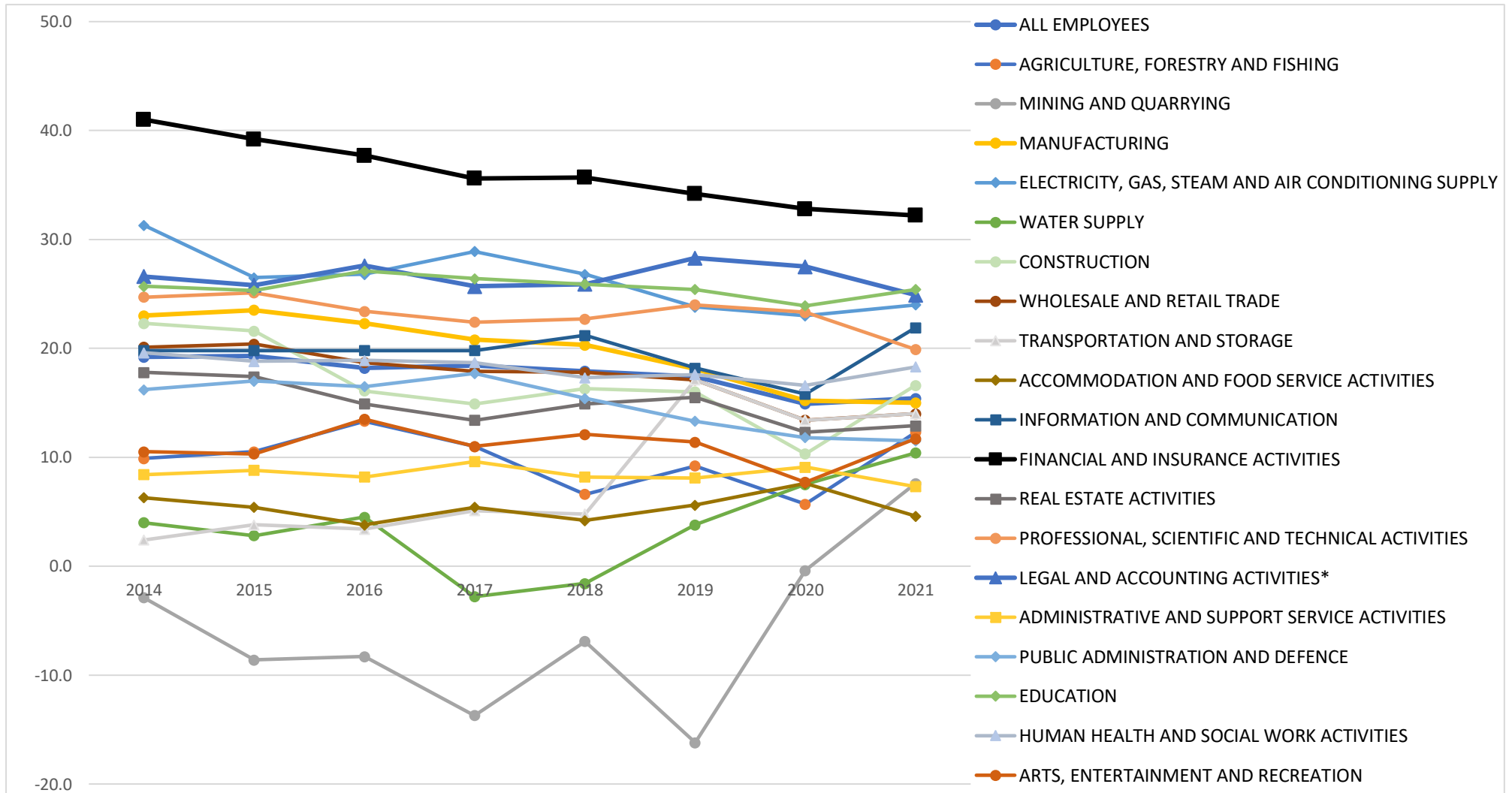
Despite the increasing attention on the gender pay gap paid by financial and legal firms, progress has stagnated. As I argue in this thesis, where actions beyond mandatory reporting remains voluntary (i.e., Cowper-Coles et al., 2021; Healey & Ahmed, 2018), current strategies do little to challenge the underlying factors of the gender pay gap. The policies enacted by the largest professional service firms reflect a wider industry trend: adopting the most commonly employed strategies that are ineffective in reducing the gender pay gap rather than the internal evaluation of data to construct effective firm-specific policies. The adoption of industry-wide policy trends reflects Ashley & Empson's (2016b) description of diversity initiatives as "convenient fictions": easily accessible and replicable narratives which have minimal impact upon the gender pay gap.

Figure 1: The 25 Year Total Mean Gender Pay Gap



Data Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, Office for National Statistics.

Figure 2: Gender Pay Gap by Industry since the introduction of mandatory reporting requirements



Data Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, Office for National Statistics

Table 1: Gender pay gap by industry since the introduction of mandatory reporting requirements

SIC (2007) Industrial Classification	Mean Gender Pay Gap &					Median Gender Pay Gap %				
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
ALL EMPLOYEES	18.4	17.9	17.4	14.9	15.4	17.4	17.1	16.3	13.9	14.9
FINANCIAL AND INSURANCE ACTIVITIES	35.6	35.7	34.2	32.8	32.2	35.1	33.4	32.6	29.6	29.9
LEGAL AND ACCOUNTING ACTIVITIES*	25.7	25.9	28.3	27.5	24.9	24.2	26	27.0	27.1	25.8
AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FISHING	11.0	6.6	9.2	5.7	12.3	14.2	8.8	8.5	3.2	6.4
MINING AND QUARRYING	-13.7	-6.9	-16.2	-0.4	7.6	1.0	-3.1	-3.7	5.4	0.4
MANUFACTURING	20.8	20.3	18.1	15.2	15.0	16.5	15.8	14.1	1.3	9.8
ELECTRICITY, GAS, STEAM AND AIR CONDITIONING SUPPLY	28.9	26.8	23.8	23.0	24.0	18.6	16.2	17.3	13.5	10.9
WATER SUPPLY	-2.8	-1.6	3.8	7.5	10.4	-12.2	-5.0	-5.5	-4.9	2.9
CONSTRUCTION	14.9	16.3	16.0	10.3	16.6	11.8	11	11.4	5.9	9.3
WHOLESALE AND RETAIL TRADE	17.9	17.8	17.1	13.4	14.0	18.9	18.4	17.5	13.2	12.3
TRANSPORTATION AND STORAGE	5.1	4.8	17.1	13.4	14.0	2.4	4.1	4.0	6.2	4.0
ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD SERVICE ACTIVITIES	5.4	4.2	5.6	7.6	4.6	11.2	8.4	9.4	7.6	7.1
INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION	19.8	21.2	18.2	15.8	21.9	16.8	15.7	14.2	12.5	17.2
REAL ESTATE ACTIVITIES	13.4	14.9	15.5	12.3	12.9	18.7	18.1	16.3	15.9	18.7
PROFESSIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL ACTIVITIES	22.4	22.7	24.0	23.3	19.9	21.8	22.2	22.9	22.2	19.6
ADMINISTRATIVE AND SUPPORT SERVICE ACTIVITIES	9.6	8.2	8.1	9.1	7.3	8.7	9.4	8.1	10.6	8.4
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND DEFENCE	17.7	15.4	13.3	11.8	11.5	10.9	10.7	9.0	6.4	7.9
EDUCATION	26.4	25.9	25.4	23.9	25.4	18.3	17.3	17.0	16.7	17.6
HUMAN HEALTH AND SOCIAL WORK ACTIVITIES	18.7	17.3	17.6	16.6	18.3	25.1	24.6	23.3	22.5	20.4
ARTS, ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION	11.0	12.1	11.4	7.7	11.7	36.9	39.6	25.7	23.0	x

Data Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, Office for National Statistics

\*Legal and accounting activities included within *Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities* under SIC (2007) Industrial Classifications and has therefore been separated out and detailed separately.

Thus, I argue that careers in the financial and legal sectors remain entrenched with assumptions of white, middle-class masculinity that demands reconstruction to meaningfully address the gender pay gap. Careers are constructed on notions of meritocracy, with individual success framed upon hard work, commitment, and personal excellence (Ashley, 2021; Littler, 2017; Longlands, 2019). The knowledge-intensive nature of the sectors demands highly skilled workers (Carter & Spence, 2014; Hanlon, 1994; Witz, 1992), and the increasing globalisation of large firms demands extremely long working hours (Anderson-Gough et al., 2000; Reid, 2015; Wharton & Blair-Loy, 2002). Thus, several traditional factors of the gender pay gap may be limited in a sector that can place women as “outsiders” through organisational structures and daily interactions (Sheehan & Lineham, 2018). Despite the increasing number of women entering the sector, and now outpacing men at junior levels (Catalyst, 2020; SRA, 2020), partnership and director roles remain male dominated (Aulakh et al., 2017; Azmat & Boring, 2020; Tomlinson et al., 2019) whilst the retention of women continues to prove problematic (Jones, 2019).

I therefore explore the gender pay gap through a theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity to problematise the power held by men in institutions (Connell, 1995; 2000; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2018). Hegemonic masculinity is defined here as the practises and processes that maintain men’s dominant positions in society and institutions based upon the subordination of women and marginalisation of non-conforming men (Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Yang, 2020). It rejects static typologies of gender and instead proposes the existence of multiple masculinities and femininities that exist under constant construction and reconstruction. The theoretical approach undertaken in this thesis recognises critical perspectives of hegemonic masculinity. First, Gramscian understandings of cultural hegemony are retained, to identify modes of domination that seek to legitimise patriarchal gender relations rather than to simply name dominant masculinities (Yang, 2020). Secondly, the underlying assumption that men unilaterally hold dominant positions over women is dismissed. Rather, the approach undertaken recognises that intersecting class, race and sexuality may afford certain demographics of women’s power over men (Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Finally, drawing upon wider intersectional feminist theory, women may engage in a hegemonic femininity based upon the



marginalisation of others to attain power whilst legitimising patriarchal gender relations (Collins, 1990; 2004; Connell, 2005; Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 1981; Phipps, 2019). In this thesis, I therefore analyse hegemonic masculinity across the careers of women and men in the financial and legal sectors. New insights into the gender pay gap are achieved: penalties and privileges occurring at the individual level across careers relating to unexplained factors of the gender pay gap; and a resistance at the institutional level to progressive policies to maintain the gender pay gap.

## 1.2 Research Questions

In this thesis, I explore persistent unexplained factors of the gender pay gap within the financial and legal sectors. Underlying this is the recognition that the role of men and masculinity is yet to be investigated) as a significant factor of the gender pay gap. Thus, hegemonic masculinity is utilized to identify the practices that concurrently afford privilege to men whilst penalizing women over the course of careers. The theoretical and empirical approaches undertaken in this thesis respond to the calls of Grimshaw & Rubery (2015) and Lips (2013b) to integrate an understanding of wider inequalities in work and private lives into the gender pay gap. To achieve this, the thesis undertakes a methodological shift away from the traditional quantitative paradigms of gender pay gap research. Rather, a qualitative approach that combines life-history interviews and document analysis is employed. As explored by Connell (2010), life-histories reveal the collective and institutional practises that regulate individual careers, and how these practises are socially constructed through an individual's own understandings. Thus, rather than utilising statistical modelling to identify supply and demand factors of the gender pay gap (i.e., Blau & Kahn, 2007; Grimshaw & Rubery, 2001; Olsen & Walby, 2004), the research identifies the different mechanisms of support and barriers afforded to men and women. Inherently, this does not generate economic data on pay. However, the findings of this thesis aim to complement existing scholarship on the gender pay gap, exploring the gaps in knowledge that may be difficult to conceptualise through quantitative data.

Guided by existing literature and the theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity, three broad research questions are therefore proposed:

R1: What wage bonuses and penalties can be identified across the career span that can explain currently unexplained factors of the gender pay gap?

R2: Are current firm-level strategies to reduce the gender pay gap effective?

R3: What roles do men hold in the reducing or maintaining the gender pay gap?

Research questions are explored through semi-structured life-history interviews. Forty-two women and men working in financial and legal professions were interviewed virtually between May 2020 and September 2021. Participants constructed their own narrative accounts of careers, focussing upon specific events and experiences perceived as important to their career development (Jackson & Russell, 2018; Miller, 2011; Stanley & Wise, 1993). Data were then analysed through a reflexive thematic analysis framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2018), initially in isolation and consequentially across participants to identify shared patterns of meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Fugard & Potts, 2020). Thus, wage penalties occurring across careers are identified, and resistance to progressive policies explored.

The data collection, analysis and arguments developed in this thesis occurred entirely throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, which had a profound impact on several aspects of the research. Research was initially designed to provide comparative ethnographic case studies from professional services firms. However, *work-from-home* orders between March 2020 and January 2022 demanded a significant methodological shift. The movement to remote interviews enabled several benefits not initially expected. For example, a greater focus was paid to observing gendered privileges and penalties within individuals' careers set within a wider context of the financial and legal professions rather than located within a single firm. Additionally, access to participants who might not have been previously available for in-person interviews was granted where remote interviews allowed greater flexibility. Women,

who within a financial or legal occupation in an in-house capacity outside of the immediate sectors, worked in reduced hours capacities, or who already worked remotely prior to the pandemic, were able to participate. Thus, a greater diversity of experiences was attained, capturing unique nuances that marginalised women across their careers would not have been available if focussing on current employees in a singular firm. Furthermore, exploring how organisations were responding to the gender pay gap in the midst of furlough, job losses and the suspension of mandatory reporting highlighted critical disparities between how firms were presenting behaviours compared to actualised policies.

### 1.3 Summary of key findings and contributions

The findings of this thesis contribute to the gender pay gap debate in two ways: the identification of wage penalties across the careers of women in contrast to the premiums received by men; and visible resistance to and rejection of gender pay gap initiatives which maintain structures of inequalities. Contributions are therefore made in explaining current unaccounted for factors of the gender pay gap, and sector-specific drivers of the gender pay gap where current responses and legislation may be ineffective in its reduction. Critically, I argue that the narrow-definition of careers in the financial and legal professions represents a significant factor of the sector-specific gender pay gap. The divergence from a masculinised career path incurs multiple wage penalties not currently accounted for.

Further contributions to gender pay gap literature are made. First, the thesis responds to the longstanding calls for a diversity in methodological approaches to the gender pay gap (i.e., Grimshaw & Rubery, 2015; Lips, 2013b). In utilising a life-history approach to qualitative data collections, an exploration of the discrimination occurring in work and private lives difficult to conceptualise in purely economic data can occur. I do not argue for the complete displacement of quantitative research in the gender pay gap. Rather, the findings demonstrate how greater complementarity between research paradigms can provide a more holistic account of the gender pay gap. Secondly, the thesis explores the role of men and masculinity in the gender pay gap. This is outlined through direct contributions across careers that marginalises and subverts the value of women's labour, and through an implicit

resistance to progressive policies. Cultural and structural penalties are identified which concurrently benefit men due to deeply engrained masculinities in notions of performance and career progression. Direct penalties occur through bonuses and wages received where performance metrics and promotion requirements disproportionately benefit men's skills and experiences. Indirect penalties are then outlined through an inequality of opportunities to allow women to demonstrate skills and accumulate said experiences. Finally, the thesis extends the arguments of Cowper-Coles et al. (2021) in the need for a reconceptualised or strengthened legislation. I argue that current iterations of mandatory reporting have failed to maintain the required engagement needed for firms to reduce the gender pay gap. Where current policies are ineffective in addressing the underlying causes, and further movements comes from altruistic motives of the firm, external stimulation is required.

Contributions are also made to hegemonic masculinity scholarship. The findings explores how men's dominance in the financial and legal sectors is maintained through the marginalisation of women's labour. This is achieved through persistent gender norms in a masculinised culture that fails to provide women equal opportunities to demonstrate and embody notions of 'ideal workers.' Although this does not provide an exhaustive typology of hegemonic practises, it identifies those most common across the careers of participants in the study. Critically, I argue that hegemonic masculinity is reproduced through the failure of senior leaders socialised into the sector to recognise the barriers faced by women throughout careers as legitimate. Thus, a 'blocked reflexivity' is developed that implicitly resists progress to the gender pay gap. Additional contributions are made to understandings of hegemonic femininity, extending the arguments of Hamilton et al. (2018): that women may appropriate the benefits of hegemonic masculinity without attaining equal power, iteratively marginalising those who do not assimilate into a masculine culture.

Finally, I propose a notion of 'glass bubbles' that offers new insight into women's careers in male-dominated occupations and industries. Here, I define 'glass bubbles' as occupations isolated from organisational hierarchies and sector-wide career paths, offering highly skilled labour comparatively lower pay with a complete absence of promotion

opportunities. No scope exists for lateral movements back into the sectors, nor vertical progression within firms, requiring an individual to restart their career at a more junior level if reintegrating back into the 'path to partnership'. Contributions are made to the gender pay gap literature, and further contributions are made to wider management and human resource literature in understanding the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions.

## 1.4 Thesis structure

The thesis is structured as follows.

Chapter 2 explores the existing academic research and scholarship on the gender pay gap. The chapter is framed around the elements that account for the majority of the gender pay gap: human capital theories, occupational segregation, part-time and motherhood penalties, and institutional factors. Furthermore, bonus-based pay gaps are discussed due to their centrality within the professional services. The chapter concludes by responding to the arguments of Grimshaw & Rubery (2015) and Lips (2013): that inequalities in work and private lives are yet to be fully accounted for in the gender pay gap. Therefore, exploring a holistic understanding of discrimination may provide insight into persistent unexplained factors (Lips, 2013a; Olsen et al., 2018).

Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity utilised throughout the research. It explores how socially constructed masculinities and femininities normatively regulate behaviours through power, marginalisation, and oppression (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The chapter explores several critical perspectives of hegemonic masculinity that have been integrated within the theoretical framework utilised (i.e., Brod, 1994; Demetriou, 2001; Hamilton et al., 2019; Holter, 2003; Yang, 2020). The philosophical foundations of cultural hegemony are retained (Gramsci, 1971; 1975), and the reconceptualization of hegemonic masculinity outlined (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The chapter explores the theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity through three factors,

identified through existing literature: the social construction of hierarchical masculinities and femininities, the retention of power through social interactions, and the institutionalisation of male dominance.

Chapter 4 contextualises the preceding chapters within the professional services. The chapter demonstrates how a need to “fit the mould” in a sector that has undergone a transformational shift towards “client is king” mentalities has engrained careers with underlying assumptions of middle-class, white masculinity (Anderson-Gough et al., 2000; Carter & Spence, 2014; Hanlon, 1994; Hayes, 2012; Lehman, 1992). Organisational structures are overtly and implicitly imbued with patriarchal norms that can place women as “outsiders” (North-Samardzic & Taska, 2011; Sheehan & Lineham, 2018). The chapter explores these through barriers of entry into the industry, the masculinity of work in the sector, the replacement of technical expertise with entrepreneurial skills, overwork and long-working hours, and the reproduction of inequalities through a “blocked reflexivity.”

Chapter 5 outlines the methods and methodological approach undertaken in this thesis. The chapter emphasises the need for a methodological shift within gender pay gap research, where the current quantitative traditions are limited in identifying discriminations in work and private lives across the career span. Thus, the philosophical assumptions of social constructivism that underline the research approach are explored and data collection and analytic techniques detailed. This is followed by a discussion of ethical considerations made. The chapter concludes by outlining limitations in the applied methodology.

Chapter 6 presents the first empirical chapter and provides a platform for the subsequent empirical chapters. Four brief vignettes of careers in the professional services are outlined, detailing the narrow, linear career path that are imbued with assumptions of middle-class white masculinity. The chapter casts insight into the differential mechanisms of support offered to men and women throughout careers, with implications upon the types of

occupations undertaken and earnings received. Furthermore, I demonstrate that the assimilation of women into a masculine career path does not guarantee equal career opportunities.

Chapter 7 extends the arguments previously made, exploring the mechanisms of support and penalties across all participants. I argue that careers in the professional services are underlined with assumptions of masculinity and penalise those whose experiences, skills and expertise diverge from narrowly defined frameworks. Thus, wage penalties are incurred directly and indirectly across the career span: direct wage penalties have immediate impact upon wages and financial bonuses received, whilst indirect penalties describe the inequality of opportunities to achieve high pay across a career span. These penalties are broadly defined through the working patterns of the financial and legal professions, constructions of performance within tight masculinities, a masculinised culture that demands conformance, and the narrow definitions of 'path to partnership' models. Critically, I argue that the industry fails to see the value in a diversity of experiences and skills, financially penalising those who divert from masculine norms.

Chapter 8 provides the final empirical chapter and describes how professional service firms are responding to the gender pay gap. In the chapter, I argue that senior leaders play a significant role in facilitating or resisting meaningful change in organisations. However, apathetic perceptions of the gender pay gap – and wider diversity initiatives – acts as an implicit practise of hegemonic masculinity. The chapter first explores the policies currently described by elite professional firms in mandatory gender pay gap reporting. Communicated policies are then compared with participant perceptions of responses, to argue a critical contradiction exists between the two. The chapter therefore explores the underlying apathy as resistance to the gender pay gap, before centring the role of senior leaders within this. The chapter concludes by exploring how senior leaders can facilitate change and challenge hegemonic masculinity.

Chapter 9 aligns the findings from empirical chapters to frame the gender pay gap across two broad factors of hegemonic masculinity: penalties and privileges occurring across careers, and a resistance to progressive policies. In the chapter, I propose a central argument that careers in the professional services act as a critical practise of hegemonic masculinity that holds significance in the gender pay gap. Success in the sector relies upon the assimilation into a masculinised culture that places women's careers as secondary. Leaning upon Whitehead's (2001) notion of 'blocked reflexivity', the assimilation into cultures obscures structures of inequalities, restricting the ability to instigate meaningful change. Theoretical contributions from the thesis are outlined, and the chapter concludes with a brief discussion on intersectionality.

Chapter 10 concludes the thesis. The central arguments and core findings are restated, and policy recommendations outlined. Primarily, I propose that to further reduce the gender pay gap, financial and legal firms need to first engage with the gender pay gap more meaningfully as a legitimate inequality that demands long-term, well-resourced strategies tailored to mechanisms internal to the firm rather than the adoption of industry-wide trends. This can be supported by a reconceptualization of mandatory reporting requirements, including financial penalties for the failure to reduce the gender pay gap and the closure of existing loopholes which enable the misrepresentation of reported figures. Finally, recommendations for future research are made.



## Chapter 2: The gender pay gap in the British labour market

The gender pay gap is the result of complex, intertwining inequalities in work and gender relations. As outlined in *Chapter 1*, progress on the gender pay gap has stagnated: in 2021, the gender pay gap for all employees was 15.4%, a reduction of only 4.5% since 2011 and an increase of 0.5% on the previous year. Only modest progress can be seen in firms required to report: a 1.6% reduction is observed between 2017 to 2021 due to declining men's wages (Blundell, 2021), and 78% of firms reported a gender pay gap in favour of men (Francis-Devine & Booth, 2022). The financial and legal sectors further report the highest gender pay gaps in British industry: 32.2% in the financial services and 24.9% in legal and accounting activities, a 3.4% and 0.8% reduction respectively since the introduction of mandatory reporting in 2017 (see table 2). Furthermore, a bonus-based pay gap of 44% is observed despite women being marginally more likely to receive a financial bonus compared to men (TIC Finance, 2022).

The gender pay gap can be understood through several broad factors, although unexplained gaps persist. Internationally, Blau & Kahn (2007; 2017) model the gender pay gap upon educational attainment, career choices and wage structures. In a U.K. context, the gender pay gap can be framed upon human capital, occupational segregation, low-paid part-time work, and motherhood penalties (Brynin, 2017; Grimshaw & Rubery, 2001; 2015; Joshi et al., 2007; 2020; Olsen & Walby, 2004; Olsen et al., 2018). Additionally, bonus-based gaps demand consideration when focussing upon the financial and legal sectors (Elvira & Graham, 2002). However, unaccounted-for factors persist in gender pay gap modelling. As I argue in this chapter, the traditional quantitative paradigms of gender pay gap research is limited in identifying ontological experiences of discrimination occurring across the careers which impact pay. Although this may be due to the difficulty of constructing a singular holistic typology of discrimination (Alkadry & Tower, 2006; Lips, 2013a), traditional analysis assumes the gender pay gap is based upon market factors and productivity rarely recognising discrimination (Rubery et al., 2005).

Thus, the chapter builds upon the calls of Grimshaw & Rubery (2015) and Lips (2013b): that to fully account for the gender pay gap, a theoretical and methodological shift is required to integrate wider inequalities in work and private lives. At present, qualitative methodologies in gender pay gap research are minimal at best. Where qualitative data is utilised, this is as a comparative method to explain gender pay gaps between sectors of economy rather than within (i.e., Bergmann et al., 2017; Milner & Gregory, 2014) or to triangulate quantitative findings on interventions (i.e., Sandberg, 2017; Ugarte & Rubery, 2020; see Table 2). Thus, the thesis explores the gender pay gap through a novel methodological and philosophical paradigm shift: to identify factors of the gender pay gap occurring as penalties and privileges across careers in the financial and legal services. Furthermore, by problematising the power held by men and masculinity as a factor of the gender pay gap, I explore current mechanisms of resistance to progressive initiatives.

The following chapter is structured upon these factors. It first explores the traditional drivers of the gender pay gap in greater detail: human capital theories, occupational segregation, and part-time and motherhood penalties. Following this, institutional factors relevant to the financial and legal sectors are explored. Bonus-based gaps are discussed, before outlining the role of pay transparency, a lack of trade union representation, and women's leadership in the gender pay gap. Finally, the chapter explores current research gaps in unexplained factors of the gender pay gap and a failure to problematise the role of men.

## 2.1. Human capital theories

Human capital theories propose that individuals make rational investments into their education and skills attainment, occupational choice, and labour market experience to enhance their economic value and pay (Becker, 1985). The gender pay gap is therefore theoretically determined as the differences in accumulated human capital between women and men (Alkadry & Tower, 2006; Kelly, 1991). Disparities can therefore emerge for several reasons. First, women may experience reduced labour market participation due to gendered expectations of caring responsibilities and full-time work (Becker, 1985; Sullivan & Gershuny, 2016). Additionally, women may experience restrained access to educational attainment,

influencing the occupations and organisations worked in (Bertrand & Hallock, 2001; Rumberger & Thomas, 1993). Although human capital theories provide a foundation to understanding the gender pay gap, this is often a narrow conceptualisation that fails to consider wider socio-economic factors.

Internationally, a small number of researchers have claimed virtually all of the gender pay gap can be attributed to human capital (see O'Neill, 2003; Polachek, 2004). However, such analysis is limited by its effectivity in which unexplained pay gaps persist (Blau & Kahn, 2006; Murphy & Oesch, 2016; Oemichen et al., 2014). For example, Olsen & Walby, (2004) attribute 19% of the gender pay gap to human capital factors, whilst Olsen et al. (2010) estimate educational attainment accounts for 7% of Britain's gender pay gap. Additionally, Manning & Swaffield (2008) analyse early-career wage growth in Britain, revealing women who enter the labour market at the same pay as men found themselves earning twenty-five log points less 10 years later. Although human capital accumulation explained half this gap, primarily due to differences in job opportunities and labour market experience, large unexplainable gaps remained. Assuming equal human capital accumulation over that period, women are still predicted to receive 92% of men's salaries. Joshi et al. (2007) replicates such patterns, demonstrating that when assuming the equal accumulation of human capital, British women should be paid higher than men between 1978 and 2000. The limits of observing the gender pay gap solely through human capital is, partly, due to its complex and dynamic structure; the sociological and organisational barriers faced by women throughout careers denote it difficult to construct a holistic, singular typology to quantify pay discriminations (Alkadry & Tower, 2006). By omitting gendered differences in job opportunities and labour market experiences, human capital theories are restricted in providing a holistic conceptualisation of gender inequality in work relations.

Critically, human capital theories rely upon the assumption that individuals make rational investments into their labour market value, but also have unconstrained choices regarding occupations and educational attainment (Grimshaw & Rubery, 2001). Furthermore, human capital fails to conceptualise social influence and organisational bias within the gender

pay gap (Olsen, 2013). For example, women are less likely to receive funded training at work compared to men (Olsen & Walby, 2004), whilst part-time work or time out of the labour market for mothers after childbirth directly impacts their ability to accumulate equal human capital (Dias et al., 2020). Considering organisational biases, in-workplace discrimination that implicates the accumulation of human capital is unaccounted for. Subjective decisions on wages, gender composition of workforces, and investment into training greatly influence an individual's human capital over their careers (Grimshaw & Rubery, 2001; Oaxaca, 1973). Thus, framing the gender pay gap solely around human capital may legitimise men's dominance in the labour market by presenting themselves as more skilled and qualified for highly paid roles (Lips, 2013b).

Human capital explanations may be further limited in a sector rooted within highly skilled work. Entry to the financial and legal professions assumes the accumulation of narrowly defined human capital, and recruitment into elite firms' centres upon candidates with specific educational attainment (Ashley et al, 2015; Cook et al., 2012; Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2008). This thesis problematises human capital in the gender pay gap as a central hegemonic masculinity. Firstly, discourses which conflate human capital and meritocracy with success may legitimise men's dominance. And secondly, problematising this definition of human capital accumulation as masculine across careers incurs wage penalties and bonuses.

## 2.2 Occupational segregation

Occupational segregation is defined as the distribution of men and women in specific sections of organisations and the economy (i.e., Bergmann, 1981; Brynin, 2017). As argued by Grimshaw & Rubery (2001), occupational segregation is the cornerstone of the British gender pay gap. Women are more likely to work within lower-paid, less productive sections of the economy (McGuinness & Pyper, 2018; Olsen & Walby, 2004), where wage bonuses occur when an occupation becomes more male-dominated (Brynin, 2017; Murphy & Oesch, 2016). Thus, Francis-Devine & Booth (2022) demonstrate how women are concurrently overrepresented in the lowest-paid quartile of work and underrepresented in the highest. It is important here to differentiate the two factors of occupational segregation. Horizontal segregation describes

the disproportionate number of women distributed into overcrowded occupations, industries and sectors with suppressed wages and minimal promotion opportunities (Olsen & Walby, 2004; Rubery & Grimshaw, 2015; Rubery & Johnson, 2019). Concurrently, vertical segregation describes the restriction of promotion opportunities to the most senior roles in organisations from women (Fortin et al., 2017; Kanter, 1977; Reskin, 1993).

Despite the increasing proportion of women entering traditionally male-dominated occupations such as the financial and legal sectors, occupational segregation persists. Across the professional services, women represented 23.7% of board members, 17.5% of executive positions, and 25.2% of management roles in 2018 (Azmat & Boring, 2020). In the legal sector, women's representation in newly qualified solicitors has increased from below 10% in 1970 to greater than 60% in 2016. Furthermore, white males are 73.5% more likely to become a partner compared to 18% of white women and 13% of black, Asian and minority ethnic<sup>3</sup> women (Aulakh et al., 2017). In the financial services and banking, women represent 43.8% of total workers (Catalyst, 2020), but only 20.1% of Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) approved workers and 9.7% of leadership positions (Suss et al., 2021). Thus, Metcalf & Rolfe (2009) explain the gender pay gap in the financial and legal sectors through occupational segregation: that women are more likely to work in lower-paid, auxiliary, or part-time functions compared to men who are overrepresented in leadership positions.

Occupational segregation demands important consideration throughout this thesis. As shall be discussed in Chapter 4, although roles in the financial and legal services are tightly defined, occupational segregation persists: highly skilled women remain underrepresented in senior positions, and gendered segregation persists in highly paid specialism and segments of the sector. Thus, the thesis builds upon current understandings of occupational gender segregation in the gender pay gap to interrogate how and why women continue to work in lower paid segments of the sector despite assumptions of equal human capital. Framed upon

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<sup>3</sup> From herein, the acronymy BAME will be used when referring to black, Asian and ethnic minority workers.

hegemonic masculinity, the thesis aims to identify the practises that underlie occupational segregation which subordinate and undervalue women's labour.

Occupational segregation will now be explored in relation to the gender pay gap, outlining theoretical and empirical literature. Horizontal and vertical segregation will be considered separately.

### 2.2.1 Horizontal occupational segregation and the feminisation of low-paid work

Horizontal occupational segregation describes the disproportionate representation of women in low-paid occupations and sectors of the labour market (Millward & Woodland, 1995; Petersen & Morgan, 1995). Despite increasing numbers of women entering traditionally masculinised occupations, they may still find themselves overcrowded within small numbers of 'female' roles distributed towards the bottom of pay structures (Anker, 1997; Bergman, 1974).

As previously discussed, horizontal occupational segregation can explain large segments of the gender pay gap (i.e., Brynin, 2017; Grimshaw & Rubery, 2001; Rubery, 1998). For example, Olsen et al. (2018) find that the concentration of women into low-paid roles account for 19% of Britain's gender pay gap. McGuinness & Pyper (2018) report that 23% of hourly wage gaps can be attributed by occupational differences showed by the higher share of women working in the lowest quartile of paid work. Similarly, Murphy & Oesch (2016) observe British workers in women-dominated occupations earn 10% lower wages than those in entirely men's occupations even when accounting for equal human capital accumulation. These findings reflect Olsen & Walby's (2004) modelling of gender pay gaps, arguing that hourly wages are boosted by 1% for every 10% increase of men's representation in an occupation.

Table 2: Gender pay gap literature and research methods

Author	Year	Scope of research	Sector	Data Set	Methodology
Bergmann et al.	2017	Sectoral differences of the gender pay gap	Healthcare & Finance	Labour Force Survey, Structure of Earnings Survey complemented by expert interviews on gender and pay issues to triangulate findings	Sectoral Analysis
Blau & Kahn	2006	Modelling the total gender pay gap	National (United States)	Michigan Panel Study of Income Dynamics	Decomposition Modelling
Blau & Kahn	2017	Modelling the total gender pay gap	National (United States)	Michigan Panel Study of Income Dynamics	Decomposition Modelling
Blundell	2021	Mandatory reporting	National	Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, UK Government Pay Gap Data, and collected survey data on legislation awareness	Regression Modelling
Brynin	2017	Modelling the total gender pay gap	National	UK Labour Force Survey and UK Household Longitudinal Study	Regression Modelling
Budig & Hodges	2010	Motherhood Penalties	National (United States)	National Longitudinal Survey of Youth	Semi-Parametric Quantile Regression
Christofides et al.	2013	Occupational segregation	International Comparisons	European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions	Quantile Regressions
England et al.	2016	Motherhood penalties	National (United States)	National Longitudinal Survey of Youth	Unconditional Quantile Regression
Gamage et al.	2020	Pay transparency	Higher Education	Administrative dataset compiling academic data from the Higher Education Statistical Agency	Regression Modelling
Grimshaw & Rubery	2002	Research methods	National	Literature Review	Decomposition Modelling
Grönlund & Magnusson	2016	Motherhood penalties, human capital, and occupational segregation	International Comparisons	European Social Survey	Ordinary Least Square Regressions

Author	Year	Scope of research	Sector	Data Set	Methodology
Grosberg et al.	2022	Human capital and performance-based pay at executive level&	C-Suite Executives (United States)	Demographic data on job placements accessed from a top-five global executive search firm, complemented by data on women's representation from 2014 Capital IQ data on Fortune 500 firms	Ordinary Least Square Regressions
Joshi et al.	2007	Longitudinal observations of human capital and the gender pay gap	National	National Survey of Health and Development, National Child Development Survey (1991), British Cohort Study (1970), and National Child Development Survey (2000)	Decomposition Modelling
Joshi et al.	2020	Longitudinal modelling of the gender pay gap	National	British National Child Development Study	Regression Modelling
Joshi et al.	1999	Motherhood penalties	National	British Cohort Study	Decomposition Modelling
Madden	2012	Bonus-based pay gaps	Stockbrokers (United States)	Case studies on two retail brokerages, with data on pay, commissions, training, asset value of an individual's portfolio	Regression Modelling
Magda & Cukrowska-Torzewska	2018	Women's leadership and within-firm gender pay gaps	Sectoral Comparison	Structure of Wages and Salaries by Occupations Survey (Poland)	Parametric and non-parametric decompositions
Manning & Swaffield	2008	Human capital	National	British Household Panel Survey, supplemented by the Labour Force Survey and New Earnings Survey	Regression Modelling
Matteazzi et al.	2017	Part-time employment	International Comparisons	European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions	Decomposition Modelling
McGuinness & Pyper	2018	Modelling the total gender pay gap	National	Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings	No explicit discussion



Author	Year	Scope of research	Sector	Data Set	Methodology
Milner & Gregory	2014	Trade union representation	International Comparisons	Gender pay gap data complemented with secondary data on collective bargaining and employment relations legislation	Comparative analysis
Murphy & Oesch	2016	Occupational segregation	International Comparisons	British Household Panel Survey, German Socio-Economic Panel Survey, and Swiss Household Panel Survey	Linear Regression Modelling
Oemichen et al.	2014	Human capital	C-Suite Executives (United States)	Salary, firm, and demographic data disclosed for companies listed in the German Prime Standard and company annual reports	Ordinary Least Square Regressions
Olsen & Walby	2004	Modelling the total gender pay gap	National	British Household Panel Survey	Regression Modelling
Olsen et al.	2018	Modelling the total gender pay gap	National	British Household Panel Survey & UK Household Longitudinal Survey	Regression and decomposition modelling
Rubery & Rafferty	2014	Occupational segregation and state interventions	National	Labour Force Survey & Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings	N/A
Sandberg	2017	Performance-based pay (not linked to gender pay gap)	Government, state, non-profit and for-profit institutions	Pay data documents, wage and survey data, and workshops on job-evaluation systems	Qualitative Content Analysis
Triventi	2013	Institutional factors	International Comparisons	Research into employment and Professional Flexibility Survey	Regression and decomposition modelling
Ugarte & Rubery*	2020	Pay transparency	Finance Sector (Chile)	In-depth critical case study combining quantitative data on demographic, human capital, and human resource processes triangulated with policy documents and interviews on gender pay initiatives	Ordinary Least Square Regressions

Grönlund & Magnusson (2016) find overall gender pay gaps decrease by a third when controlling for percentage of women's representation in an occupation. Furthermore, this is emphasised more in low-skilled workers, reflecting Millward & Woodland's (1995) estimate that unskilled British workers in male-dominated occupations earn 30% more than comparative female-dominated roles.

Several sociological approaches may explain mechanisms of horizontal occupational segregation. Dual labour market theories propose that women are more likely to work in lower-paid, public-sector roles for non-salaried benefits such as flexible working arrangements (Grönlund & Magnusson, 2016; Jones et al., 2018; Mandel & Shalev, 2009). Furthermore, women are more likely to work within smaller, less bureaucratic organisations with lower progression opportunities towards the bottom of organisational hierarchies (Lips, 2013b, Rubery & Grimshaw, 2016; Millward & Woodland, 1995). Critically, the social construction of women's labour is conflated with low value-added skills such as caring and nursing across the economy (England, 1992; Perales, 2013; Rubery, 2017), or as auxiliary in the financial and legal sectors (Francis-Devine & Booth, 2022). The social construction of women's labour as low-value may therefore enact barriers of entry into male-dominated sectors of the economy (Bolton & Muzio, 2007; Muzio & Tomlinson, 2012).

Taking these sociological explanations provides a central line of inquiry into the role of hegemonic masculinity in the gender pay gap. Although the financial and legal sectors demand highly skilled workers in tightly defined occupations, lower-paid 'feminised' roles may still exist. Understanding how careers lead to these positions may provide critical insight into current unaccounted for factors of the gender pay gap as a hegemonic masculinity. Furthermore, if pay gaps can be partially explained through the underrepresentation of women in highly paid sections of the economy (i.e., Jones et al., 2018; Rubery & Grimshaw, 2016), barriers of entry can be centred as hegemonic masculinity. Although a narrowing of occupational segregation can be observed in the financial and legal sectors (Aulakh et al., 2017, Azmat & Boring, 2020), the segmentation of the labour market is central to the research goal. As argued by Grynin & Peralas (2016) the gender pay gap cannot be closed entirely by

ensuring women's equal representation in male-dominated occupations where women remain overrepresented in low-paid roles (Joshi & Paci, 1998; Rubery, 2008).

### 2.2.2 Vertical occupational segregation and *'the glass ceiling'*

Described often as *"the glass ceiling,"* vertical occupational segregation is defined as the underrepresentation of women in the highest-earning occupations distributed at the top of organisational hierarchies (Albrecht et al., 2003; Bjerk, 2008; Maume, 1999). Vertical segregation is the result of unequal and restricted promotion opportunities throughout careers, with women less likely to hold positions of higher responsibilities (Kanter 1977; Reskin & Ross, 1995). Although greater numbers of women are entering senior positions in the financial and legal sectors than ever before (i.e. Financial Conduct Authority, 2021; Solicitors Regulation Authority, 2022), considerations to the gender pay gap are required.

Increasing wage inequalities for top earners coupled with the under-representation of women employed in these roles resists progress on the gender pay gap. For example, Atkinson et al. (2016) describe women accounting for just 17.8% of Britain's 1% of earners. Furthermore, Fortin et al. (2017) observe no increase of women into the top 0.1% of earners post 2008 financial crisis. Thus, observing the gender pay gap across the earning distributions implies a U-curve: wage inequalities being most pronounced at the highest and lowest distribution of earners (Christofides et al., 2013; Chzenhen & Mumford, 2011; Scicchitano, 2012). For example, Christofides et al. (2013) argue that wage gaps are greatest in the highest earning roles across Europe, with a larger gap for full-time women in *'better jobs'* than those in low-paid occupations. Similarly, Chzenhen & Mumford (2011) observe the trend of wage gaps growing upwards across earning distributions. Vertical segregation and glass ceilings impact those towards the higher end of organisational hierarchies, intensifying throughout the course of an individuals' careers to increasingly restrict their career potential (Bushu & Alkadry, 2016; Ciminelli et al., 2021; Zeng, 2011). Contextualized into the financial and legal sectors, Fox & Partners (2021) demonstrate wage gaps of 66% between directors due to the size of firms worked within.

Assumptions that glass ceilings are attributed to a lack of human capital are problematic where they may further legitimise men's domination in organisations (i.e. Lips, 2013a). Anker (1997) therefore argues that organisations may be reluctant to promote women due to negative assumptions of work-family conflicts and the feminisation of caring responsibilities. Furthermore, Bjerk (2008) proposes inaccurate perceptions of women's abilities may restrict their progression into senior roles. Finally, where women do progress beyond the glass ceiling, this may be into "*glass cliffs*": precarious leadership positions in firms undergoing crisis (Ryan & Haslam, 2005; 2007; Haslam, & Ryan, 2008). In times of crisis, firms may reverse traditional "*think manager, think male*" mentalities (Schein, 1973; 1975) to promote women into senior leadership positions (Ryan & Haslam, 2011). Women in these positions, however, may experience heightened performance pressures, visibility, and hostility due to an incongruence with perceived leadership skills and femininities. Assuming the continuation of a crisis, this is likely to be coupled with women's leadership rather than preceding factors (Haslam et al., 1996). Thus, Cook & Glass (2014) extend the theory to demonstrate a "*saviour effect*": the likelihood for a departing female leader to be replaced with by a while male.

As set out in *Chapter 2.2.1*, vertical segregation offers a central line of inquiry throughout this thesis. Following Ryan & Haslam's (2005; 2007) argument that glass cliffs occur under the reversal of "*think manager, think male*" mentalities, I aim to deconstruct notions of ideal workers as masculine throughout financial and legal careers. Thus, vertical occupational segregation is an important consideration in the present research not only for its centrality in the gender pay gap but where women remain underrepresented in senior roles. For example, they only represent 23.7% of board members, 17.5% of executive positions, and 25.2% of management roles across the entire professional services (Azmat & Boring, 2020). I aim to further identify those barriers to women's progression into the highest paid roles as a hegemonic masculinity that afford men pay premiums over women. Furthermore, the research aims to understand how strategies employed to navigate barriers can influence earnings: to be discussed in further detail in *Chapter 4*.

## 2.3 Part-time penalties

The low wages associated with part-time work must be considered when understanding the gender pay gap. Part-time work is distributed towards the lower end of earning hierarchies with limited training and promotion opportunities (Arumlampalam & Booth, 1998; Grimshaw & Rubery, 2001; Matteazzi et al., 2014; Matteazzi et al., 2017), being paid on average two-thirds below the median hourly wage (Nightingale, 2018). Critically, women are disproportionately more likely to work part-time functions: in 2018, women represented 76.4% of all part-time workers in Britain (Office for National Statistics, 2018). Consequentially, the low pay of part-time work has inherent implications on the gender pay gap.

For example, Grimshaw & Rubery (2001) explain the inclusion of part-time work caused the gender pay gap to increase from 20% to 27% in 1995. McGuinness & Pyper (2018) further demonstrate an increase from 8.6% to 17.9% when including part-time work. Furthermore, the growing emphasis on flexible workforces has increased inequalities and wage penalties for part-time workers (Arumlampalam & Booth, 1998; Tomlinson, 2011). Bardasi & Gornick (2008) discuss how part-time women earn 12-15% less than their full-time counterparts, whilst Manning & Petrongolo (2008) find that part-time women earn 3% less than full-time counterparts within the same occupation. Matteazzi et al. (2017) attribute approximately 8% of the British gender pay gap to part-time work, explained through persistent vertical and occupational segregation related to part-time work: that is, part-time work in low-paid functions and sectors. This impact is greater in the U.K. than alternative European countries due to the expansion of part-time work in female-dominated, low-paid sectors<sup>4</sup> (Matteazzi et al., 2017).

Rubery & Koukiadaki (2016) further demonstrate the role of part-time work regarding expectations of work. Where work-life policies are increasingly individualistic (Fleetwood

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<sup>4</sup> Part-time work is uncommon throughout the professional services. However, the existence of in-house roles from professional service functions may have impacts on pay gaps in which women may qualify in legal, accounting, or financial occupations before leaving the sector to a lower-paid, part-time roles outside of the sector but remain in a legal, accounting, or financial occupation.

(2008), Rubery & Koukiadaki argue that part-time work has diverted attention from exclusionary working expectations regarding working-time. The normalisation of long-working hours as a measure of work dedication is incompatible with part-time work. As argued by Rubery & Rafferty (2013), public-sector employment is vital within female work in enabling shorter, more flexible work to facilitate the reconciliation of work-family conflicts. In contrast, private-sector employment has normalised part-time work to account for perceived increased non-work responsibilities to rationalise lower quality employment. Furthermore, a lack of legal protection restricts women from re-entering full-time work at the same level of responsibilities and pay after temporarily undertaking part-time work (Deakin, 2013; Rubery & Koukiadaki, 2016). Thus, part-time employment must be considered when understanding its effects upon the gender pay gap. The failure to provide equal pay, resources, opportunities, and benefits compared to its full-time equivalents enables inequalities to persist (Nightingale, 2018; Rubery & Koukiadaki, 2016).

Several considerations are made regarding part-time penalties within this thesis. Careers in the financial and legal sectors are built upon assumptions of a near constant commitment to the firm (Collier, 2015), where extreme working patterns beyond contracted hours is conflated with skills (Collier, 2015; Cook et al., 2012; Longlands, 2019). Thus, part-time work may be minimal and restrict earning capacities of individuals required to work reduced hours (i.e., Cahusac & Kanji, 2013). Identifying working patterns and the marginalisation of part-time work as a hegemonic masculinity may therefore provide insight into currently unexplained factors of the gender pay gap. Furthermore, where part-time work does exist, the thesis aims to understand the quality of these occupations regarding pay and training opportunities. Similar to Cooper et al. (2021), I envision that highly skilled women who work reduced hours may incur career penalties or experience barriers of entry into and within the sector.

## 2.4 Motherhood penalties and the fatherhood bonus

Part-time penalties are further compounded by, and strongly associated with, motherhood penalties. Interruptions to full-time employment and negative perceptions of work-family

conflicts incur penalties to mothers' wages and create difficulties returning to previously held employment after maternity leave (Grimshaw & Rubery, 2015; Rubery & Koukiadaki, 2016; Olsen & Walby, 2004; Tomlinson et al., 2009). New mothers are more likely to work reduced hours (Sani & Scherer, 2018), and the gender pay gap could be reduced by up to 50% if mothers faced no restrictions in returning to work in a full-time capacity (Costa Dias et al., 2018). Furthermore, the failure of welfare states to support mothers with childcare costs may restrict women from returning to the same level of employment held prior to childbirth, instead moving to flexible work, or dropping out of the workforce entirely (Gash, 2009; Mandel & Shalev, 2009; Tomlinson et al., 2011).

Considering the relationship between motherhood penalties and the gender pay gap, Gangl & Ziefle (2009) demonstrate a 13% penalty per child, whilst Davis & Pierre (2005) estimate a 21% drop in wages for mothers. Similarly, Anderson et al. (2003) observe a 24% reduction in earnings after the first child, and a 44% reduction for consequential children due to reduced labour market experience and firm-specific training. Within low-earning roles, statistically significant earning gaps between mothers and non-mothers emerge by the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile of earners in Britain (Cooke, 2014). However, penalties may occur due to the overrepresentation of women in low-paid and part-time work rather than incurring further penalties (Cooke, 2014; Gangl & Ziefle, 2009). This is emphasised by Gash (2009), who demonstrates a drop in mean earnings from £11.70 per hour to £10.41 per hour for mothers. Critically, this is driven by mothers being six to eight times more likely to work within part-time roles and a distinct lack of childcare support from the state (i.e. Gash, 2009; Mandl & Shalev, 2009).

Considering the research context in the financial and legal professions, motherhood penalties in high-earning women require consideration. In the United States, a 10% pay penalty can be observed in middle-class white women working in highly paid occupations due to losses of essential experiences in short absences from work (England et al., 2016). Similarly, Budig & Hodges (2010) demonstrate penalties of 2.5% in the highest earning mothers. Penalties incur due to losses in human capital (Anderson, 2003; Joshi et al., 1999; Glauber,

2018), whilst occupational segregation may sort mothers into lower-paid, part-time roles (Cooke, 2014; Fuller, 2018; Gangl & Ziefle, 2009; Gash, 2009). As an important consideration for the present study, England et al. (2016, p.1181) hypothesise that:

“In the case of privilege on wage and skill, the penalty arises because when highly skilled women are in high-wage jobs, they have high rates of return to experience, and these steep wage trajectories make them lose large amounts of wage growth during the typically small amounts of time they take out.”

Exploring the gender pay gap through a theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity places significant importance on the mechanisms of motherhood penalties, but also it emphasises the existence of fatherhood bonuses. In direct contrast to women, fathers can expect to receive larger bonuses and salary benefits due to positive perceptions of increased breadwinner responsibilities (Bear & Glick, 2017; Hodges & Budig, 2010). In the U.K., fathers receive on average a 21% increase in salaries post-childbirth over a lifetime working (Cory & Sterling, 2016). Additionally, fatherhood bonuses increase alongside wage distribution (Glauber, 2018; Musick et al., 2020). For example, Cooke (2014) demonstrates a 4% fatherhood penalty in low-earning roles related to human capital and hours worked compared to an unconditional 6% bonus in highest earning roles across the British labour market in 2004. Furthermore, Glauber (2018) observe bonuses of 10% for high earning fathers and 5% for low earning fathers.

In analysing the gender pay gap through a theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity, motherhood penalties and fatherhood bonuses emphasise the contradictory responses to parental responsibilities. Several underlying assumptions may be mitigated in a professional services sector that demand extreme long-working hours and constant commitment to the firm. The coupled effects of occupational segregation and human capital may therefore be limited in the effects of motherhood penalties in the current research context of highly skilled, highly paid work. Thus, this thesis interrogates how the cultures and institutional structures of the professional services incurs penalties across the life course of



women. It is envisioned penalties may not be solely incurred by mothers. Rather, negative assumptions of motherhood and the conflicts between work and familiar responsibilities may be ascribed to all women.

## 2.5 Bonus-based pay gaps & performance perceptions

Mandatory reporting requires the publication of bonus figures: first, in the percentages of women compared to men receiving a bonus; and secondly, the average differences in bonuses paid between genders. As shall be explored in *Chapter 4*, the professional services sector represents an individualistic, financially incentivised industry where performance-based incentives are a commonality (Elvira & Graham, 2002; Longlands, 2019; Ugarte & Rubery, 2020). Thus, understanding performance-based pay is critical where explanations of human capital and occupational segregation may be limited<sup>5</sup> (Briscoe & Joshi, 2016). Women are underrepresented in income-producing functions throughout the professional services, reducing their access to bonus structures not inclusive in salaries (Ugarte & Rubery, 2020). Furthermore, performance-based pay is constructed as meritocratic reward systems based upon individual performance to reduce inequalities (Jackson, 1998; Sandberg, 2017).

It is worth noting that less consideration has been paid to performance-based pay within the gender pay gap. Although this may be because of the relative minority of workers who have access to bonuses (Elvira & Graham, 2002), their prevalence throughout the professional services requires consideration. For example, Elvira & Graham (2002) observe a decrease of 1% in bonuses paid and a decrease of 8.4% in likelihood to receive a bonus for every 10% increase in women's representation in an occupation. Furthermore, Madden (2012) find that women earned 18-20% less than male-counterparts due to a performance-support bias: the disproportionate delegation of higher value sales opportunities to men compared to women (Briscoe & Joshi, 2016; Madden, 2012; Madden & Vekker, 2017). Finally,

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<sup>5</sup> Entry into the labour market within the professional services runs on the assumptions of highly skilled work to move into singular, income producing roles. Thus, human capital at the point of recruitment can be assumed as relatively equal across genders whilst occupational segregation is mitigated by the nature of roles undertaken. Rather than women placed into lower-paid occupations, the issue remains of underrepresentation overall.

Grosberg et al. (2022) finds bonus-based gap of 2% in executive positions, narrowing concurrently with an increase with wages and seniority.

The contribution of performance-based pay remains a relative research gap to be explored in this thesis. However, further understanding the underlying mechanisms provides insight into how hegemonic masculinity can result in wage premiums and penalties throughout careers. A number of existing theories are therefore leaned upon in the empirical enquiries of this thesis. Although these theories do not explicitly explore bonuses received, they are utilised to understand differential rewards for equal performance in the financial and legal sectors. Additionally, they provide insight into understanding differential career outcomes between men and women: a central research aim of this thesis.

*Performance-perception biases* propose that male supervisors may perceive women's performance adversely compared to men's (i.e., Bartol, 1999; Bjerk, 2008). In a productivity-based context, women's entrance into male-dominated workplaces can cause perceptions that divert from gendered expectations of the role. Thus, women's skills are undervalued or disregarded as illegitimate due to an incongruence with socially constructed gender roles (Eagley & Karau, 2002). Joshi et al. (2015) therefore argue women face a double bind when performance is evaluated. Incongruity with presumed masculine behaviours may discredit women's skills, whilst exhibiting masculinities may be perceived as a threat to status quo and thus received negatively (e.g., Eagley et al., 1995; Rudman, et al., 2012).

Concurrently, *performance-reward biases* demonstrate that positive evaluations of work provide greater bonuses to men compared to men (Castilla, 2008). Assuming men and women perform to the same level, it suggests that women's performance will be discredited, and lower bonuses received. This is demonstrated by Castilla & Bernard (2010) through experimental studies of managerial decision-making regarding bonus allocations. Where meritocratic conditions are emphasised, men were given bonuses over equally performing women. Under non-meritocratic conditions however, no gender biases occur.

Finally, *performance-support biases* suggests that performance-based pay is a result of the differential quality in opportunities provided to men and women (Madden, 2012). As

outlined previously, Madden (2012) explains bonus-based pay gaps within stockbroking due to the quality of sales leads provided to men and women. Men were more likely to access higher value sales opportunities from their managers and thus achieve higher performance-based pay. When controlling for value and quality of sales leads, performance between genders was equal (Madden, 2012). Bonus-based pay gaps are therefore not explained through differential capacities and skills between genders. Rather, bonus-based gaps emerge through the delegation of work that provides ability to perform at higher levels whilst restricting these opportunities from women (e.g., Briscoe & Joshi, 2016; Madden & Vekker, 2017).

Bonus-based gaps remain a relative research gap within the gender pay gap literature, perhaps due to performance-based pay not being readily accessible in large sections of the economy. However, where the financial and legal sectors represents an individualistic, financially incentivised industry where performance-based incentives are a commonality (Elvira & Graham, 2002; Longlands, 2019; Ugarte & Rubery, 2020), bonus-based gaps are a central consideration of this thesis. Integrating bonus structures as a hegemonic masculinity into the gender pay gap can provide meaningful insight into unexplained elements and sector-specific gaps. Thus, the empirical enquiries pursued in this thesis move beyond solely understanding how performance-based pay can be rewarded at differential rates for equal performance, to further identify differential career outcomes between men and women.

## 2.6 Institutional factors in the financial and legal sectors: pay structures, employment relations and women's leadership.

Specific institutional factors that are influential in gender pay gaps demand consideration when contextualising research into the financial and legal sectors. Organisations operate as wage-setting institutions within wider state interventions that may influence differential gender pay gaps between firms and sectors of the economy. At a collective level, the gender pay gap tends to be lower within countries with higher trade union densities, centralised collective bargaining arrangements, family-friendly welfare policies and high levels of women's empowerment (Triventi, 2013). However, these drivers may be limited in a sector with a near complete absence of collective bargaining, union representation, limited family-

friendly policies, and individualistic pay negotiations (e.g., Ashley et al., 2015; Healey & Ahmed, 2017; Longlands, 2019). For example, despite not offering greater pay potential compared to the private sector, public sector institutions often report lower gender pay gaps due to sector level agreements in job evaluations and pay structures (Rubery & Grimshaw, 2014). Furthermore, the concentration of professional service firms into the City of London may drive the gender pay gap. A pay bonus can be observed for occupations in London compared to other British cities that is emphasised in the financial sector: 58% for men compared to 32% for women (Amadjarif et al., 2020). Although firm-specific factors are relatively under researched at present, a number of considerations are made.

First, a lack of transparent pay structures coinciding with flexible salaries negotiated on individualistic cases may emphasise the gender pay gap in the financial and legal sectors (Bergmann et al., 2017). The implementation of transparent pay and promotion policies increases bargaining power for women through greater availability of information. Furthermore, transparent pay structures can identify unjustified or discriminatory pay discretion, allowing negotiations to occur more frequently and enabling women to make more informed labour choices (Hoffman et al., 2020). Thus, Gamage et al. (2020) observe that pay transparency policies reduce the gender pay gap by 11.6% driven by the renegotiation of women's wages or the relocation of women into organisations offering these policies. Furthermore, Duchini et al. (2020) observe that women are 5% more likely to be recruited into above-average occupations compared to firms with non-transparent policies. However, the sole pursuit of transparent pay structures may legitimise or mask inequalities where policies remain imbued with gendered cultural valuations (Sandberg, 2017). For example, Ugarte & Rubery (2020) observe little to no effect on the gender pay gap upon the introduction of transparent pay policies where assumed masculinities remain rewarded at greater rates.

Centralised collective bargaining arrangements and trade union participation can be related to lower a gender pay gap (Blau & Kahn, 1996; O'Reilly et al., 2015; Triventi, 2013). Differential trade union participation narrows gender pay gaps even when controlling for

human capital and occupational segregation (Elvria & Saporta, 2001; McGuinness et al., 2011; Plasman & Sissoko, 2004). Milner & Gregory (2014) explore how collective bargaining and trade unionism can support (or resist) progress on gender pay gaps, critically demonstrating that collective bargaining is least developed in those sectors where gender pay gaps are highest. In a British context, unions have demonstrated successful bargaining outcomes to support parental-friendly policies and pay equality. This may be severely limited in the professional services, however, in the clear absence of trade unions and rigid working patterns. In a German and Austrian context, however, Bergmann et al. (2019) argues that the high coverage of collective bargaining benefits pay equality in the financial and insurance sector. Although much higher in Austria compared to Germany<sup>6</sup>, collective bargaining moves away from individualised pay negotiations that disadvantage women in both salary and bonuses. The increased presence of trade unions attempts to reconcile work and family life to improve women's participations in highly paid roles alongside increased transparency in formalised pay and bonus structures (Bergmann et al., 2019).

Finally, despite a number of state action plans recommending increased women's senior leadership (i.e., Government Equalities Office, 2015), these claims may be problematic. Although the increase of women's participation may have positive effects on vertical segregation, the impact women leaders have on within-firm pay gaps may be overstated. For example, Magda & Cukrowska-Torzewska (2018) demonstrate that in private firms, lower gender pay gaps are associated with higher shares of women in the firms, but not specifically in management position. Furthermore, board diversity fails to show significant effects on the gender pay gap (Bertrand et al., 2014), with any observable reductions being caused by women's representation within average earnings occupations within firms (Gagliarducci & Paserman, 2015; Bertrand et al., 2014). The underlying assumption that women's representation in leadership roles reduces gender pay gaps is therefore restricted to the impact of occupational segregation. Women managers may experience limited abilities in

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<sup>6</sup> Trade union membership was reported as 90 to 95% in the private sector of Austria compared to 46% of Germany (Bergmann et al., 2019); markedly greater than the 12.9% of private sector employees in Britain (Office for National Statistics, 2020).

male-dominated organisations to instigate the required challenges needed to reduce gender pay gaps<sup>7</sup> (Srivastava & Sherman, 2015).

These institutional factors of the gender pay gap, tied with previously discussed drivers, may therefore only partially explain the gender pay gap in the financial and legal sectors that consistently report the highest figures across the British economy. As argued by Healy & Ahmed (2019), the restricted collective bargaining agreements and lower trade union representation of the financial and legal sectors may counteract any state interventions to reduce the gender pay gap. However, the working practises, lack of family-friendly policies and individualistic pay negotiations (i.e., Ashley et al., 2015; Healey & Ahmed, 2017; Longlands, 2019) may further contribute to the sector-specific gender pay gap. Thus, coupled with limitations within mandatory reporting, the thesis aims to further identify institutional factors that explain current unaccounted-for factors of the gender pay gap.

## 2.7 Discrimination and unexplainable pay gaps

Although modelling the factors outlined in this chapter explains large sections of the gender pay gap, unexplainable pay gaps persist in economic modelling. Discrimination and the undervaluation of social constructed femininity are recognised as critical, yet remains a gap in knowledge where not explicitly explored in empirical research (Lips, 2013b; Olsen & Walby, 2004). As argued by Lips (2013b), a meaningful understanding of systemic and cultural disadvantages faced by women throughout their careers needs to be integrated to provide a more holistic understanding of the gender pay gap. That is not to state the outlined factors are not experienced inequalities. Rather, that discrimination occurring in day-to-day interactions and across a career span may be difficult to observe solely through quantitative data (Alkadry & Tower, 2006; Lips, 2013a).

To account for unexplained components of the gender pay gap, Blau & Kahn (2007) decompose human capital variables and inflation to theoretically '*close the gap*'. Despite

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<sup>7</sup> The cultural and structural changes required to address gender (and wider) inequalities will be explored in Chapter 4.

the manipulation of raw wage data to account for these factors, an unexplained gap of 11% remained. In a British context, Harkness (1996) argued that the increasing labour market participation of women between 1973 and 1993 should close pay gaps; despite this, unexplained elements still contributed to 18% of adjusted pay gaps. Joshi et al. (2007) track careers further between 1978 and 2000, finding unexplained elements of 18.5% even when adjusted to reflect equal human capital accumulation. Joshi et al. (2020) further finds large unexplainable gaps periodically on initial entry to the labour market, pre-parenthood and after the age of fifty-five for women and men when analysing life-course pay and experience. Critically, this undermines the notion that pay gaps may be explained entirely by human capital, occupational differences, and caring responsibilities. This is underlined by Olsen & Walby (2004), who argue that *“other factors associated with being female”* such as preferences, motivations and attitudes reduce hourly wages by 9%.

The exploration of persistent unexplained elements may be restricted through the predominant economic modelling utilised throughout existing literature. Traditional analysis that assumes the gender pay gap is based on market factors and productivity rarely recognise gender discrimination (Rubery et al., 2005). Although this may be due to the difficulty of measuring discrimination experienced in day-to-day work in quantitative measures, the role of discrimination needs to be legitimately integrated into gender pay gap literature (Lips, 2013b). Furthermore, centralising the power of men and masculinity and deconstructing assumption of work and labour may provide further insight into these discriminations. Explanations of gender pay gaps often rely upon the differentials of women’s careers from an assumed “normality” that is rooted within masculinity. Integrating this understanding through a theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity may provide insight into persistent unexplained pay gaps, primarily through the problematization of male power and gender discrimination.

## 2.8 Conclusion

The gender pay gap is structured upon multiple, often intertwining, inequalities across careers. Although many factors can be accounted for, unexplained elements persist whilst

traditional factors may be limited within the financial and legal sectors. As is explored in *Chapter 4*, assumptions of human capital may be dampened in a sector that demands narrowly defined educational attainment and job experience to enter and progress within the sector (Ashley et al., 2015; Ashley & Empson, 2017; Cook et al., 2012). Furthermore, mechanisms of occupational segregation may operate differently within tightly defined legal and financial occupations to influence differential pay over the life-course. Finally, institutional factors that do not fully account for the structures and cultures of the professional factors may fail to capture the underlying drivers of the gender pay gap. In a sector where individual success is constructed upon notions of hard-work, extreme working hours, and meritocracy (Ashely, 2021; Littler, 2017; Longlands, 2019), part-time and motherhood penalties may be used to legitimise the gender pay gap rather than to explain. Critically, where large unexplained elements persist in a sector that consistently reports the highest gender pay gap across all industrial sectors, research gaps remain.

These gaps may remain due to the difficulties of conceptualising discrimination and inequalities occurring due to perceptions of masculinity and femininity across careers within quantitative data collections (Alkadry & Towers, 2006; Lips, 2013a). Where traditional analysis assumes the gender pay gap is based upon market factors and productivity, this thesis therefore responds to the calls of Grimshaw & Rubery (2015) and Lips (2013): that to fully account for the gender pay gap, a methodological and theoretical shift is required. As described in Table 3, qualitative methodologies at present are limited at best, utilised to explain sectoral differences (e.g., Bergmann et al., 2017; Milner & Gregory, 2014), to interrogate policy (e.g., Cowper-Cowles et al., 2021; Healey & Ahmed, 2018), or to triangulate quantitative findings (e.g., Blundell, 2021, Ugarte & Rubery, 2020). Qualitative methodologies are yet to be employed to explore factors of the gender pay gap occurring across the career of the individual. Thus, the thesis utilises a theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity to employ life-history interviews with women and men working in the financial and legal sectors. This theoretical and methodological paradigm shift offers new insight to gender pay gap research: first, to problematise the role of men and masculinity within the gender pay gap. And second, to identify the practises and processes that afford differential wage bonuses



and penalties across the careers of men and women in the financial and legal sectors. Therefore, a number of research gaps are explored:

First, the research aims to explore persistent unexplained factors of the gender pay gap. Following Lips (2013a), a more holistic understanding of the discriminations faced by women across their careers needs to be legitimately integrated into gender pay gap research to complement existing empirical knowledge. The research therefore proposes a methodological shift towards qualitative data collection to explore discrimination across careers where the traditional quantitative paradigms may struggle to conceptualise inequalities in work and private lives (Grimshaw & Rubery, 2015).

Secondly, gender pay gap research often relies on identifying economic differences of women's careers from an assumed '*normality*': a normality rooted in masculinity that is rarely, if ever, named as masculine. I therefore problematises the role of men and masculinity throughout careers as a dominant factor in the gender pay gap through a theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity. This aims to provide further insight into unexplored gender pay gaps and the resistance to progress within firms.

Finally, the research focuses upon the financial and legal sectors. Despite consistently reporting the highest gender pay gap across industrial sectors, there has been minimal research into understanding specific sector-wide factors. Thus, the research aims to problematise the cultural and institutional factors of inequality that may explain persistently high figures in a sector constructed upon meritocracy and highly skilled work (e.g., Ashley & Empson, 2016a; Kornberger et al., 2010; Longlands, 2019).

### Chapter 3: A theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity

Gender pay gap discourses often identify the differences between women's careers and that of an assumed normality; a normality rooted within masculinity that rarely problematises the role, behaviours, and actions of men. Deconstructing the underlying assumptions of masculine careers therefore enables an understanding of how inequalities are experienced throughout careers. Thus, hegemonic masculinity is used in this thesis as a theoretical lens to problematise and conceptualise gendered power and oppression within the gender pay gap (Connell, 1987; 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2018). The following definition is used as the foundation and subsequent theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity: "the configuration of gender practises which embody the currently accepted answer to the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees [or is taken to guarantee] the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell, 2005; p.77). It facilitates an exploration of how socially constructed masculinities and femininities normatively regulate behaviours through power, marginalisation, and oppression (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

The theoretical approach undertaken in this thesis recognises critical perspectives of hegemonic masculinity (e.g., Demetriou, 2001; Hamilton et al., 2019; Holter, 2003; Yang, 2020). The Gramscian conceptions of cultural hegemony are retained to identify modes of domination that legitimise inequalities rather than to name dominant masculinities (Messerschmidt, 2018; Yang, 2020). Furthermore, the application of hegemonic masculinity is aligned with hierarchical gender orders (Connell, 2005). The assumptions that all men unilaterally hold dominant positions over women is dismissed, instead it is accepted that intersecting race, class and sexuality may afford certain demographics of women power over men (Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Additionally, it is assumed that women may engage in a form of hegemonic femininity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Hamilton et al., 2019). Drawing upon intersectional feminist theory, women may practise a hegemonic femininity to attain power based on the marginalisation of others whilst legitimising patriarchal gender relations (Collins, 1981; 1990; 2004; Connell, 2005; Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 1981; Phipps, 2019). Similarly, men are not unilaterally assumed as contributing

towards hegemonic masculinity. Rather, they can play critical roles in challenging and transforming the practises and structures that legitimise men's dominant positions (hooks, 1981, 2004; Messerschmidt, 2018).

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity that guides the research. First, a broad overview of the theoretical foundations of hegemonic masculinity will be discussed. Secondly, the social construction of masculinities and femininities as a mean of domination and marginalization will be explored with reference to empirical studies. Finally, the institutional and organisational amplification of hegemonic masculinity through formalised policies and hierarchies will be presented.

### 3.1 Theoretical foundations of hegemonic masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity was conceptualised through observations of social inequalities in Australian high schools (Connell et al., 1982; Carrigan et al., 1985); namely, how the behaviours of young men were regulated by expectations of gender distinguished from wider social class relations. Gender and class are considered to exist as socially constructed and interwoven, and a person's behaviours regulated through power relations (Carrigan et al., 1985). Sex role theories are criticised for the failure to identify intersecting race, class, and sexuality by assuming roles apply unilaterally (Davis, 1983; hooks, 1984), instead recognising the social construction of multiple masculinities in localised contexts (i.e., Cockburn, 1983; Collinson, 1988). Hegemonic masculinities are therefore distinguished from alternative masculinities and femininities. Hegemonic masculinities are those behaviours and practises that legitimise the dominant positions of men based on the subordination of women and non-conforming men (Connell, 1987). Although only a small proportion of men may embody a complete hegemonic masculinity, they normatively guide the behaviours of others in position to these masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Donaldson, 1993).

The core concept of hegemony draws upon Gramscian class analysis: that dominance can be attained through consensus rather than force (Connell, 2005; Gramsci, 1992). Gramsci

(1971) argues that power can be sustained through the reconstruction of cultural values to legitimise the ideals of a minority ruling class. Consensus and consent is achieved between the oppressor and the oppressed through ideology rather than force and violence. Ideological values guide an individual's domination, such that marginalised communities identify their own good with that of the oppressor to maintain status quo (Gramsci, 1971). A person therefore regulates their own behaviours and the behaviours of others aligned with hegemonic ideals (Bates, 1975). Assimilation with ideal behaviours assumes an attainment of power based on the marginalisation of non-conforming persons. Hegemonic masculinity can therefore be understood as the maintenance of patriarchal gender relations through the consent to ideological constructions of masculinity and femininity in which power is legitimised through the marginalisation of women.

Despite wide-ranging application across disciplines and further development of the theory (see Jewkes et al., 2015; Messerschmidt, 2018), Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) reformulate hegemonic masculinity based on a number of critiques. The concept of masculinity is problematised as being framed upon heteronormative terms which essentialise male-female differences: gender is assumed as historically fixed where masculinity can only be embodied by men and femininities by women. Furthermore, the underlying critiques of sex role theories were relatively ignored when mobilised in early research in this area. Empirical studies relied upon static typologies of gender rather than pursuing an understanding of power relations through the social construction of masculinity and femininity. Finally, masculine power is critiqued as observed through the experiences of men rather than understanding the structures of subordination and oppression. Hierarchies of masculinities assumed a complete dominance over all woman rather than understanding how and why men legitimise and reproduce dominance. Thus, all masculinities are assumed as hegemonic: marginalised and subordinated masculinities were erased and assumed as asserting power over women in which men cannot act as agents of change. Critically, Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) argue that the central notions of cultural hegemony were abandoned or misinterpreted within early applications of the theory. The identification of dominant masculinities was the central focus of research rather than understanding the processes of domination.

### 3.2 Core concepts of hegemonic masculinity

Reconceptualising hegemonic masculinity to recognise the central critiques, Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) retain the centrality of hierarchical socially constructed masculinities and femininities ordered in power relations. The unilateral dominance of men is rejected, instead it is argued that marginalised groups of men can be subordinated by women who appropriate hegemonic power and who are complicit in the legitimisation of patriarchal gender relations. Although this risks denying agency to women by failing to recognise a double-bind faced by women exhibiting masculinities (e.g., Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Eagly & Karau, 2002), femininities are integrated in a gender hierarchical to holistically understand marginalisation (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) reject monolithic typologies, instead proposing that masculinities are constructed across three levels: local masculinities constructed through everyday interactions; national masculinities constructed through cultural expectations of gender relations and communicated through political and discursive means; and finally, global masculinities constructed through the acceleration of globalisation and transnational interactions. Stratifying masculinities in this way enables a greater deconstruction of the power and oppression from genders in different lived experiences. Observations of masculinities and femininities constructed in national and international cultures and their implications on individual behaviours have been made (i.e., Connell & Wood, 2005). However, this research follows the arguments of Pringle (2001): that local and regional masculinities require further deconstruction. Thus, hegemonic masculinity enables the identification of penalties incurred by women through the social construction of femininity aligned with the engenderment of work in financial and legal careers.

Hierarchies of gender are retained as central to hegemonic masculinity, describing complex relationships between genders (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Similar to intersectional approaches to inequalities, masculinities and femininities are positioned as existing in social contexts each competing for legitimacy. Thus, multiple masculinities and femininities emerge as individuals construct their own identities through the appropriation

or rejection of localised expectations of gender. Protest masculinities may exist that claim the power of global masculinities without its local institutionalisation, whilst non-hegemonic masculinities are constructed as nonconforming or divergent from hegemonic ideals (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Hegemonic masculinities may appropriate or integrate alternative masculinities to sustain unequal gender relations or to further oppress alternative expressions of masculinity (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014, 2015; Connell & Wood, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2004).

An outlined previously, femininity is therefore differentiated from hegemonic masculinity in that socially constructed femininities still regulate women's behaviours, yet power and domination over others is relatively removed (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). An emphasised femininity may therefore exist in parallel with hegemonic masculinity, complicit in its legitimisation when unchallenged by without attaining the power afforded to men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). However, this assumes a passive compliance in the reproduction of inequalities. As argued by Hamilton et al. (2019), the Gramscian foundations of cultural hegemony need to be retained whilst at the same time understanding the role of femininities within structures of inequality. By recognising intersecting race and class within gender, a hegemonic femininity can be constructed that affords privilege to certain demographics of women whilst maintaining existing patriarchal structures of domination (Collins, 1990; 2004; Crenshaw, 1991; 2016):

“Women who are white, affluent, heterosexual, and cisgender are in the best position to perform these femininities, which often help shore up group advantages. Women's efforts to navigate for personal and group gain help uphold the matrix of domination. When these women leverage their privileged intersectional locations to exercise power over others, they engage in forms of intersectional domination that have damaging consequences for people of colour [sic], in particular” (Hamilton et al., 2019, p.334).

Integrating a concept of hegemonic femininity within a wider framework of hegemonic masculinity requires important considerations. Hegemonic masculinity has previously simplified oppression to the total subordination of femininity (Demetriou, 2001; Ellis & Meyer, 2007). Demerouti (2001) therefore proposes two forms of hegemony central to this research: internal hegemony, which oppresses and marginalises non-hegemonic and protest masculinities and any femininities, whilst an external hegemony describes the institutionalisation of the oppression of women.

The social embodiment of hegemonic masculinities frames bodies as both objects of and agents within the construction and legitimisation of unequal gender practises (Connell, 2002). Masculinities and femininities are linked to the human body and human behaviours, but are integrated within social structures and non-human entities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Gender is therefore extrapolated from purely exhibited behaviours of individuals to argue social processes and institutions amplify the power and dominance of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic ideals of gender are engrained within economic relations, occupations, and cultures external to humans (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2018). Acker's (1990) analysis of gendered organisations assists in integrating this into an organisational perspective. Assumed non-gendered entities such as occupations, hierarchies and performance evaluations can be prescribed with gendered characteristics that reinforce and legitimise hegemonic masculinities. This notion forms a central part of research design and analysis to be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Finally, gender hierarchies derive complexities existing between genders where tensions arise to challenge hegemony and power. By rejecting unitary understandings of masculinities at a global level, Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) argue that exploring local masculinity provides insight into the contradictory behaviours in embodied genders. As described by Collinson's (1988) observations of male engineers in the north of England, workplace masculinity and home-life masculinities held inherent contradictions to be managed. Workers often expressed anger when work-based masculinities were demanded in an out-of-work context, causing incongruity with identity at that moment. Connell &

Messerschmidt (2005) thus argue that the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity does not directly correlate into life satisfaction for men. However, focus should be paid to their existence within hierarchies and the processes undertaken to maintain hegemony that requires the oppression of others (Schwalbe, 1992).

### 3.3 The social construction of masculinities and femininities

Hegemonic masculinity is underpinned by assumptions of social constructionism. Gender is defined as socially constructed through constant cultural re-interpretations that individuals position themselves against (Donaldson, 1993). By rejecting static, time-bound interpretations of gender, multiple hierarchical masculinities and femininities exist. Hegemony is therefore maintained through the marginalisation of women and non-conforming men. Critically, this proposes that a person's gender relies on validation: that masculinity or femininities do not occur without being perceived as legitimate by others (Kerfoot & Knights, 1993). It is this space where power and domination exists. For example, Barrett (1996) describes how emasculation it used to assert dominance between groups of men in the U.S. Navy, whilst Collinson (1998) observed the utilisation of derogatory humour to isolate men in manual labour.

Exploring the social construction of masculinity and femininity in male-dominated occupations guides the enquiries in this thesis into the marginalisation and undervaluation of women's work. The subordination of femininity and non-conforming masculinity has been observed in the explicit challenges through humour or cultural norms (e.g., Collinson, 1988; Connell, 2001; Powell & Sang, 2015) and through ideals of the material image of the human body (e.g., Bridges et al., 2020; Collier, 2015). For example, Giazitzoglu & Muzio (2020) demonstrate how men moving into elite, London-based corporations constructed a masculinity based upon the appropriation of middle-class, white masculinities and the rejection of their own previous identities. Integration into a London masculinity required conformance within "what an ideal man looks like, acts like, and sounds like" (p.77), adapting to specific dress codes and downplaying regional accents. McDowell (2001; 2010) parallels these arguments in the British banking sector, arguing that a corporate masculinity



constructed on material means of clothing and physical appearance maintains a hegemonic masculinity. By constructing a masculinity upon physical identity and middle-class assumptions, hegemony can be maintained through the othering of non-conforming individuals. Men that fell outside of narrow, class-based masculinity were marginalised to “back-office jobs,” with women subsequently othered through the use of sexist humour (Giazitzoglu & Muzio, 2020; McDowell, 2010).

A sole focus on marginalisation through the behaviours of men may ignore the agency of women and femininity. In male-dominated industries such as finance and law, femininity can be constructed as incongruent with a masculinisation of work and labour (Bridges et al., 2020) or through the reinforcement of negative assumptions of femininity (Kelly et al., 2015; Powell & Sang, 2015). The deployment of sexist humour can marginalise women unless they demonstrate an emotional detachment (McDowell, 2010; Powell & Sang, 2015); although this may in turn normalise negative stereotypes of femininity in the workplace (Kelly et al., 2015). Furthermore, constructed femininities are utilised to justify the underrepresentation of women in male-dominated occupations. In the skilled trades, the female body is perceived as one incompatible with the demands of physical labour (e.g., Collinson, 1988; Bridges et al., 2020). In the professional services, notions of ideal workers remain rooted within masculinities: long-working hours, out-of-hours social events, constant commitment to the firm and an idealised masculine body (Collier, 2015; Giazitzoglu & Muzio, 2020; Kumra & Vinnecombe, 2008). Following the assumption that a person’s gender relies upon external validation (Kerfoot & Knights, 1993), the present research aims understand any penalties occurring across women’s careers due to an incongruity between femininity and engendered work.

Although women may attempt to reconstruct their own gender through the rejection of femininities or appropriation of masculinities, this does not unilaterally attain the power afforded through hegemonic masculinity. Rather, women may be further marginalised through an incurred ‘double-bind’ penalty, which is the assumption that behaviours are illegitimate or inauthentic (Eagly & Johannsson-Schmidt, 2001; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Elserrer

& Lever, 2011). Furthermore, Powell & Sang (2015) demonstrate how women may emphasise femininities to deliberately leverage career advantages. Similarly, Tomlinson et al. (2013) describe the strategies employed by women in the legal profession that critically reproduce structures of inequalities. Women may assimilate into, or emphasise, femininity to leverage advantage or distinction. Although demonstrations of femininity or assimilated masculinity may leverage some advantage, it fails to position women as equal to men, instead reproducing structures of inequality and further marginalising others (Hamilton et al., 2019; Tomlinson et al, 2013).

Thus, gender is assumed as fluid and under constant reinterpretation in the theoretical framework utilised in this thesis. Hegemonic masculinity can therefore be maintained through the appropriation of marginalised masculinities and femininities (Connell & Wood, 2005; Demetriou, 2001; Messerschmidt, 2004). Hegemonic masculinities may undergo superficial transformations to normalise certain behaviours whilst obscuring structures of inequalities (Abelson, 2019; Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Yang, 2020). For example, Bridges (2014) explores a notion of ‘hybrid masculinities’: the appropriation of homosexual masculinities by straight men for their own benefit without challenging underlying homophobia. This is expanded upon by Arxer (2011), who demonstrates the rejection of emotionally detached masculinities in straight, white men who observed a “dividend” achievable by demonstrating a sensitivity. Thus, where specific practises of a marginalised “other” are identified as beneficial, they are appropriated into a hegemonic masculinity whilst maintaining power (Demetriou, 2001; Bridges & Pascoe, 2014).

### 3.4. The maintenance of hegemonic masculinity

As emphasised throughout this chapter, the theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity used in this thesis does not seek to identify dominant masculine cultures, but to understand the practises that legitimise unequal gender relations that incurs financial penalties and bonuses (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Yang, 2020). Thus, an understanding of how power is retained within groups based upon the subordination and marginalisation of others is

required (Carrigan et al., 195; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Donaldson, 1993). Contextualised into organisational studies, social networks provide access to career support, opportunities, and influence (Hudson et al., 2017). Where power is retained within male-dominated social networks, women and non-conforming men may not access the same benefits afforded to men. Thus, hegemonic masculinity can be maintained in two means: the explicit opposition of women entering male-dominated occupations (i.e., Cockburn, 1991; Holgersson, 2013), and the restriction of work-resources in male-dominated groups (e.g., Collinson & Hearn, 1996; Madden, 2012). When considering the gender pay gap, hegemonic masculinity therefore offers the present research several insights. First, in how benefits afforded to men to progress pay across their careers may be restricted from women. And secondly, in identifying barriers of entry into highly paid sections of the financial and legal professions. These two practises will now be explored in greater depth.

#### 3.4.1 Retaining power through homosocial reproduction

Hegemonic masculinity can be maintained through the explicit exclusion of women in male-dominated groups. To refer back to the discussions of Chapter 2, traditional modelling of the gender pay gap upon occupational segregation and human capital within the financial and legal sectors may be limited. Recruitment into, and progression within, the sector assumes the accumulation of narrowly defined educational attainment and job experience (Ashley & Empson, 2013; Bolton & Muzio, 2007; Crawford & Wang, 2019). Yet, women remain underrepresented in the highest-paid positions throughout the sectors, despite entering the workforce at greater rates than men (i.e., Financial Conduct Authority, 2021; Solicitors Regulation Authority, 2022). Thus, the exclusion of women from highly paid sections of the workforce may be explained through hegemonic masculinity.

Homosocial reproduction is defined as the tendency for an individual to recruit those similar in appearance, background, behaviours, and beliefs to themselves (Kanter, 1977; Segwick, 1976). As a critical practise of hegemonic masculinity (i.e., Hammarén & Jahansson, 2014; Lipman-Blumen, 1976), power is safeguarded through the exclusion of others (Bird,

1996; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messner, 2001). An underlying assumption of the theoretical framework used in this thesis is that recruitment into the sector and promotion within it inherently favours specific men who align with hegemonic masculinity through a process of homosocial reproduction (e.g., Heilman & Eagly, 2008; Rudman & Glick, 2001). Critically, the construction of ideal workers as masculine may afford differential wage penalties and privileges to men and women who embody these ideals – to and this will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

However, informal recruitment may further reinforce men's dominant positions (Doldor et al., 2016; Grugulis & Stoyanova, 2012; Hudson et al., 2017). For example, Bolton & Muzio (2007) argue that the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions is in part due to recruitment relying on informal considerations such as personal networks. Furthermore, Amon (2017) demonstrate how entry into the STEM industry relies upon an individual's access to male-dominated social networks, whilst Holgersson (2013) develops these arguments in management director occupations. Recruitment and promotion is proposed as reliant upon "identifying, grooming, and selecting younger prospects...and younger men making themselves available and visible, not challenging the hierarchy but conforming to the management norm." (Holgersson, 2013, p.463). The reliance on social networks therefore mitigates competency-based recruitment, undervaluing women's skills and experiences when recruiting into highly paid roles (Bygren, 2013; Nielsen, 2009; Rubineau & Fernandez, 2015).

This should not assume that formalising recruitment processes removes barriers of entry to senior positions. As discussed in section 2.5, the transfer to formal promotion and recruitment policies has minimal impact on the gender pay gap where policies favour male-dominated experiences (Sandberg, 2017; Ugarte & Rubery, 2020). As argued by Scholten & Witmer (2017) homosocial reproduction in the recruitment to leadership positions maintains hegemonic masculinity through the reinforcement of "think manager, think male" mentalities. Individuals who progress into senior leadership positions are socialised into a

masculine culture, and iteratively recruit in their own image. This does not assume that homosocial recruitment cannot be challenged. Actors involved in the recruitment may look to actively reshape gender dynamics to challenge informal hegemonic masculinity, yet this relies on engagement from senior leaders (Blommaet & van den Brink, 2020). However, where power remains unequally distributed throughout organisations, senior leaders are positioned as most capable to challenge hegemony (Acker, 1991; 2006; de Vries, 2015; Kelan & Wrantil, 2018; Kessler et al., 1985). Homosocial reproduction therefore proposes that senior leaders are socialised into dominant masculinities, instead looking to maintain the cultures and structures they have benefited from (Cortis et al., 2020; Humbert, 2019).

#### 3.4.2 Social networks and the allocation of job resources

Concurrent with homosocial reproduction, hegemonic masculinity is maintained through the retention of workplace opportunities within male-dominated groups. To refer back to the discussions of bonus-based gaps in section 2.6, performance-support and reward biases propose that, even when performing equally to women, men are more likely to receive higher-value workplace opportunities and higher financial rewards (Castilla, 2008; Castilla & Bernard, 2010; Madden, 2012). A hegemonic masculinity, which retains workplace opportunities within male-dominated groups, may therefore offer insight into wage penalties across two factors: firstly, through direct wage penalties in bonuses and wages received; and secondly, indirectly in differential promotion and progression opportunities over the career span.

The theoretical framework used in this thesis leans upon understandings of homosociality to propose that male dominance is maintained through the allocation of job resources. Homosociality describes the innate preference to socialise with individuals perceived as similar to themselves (Lipman-Blumen, 1976). Thus, training opportunities, information, resources, and workplace support may be retained within immediate personal networks (Coe, 1992; Liff & Cameron, 1997). To again refer to Madden's (2012) *performance support bias*, men are able to obtain favourable opportunities compared to women that

enables them to perform at a higher level (Briscoe & Joshi, 2016; Madden & Vekker, 2017). The social relationship between men within the stock-broking industry maintains hegemonic masculinity through retention of high-value sales opportunities in social networks (Madden, 2012). McGuire (2002) expands upon this, describing lower levels of workplace support for women due to the exclusion from male-dominated social networks. Similarly, Traavik (2018) claims that professional service firms disproportionately support the careers of men compared to women, providing men with greater development opportunities and career support.

Critically, this practise of hegemonic masculinity relies on the exclusion of women from social networks. Contextualised into the research setting of this thesis, out-of-work hours networking with clients and colleagues is central to career success in the financial and legal professions (e.g., McDowell, 2010; Sang et al., 2014; to be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4). Despite being central to career progression, networking often occurs in masculinised spaces that restricts women's participation and consequential access to job resources and opportunities. For example, Gregory (2009) argues that social networking in the British advertising sector segregated women through occurring in stereotypically male settings that exclude or discourage women's attendance. Similarly, Sang et al. (2014) describe how sales and promotion opportunities are disproportionately afforded to men in the architecture industry where social relationships are built in masculinised contexts. This is a pattern consistent across the financial and legal sectors: networked forms of male socialisation beyond the traditional working hours is required to gain access to sales and job opportunities (Crewe & Wang, 2018; Morgan & Martin, 2006). That is not to assume that women's marginalisation is solely based upon masculinised spaces: rather, underlying class-based masculinity can act as a hegemonic masculinity through sexist or classist humour (Crewe & Wang, 2018; McDowell, 1999; 2010). Despite recognising a need to network to access the opportunities afforded to men throughout careers, women are either explicitly excluded through the social context, or by facing greater scrutiny when attending (Amon, 2017).

### 3.5 The institutionalisation of hegemonic masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity can explain the institutionalisation of men's dominant positions through practises and process within organisations (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Demetriou, 2001). These perspectives further realign the theoretical approach of hegemonic masculinity in its Gramscian conceptions of power congregated within a ruling class (Gramsci, 1992), to problematise the role of senior leaders in facilitating or resisting challenges to structures of inequality. Furthermore, observing the maintenance of hegemony through institutions and social processes aligns the theoretical framework within wider feminist theory (Brod, 1994; Ellis & Meyer, 2007): that institutions as non-human actors structure agency within gender and intersectional inequalities (i.e., Acker, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 1983; hooks, 1994). Understanding hegemonic masculinity through the prescription of gendered power in institutions therefore enables the present research to problematise bureaucratic practises in maintaining patriarchal gender relations and subsequent penalties incurred within the gender pay gap. This is explored in three broad factors: the engenderment of work and occupations, the inscription of masculine power in organisational practises, and the congregation of power in male-dominated occupations.

Institutionalised hegemonic masculinity assumes that work and labour are ingrained with gendered power. The division of sexual labour and segmentation of labour markets reinforce hegemony through the marginalisation and undervaluation of women's work (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Yang, 2020). Leaning on Acker's interpretations of gendered organisations and inequality regimes (1990; 2006), hierarchies and occupations are problematised as gendered constructs inscribed with masculine power. Jobs and institutions are ingrained with engendered traits and responsibilities influenced by cultural gendered expectations of who will undertake these. Thus, work in specific occupations or industrial sectors can be constructed as incongruent with femininity, legitimising men's dominance in highly paid occupations (Benschop & Doorewaard, 2012; Heilman & Eagly, 2008; Rudman & Glick, 2001). The institutionalisation of gendered assumptions in occupations and hierarchies is not static, however. Hegemonic persists as fluid and can reconstruct gendered occupations to maintain men's dominance (Acker, 2006; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

The fluidity of masculine power is further maintained through the reconstruction of workplace policies in the masculine image (Acker, 1990; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Day-to-day processes and practises are inscribed with gendered assumptions that may disproportionately benefit those embodying the appropriate masculinity (Acker, 2006). For example Cockburn (1983) describes how performance metrics can be reconstructed from gender-neutral behaviours to favour masculinised competencies. Similarly, formalised performance-based pay can be manipulated to benefit the careers of men: perhaps most notably through the reconstruction of parental responsibilities to provide fatherhood bonuses (Hodges & Budig, 2010). Furthermore, the central notion of careers operating on meritocracies<sup>8</sup> may legitimise and reinforce hegemonic masculinity. As argued by Castilla & Ranganathan (2020), observations of performance are constructed on ideals chosen by an individual based upon their own experiences of meritocratic evaluations. Men's power can therefore be covertly embedded into institutional processes, evaluating performance based upon masculine frameworks and limiting women's opportunities to perform and progress at equal rates (Bode et al., 2022; Hodgins & O'Connor, 2021). Meritocratic conditions provide a legitimate cover for the maintenance of inequalities and are "at best adopted symbolically to gain legitimacy but are in fact inefficient or ineffective" (Amis et al., 2017; Amis et al., 2020, p.213).

Finally, the unequal power in organisations centralises leaders in supporting and resisting challenges to hegemonic masculinity. As argued by Acker (1991; 2006), men's dominance is reinforced through the congregation of power in male-dominated occupations. Furthermore, the top-down nature of hegemony presupposes that ruling classes with disproportionate power shape the discourses that legitimise hegemonic masculinity through administrative regimes and formal policies (Kessler et al., 1985). Senior leaders within firms are therefore positioned as critical actors in facilitating the maintenance or challenge to hegemony. Critically, resistance may exist where male leaders remain ambivalent to diversity and inclusion initiatives, instead maintaining status quo and sustaining inequalities (Cockburn, 1991; Cortis et al., 2020; Humbert, 2019). Ambivalence and the resulting maintenance of

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<sup>8</sup> The centrality of meritocracy within careers in the professional services will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 4.



hegemony may not be a personal exertion of power by men, but a restricted ability to enact change within institutions (Kelan & Wrantil, 2018). As argued by de Vries (2015), although male leaders are critical agents of change due to their positioned power and advantages afforded through their gender, they may be unable to deconstruct their own privilege borne from masculine identity.

Where hegemonic masculinity can be maintained through social procedures external to the individual (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), exploring the institutional processes that maintain male dominance may provide insight into currently unexplained elements of the gender pay gap. In this thesis, hegemonic masculinity is therefore used to interrogate the institutional practises that incur penalties and bonuses across the careers of men. Critically, the theoretical frameworks guides enquiries into institutional factors beyond those described in section 2.6. It is recognised that the absence of collective bargaining and family-family working practises may contribute to sector-specific gender pay gaps but understanding hegemonic masculinity in the financial and legal sectors may explain the stagnated gender pay gap despite state interventions. This will be pursued through organisational practises and cultures and the effectiveness of senior leaders in instigating change.

### 3.6 Conclusion

Hegemonic masculinity problematises the power held by men in institutions (Connell, 1995; 2000; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) to identify the practises and processes that legitimise patriarchal gender relations based upon the subordination of women and nonconforming men (Gramsci, 1971; Yang, 2020). Where the role of men and masculinity remains a research gap within the gender pay gap literature, hegemonic masculinity is used in the present research to explore the previously outlined gaps within gender pay gap literature: persistent unaccounted-for factors and the problematisation of men and masculinity. It is used both as a theoretical framework within empirical enquiries and in guiding the methodological approaches undertaken. Comparative career histories between women and men aim to identify the practises of hegemonic masculinity that shapes the different occupations, career trajectories and consequential wages received. The gender pay gap is therefore positioned as

interwoven inequalities and experienced discrimination occurring across a career span rather than the differential characteristics at a demographic level at a static point in time. Considering the theoretical approach of this thesis, hegemonic masculinity is utilised to identify the practises that can incur wage penalties across the careers of women in the financial and legal sector whilst concurrently affording bonuses to men. This is interrogated across three broad factors:

First, the social construction of masculinity and femininity is problematised as a factor in the gender pay gap. This is theorised to occur in underlying assumptions of masculinity within labour in the professional services, influencing notions of ideal workers incongruent with femininity. Thus, women may experience heightened performance pressures or lesser workplace support compared to men. Furthermore, despite occupations being tightly defined in finance and law, the thesis aims to explore persistent gender roles and gendered labour that incurs an inequality of opportunities to progression into highly paid roles.

Secondly, the thesis aims to identify the social practises and processes that maintain hegemonic masculinity. It is envisioned that in identifying the practises that uphold men's dominance in the financial and legal sector, insight can be achieved into women's persistent underrepresentation in the highest-paid segments of the sector. Furthermore, I argue that this process may incur penalties directly through wages and financial bonuses received, and indirectly across the career span through an inequality of opportunities.

Finally, the institutionalisation of hegemonic masculinity looks to understand the organisational practises and processes that resist progress on the gender pay gap. It is envisioned that institutionalisation may not identify wage penalties incurred, but instead look at mechanisms of resistance that may explain why the gender pay gap in the sector remains resilient despite government interventions.

## Chapter 4: Gender and (in)equality in the professional services

The professional service occupations represent historically conservative institutions (Kornberger et al., 2011; Witz, 1992), driven by knowledge-intensive labour and technical expertise underlined by an ethical commitment to public good (Carter & Spence, 2014; Hanlon, 1994), deeply engrained with assumption of middle-class white masculinity and the exclusion, and later marginalization, of women (Haynes, 2012; Lehman, 1992). The contemporary commercialization of the sectors has given birth to “client is king” cultures (Anderson-Gough et al., 2000), replacing technical expertise with business development abilities (Carter & Spence, 2014). Despite the increasing participation of women, now resulting in a numerical dominance of women in the legal services, the reconstruction of desirable skills away from technical expertise reinforces men’s career dominance (Bolton & Muzio, 2007).

The professional services report the highest gender pay gaps across the industrial sectors: 32.2% across the financial services and 24.9% in legal and accounting activities compared to an overall mean pay gap of 15.4% in 2021 (Office for National Statistics; this represented a minor drop from 33.2% and 27.3% respectively on the previous year (Office for National Statistics, 2020). Occupational segregation persists despite the increasing number of women entering the professions: across the sectors, women represent only 27.3% of board members and 25.2% of managers (Azmat & Boring, 2020). In the financial services, women represent 43.8% of the total labour force (Catalyst, 2020) but only 20.1% of FCA approved workers and 9.7% of senior leaders (Suss et al., 2021); figures relatively unchanged since 2005 (Croxson et al., 2019). Similarly in the legal sector, women represent 60% of solicitors admitted to the Roll, yet white women are 47.7% and BAME women 55% less likely to be promoted to partnership in large corporate firms than white males (Aulakh et al., 2017). Integrating class considerations, privately education candidates are thirteen times more likely to enter elite City law firms compared to state-educated candidates (Cook et al., 2012). Tomlinson et al. (2019) corroborates this, describing a dominance of white, privately educated men across large corporate and city-boutique law firms.

The professional services provide strong research setting not only due to reported gender pay gap figures, but how organisational structures and daily interactions can penalise women throughout careers (Bolton & Muzio, 2007, Kumra & Vinnecombe, 2007; Sheehan & Lineham, 2018). Hegemonic masculinity is underutilized as a theoretical framework in gender inequality in the professional services literature (i.e., Connell & Wood, 2005; Gregory, 2016) to instead pursue an analytical procedure utilizing an understanding of Bourdieu's *habitus*. Regardless, gender often remains unnamed in organisational inequalities where men's practices and identities are rendered invisible (Collier, 2015). Careers are constructed on a persistent need to "fit the mold" regarding the physical body, behaviours, and social interactions engrained with white, middle-class masculinities (Giazitzoglu & Muzio, 2020; Kumra & Vinnecombe, 2008; McDowell, 2010). Practises and structures are overtly and covertly patriarchal, with women's success depending on conformance with masculine norms (North-Samardzic & Taksa, 2011; Tomlinson et al., 2013). Although equality and diversity initiatives are becoming more prevalent, their potential to transform organisations may be restricted. Business case rationales have failed to implement meaningful initiatives to support equal opportunities where these directly contradict neoliberal, profit-driven motives throughout the professional services (Ashley & Empson, 2016b; Noon, 2007). Furthermore, strategies that have been implemented often fail to challenge underlying culture and structures that enabled inequalities to emerge, instead reinforcing myths of meritocracies. Although individuals from differential racial and gender demographics may be promoted into senior roles, they often undergo a socialisation that obscures and fails to challenge existing structures of inequalities (Ashely, 2010).

For the purpose of the research, five broad themes will be explored to guide the research in how hegemonic masculinity may explain unaccounted for elements of the gender pay gap: barriers of entry into the industry, the masculine habitus, masculine entrepreneurial skills as performance, over-work, and long-hours, and a "blocked reflexivity." These themes are utilised to guide the empirical enquiries in this thesis, to identify unexplained factors of the gender pay gap incurred across the careers in the financial and legal sectors.

#### 4.1. Barriers of entry into the industry

Despite increasing number of women into the sector, barriers of entry persist. As argued by Bolton & Muzio (2007), a shift away from recruitment based upon human capital to informal, masculinized considerations such as pre-established personal relationships and cultural capital can restrict women's entry into elite, highly paid firms. Although there is an evidencable increase in recruitment from underrepresented demographics across the entire financial and legal occupations, entry into elite firms remains dominated by middle-class, white men (Cook et al., 2012; Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2008). Recruitment from 'elite' higher education institutions overrepresented by students from privileged backgrounds is compounded with a cultural fit rooted in assumptions of middle-class interests (Ashely et al., 2015; Ashley & Empson, 2017; Rivera & Tilcsik, 2016). Thus, closure mechanisms present barriers into the highest paid roles in elite, City-based firms that consequentially impacts who progress into partnership and director roles (Aulakh et al., 2017; Ashley & Empson, 2016a; Tomlinson et al., 2018).

The segmentation of the professional services is upheld by internal closure mechanisms that place greater focus on informal consideration such as 'clubability,' gentlemanly characters and personal ties rather than technical capabilities (Bolton & Muzio, 2007). Despite languages of meritocracies, recruitment has increasingly focused upon notions of cultural capital as an indication of a candidate's ability to perform (Cook et al., 2012). Conformity within a notion of "polished" is as critical to employment as formal qualifications, education, and experience: "polished" being described by Ashley & Empson (2016b) as confidence, communication skills, and professional presentation regarding dress and appearance whilst also being able to communicate and hold conversations with others throughout the sector. This is emphasised by Rivera et al. (2012), who argue that the cultural fit between candidates, recruiters and institutions regarding leisure activity, experiences and self-presentation is weighted as importantly as technical competency. Furthermore, concerns of a candidate's cultural fit outweigh that of productivity and abilities on the notion they may damage a firm's reputation when communicating with clients (Cook et al., 2012; Rivera et al., 2012). Closure mechanisms not only restrict entry in which cultural capital may benefit white,

middle-class men, but students may self-select out of application processes where they do not feel like they will be accepted (Ashley et al., 2015).

Furthermore, entry into the sector may be restricted by a focus upon education within 'elite' higher education institutions. Ashley & Empson (2013) argue that the predominant recruitment of trainees from Russell Group universities allows elite firms to present an 'upmarket' image as a comparative advantage in the marketplace. Thus, coinciding with the restricted access to such universities for working-class demographics, access into the professions may be limited. Strong academic performance within a Russell Group university predicts placements and employment in elite financial and legal firms regardless of social class and gender but is undermined by constrained access to such education (Crawford & Wang, 2019; Wang & Crawford, 2019).

Thus, recruitment into highly paid occupations in elite firms may represent closure mechanisms considering cultural fit and educational attainment. Elite, City-based firms provide greater progression routes to partnership roles yet remain over-represented by middle-class white men (Aulakh et al., 2017; Cook et al., 2012; Tomlinson et al., 2019). However, the recruitment policies of large firms may have consequential impacts upon smaller firms who have previously employed diverse hiring practices. The recruitment policies of elite firms may be employed by smaller firms to mimic the conditions that enables competitive advantage, creating barriers of entry into the sector previously utilized by underrepresented demographics (Ashley & Empson, 2016a; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991).

## 4.2 Work and labour in the professional services as masculinity

The professional services are deeply engrained with masculinities supporting the careers of men based on women's marginalization. Promotion to partnership is constructed on profit-driven motives, with social skills and business development prioritized over technical skills (Carter & Spence, 2014; Empson, 2007; Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2008; Hanlon, 2004; Shore & Wright, 2018). Thus, socially constructed notions of management are underpinned with

assumptions of masculinity, dominated by male-dominated networks and social interactions (Connell & Wood, 2005; Cook et al., 2012; Gregory, 2016).

Financial and legal occupations are centered upon expectations of intense work orientation, commitment to the firm, and constant availability to clients underlined by competitiveness and assertiveness (Collier, 2015; Longlands, 2019; McDowell, 2010; Sheerin & Garavan, 2021). The shift towards commercialisation of the sector and embrace of neoliberal profit-driven motives have further engrained desirable skills with masculinities. Through an understanding of Bourdieu's habitus, Cook et al. (2012) propose a masculine cultural capital must be appropriated and embodied to be perceived as high potential in careers. Promotion to partnership is reliant upon an embodied "champagne and espresso lifestyle" of middle-class interests, beliefs, physical appearance, and social interactions. As previously explored in Section 3.3, Giazitzoglu & Muzio (2020) describe how middle-class masculinity is reproduced by men moving into elite, London-based firms consequentially marginalising their own previous identities. A habitus appropriated through social beliefs, specific dress codes and downplaying regional accent: embodying "what an ideal man looks like, acts like, and sounds like" (p.77). McDowell (2001; 2010) parallels this habitus in the British banking sector, describing a corporate masculinity constructed upon material clothing and a physical appearance that maintains a hegemonic position reproduced through homosociality. Men falling outside of narrow, class-based masculinity were marginalised within "back-office jobs," with women subsequently othered through the use of sexist humour and sexualised cultures (McDowell, 2010).

The underlying assumptions of middle-class, white masculinity is thus reproduced through the assimilation of cultural norms. Although observed through intersecting identifies (i.e., Ashley & Empson, 2013; 2016; Ashley, 2021; Castro & Holvino, 2016 Giazitzoglu & Muzio, 2020), a focus upon gender highlights the barriers faced by women throughout the professional services (Anderson-Gough et al., 2005), although not linked to pay penalties. Women are penalised through self-managed career paths in the need to conform to masculinised characteristics reliant upon self-promoting behaviours that fails to recognise the

existence of work-family reconciliation (Kumra & Vinnecombe, 2008). Furthermore, women face penalties related to negative perceptions of socially constructed femininity. They face greater scrutiny in their abilities compared to male counterpart (Kapasi et al., 2016), self-managing conformance within masculine cultures regarding voice, presence, and appearance despite occurring double-bind penalties where these are assumed as illegitimate (Anderson-Gough et al., 2005; Haynes, 2012; McDowell, 2010; Sheerin & Garavan, 2021). As explored by Tomlinson et al. (2013), inequalities may persist through the inability to challenge masculinised cultures. To attain comparative career success to senior men, women align themselves within masculinities, reproducing professional norms whilst still being seen as an inferior version of masculinity (Ford et al., 2020; Muzio & Tomlinson, 2012).

### 4.3 Entrepreneurial skills as performance

Concurrent with a masculine habitus throughout work in the professional services, institutions have become increasingly centered upon male-dominated ideals which reinforce men's dominance through the sector (Kumra & Vinnecombe, 2007). The increasing prominence of "client is king" mentalities has reconstructed notions of professionalism away from technical expertise (Anderson-Gough et al., 2000). Instead, the promotion to partnership roles has become centred upon managerial and commercial skills with individualistic performance measured by revenue generated for the firm (Empson, 2007; Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2007; Hanlon, 2004; Spence et al., 2015). The sole reliance upon managerial and commercial skills not only penalises women throughout careers where these are constructed as masculine, but also in the social context client-development occurs within (Crewe & Wang, 2019; McDowell, 2010).

It is important to note that business development and managerial skills are not the sole demonstration of potential throughout careers. Rather, technical skills remain highly valuable in early career stages, but are replaced by social skills as an individual progresses throughout hierarchies (Carter & Spence, 2014; Gorman, 2015; Kornberger et al., 2010). High-potential candidates are constructed around the demonstration of subjective perceptions of



gravitas, trustworthiness and “clubability”: a person that clients are believed to want to spend time with (Carter & Spence, 2014). Considering the construction of work as a masculinity throughout the sector, the dominance of men throughout careers are reinforced through social networks reliant upon specific embodied masculinities. As argued by Hanlon (2004), sales relationships are created through face-to-face contact between parties that are perceived as social equals. The embodiment of specific socially constructed identities based upon competence and a masculine gravitas is critical to building relationships with client (Gorman, 2015; Rivera et al., 2012). As demonstrated by Kornberger et al. (2011), partners undergo a ‘rite of passage’ that discursively shifts their roles to becoming more entrepreneurial and managerial that occurs once individuals have “climbed and conquered” (p.521) the hierarchy of professional service firms. Those with prospects of moving into the highest paid roles must reject technical skills to embody a ‘hunter’ and ‘killer’ mentality (Spence & Carter, 2014): the ability to understand client needs, social skills, and generating rapport with a middle-class white demographic dominating senior positions throughout the sector.

As explored in Section 3.4, hegemonic masculinity can be maintained through a restricted access to recruitment opportunity and job resources. Contextualised into the professional services sector, the increasing requirements of entrepreneurial skills reflectively marginalises women’s careers: generated revenues are achieved primarily through a person’s immediate network or abilities to build these. Thus, the dominance of [middle-class, white] men throughout the sector is reinforced through a restricted access to these networks (Hanlon, 2004). However, beyond the problematic assimilation into narrow expectations of unnamed masculinity in the sector, the social contexts where networking occurs presents barriers in women’s careers. There remains a reliance on old boys’ club mentalities in client-based social networking occurring within masculinised spaces (Maclean et al., 2017). A “feast or famine” attitude (Crewe & Wang, 2018) infers a need for survival throughout careers, where the consistent networking outside of the office and traditional working hours ensures career progression – or even stability. Intertwining with the persistence of long-working hours – to be discussed later – the requirement for social interactions beyond the working day runs

incongruent with any caring or non-working responsibilities of women (Collier, 2015; Crewe & Wang, 2018).

#### 4.4 Over-work and long-working hours

The reconfiguration of work in the professional services towards “client is king” mentality has institutionalised the expectation of long-working hours and overwork as a demonstration of a near constant commitment to the firm (Anderson-Gough et al., 2000; Longlands, 2019; Reid, 2015; Wharton & Blair-Loy, 2002). The promotion into partnership roles has become increasingly reliant upon billable hours charged, legitimising a culture of overwork and presenteeism (Carter & Spence, 2014). As demonstrated by Kornberger et al. (2011), an embodiment of long-working hours is central to the notions of professionalism in management positions. They describe a ‘rite of passage’ in which managers and partners find themselves isolated from personal lives collectively described as a “black hole” (Kornberger et al., 2011). Thus, the sole focus upon achieving individual targets with little attention to how these are accomplished obscured an underlying masculinity in the working practises that may marginalise women (Collier, 2015; Sheehan & Lineham, 2018). The valuation of long-working hours may be seen as equal or supersede actual performance throughout the sector, disproportionately supporting those able to engage in these cultures (Gorman, 2005; 2015; Leahey & Hunter, 2012). Coupled with the societal expectations of family responsibilities of women, Adams et al. (2016) propose the working patterns of the sector creates a small pool of women attracted to the sector, whilst Cooper et al. (2021) demonstrates how the conflicts between motherhood and long-hours can cause women to relocate themselves in the labour market. Furthermore, the normalisation of extremely long-working hours may subvert the value of part-time and flexible working arrangements.

Notions of ‘ideal workers’ (i.e., Acker, 1990) have become increasingly engrained with the engagement of extremely long-hours to demonstrate a near constant commitment to the firm (Collier, 2015; Reid, 2015). Working patterns are regulated on the notion that long-hours demonstrates competency and motivations over actual performance (Karreman & Alvesson, 2009; Kunda, 1992). Despite a recognition that extreme, intense working hours may be

unsustainable throughout careers, they are institutionalised in careers on the notion that they must be engaged with to achieve partnership (Ahuja, 2019; Ruiz Castro, 2012). The rejection of extreme working patterns is perceived as incompatible with career success leading to a near inevitability of long-work. As described by Lupu et al. (2020), individuals either conform to these pressures or instead look to shape their occupational meaning pursuing alternatives to the traditional “up or out” careers: “you cannot be a good professional without working long hours” (p.10). This inevitability of long-hours in the professional services is thus rationalised by both individuals and firms. Lupu & Empson (2015) outline a sense a helplessness of a sense of being trapped in the cultural and institutional norms of overwork and long-hours. Despite this, individuals rationalise this as a ‘natural’ element of a sector perceived to afford them an elevated social status in return. Long-working hours are rarely challenged not solely due the assumptions of commitment and motivation (i.e., Collier, 2015; Reid, 2015; Karreman & Alvesson, 2009), but where these are constructed as a ‘rite of passage’ an individual must go through to attain senior, highly paid roles (Kornberger et al., 2011; Carter & Spence, 2014). Thus, they are instead embraced and normalised by individuals (Lupu et al., 2020), their meanings reconceptualised or reframed (Ahuja, 2019), or used to justify the high wages received (Reid, 2015).

The normalised working patterns of extreme long hours in throughout careers in the professional services require consideration in the wider research context for a number of reasons. Primarily, observing the gender pay gap through the theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity problematises such norms as one which marginalises those who cannot engage with working practises through the undervaluation of their labour or a stagnated career trajectory. As previously outlined, hours worked are often valued over actual demonstrated skills (Gorman, 2005; 2015), in which little attention is paid to how individual targets are achieved (Sheehan & Lineham, 2018). Thus, cultures may emerge of people being “busy doing nothing” solely to remain physically present in the workplace (Collier, 2015; Kumra, 2015). Ruiz Castro (2012) thus explicitly names long-working hours as a masculinity: that the gendered division of care and non-work responsibilities allow men to engage in extreme working practises at greater rates than women and are in turn reinforced as a cultural norm to secure the workplace masculine. Working practises fail to recognise the

double-bind placed upon women in the sector in which parenting, domestic labour and elderly care are disproportionately assumed of them (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2004; Collier, 2015; North-Samardzic & Taska, 2011; Wharton & Blair-Loy, 2006). The marginalisation of mothers through demanded hours worked is explored in the investment banked sector by Cooper et al. (2021), who centrally highlight the incompatibility of parental responsibilities and work in the professional services. To succeed (or indeed *survive*) in the professional services, mothers must conform to a masculinity of long working hours through outsourcing childcare. Non-conformance often leads to the relocation outside of the full-time labour market and into lower-paid, more accommodating roles offset from the linear “up or out” career trajectory where part-time work or even the standard working week is seen as impossible in the professional services (Cooper et al., 2021; Tomlinson et al., 2013; Wharton & Blair-Loy, 2002).

#### 4.5 Blocked reflexivity and the reproduction of inequalities

Locating work and labour in the professional services within the wider research context provides a critical insight into the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity to be explored in this thesis. Practices and structures are overtly and covertly patriarchal where women’s success is dependent upon conformity within masculine norms (North-Samardzic & Taska, 2011; Tomlinson et al., 2013). Although equality and diversity policies have become more common in the sector, they are undermined by working practises and restricted in their ability to challenge cultural and structural factors of inequality (Ashley & Empson, 2016b; Noon, 2007).

Entry into the sector requires a candidate to embody a middle-class, white masculinity (Ashley et al., 2015; Ashley & Empson, 2016b; Cook et al., 2012; Rivera et al., 2012) that consequentially is taken to signify an individual’s competence and potential based upon conformity with dominant masculinities and marginalisation of others (Giazitzoglu & Muzio, 2020; Sheerin & Garavan, 2021). Thus, this replaces an individual’s technical capabilities with entrepreneurial social skills demonstrated within male-dominated social contexts (Gorman, 2015; Hanlon, 2004; Spence & Carter, 2014; MacLean, 2016; McDowell, 2010). Critically,

women's success relies upon the acceptance and conformance within hegemonic masculinity. Structures are reproduced in which their rejection or disengagement is not possible without career penalties (Cooper et al., 2021; Sheehan & Lineham, 2018; Tomlinson et al., 2013). Furthermore, "up-or-out" organisational hierarchies that frame career progression on meritocracies obscures inequalities by positioning an individual's success as through their arduous work and abilities (Hanlon, 1994; 2004). The demanded performance constructed in the masculine image pays little attention to how these are achieved, obscuring the penalties incurred to those who cannot embody them (Collier, 2015; Sheehan & Lineham, 2018). Thus, "up-or-out" notions penalize women's career progression where an upward mobility is restricted by men's social relationships superseded women's performance and capabilities (Bolton & Muzio, 2007; Kornberger et al., 2011; Shore & Wright, 2018).

Whitehead (2001) therefore proposes a notion of "blocked reflexivity". Inequalities are obscured through the emphasis of individual success as meritocratic: a meritocracy engrained with assumptions that cannot be critiqued, only embodied, and reproduced throughout careers (Ashley & Empson, 2016b; Ashley, 2021; Littler, 2017; Spence & Carter, 2014). The legitimacy of long-working hours to attain partnership and director roles subvert the value of parental responsibilities initiatives in which flexible, part-time, or even conformity within traditional working hours is seen as incompatible with career success (Bessa & Tomlinson, 2017; Collier, 2015; Cooper et al., 2021). Even where gender neutral terms are adopted in work-life policies, there is little support for mothers or those with caring responsibilities in which the ongoing intensification of work process in the professional services positions those working less as lacking in their commitment to the firm (Ashley & Sommerland, 2015; Kornberger et al., 2010). Furthermore, business case rationales have failed to implement meaningful initiatives to support equal opportunities where these directly contradict neoliberal, profit-driven motives throughout the professional services where resources are perceived as better placed within client-based work (Ashley & Empson, 2016b; Kornberger et al., 2010; Noon, 2007). Instead, implemented equality and diversity initiatives in the professional sectors rely upon "convenient fictions": easily accessible and replicable narratives that have minimal impact on gender inequality in professional service firms (Ashley & Empson, 2016b).

## 4.6 Conclusion

The professional service sector provides a critical occupational context for examining mechanism of pay inequality and the gender pay gap. There is an existing research gap regarding unexplained elements and the relatively under-explored impact of wider inequalities in work and private lives as significant factors in the gender pay gap. These gaps are to be explored through the theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity, to problematise the power held by men and masculinity, and identify the practises that maintain their dominant positions in the labour market. Where the theoretical framework aims to explore these on the social construction of genders, the maintenance of power through social interactions, and the institutionalisation of hegemonic masculinity, these can already be inferred from existing literature on inequalities in the professional services. Although not named as hegemonic masculinity, women's careers are marginalised through a middle-class, white masculinity, an increasing reliance on business development in masculine social contexts, and career trajectories underlined and reinforced through institutions with assumptions of masculinity. Furthermore, the sector consistently represents higher than the highest gender pay gap amongst industrial sectors. This is despite careers operating on notions of meritocracies, where traditional explanations may be limited where long-working hours, continuous full-time work are normalised, and occupations are tightly defined in highly skilled work. Thus, by focussing problematising the outlined factors through a theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity, the presented research aims to fully conceptualise discriminations faced throughout the career histories of women as significant factors to the gender pay gap.

## Chapter 5: Methodology

The overarching aim of this thesis is to problematise the power of men and masculinity in the financial and legal sectors in order to explore currently unexplained factors of the gender pay gap. As explored in Chapter 2, the research traditions of gender pay gap scholarship is rooted within econometric data collection and analysis. The gender pay gap is assumed to be the result of market factors and productivity differences (Rubery et al., 2005), identifying the economic differences between women and men. However, this paradigm may be limited in providing a holistic account of discrimination across the career course where singular conceptualisations of inequalities prove difficult (Alkadry & Tower, 2006; Geertz, 1973; Lips, 2013a). Qualitative methodologies remain vastly underutilised in gender pay gap research. This is despite the potential offer insight into specific interpretations of social worlds, to identify the first hand-experiences of discrimination in the financial and legal sectors (i.e., Hardin, 2019; Kvale, 2011a; Spradley, 1979). Thus, this thesis responds to the calls of Grimshaw & Rubery (2015) and Lips (2013b) whereby a theoretical and methodological shift is required to fully account for the gender pay gap. Hegemonic masculinity is therefore utilised not only to guide theoretical inquiries, but in the philosophical and methodological approaches taken. Semi-structured life-history interviews were conducted between May 2020 and September 2021 to understand how hegemonic masculinity in the financial and legal sectors may explore currently unaccounted for factors of the gender pay gap. It is important to note here that through this methodological and philosophical shift, I do not argue for the complete displacement of quantitative methodologies in gender pay gap research. Rather, that greater complementarity between research paradigms can greater understand the mechanisms of the gender pay gap to allow for more effective interventions. Furthermore, the context of the financial and legal sectors are important: the methodological approach undertaken does not look to generalise findings across the labour market or indeed the sector as a whole. Instead, I aim to identify shared patterns of meanings across the personal accounts of participants to explore current gaps in knowledge. Thus, the following research questions are proposed:

R1: What wage bonuses and penalties can be identified across financial and legal careers that can explain currently unexplained factors of the gender pay gap?

R2: How effective are current firm-level strategies in reducing the gender pay gap?

R3: What roles do men hold in reducing or maintaining the gender pay gap?

The chapter is structured as followed. First, a summary of the research design it outlined. The philosophical assumptions of social construction which underpin the research design will then be discussed, including the rational for undertaking a paradigm shift away from the broadly positivist traditions of gender pay gap research. A detailed discussion of the data collection methods follows: the reflexivity thematic data analysis approached will be outlined, alongside the sampling strategy and participant sample. Finally, the chapter outlines with ethical considerations and methodological limitations, concluding with a brief discussion on my own reflexivity regarding my identify and how this influenced the research process.

## 5.1 Summary of research design

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with forty-two participants working in financial and legal occupations between May 2020 and September 2021. Qualitative data collection allowed an exploration of the ontological experiences of disadvantage and discrimination throughout careers within occupations and organisations that may be limited in quantitative strategies (Geertz, 1973). The practises and processes that maintain the dominant positions of men may be difficult to conceptualise in economic data alone. Therefore, qualitative methods provided insight into unexplained pay gaps to account for wider inequalities in work and private lives (Grimshaw & Rubery, 2015).

Purposeful sampling identified specific cases to provide rich, deep narrative accounts of participants careers and insight into how firms were responding to their gender pay gap (Palinkas et al., 2015; Suri, 2011). Snowball sampling was employed upon completion of interviews, requesting participants to relay research information to colleagues. Thus, diverse storytelling, opinions and beliefs on careers and the gender pay gap were collected that may



have been difficult to conceptualise in quantitative means (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021; Rowley, 2012).

Alternative methodologies were considered but ultimately deemed unachievable within the context of the COVID-19. A small number of ethnographic case studies were planned to gather complementary interview data, non-participant observations and document analysis. As in the work of Cockburn (1991), this aimed to compare and contrast differential implementations of hegemonic masculinity in organisations that resisted or supported progress on their gender pay gap. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person ethnographic data collection was rendered impossible due to work-from-home orders from government from March 2020 to July 2021. Therefore, data collection was recalibrated, instead pursuing remote interviews with participants across the professional services with an increased focus upon career narratives across the sector rather than within the individual organisation.

## 5.2 Philosophical assumptions

The research design is underpinned with assumptions of social constructionism. Social constructionism aims to understand the structures that guide individual behaviours (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003; 2008). This differentiates from traditional paradigms employed in gender pay gap research which aim to identify empirical facts. Rather, social constructionism centralises understanding human behaviours with an emphasis that knowledge and reality are negotiated through human interactions (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Bryman & Bell, 2003). Critically, this contends that structures of inequality experienced throughout careers in the professional services are socially constructed through the interaction of humans and institutions rather than occurring naturally (Kukla, 2000). Thus, researching the gender pay gap through the philosophical assumptions of social constructionism shifts empirical enquiries away from the identification of supply and demand determinants of pay to explore how careers are regulated by power and marginalisation.

Central to the philosophical assumptions is the rejection of a unitary reality (Bryman & Bell, 2003; Burr, 2003). Rather, multiple realities are continuously constructed and reconstructed, internally interpreted by the individual in relation to their environment (Wittgenstein, 1953). Following the assumptions of hierarchically socially constructed masculinities and femininities (Connell, 1987; 2005), gender is positioned as continuously interpreted, reconstructed, and performed based upon the appropriation and rejection of culturally expected behaviours of sex (Butler, 2007; Connell, 2002; de Beauvoir, 1997; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Critically, socially constructed realities – and consequential genders – conflict and contrast in an attempt to institutionalise power and develop their own social phenomena. Gender is interwoven with power dynamics to assert dominance based on the marginalisation over others (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Furthermore, social constructionism centralises that power and domination is exerted through the regulation of self and others (Symon & Cassell, 2012). Identities are positioned as non-fixed entities defined by continuous discourse, where an individual has an inherent “form of power which subjugates and makes subject to” (Foucault, 1969; 1982: p.781). Identity, cultural ideals, understandings, and attitudes are shaped by language use deeply engrained with power (Fairclough, 1992; Parker, 1992). These are further engrained within the cultural fabric of its own existence, further regulating and marginalised individuals whilst retaining power (White & Epston, 1990). Individuals therefore regulate their own behaviours and the behaviours of others to conform or protest socially constructed expectations (Foucault, 1975). As described by Gramsci (1971; 1973), ruling classes maintain power through the consent to ideals that maintain existing status quo: ‘*scientific*’ truths are problematised, and subject to manipulation through power and political discourse to marginalise non-conformance within cultural ideals (Foucault, 1982).

Finally, underpinning the methodology is the aim to make the hidden conditions of women’s marginalisation visible (Bury, 1986). The subordination of women’s work is understood through the social rules that an individual undertakes to rationalise their experiences through narrative accounts of interactions with others and institutions (Holstein

& Gubrium, 2008). Identity, gender, and institutions are engrained with power based upon the marginalisation of others deployed through discourses, politics, and cultural norms (Gramsci, 1971). Thus, the taken-for-granted assumptions of work and labour within institutions to retain power and within a small ruling class can be problematised (Derrida, 1976). Culturally assumed unwritten rules that regulate behaviours are not explicitly observable yet sustain authoritarian patriarchal structures the subject determinant orders (Derrida, 1979; 1981). Following Foucault (1978), work and labour is engrained with notions of an “ideal employee” socially constructed and engrained within organisational structures and regimes. Power is deployed through a person’s positioning against institutionalised ideals. Non-conformance marginalises individuals through a ‘scientific’ classification of a person’s positioning within cultural frameworks to therefore create distinct groups of power (Foucault, 1978).

Social constructivism represents a further paradigm shift away from traditional gender pay gap research. Epistemological inquiries are often rooted within positivist approaches, understanding empirical and verifiable universal laws that regulate differential pay between women and men (Benton & Craib, 2001; Comte, 1880). Comparative studies across industries and nations highlight the ‘social facts’ (Durkheim, 1897) of cultural and political differences that underpin the gender pay gap (e.g., Blau & Kahn, 2003; Mandel & Shalev, 2009). However, knowledge creation through empirical and verifiable relationships fail to recognise the ontological realities of the human experience (Weber, 1947). A shift towards social constructivism instead allows a focus upon how socially constructed genders achieve dominance and maintain power through cultural and structural inequalities that subordinate women’s careers. The presented research therefore attempts to understand how the subordination of women reinforces the gender pay gap through legitimised social and structural practises. Assumptions of social constructivism enables the deconstruction of multiple realities to understand how interwoven power structures throughout the professional services influence the careers and occupations of men and women.

## 5.3 Research methods

The following section details the data collection methods employed, the interview procedure used, sampling strategies and limitations. Additionally, ethical implications and researcher reflexivity will be explored.

### 5.3.1 Data collection

Forty-two interviews were conducted remotely with participants of differing seniority across the professional services between May 2020 and September 2021. Interviews were semi-structured interviews and integrated a life-history approach to gain a first-hand, narrative account of careers that could be comparatively analysed to identify practises and processes that penalised women's wages across careers. Although subjectivity and cognitive memory must be considered as a potential limitation, this approach enabled access to diverse storytelling, opinions and beliefs in which commonalities and differences can be identified across cases (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021; Rowley, 2012). Additionally, publicly available gender pay gap reports were analysed to supplement interview data to provide a robust understanding that could contrast, confirm, or expand upon claims being made. Reports between 2017 and 2021 were collected from twenty-two of the largest professional service firms based upon revenue and number of employees. In total, 64 individual gender pay gap reports were analysed – full details of firms can be found in Table 5 (page 143).

Primary data collection aimed to generate specific interpersonal knowledge produced through interviews (Kvale, 2011a). Interviews allowed access to specific interpretations of social worlds through cultural patterns and themes (Spradley, 1979; Warren, 2011), exploring the first-hand experiences of hegemonic masculinity in the careers of women in the financial and legal professions. They “explore[d] silences and the half-said” (Hardin, 2019: p.147), to critique and deconstruct the power and privilege retained by men. The interview procedure assumed an active role of the researcher, co-constructing knowledge with participants (Foley, 2014; Kvale, 2011b). Research goals and my own motivations for undertaking the project were disclosed to build rapport with participants, consequentially allowing a greater depth

and information in responses (Schilt, 2006). Furthermore, the semi-structured approach both allowed for greater flexibility to explore the unique experiences of participants but enabled participants to respond to ideas and discuss issues they found most important. As discussed by Kronsell (2006), by interviewing women within male-dominated institutions such as professional service firms, where “men are ‘persons’ and there is no gender by the feminine” (Butler, 1990, p.19), legitimised masculinity can be problematised, deconstructed and observed relationally through lived experiences. Hegemonic masculinities can be explicitly named as modes of domination through the experiences of women (Kronsell, 2006).

The structure of the life-history technique applied to interviews changed throughout the data collection period to gain more meaningful data. Early interviews undertook a semi-structured approach, with specific questions asked regarding current occupation and repeated across their careers. Questions explored responsibilities in roles, social interactions, motivations to move jobs, and how any job movements were facilitated. Upon completion of five interviews, a preliminary analysis was completed, and it was deemed a narrative approach to life-histories was more suitable (Miller, 2011; Stanley & Wise, 1993). At the start of interviews, participants were asked to describe their careers to the present day; specific areas of interest in the research were highlighted by the researcher if requested. A narrative approach allowed participants to control their own storytelling, allowing events and experiences perceived as important to emerge more naturally than when guided by the researcher (Miller, 2011). Furthermore, this provided a more natural flow to the conversations. It was noted that the relationships between researcher and participants appeared stronger, with participants more likely to disclose in-depth information without being probed. The traditional power dynamics in interview relationships were flipped, with the participant holding superior understanding of what is being discussed and disclosing only information they were comfortable in doing so (Stanley & Wise, 1993).

Interviews also explored participant’s opinions on the effectiveness in how their current employers were reducing their gender pay gap. Reflective of Cockburn’s (1991) exploration of male resistance to equal opportunity initiatives, expert insight can be achieved

to explore how gender pay gaps are perceived and responded to within organisations. For example, participants often discussed barriers to enact policies to address gender pay gaps in their organisations without initially being probed by the researcher on the subject. As this emerged as a common theme, this became integrated as part of the schedule for later interviews. Time restrictions within participants' diaries occasionally meant that the full list of questions could not be asked. In these situations, the researcher focussed upon questions believed to be the most relevant to the participant. The full interview structure can be found in Appendix 1.

Data collection continued until a theoretical saturation was deemed achieved rather than a predetermined sample size. Saturation here refers to the stage in data collection from which no new information, codes, or themes were yielded from conducted interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Although it was recognised that valuable information may have emerged if data collection continued infinitely, project timescales had to be considered. Thus, data collection closed once theoretical claims were robustly and comprehensively supported with distinct boundaries between themes (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Kvale, 1996; Malerud et al., 2016; Sims et al., 2018). Theoretical saturation occurred at approximately *thirty* interviews. Final interviews were completed to ensure greater representation across the financial and legal sectors and to target specific underrepresented occupations: for example, male-senior leaders. No new information arose from additional interviews completed.

### 5.3.2 Interview procedure

Interviews were structured in two sections: a narrative life-history primarily led by the participants, followed by semi-structured questions based upon previous discussions. Guide questions were based upon existing literature and research questions, whilst still allowing flexibility to explore unique responses and experiences of participants. Interviews roughly followed four key areas: narrative career history, gender and equality within organisations, social interactions in the industry, and organisational responses to gender pay gaps.

Interviews were conducted remotely using Zoom or Microsoft Team. Interviews lasted on average fifty-three minutes, with a total of thirty-eight and a half hours of interview data recorded; the length of interviews ranging from twenty-one minutes to two hours and three minutes long. Disparities were due to time scheduling problems, with some participants unable to commit prolonged periods of time out of work or family commitments. Longer interviews were conducted with more senior participants, often non-executive board members, directors or partners who had greater control over their time schedule and offered more in-depth information on research topics.

All interviews were digitally recorded with the consent of participants and transcribed by the researcher upon completion. Minor notes were kept throughout interviews to allow for further questions based upon specific topics raised by participants. Upon the completion of transcription, anonymised transcripts were made available to participants. This aimed to not only enhance trustworthiness of data through member checking, allowing participants to confirm this was an accurate representation of interviews and their own experiences, but to also allow the ability to further anonymise or retract information that might be identifiable to themselves (Cho & Trent, 2006; Thomas, 2017).

### 5.3.2 Sampling strategy

Purposeful sampling was undertaken to identify specific cases that could provide rich information (Palinkas et al., 2015; Suri, 2011). Industry-based women's networks were approached to distribute a call for participants amongst members, with those interested requested to signal interest to the lead researcher. Additionally, the call for participants was distributed through social media websites (i.e., LinkedIn and Twitter), utilising specific hashtags to reach potential participants who fit the particular characteristics from purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990): hashtags included #womeninlaw, #womeninfinance, #legaltwitter and #genderpaygap. An example of emails and social media posts, alongside recruitment material, can be found in the accompanying appendices. Prospective participants who

responded were asked basic demographic questions regarding their current job role, industry, and years of experience to ensure they fit the desired sample before interviews were organised.

Snowball sampling was employed upon the completion of interviews. Participants were asked to distribute research information to any colleagues they thought would be interested, however it was emphasised this was not required. This aimed to identify comparative cases with individuals in roles and organisational cultures to understand any differentials within career experiences and earning abilities, especially when focussed upon men.

It is worth noting a difficulty faced in recruiting men. Initially, men were envisioned to represent a substantial proportion of the sample, but their recruitment proved problematic. The men that did participate often did so through snowball sampling rather than responding to the primary sampling strategy. Furthermore, all men who participated identified themselves as allies to gender (and intersecting demographic) equality at work. Where the research aims to explore hegemonic masculinity in the gender pay gap, it is recognised that there may be a limited data on the men deemed as problematic in women's careers<sup>9</sup>. The resistance of such men to participate is thus recognised as a potential limitation in the data collection but may inherently represent their resistance to gender pay gap initiatives, as shall be discussed in Chapter 9.

#### 5.3.4 Participant sample

Forty-two interviews were completed in total. Twenty interviews were conducted from participants working or who had previously worked in financial occupations, and twenty-two in legal occupations<sup>10</sup>. Thirty-five participants were women and seven men: although the

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<sup>9</sup> Men who participated in the research often positioned themselves away from other groups of men perceived as problematic in the gender pay gap which shall be discussed in greater detail in *Chapter 8*.

<sup>10</sup> Participants who worked in financial and legal occupations not within the immediate sectors are labelled as Auxiliary throughout empirical chapters. Examples included In-House Solicitors, In-House Accountants.



research explores the penalties and mechanisms of support occurring across careers through the narrative experiences of women, men were including in the sample to enable comparative analysis and to provide greater insight into the practises that maintain hegemonic masculinity. Further demographic information including age, ethnicity and pay can be found in the appendices.

Table 3: Participant Information

Career Seniority	Description	Women	Men	Total
<i>Finance</i>				
Senior	Partner, Director	8	1	9
Mid-career	Senior Manager, Manager	4	1	5
Junior	Trainees, Executives, Associate	4	1	5
				<u>19</u>
<i>Law</i>				
Senior	Partners, Director	6	3	9
Mid-career	Senior Lawyers, Senior Associate	11	0	11
Junior	Trainee Solicitors	1	1	2
				<u>22</u>
Informant	External to 'core operations' of the firm able provide outsider perspectives	2	0	<u>2</u>
<b>Total Interviews</b>		<b>36</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>42</b>

The sample represented diverse stages of the career path. Senior positions were the most represented in the data collection with eighteen interviews conducted in occupations such as partners, directors, and non-executive board members. This was followed by mid-career occupations such as associates and operational risk managers (sixteen interviews), whilst junior occupations included trainee solicitors and research executives (eight interviews). Data gathered across the career lifespan aimed to achieve two goals. First, time-bound considerations could be made to observe if previous common experiences senior women

experienced still occurred by current trainees. Secondly, it enabled diverse perspectives in how the sector is responding to the gender pay gap outside of solely leadership contexts.

### 5.3.5 Researcher reflexivity

Following the philosophical assumption that interviews are co-constructed between researcher and participant, the influence of gender within the interview process required a reflexive consideration (Oakley, 1998; 2016; Reinharz, 1993). Prior to data collection commencing, my own identity as a straight, white man was seen as potentially problematic when discussing certain themes with women and potentially facilitating more open discussions with men due to a shared masculinity. Thus, *muted masculinities* and interviewer self-disclosure strategies were employed to interviews (Hassan et al., 2015; 2019; Reinharz & Chase, 2001): the power of gender in the interview process is recognised, and gendered differences are rationally minimised to ensure that men's voices are not taken as an assumption and women's voices silenced (Butler, 1990; DeVault & Gross, 2011; Kronsell, 2006). Similarly, interviewer self-disclosure (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011a) prior to interviews attempted to mitigate any potential implications of gendered power. This pursued the sharing of ideas, attitudes and experiences related to the research to further build rapport and encourage respondents to be more forthcoming. However, this required subjective consideration to ensure I did not take over interview processes and silence participants (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992).

Thus, there were rational attempts to mute my own masculinity in communications prior to and during interviews conducted, instead emphasising my professional and personal identity and interests as a feminist researcher. Open conversations were pursued prior to the interviews, often discussing the difficulties dealing with COVID-19 and working from home. Additionally, I would discuss my own research goals, often with participants asking, "Why are you researching this?" This allowed me to state my motivations in researching the subject matter and wider gender inequalities at work: namely, that white men like myself play a critical role in transforming gender and racial inequalities where they still hold

disproportionate power in society; that the increasing participation of men in feminist causes can support the instigation of change, but:

“This does not mean that they are better equipped to lead feminist movement; it does mean that they should share equally in resistance struggle. In particular, men have a tremendous contribution to make feminist struggle in the area of exposing, confronting, opposing, and transforming the sexism of their male peers” (hooks, 1984, p.81).

Additionally, my outsider status from the industry was discussed with participants: I emphasised that I have never worked within the professional services, instead with experience in the care and food sectors that encouraged participants to explain any industry-based assumptions.

As previously discussed, there were concerns my identify could cause issues when discussing certain themes with women whilst facilitating a more open discussion with men. In contrast to my expectations, women were open to discussing potentially upsetting themes such as sexual harassment, whereas men often diverted potential controversial subjects. Men emphasised their roles as allies, but it is recognised they may have reconstructed realities and behaviours to better fit the research goals. Performances of masculinity from participants did not fit a hegemonic norm, but one of a stated allyship to gender equality perhaps due to my own positioning.

### 5.3.6 Ethical considerations

Ethical implications were considered carefully throughout each stage of the research process. Informed consent, the use of gatekeepers to access participants, the transparency of research aims, and anonymity were all central considerations to the ethical standards of the research process (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018; Plankey-Videla, 2012). Thus, relevant

processes were enacted to minimise any negative impact on participants. Prior to participation, interested individuals were given detailed research information sheets that outlined research aims, what would be required from participants and how data would be used (Appendix 3). Informed consent was required prior to interviews to confirm consent to data use within publications, held in a research repository, and that consent could be withdrawn up to two-months after the interview date. Interview transcripts were made available to participants to ensure anonymity and to allow the opportunities to retract or edit any identifiable information if required.

In line with the University of Leeds Research Data Management policy, all anonymised transcripts are to be deposited in the Research Data Leeds repository upon completion of the research. Audio recordings were deleted upon completion of transcripts. Names of individuals, companies and occupations were either removed or provided a generalised pseudonym to protect participants identity. Examples included generic geographical information rather than specific locations if important to the participant's narrative (i.e. Leeds changed to Yorkshire or the North of England) or changing institutional names to a generic format (i.e. the University of Leeds changed to Northern University). Participant names were initially replaced with an alpha-numerical code based upon occupation, industry and the chronological order of participation (e.g. finance =FI, senior management = SM, thus FISM1). When writing up results, alpha-numerical codes were replaced with generic names, with gender, occupation and industry included in any quotes to provide required context. Finally, any documentation with identifiable information including audio, information consent and information on participants was stored in password protected files on University of Leeds servers. These documents were indexed based on participants alpha-numerical code rather than by name; a separate password protected document detailed participant names with their relevant alpha-numerical code only available to the researcher.

## 5.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis broadly undertook a reflexive thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2019). An exploratory, flexible, and iterative understanding was applied which pursued the generation of codes and themes through shared meanings between and within participants in a more open means compared to structured approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This enabled the identification of specific hegemonic masculinities occurring across financial and legal careers that restricted the ability of women to earn at parity with men.

### 5.4.1 Analytical procedure

Data analysis was conducted through a reflexive approach, theoretically driven with the influence of researcher subjectivity to generate themes that would best answer research questions whilst still retaining the freedom to allow themes to emerge inductively (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2019; 2020; Terry et al., 2017). Analysis took place simultaneously alongside data collection. This allowed for a more focussed data collection, exploring identified themes in greater depth in later interviews. Thus, analysis was able to capture shared patterns of meanings more organically throughout interview transcripts.

Thematic analysis broadly represents multiple approaches that identify and understand shared patterns of meaning across qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2019; Fugard & Potts, 2020). It focusses upon the identification, organisation, and interpretation of themes within qualitative transcripts (King & Brooks, 2019). Thematic analysis differs from “off-the-shelf” methodologies such as grounded theory and discourses analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2020), to instead pursue an experiential or reflexive approach to identify recurrent and distinctive themes subjectively perceived as relevant to the research (King & Horrocks, 2010; King & Brooks, 2019). Analysis occurs by understanding the phenomena researched by studying its individual parts, but those that cannot be observed in isolation: themes are identified in relation to the research questions, context, and theoretical framework (Roberts et al., 2019). It allows for a flexibility in theoretical and methodological approaches whilst

facilitating rich and detailed, yet complex, accounts of data from diverse perspectives of participants to highlight similarities and differences (Braun & Clarke, 2006; King, 2004).

Due to the flexibility afforded by thematic analysis, a specific statement on the types of analysis and underlying assumptions undertaken is required (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Following King & Brooks (2017), a *radical constructionist* approach was adopted, examining how phenomenon is constructed in organisational life with themes constructed from discourse and lived experiences. Furthermore, a reflexive approach to analysis was undertaken (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2019). The analysis process generated codes and themes subjectively that required reflection on how these were shaped by underlying assumptions and motivations of myself. Codes were theoretically and reflexively driven that best addressed the research aims rather than to solely pursue reliability and verifiability (Braun & Clarke, 2019; King & Brooks, 2019). Thus, Braun & Clarke's (2006; 2019) reflexive thematic analysis framework was followed: the familiarisation with data; initial coding; generating initial themes; reviewing and developing themes; refining, defining, and naming themes; and a final writing up stage.

Data familiarisation occurred alongside the data collection process. Brief notes were taken during interviews to highlight specific narratives, events, and opinions to act as probes for questions and to emphasise key themes. The manual transcription of interviews allowed for an interpretive understanding of data in relation to the wider theoretical framework prior to initial analysis. Finalised transcripts were preliminarily coded in isolation in a broadly semantic approach based upon explicit narratives (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Once an initial round of interviews was transcribed (approximately five), initial codes were analysed across interviews to capture shared patterns of meanings to generate first-order codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First-order codes described broad narratives, for example "long-working hours," "part-time contract but full-time hours" and "nepotism." At this stage,

sections of text often fell in multiple codes to reduce any loss of context through segmentation (Bryman, 2001).

Second-order codes were then generated in a latent approach to capture recurrent and valuable information that meaningfully addressed the research goals (Braun & Clarke, 2019; King & Brooks, 2017). Second-order codes were theoretically driven, aiming to capture implicit ideas throughout transcripts as opposed to the explicit, narrative-driven segments in first-order codes. All codes were ordered and described in NVivo to support future coding and to assist in grouping.

Upon completion, themes were latently conceptualised to capture theoretically driven meaningful information that described interpretative narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thus, a preliminary thematic map was created and applied to future transcripts,

Themes were continuously reviewed and refined throughout the research process. New codes generated that did not fit second-order codes or themes were reconsidered. For example, the importance of intersectional identities in careers emerged later in the data collection than the initial thematic map. Furthermore, theoretically driven analysis required themes to be reconceptualised and second-order codes to be compounded into a singular complex after becoming too diverse in meaning or did not hold sufficient evidence. For example, the second-order code 'recruitment' described difficulties participants encountered in progressing careers and fit within the 'comparative career development' theme. As data collection continued, the second-order concept lost its initial meaning due to a diversity in texts coded to include recruitment policies that favoured a masculine human capital. Similarly, the three separate themes of 'comparative career development,' 'gender' and 'socialisation' were combined to represent the theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity more holistically. The final thematic map used can be found in Table 4.

Table 4: Final thematic analysis procedure

Theme	First-order concept	Second-order concept	Additional codes	
Comparative career development	Cultural and social factors	Industry culture	Long working hours Masculine Culture Values	
		Social networking	Non-employment benefits Employment through networks Masculine context Sexual harassment	
	Occupational context	External mobilities	Barriers to progression	
		Internal progression		
		Part-time work	Part-time employment, full-time hours Perceptions of part-time work	
		Recruitment	External recruitment Internal recruitment	
	Policy, procedures and processes	Parental responsibilities	Incompatibility with parental roles	Working patterns Career penalties Stalled development
Strategies to address penalties			Leaving full-time work Outsourced (or no) childcare	
Performance metrics			Centrality of billables	Challenging women's performance Exerted effort Undervaluation of women's performance
Promotion and progression		Masculinised criteria	Human capital and meritocracy Narrow recruitment networks Policy as a barrier	
		No flexibility for deviation	Alternative career paths Part-time and flexible work	
Organisational resistance		Externalities	Client demands	
			Publicity	
	Procurement			
	Facilitating change	Leadership		
		Media attention New legislation		
	Leadership resistance	Apathy	Shaping narratives	
		Explicit resistance		
Reflexivity				
Legislation	Legal non-compliance			
	Problematising legislation			
Internal legitimacy	Contradictions			
	Inaction			



#### 5.4.2 Critical appraisal of thematic procedure

Critiques and limitations of thematic analysis were recognised throughout the analysis procedure. Primarily, where reliability and verifiability were not explicitly pursued through the data collection and analysis (Holloway & Tordes, 2003), a criterion of trustworthiness was applied throughout the research. Rich descriptions of data in the writing up phase were pursued, using participants' narratives as often as possible to provide the wider context they occurred within (Geertz, 1973; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; 1989). Additionally, themes generated were ensured as applicable across all data sources to ensure meaningful information is accessible for future use (Nowell et al., 2017; Starks & Trinidad, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Fragmentation was considered in the data analysis and writing up process where specific codes or segments of texts may lose valuable context. Following the philosophical assumptions that researchers co-create data with participants, only representing participants' responses can remove meaningful information (Potter & Hepburn, 2005; Silverman, 2017). Thus, where relevant, questions asked by the researcher, or any conversations occurring between researcher and participant, were included in coding and the presentation of findings. Furthermore, important context can also be lost on a person's wider circumstances when taking isolated segments of text from interview transcripts (Robert et al., 2019). Thus, Chapter 6 provides four in-depth case studies to retain the valuable information gained through narrative life-history interviews, and demographic information is included with all references to participants and is discussed in greater detail when beneficial.

Finally, the critiques of King & Brooks (2019) and Terry et al. (2017) were recognised: that thematic analysis can often rely upon solely identifying patterns in collected data following set procedures. Data analysis can amount to little more than providing descriptions of interview content (Chamberlain, 2000). However, the philosophical underpinnings of the research project aim to address such limitations. Language is recognised as a mode of communicating ideas between participants and researchers that needs to be rooted within a wider theoretical framework to understand a participant's narrative and subjective reality (Nowell, et al., 2017). Codes and themes were generated from a theoretical framework of

hegemonic masculinity to understand how common events and experiences throughout careers to concurrently penalise women's wages whilst supporting the careers of men that were not explicitly stated by participants. By rooting thematic analysis within theoretical and philosophical assumptions, a rigorous and systematic engagement with data can occur (Terry et al., 2017).

## Chapter 6. The middle-class, white male career path

The following chapter illuminates how career paths in the professional services are underpinned by assumptions of middle-class, white masculinity. It argues that narrowly defined, linear trajectories are imbued with penalties and privileges that marginalises those who do not assimilate into a hegemonic masculinity. Critically, specific practises across careers incur penalties in women's careers afforded bonuses for men. Navigating penalties reflected the strategies described by Tomlinson et al. (2013): conformance within or ultimate relocation out of the sector. The penalties and privileges incurred across careers are here described through four in-depth vignettes of participants' careers. The chapter does not aim to make empirical claims, but to be used to introduce the arguments built upon in the subsequent empirical chapters whilst still retaining the valuable narrative afforded through life-history interviews. It aims to provide an understanding of hegemonic masculinity through careers in the financial and legal sectors that remains embedded with an individual's wider social and cultural context (Potter & Hepburn, 2005; Miller, 2011; Robert et al., 2019).

The chapter first explores the career histories of two male directors in the legal sector. Although both describe different mechanisms of support afforded by social class, commonalities are drawn. I demonstrate how near constant commitment to the firm, the assimilation into masculine cultures, and out-of-hours social networking afford critical mechanisms of support across careers. Following this, the career histories of two women are presented to demonstrate how these mechanisms in men's career can act as a hegemonic masculinity. The first case study describes the career of Heather, a Chief Financial Officer in a London-based private equity firm, demonstrating a need to 'play the game' of assimilating into hegemonic masculinity and rejecting socially constructed femininities. Critically, I argue that even when undertaking strategies, femininities projected onto women can undermine their skills and subvert their value. Finally, the chapter explores the career of Paula in the legal sector. The case describes a marginalisation throughout her career that consequentially led to a relocation out of the sector, continuing in a legal occupation, but incurring an immediate pay cut and restricted earning capacities across her career.

## 6.1 Lads' culture, pints, and the path to partnership

Daniel is a partner in a London-based law firm. He described his job as “drafting and negotiating contracts, to run complex systems, to bring new clients in, serve existing clients, and build know-how to actually do the deals.” He described his firm as small, but market-leading, with a small partnership group, which was progressive on gender equality when compared to the rest of the marketplace.

Describing his career, Daniel was raised in a middle-class background in North London before attending a Russell Group university. Prior to university, he gained work experience through family connections in a London-based law firm, working in the post room to gain exposure to the sector. Upon completion of his university studies, Daniel describe difficulties in finding a training contract despite graduating with first-class honours due to his A-Level results:

“You’ve got a thousand applicants with 2:1’s and firsts, okay – who got shit A-levels? What school did they go to? No one had heard of my school...there was people who were much, much dimmer than me with training contracts.”

Daniel’s route to qualification was first based upon working as a paralegal in a firm known for offering training contracts internally. He described building strong relationships with his hiring managers, getting “along very well with her, but very, very well with him.” After working in the company and strengthening those relationships further, he was offered a training contract, consequentially qualifying in the firm before moving a top insurance litigation firm. The litigation culture was described as fun, but a “weird, ultra-masculine priesthood... you have to know the industry, it’s very jargon heavy.” Daniel recalled how he was “bubbling” along in his career, likely to become an insurance litigator until he met a “very charismatic guy” hired into the firm to start a department specialised on technology law. After building a relationship with him, Daniel was able to complete a training seat with the department. He described the move into technology law as “pure luck” but allowed him to qualify into a highly specialised role.

Post-qualification, Daniel undertook several secondment roles: one, in-house in a technology firm, and another launching a new communications company with a previous colleague. He described working extremely long hours, “but having a lot of fun.” It enabled him to gain skills positioned as critical to his career success that couldn’t be learned through law school or his legal training: communicating and interacting with people outside of the sector:

“Most of the people I was dealing with on a day-to-day basis are normal people. They think lawyers are weirdos. That’s when having that mixture of skills – the academic skills and the ability to just get on with people – started coming into its own. I think the further you get on, the more important is the ability to get on with people, because that’s how you generate business and build rapport. That’s harder to teach than how to draft a contract.”

Including secondments, Daniel remained with the firm for over ten years. He discussed loving the experience but believed he was able to succeed due to the culture. It was described as “incredibly blokey” and a “lads’ culture.” His ability to “drink pints and talk nonsense” was seen as significant to his achievements. Daniel did recognise that an inability for someone to participate in these cultures, regardless of gender, would impact their ability to succeed in the sector. However, he was quick to emphasise that engagement with a “lads’ culture” and expressions of a specific masculinity had to be controlled:

“I think the people who did best were the people who could codeswitch. That you could do the lads culture but weren’t just a lad. If you were just a lad, then people would look askance at you. You had to be just ‘laddy’ enough.”

Daniel left the firm due to redundancies, using the opportunity to move into an international firm. However, the cultural differences provided a much more negative experience. Daniel discussed a different type of masculinity that he failed to adapt to. In contrast to the cultures of “drinking pints and talking nonsense,” he was now working in a more “conservative” masculinity: “it was very much “who’s a good chap?” All public school, pinkie ring nonsense that...let’s put this way, I didn’t adapt very well.” Reflective of how Daniel saw that his masculinity would allow him to adapt into a lads’ culture more than a woman may be able to, he was able to “get the hang of it.” However, he believed he would never gain partnership in the firm due to the cultural differences, instead pursuing alternative work. He described his job search and finding his current firm hiring at partnership level by “pure luck.” After applying for the role, he was recruited into a partnership role through mutual friends in the sector between the hiring manager and himself:

“My interview started as a normal interview does before, we then started talking about our mutual connection. It went from an interview to going for a curry with the mutual friend. We established a connection based on that mutual – we knew people in common. In every industry you know people in common and I knew pretty much everyone who is a partner in my sector in London.”

The social connections throughout Daniel’s career were positioned as critical to his success. His masculinity allowed him to engage in a culture that widened his professional network, and his secondments allowed a diversity of experiences in multiple sectors of the law. Working outside of his firm allowed him to build relationships with partners in similar legal companies that he maintained throughout his career. Daniel argued he wasn’t “savvy” enough to leverage these his social connections to gain employment, but recognised the benefits of being well-known throughout the industry when applying for partnership roles:

“What I did know is that partners at my firm who were thinking about hiring me asked around and people like him said I was a great guy. They weren’t formal references, but you do due diligence on people at partner level. You absolutely do due diligence when you are hiring someone laterally as opposed to promoting someone.”

Despite recognising his ability to immerse himself in the masculinity cultures of the legal sector, Daniel did problematise this in relation to family life. He argued that the law on a whole was not family friendly, and that the long-hours cultures and the centrality billable hours was “destructive to family life.” He even expressed his own guilt and anger of missing events in his children’s life because of work demands. Client demands and case litigation had to be prioritised over his own preferences to be more involved in childcare to succeed in his career. Although Daniel firmly believed that to achieve greater gender equality more flexible approaches to working hours needs to be employed to support parental responsibilities: “if we have clients, a deal needs doing, and it needs doing now.” The constant commitment to client demands took precedent over his parental responsibilities, and deviation from this would inherently limit his career progression:

“Ultimately, how do you become a partner? By being a very good lawyer, by building a good rapport with clients.”

## 6.2 Oxbridge and professional social networks

George is a partner and Head of Department in a London-based law firm. Running a small department, he specialises in human rights and immigration, working to secure visas and permits for individuals to stay in the United Kingdom. Additionally, he holds managerial responsibilities, namely detailing financial and human resource problems. He describes his job as a “mixture of administration and the responsibilities that come with leading the team and my legal content of securing permits and visas for individuals and their family members.” However, as George described his career, he positioned it as an interesting journey, and one he believes isn’t stereotypical.

George studied English at an Oxbridge university, where he was heavily involved in student politics before working as a fundraiser for a human rights charity. He described being “terrible at it, I didn’t last very long doing it at all. I just threw it in because I thought I couldn’t do it.” Whilst looking for work, a friend passed information onto him regarding a part-time clerking role for a small criminal law firm in North London: “Basically, you went to court, to

police stations – which you could do without the qualifications then – taking notes in interviews, going to see people in prison, taking their statements and so on.” After briefly moving out of London to continue the role in a full-time capacity, he returned to the firm before deciding to qualify as a lawyer through a conversion course. Upon qualification, he undertook more immigration clerking provided through university friends already working in the sector.

“That helped subsidised my studies, my law studies. I needed something to live on. I was doing my studies full-time but working full-time doing my clerking. But I was able to rely upon a fair bit of support from family and so on.”

After completing his studies, he gained a training contract in a legal aid firm in which he already had strong social connections. Post-qualification, he moved into a new role working purely on immigration, asylum, and mental health before a quick succession of multiple legal aid firms. He discussed how the quick succession of different roles was critical in his career success. It not only allowed him to gain a reputation, but to begin to expand his social network in the sector:

“What it helped me do was establish – to get quite a lot of experience in different environments, establish my preferred ways of working and establish my reputation. They were all very different, but they were all very connected to the immigration legal community...I think if anything, it was that – the legal community – that has been the thing that has took me from place to another more than anything else.”

However, once legal aid funding was cut in England, he found it increasingly difficult to do the work he was passionate about at a high level. This prompted a change in his career path, instead looking to firms that were specialised with a high reputation for personal immigration law. After a quick succession of multiple firms, George stayed within “small, almost family firm” for ten years, eventually becoming a partner for the final two. Despite this, he felt he needed to move to a larger, city-based firm. He discussed how despite loving



the role he was doing; he didn't feel he was being paid enough for his work. Additionally, he was becoming increasingly aware that he had no pension and little financial security for the future. George therefore hired a career coach highly regarded from his personal network. He was encouraged to reach out to his professional network for advice and potential employment opportunities. A contact responded, recommending a previous colleague who had worked in similar firms and had a similar career path to George himself:

"I had a bit of a chat with him about what it was like working there and on the back of that I did a speculative application to the boss, now my predecessor. I didn't hear anything. Because I didn't hear anything, and it was the only place I'd expressed any.... I'd kind of fixed that's where I was going to do – because I didn't hear anything I felt a bit dispirited. I put it all aside for about six months and then I had some more coaching. She said "just bloody contact them. Don't just not contact them because you haven't heard back." I got back in touch with my predecessor and he obviously either hadn't seen – he didn't really clock the original speculative application. On the back of that he then said "look, why don't you come in for a chat?"

After interviewing for a role unsuccessfully, George was still given what was seen as vital feedback, encouraging him to expand his commercial knowledge and profile if he were to continue his career trajectory. Thus, George began "broadening my net in terms of where I might go" when he got a call back offering him a job. He recognised that this was an unorthodox approach from the hiring manager, and that he believed it's rare for firms to give feedback so directly. However, he emphasised the benefits he was afforded through his personal and professional network in securing the role.

"I think my initial way in was definitely through the network of immigration lawyers. It's a relatively small world, particularly of people my age. There's a generation who've been doing this for quite a while. If you were joking, you would say it's a bit of a mafia. But it's not a mafia, it's a small world of people who know each other quite well."

Since moving into the firm, George has been promoted to partnership and is current head of department.

Similar to the previous case study, George was quick to emphasise the importance of his personal and professional networks in helping him progress his career and pay. He discussed explicitly several experiences of this, whilst broadly recognising a consistent pattern. First, a connection from the firm he initially trained in made him aware of a potential job opening and then supported him in being recruited: “Then the pattern went from there.” A second example was given of a former colleague alerting him to a job opening for maternity cover that he applied for and was offered. Finally, he discussed a contact he had in what was seen as a great firm in South London. He described her attempts to “schmooze me because we got on really well,” offering him job opportunities that he never pursued. Finally, when work wasn’t work in his favour, George described picking up the phone and asking if there were any opportunities before being recruited by the firm.

“It was connections that I made along the way that got me those jobs, without a doubt. I didn’t see an advert in the Guardian or whatever and applied for it. I pulled in connections that I made to get the job.”

In contrast to Daniel’s ability to socialise within the lads’ culture of city-based law firm, George discussed a different culture he thrived in. He believed that his confidence initially developed in student politics at Oxbridge supported his ability to socialise and make those critical social connections. He saw himself as affable and communicative, able to have a good relationship with people who “aren’t from the same background as me.” “I move quite well in different circles like that” but hates networking events with “lawyers and financial people in ties sipping wine, talking to each other – I hate them. I’m always straight for the corner to find the person I know that I can have a chat with.” This ability to socialise was seen as critical to his career, in which he felt this made up for his lack of commercial law skills, allowing him to offer something different. He believed he was at ease making connections with people and was happy to socialise in environments where “a lot of wine got drunk, and we did a lot of

dancing... it was fun.” It was in these environments that George built the relationships that allowed him to succeed in his career through employment opportunities:

“I don’t think I would have found the jobs that I have had had it not been for the importance of socialisation. I think every single job has pretty much come through a connection of some sort, just different ones over the years. But absolutely.”

Finally, George explicitly explored how his middle-class privileges had been critical to his career success. He discussed the rational decision to choose immigration law based off his own political beliefs despite the knowledge that it was underpaid compared to alternative sectors of the law. He was aware that had he chosen to pursue commercial law he would be earning a higher salary than he is now, but he never had to consider that as a priority. Instead, he was still able to specialise within a narrow, and difficult to enter, area of the law without financial considerations:

“I think, if I’m being reflective, having privilege can help you run your life like that. I think having the security of having a relatively wealthy background and that behind you can give you a confidence you might not have if you were really worried about not being able to have somewhere to rent. Even though I was very, very broke for quite a long period in my life I always knew ultimately, if it all went tits up, I’d just jump on the train and ask my mum for money. I know that security does make a difference in how you can run your life. In a sense it enabled me, it gave me the luxury of deciding to work in an area where I was going to be really badly paid.”

### 6.3 Playing the game in an alpha-male field

Heather works as a chief financial officer in a London-based private equity firm. She described the majority of her career had been within a singular firm, before spending the more recent years moving between a “spate of maybe three or four jobs: typically for a year and a half,

two years.” Throughout her career, she described an “incredible alpha-male” culture that presented difficulties to her progression.

Heather trained to be a management accountant with an international investment bank based in Surrey. She described the early years of her career as working “in the back office” where she would consistently see women “essentially being screwed over.” After five years in the firm, she managed a small team of five people but increasingly grew frustrated in the role. She described how the female-dominated back-office roles she had been working in were underpaid and offered fewer promotion opportunities. After multiple requests for pay rises, promotions, or lateral moves into different functions within the firm had been turned down, she resigned from her position to seek alternative opportunities:

“There was the typical thing where I resigned, and I immediately was offered a forty percent pay rise and moved to the front office. It wasn’t given to me when I asked for it, only when I resigned, I was offered it.”

One of the difficulties Heather described during her time within the firm was a complete absence of mentoring or support. Careers were constructed as self-directed, where people were expected to build their own networks, and to identify and pursue their own development. There was a hierarchy within the firm, where her development was seen as “very, very low in the pecking order – but that is the investment guy mentality.” Heather noted that even when formal mentoring was provided to her, the development of male-dominated front-office staff was prioritised:

“a couple of times the person who was meant to mentor me didn’t want to – and were very clear about it – but they were willing to mentor investment [front office] guys.”

After spending a total of ten years with her initial firm, Heather moved into a large, “male-dominated organisation.” The decision to move was described as difficult for her, although she believed that staying within the firm for as long as she had was bad for career. Heather believed that she had fewer experiences and opportunities to learn than if she had moved between firms earlier in her career, with her work becoming relatively repetitive: “you

do ten years at the place, but you're doing eight years of the same work and only two years are different". Heather stated that she was very well paid in the firm, receiving what she currently is in a more senior position. However, she didn't feel there was the possibility to progress in her firm, and made the rational decision to leave despite any loss of income:

"They were real outliers in pay which made it kind of difficult for me to move because I would have to take a wage cut to become more senior at another organisation."

Heather has since moved between a number of firms within the private equity sector, predominantly within Chief Finance Officer or Head of Investor Relations functions. She described feeling somewhat of an outlier in a "incredibly alpha-male" culture that created barriers that she has had to overcome. She believed that her position as a Northern woman in a middle-class, London-based industry marginalised her both within firms and in networking events. Heather described an "old boy's club" that viewed her behaviour differently than if exhibited by men:

"You put your hand up and say you don't understand something at a conference, you're viewed differently as a woman. It's like "she doesn't understand, bless her" whereas if it's a man it's like "oh gosh, there must be a really interesting nuance here that we've missed"".

Heather emphasised that the perceptions of her femininity was conflated with a northern accent which created a perception that she was "a bit thick, and that has made networking even more difficult." She described a clear distinction between herself as a "northern, female" and working with an "awful lot of people from Oxbridge" where she "just didn't have the connection" that other men in the sector would: "you are constantly trying to find different ways to connect with people." Heather described a tendency for men to "mansplain things" to herself and other women, undervaluing their own skills failing to see the value in her contributions. She believed that she wasn't gaining the benefits drawn from mentoring and personal networks that were naturally afforded to men, as previously described by George and Daniel. Thus, she initiated her own personal networks of women to

address the failure of her firm and the sector to support her in the same ways it had supported men:

“I set up this very small network of maybe six, seven women and we used to mail each other little queries. Maybe one was a compliance expert, one finance expert and they were willing to say, “I don’t know” and to ask a question, and equally be willing to share and help each other. But that was literally a group of women that I initiated and put together which continues.”

Despite the challenges faced of being a Northern woman in an “alpha-male” culture, Heather believed many of the barriers faced by other women in networking didn’t apply to her. She described a culture akin to that of Daniel’s “lad culture” of “drinking pints and talking nonsense” into which she could assimilate.

“I think I had that less, simply because as I said, I like going out, I like drinking. I have got quite a rivalled sense of humour and there was a lot of sexism... I don’t know, that were quite – just daft jokes that I must confess, I found quite amusing. I didn’t find it misogynist at all, I didn’t particularly find it sexist, so I kind of manged okay because of that I would say.”

More recently in her career, Heather highlighted major difficulties emerging from maternity leave and childcare responsibilities. Despite her husband undertaking the majority of parental responsibilities, including six-months of paternity leave allowing her to return to work soon after childbirth, undermining assumptions were made of her capabilities and capacities. The long working hours culture was seen to directly conflict with her responsibilities as a mother. Despite working beyond the traditional nine-to-five, Heather described her colleagues believing she lacked commitment to the firm:

“When I was pregnant, I remember getting in at six in the morning. I would be the one turning on the lights in the office. Other people would turn up at about half eight, but

then I would leave at half five, six and in my appraisal, I had been told I had been slacking off, I hadn't been working hard... oh my god."

Heather described a culture in which presenteeism was conflated with performance. Her performance in a "compressed working day" was perceived as less than that of equally performing men who worked more hours in the office. She found her parental responsibilities were used as a "dog-whistle" to critique her working hours and perceived performance levels, with her time out of the office critiqued in ways not present in men's careers:

"There's certain things that are acceptable and there are things that are not acceptable. For a woman to go home and see your child, it is not acceptable. For a man to go and play squash, play golf, do whatever, it's acceptable. Long hours, different people benefit and suffer from the in different ways, I think."

Despite the barriers faced by Heather, she has attained an executive position comparative of Daniel and George. When asked how, Heather replied by "working damn, damn hard." She described a need to "prove herself," where her femininity would always work against her in a hyper-masculine culture. Thus, she developed specialist skills not immediately required in her role to prove a level of competency above her male colleagues to justify her seniority:

"You are a woman; you have to prove yourself. You are with alpha males; you have to prove yourself. I chose to prove myself by knowing my stuff inside out."

Additionally, Heather outlined several strategies she had employed throughout her career to address the challenges faced by her femininity. She described an element of "playing the game," and "knowing when to fight battles," a conformance into hyper-masculine cultures when required, but also emphasising the expectations of her femininity when required:

“I’ve been told time and time again that you do not offer the tea and coffee. What I’ve always done as a way of ironing out and controlling the room because you all have to look at me, I am the one talking, I can butt in any conversations and ask if you want tea and then I can control the conversation. I doubt a man has to think of these strategies. I have lots of these little daft strategies that show I am the person in authority because otherwise you’ll immediately be considered not to be the person in authority. That is the default.”

Heather however still recognised that her femininity created innate barriers throughout her sector that had to be navigated that did not exist in men’s careers. She explored having to justify her position and skills throughout the sector: her femininity was perceived as incongruent with senior management within the sector. Beyond the difficulties of maternity leave and a restricted professional network was the idea “that you are constantly going against the default thinking.”

#### 6.4 Marginalisation and relocation

Paula works as the Head of Legal for a public sector body. As an in-house lawyer, she described her role as providing advice on strategic issues, but also managing a team of lawyers that required supervision, prioritising workloads, and managing budgets. Although Paula qualified and worked for close to a decade in the private sector, she moved to an in-house function due to increasing frustrations with the commercial aspects of the law.

Paula gave a brief overview of her career before specifically exploring the reasons she eventually left the sector. After completing her university studies, she undertook her legal training with a London-based law firm specialising in public health. After qualifying, she moved out of London to undertake a position in professional and health care regulation in a Lancashire-based firm. Paula described several reasons for leaving London. Primarily, the work life balance in city-based firms, alongside the lifestyle of working full-time in London, didn’t suit her. Secondly, she failed to obtain an NQ position in her firm despite these being advertised. Paula described feedback in her interview around concerns of her working ability



that had never been raised before. When she challenged these, she believed the reason she was rejected for the position was the cultural differences between herself and a middle-class, masculine culture in the firm:

*“I got the feeling I was quite different to the partners I would have been working for. They were both men, but also my accent...I’m the first in my family to go to university, I didn’t grow up disadvantaged or anything, but I am from a working-class background. One of the things I struggled with was learning how to talk and find things in common with these people who had much – quite frankly – posher backgrounds than me and were interested in different things to me. I found that very difficult.”*

The middle-class cultures of social networking was something Paula struggled with throughout her career in the private sector. She described a sense of isolation as an introvert who struggled to engage with the culture. She recognised that to succeed in the legal sector, you had to “go out and socialise with people and get in front of clients, but these are people who are from a completely different world to me.” Paula described social events built around a middle-class masculinity and alcohol, although these environments were open to women if they conformed to these cultures. She felt like the legal sector was not built for “introverts like me,” in which she was marginalised due to being uncomfortable in business development.

*“It felt very much like women were welcome if... the traits you were expected to show there were traditionally masculine traits. It was loud, drinking – not necessarily sexualised but if someone made a sexist or perhaps inappropriate comment it was expected that the women just laughed along or ignored it – one thing I was told once in a session for women in a law firm is “sometimes you have to act like one of the men to get ahead.”*

Paula found the initial movement out of London-based firms difficult. She was reliant upon recruiters but described a reluctance on their part to find suitable roles. She described not feeling like a priority for recruiters, partly because of the commission-oriented nature of

the role, but also her reluctance to move into a commercial role. Thus, Paula felt like she wasn't afforded the benefits attained by others where recruiters focussed upon other clients.

After moving firms, Paula started experiencing an increasing frustration with private sector law. She believed that she was one of the few lawyers who actually "enjoyed the law" and her roles were increasingly focussed upon "billing targets and business development." Paula's own skills and abilities were starting to become undervalued throughout her career. Paula didn't have any family commitments and was happy to commit to long working hours but felt that she wasn't valued on the "quality of the work you did, it was how many hours you could do." The business development she contributed to through an understanding of legal technicality wasn't attributed to Paula, instead "benefiting other people in the organisation" who "went out and got the deal done." She believed that people who were more interested in the law, "and less so the business relationship" weren't valued as highly:

*I was put on a new business development project out at a business park. A lot of the work that people needed out there was in different areas of law than what I worked in. I would have the first meetings and then put them in touch with the right people, but that never actually generated money for my team even if it generated money for other teams.*

After moving out of London, Paula started noticing fewer opportunities were available to her. Despite her firm having offices across England, including London, there was a stark disadvantage to her career progression by being based in Lancashire. Higher quality work was available in London and would be retained in London: "it felt like they would go to the people based in London every time; it was a case of out of sight, out of mind." Increasingly, Paula found that the geographical location and the relationships between colleagues was superseding the skills and abilities that she demonstrated:

*"By the end it was acknowledged that the partners in London would share the work with the associates in London but wouldn't come to our team for it. It meant that people*

*in London were progressing and being promoted faster than I was purely because of their location and their relationship with the partners down there which I couldn't have because I needed a business case to go down to London every time and it was always a rarity to see me."*

The increasing frustrations led to Paula looking at options outside of the private sector. She gravitated towards in-house roles despite knowing she would incur a loss of income on future earnings as she believed that her skills were not valued in the "traditional way law firms work." She believed she was one of the only people that enjoyed the law but wasn't rewarded for this, and that her progression opportunities were stunted because of the movement out of London. Paula believed people like her, who liked to work on "technical aspects of the law," weren't valued. Thus, working in a public sector firm allowed her to work with clients she enjoyed and felt that she was valued. Paula described coming to the slow realisation that she was very highly skilled as a lawyer, but this wouldn't be appreciated in a sector increasingly focussed on business development:

*"Public law naturally involves public sector bodies a lot and that's where they opportunities I was interested in were. It meant less billing, less business development, and more time on not just giving a piece of legal advice but actually seeing a project through to completion."*

## 6.5 Conclusion

This chapter illustrates how career paths in the professional services are embedded with assumptions of middle-class, white masculinity. Specific practises and processes in the sector present barriers to women's careers not faced by men that require conformance to succeed or an ultimate relocation out of the sector (e.g., Cahusac & Kanji, 2013; Tomlinson et al., 2013). Progression to partnership roles are underpinned with cultures of long working hours, out-of-hours social networking and recruitment restricted within elite and class-based social networks. Although the women interviewed were able to engage in these practises, they still experienced a marginalisation from their own femininity. The conflation of hours worked with performance undervalued their own high performance, be it through a "compressed working

day” described by Heather or the focus upon business development rather than technical expertise described by Paula. However, the women whose case studies have been provided have attained success in their careers. They emphasised hard work beyond what was required by men, skills development to justify their seniority, an engagement with masculine cultures. Critically, their success demanded specific strategies. For Paula, it was the relocation out of private sector. For Heather, there was conformance within the practises and an element of ‘playing the game.’ As noted by Tomlinson et al. (2013), these strategies inherently reproduce hegemonic masculinity where there is no space for women to challenge the structures of inequalities faced.

These structures of inequalities that maintain men’s dominant position in the sector will now be explored in greater detail. The following chapter explores hegemonic masculinity through cultural and structural penalties incurred across the career span. Long-working hours, the marginalisation of femininity, and the masculinity of social networking will be problematised as a central barrier to women’s career progression in the professional services. Furthermore, I argue that the narrow, linear career path to partnership in the professional services restricts women’s abilities to attain the highest paid roles.

## Chapter 7: Cultural and structural penalties in the financial and legal professions

The following chapter builds upon the arguments introduced in Chapter 6. By exploring the mechanisms of support and penalties across all participants, I argue that the culture and structure of careers in the financial and legal professions can explain current unaccounted for elements of the gender pay gap. Careers in the professional services are underpinned with assumptions of masculinity, penalizing those whose experiences, skills and expertise divert from narrowly defined frameworks. Wage penalties are therefore identified directly and indirectly across the career span.

Several contributions are made. First, the chapter responds to the calls of Grimshaw & Rubery (2015) and Lips (2013b) to explore discriminations occurring within the ontological experiences of women's careers. Penalties are identified in negative assumptions of femininity and persistent gendered work prescribed to women that fails to provide equal progression opportunities across careers. Furthermore, the need to conform to a hegemonic masculinity incurs penalties in those who reject cultural and structural working practices. Thus, penalties are identified directly in the form of lower wages or fewer bonuses received, and indirectly across the career span in ceilings enacted on earning capacities. Finally, a novel contribution is made through a notion of "glass bubbles." The restricted or stagnated careers trajectories of women unable to embody masculine practices placed them within "glass bubbles": occupations divergent from traditional career paths, isolated from organisational hierarchies and incurring lower pay and prestige with little career progression routes.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, working patterns are problematised. It explores the penalties incurred when individuals are unable to engage extreme working hours, where performance is conflated with physical presence in the workspace. Secondly, the chapter argues that performance metrics act as a hegemonic masculinity. Performance is constructed to support the careers of men, where the high-performance of women is challenged as illegitimate. Thus, implications affect bonuses and wages received. Third, the chapter explores a culture of masculinity. Cultural factors are integrated into the

understanding of the gender pay gap, demonstrating how women's labour is assumed to be supportive of, rather than equal to, men's careers. Finally, the chapter problematizes the narrow definitions of careers in the professional services. Critically, it argues that the industry fails to see the value in a diversity of experiences and skills, penalizing those who divert from a masculine norm.

## 7.1 Working patterns and wage penalties

The following section argues that the working patterns of the financial and legal professions penalise the wages of women whilst concurrently supporting those of men. Extreme working patterns are compounded by the need for out-of-hours networking occurring within masculine spaces. Wage penalties are identified when individuals cannot engage in demanded hours through fewer promotion opportunities. The conflation of long-hours with performance constructs negative perceptions of an individual's suitability for promotions, restricting earning capacities. Furthermore, the inability to engage in out-of-hours networking hinders a person's job and business development opportunities positioned as central to career development.

### 7.1.1 Extreme working patterns, physical presence, and motherhood penalties

Physical presence in the office<sup>11</sup> assumed a notion of commitment and capability as noted by Gorman (2005; 2015) and Kornberger et al. (2011): "ultimately, how else do you become a partner?" (Daniel, Partner, Law). Engagement with long-hours is constructed as an inevitability in attaining highly paid positions, but are here centered a hegemonic masculinity in the gender pay gap. Extreme working patterns are positioned as a "very male set up of the working day" (Deborah, Director, Law) that penalise the wages of those who do not, or cannot, practice them.

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<sup>11</sup> Prior to periods of remote working and increasing flexibility from COVID-19.

Penalties were most present when motherhood and childcare were present. Parental responsibilities directly impacted on working patterns, with several participants describing an inability to engage with the work demanded (Andrea, Risk & Auditing, Banking; Sarah, Senior Associate, Law). For some, this conflict contributed to leaving the sectors to continue the profession in an in-house capacity despite incurring a wage penalty for doing so. For example, Donna (Lawyer, Auxiliary Sector) said that the inability to “negotiate throughout the night, arguing over every nitty-gritty bit” resulted in lower business development opportunities and a restricted career trajectory. Similarly, Sarah (Senior Associate, Law) described leaving her firm to a less well-paid position to reconcile parental demands with working patterns due to negative assumptions of her working abilities when not committing to hours undertaken by men. Despite being problematised by women as unattainable with childcare, extreme working hours to achieve pay and career progress was positioned as an inevitability by men.

“The very male set up of the working day will render women incapable of looking after home commitments. Because they’re expected to hit their desks at half seven in the morning and not leave until late at night you’re left with a very stark choice” Deborah, Director, Law.

The hegemonic masculinity of working patterns further penalized women’s wages in the construction of acceptable absences during the working day. Time outside of the office space was viewed negatively when associated with caring responsibilities, whilst men had the ability to “go for a coffee or go to the gym” (Heather, Chief Finance Officer, Banking). Men’s leisure time was aligned with extreme working patterns, conflating physical presence in the office beyond traditional hours with performance rather than actual work completed (Leslie, Associate, Law). In contrast, women had to justify absences for childcare responsibilities to navigate perceptions they were not as committed to the firm (Carol, Risk & Auditing, Finance; Sarah, Senior Associate, Law; Mary, Chief of Staff, Finance).

“If you’re having to justify your need to have logistics, there is always this “they’re not working quite as hard” type of thing; “they’re not really as committed. Bullshit, I’m way more committed than the guy that has no pull on their time. It’s really easy to turn up if you’ve got nothing else to do. It’s really hard if you’ve got a little person who’s

dependant on you. I'm way more committed! I just haven't got the flexibility that 25-year-old Joe Bloggs does. That's really missed, that dichotomy of the two is completely missed." Mary, Chief of Staff

Pay penalties can therefore be identified. Direct penalties are observed in the cases of Sarah & Donna: the movement to lower-paid occupations to reconcile working demands. Indirect penalties are further identified in the cases of Leslie, Mary, & Carol. Promotion opportunities were not as accessible due to negative perceptions of commitment to the profession when not practicing long-working hours. Thus, career trajectories and earning potential are stagnated across the life span. For example, despite working to contracted hours, Carol (Risk & Auditing, Banking) experienced stagnated pay due to an inability to complete the additional hours due to her responsibilities as a single mother:

"The fact that you have to work extra-long hours automatically writes off a lot of women. If you have elderly parents, you are going home to look after your mum and dad. You've got to be really on it. You've got to be in early. You've got to work super long hours. Who's able to do that predominantly?"

### 7.1.2 Out-of-hours networking and business development

The requirement to develop professional relationships and conduct business development aligned with extreme working hours problematizes the working patterns of the financial and legal professions. As explored in Chapter 6, networking accesses promotion and job opportunities, training, and business development centered as critical to career progression. This section therefore argues that the time and social contexts networking occurs within acts as hegemonic masculinity.

Networking events critical to career progression occurred within heavily masculine time and social contexts. As outlined in Chapter 6, Daniel (Partner, Law) described a "lad's culture" where his ability to "drink pints and talk nonsense" was central to his success, whilst



George (Partner, Law) built his professional networking where “a lot of wine got drunk, we did a lot of dancing – it was fun”. Although Matthew (Partner) stated that he didn’t enjoy socialising in the “male biased social environments,” there was “plenty of opportunities for that!” The late-night drinking cultures were common across interviews, described as a “work hard, play hard culture” (Paula, Senior Associate, Auxiliary) reliant on a “heavy drinking culture...social events always involved alcohol” (Kimberly, Change Director, Finance). Masculine cultures spilled into client development, often occurring within sports events (Diane, Director, Finance; Michelle, Head of Change, Finance; Donna, Lawyer, Auxiliary; Catherine, Lawyer, Auxiliary). A small number of participants described celebrations and bonding between men occurring in sexualised environments. Networks between men were strengthened within strip clubs and brothels despite recognising this could place women in uncomfortable situations<sup>12</sup> (Diane, Director, Finance; Michelle, Head of Department, Finance):

“I know when I was working as a paralegal they would have these partners – corporate team – and he would take trainees out to strip clubs. Women, men, all the trainees would be invited. But really? Seriously? Would a lot of the female trainees would want to go there? They would go out for a meal or a drink and end in the strip club” (Catherine, In House Lawyer).

The social environment of networking is therefore positioned as a central practice of hegemonic masculinity in the gender pay gap. Although women were not explicitly excluded from attending, an implicit marginalization is identified. Participants discussed not being invited to sports-based networking due to assumptions they wouldn’t be interested in the event (Diane, Director, Finance; Michelle, Head of Change, Finance; Shannon, Trainee Solicitor, Law), creating “blokes clubs with senior partners”. Furthermore, drinking cultures with sexualized and racially charged banter minimized women’s participation in industry-based networking. For example, Sarah (Senior Associate, Law) and Jodie (Programme Manager, Finance) expressed discomfort attending networking due to not drinking, avoiding

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<sup>12</sup> Considerations regarding time and the evolution of professional standards in firms is required here. Interviews did not explore the time-context of the events discussed with participants, so assumptions this continues to occur in present day careers can be problematic.

events entirely. Finally, several women explored how a sexualized social environment marginalized their participation at best, or an absolute exclusion at worst. Drinking cultures led to “senior leaders getting pissed and snogging a young girl from a contact center on the dancefloor” (Donna, Lawyer, Auxiliary), creating unsafe environments in events constructed as critical for career development (Deborah, Director, Law; Mary, Chief of Staff, Finance; Suzanne, Director, Law). Although participants explained that the culture of the sector was slowly changing, experiences earlier in their careers excluded their participation and penalized careers. For example, Linda (Head of Business Development, Finance) described “inappropriate ‘me-too’ stuff” that made herself and other women vulnerable to sexual harassment:

“It’s quite a vulnerable thing to do actually...I’ve made it my business to make it clear that it’s quite a vulnerable position, that sales job, to try and set up stuff to make it clear people don’t have to put up with it. People can come to me if they want help, and I’ll believe them”

It is important to note that not all women interviewed experienced this: several participants described drinking cultures but didn’t experience this as a barrier (Paula, Senior Lawyer, Auxiliary; Kimberly, Change Director, Finance; Donna, Lawyer, Auxiliary). However, this required an emotional detachment from sexist behaviours. For example, Paula (Senior Lawyer, Auxiliary) argued events welcomed women assuming they “showed traditionally masculine traits.” She described environments that were not “necessarily sexualised” but prevalent with “sexist or perhaps inappropriate comments” that expected women to “laugh along or just ignore it.” Similarly, Carol (Risk & Auditing, Finance) experienced difficulties engaging due to the humour used:

“Its usually men are... it’s always like banter and if you don’t like it then you’re ‘quite sensitive’: “oh right, don’t get your knickers in a twist” ...that sort of thing. It’s a culture of it’s okay to crack jokes and it’s just a joke. Laddish behaviours in a negative way, you know?”

As described by Holgersson (2013) and Hudson et al. (2017), social networks access job offers, performance support and mentoring. This section builds such arguments, to identify marginalisation and exclusion that incurs penalties across the career span. Restricted networks limits the client development and professional networks undertaken centred as critical in attaining promotions and pay progression (Vickie, Director, Finance; Sarah, Senior Associate, Law). Thus, a ceiling is placed upon promotion capacities not experienced in the careers of men.

“It’s building your network. That’s what I missed out on. Because I was trying to balance what I had, so I tried get my work done and see my family. What then misses out is your networking. I had a much more limited network than other people at my level. People just didn’t know who I was, and that then means that you miss out on job offers and stuff.” Linda, Head of Business Development, Finance.

## 7.2 The masculinity of performance

The following section argues that the reconfiguration of demanded skills from technical abilities to entrepreneurial abilities undervalues women’s skills that fall outside narrow, masculinized measures. Wage penalties are identified through lesser bonuses and promotion opportunities received due to a conflation of business development and long-working hours with performance. Additionally, performance policies disproportionately reward male-dominated functions, failing to provide reflective opportunities to women-dominated specialisms. Critically, where women demonstrated high performance, this was challenged as illegitimate, or performance shifted to subjective, vague measures.

### 7.2.1 The masculinity of performance and entrepreneurial skills

Notions of ideal workers and the performance were constructed upon billable hours charged, reliant on long-working hours and entrepreneurial skills in masculine social environments. Skills and behaviours outside of narrow constructions were not equally rewarded through pay and bonuses received and indirectly penalized through restricted promotion opportunities.

As described in section 7.1, extreme working hours were perceived as an inevitability in the careers of those aspiring to director and partnership positions regardless of gender. During the junior stages of careers, performance is reliant upon billable hours completed, with work outside of contracted hours seen as a “badge of honor” (Rachel, Inclusion and Diversity Manager, Law; Charlotte, Associate Solicitor, Law). The conflation of hours completed over actual performance thus favored the career progression of those able to complete these. Participants who worked to contracted hours were perceived as underperforming regardless of actual performance (Andrea, Risk & Auditing, Finance), and their commitment to the profession questioned (Carol, Risk & Auditing, Banking).

Extending the arguments of Anderson-Gough et al. (2000) and Carter & Spence (2014), the reconstruction of performance away from technical expertise penalised the wages of women through restricted promotion opportunities. Billable hours and entrepreneurial skills were positioned as central to promotion, reconstructing technical abilities as peripheral “that can be hired in... you can recruit council to do your technical work, so you don’t really need to know what you are doing” (Suzanne, Director, Law). Thus, technical expertise in finance and the law are undervalued. For example, Paula (Lawyer, Auxiliary) expressed frustration when working in the legal sector that eventually led to a relocation. Technical skills were not valued equally as colleagues conducting business development despite Paula conducting the legal research required for successful business development:

“You weren’t valued on the quality of the work you did. It was how many hours you could work. One of the arguments I ended up have was that a lot of the business development I was doing ended up benefiting other people in the organisation apart from me and my manager. That wasn’t really recognised.”

Thus, the reconstruction of performance to entrepreneurial skills is centralised as a hegemonic masculinity in the gender pay gap. Wages are penalised indirectly over the career course through restricted promotion opportunities, where women are not perceived as suitable to move into more senior positions. For some participants, this manifested itself into a stagnated career path, attaining highly paid partnership and director roles later in their

careers (Suzanne, Director, Law), whilst for others it was a barrier faced at the time of data collection (Andrea, Risk & Auditing, Finance; Carol, Risk & Auditing, Finance; Charlotte, Associate Solicitor, Law). Critically, participants navigated hegemonic masculinity by relocating out of the legal sector and into, in-house legal occupations to facilitate promotions despite incurring an immediate loss of pay and enacting a ceiling on earning potential (Paula, Lawyer, Auxiliary).

### 7.2.2 The reconstruction of performance to maintain hegemony

The reconstruction of performance implicitly attributes billable hours and entrepreneurial skills as masculine. Women's success relies upon mimicking the behaviours of successful men in male-dominated specialisms. Critically, women's performance failed to attain the benefits afforded to men. Rather, alternative factors superseded women's skills. Thus, hegemonic masculinity is maintained through the justification of disproportionate rewards despite equal performance though meritocratic or social capital rationales.

Promotion structures throughout the financial and legal sectors were emphasised as meritocratic: that career success is underpinned by hard performance. "I was told it was based on merit and performance, it's all a meritocracy" (Natalie, Associate, Law). In the legal sector, Post Qualification Experience (PQE) blocked women's progression into senior, higher paid roles. PQE relied on assumptions of continuous, full-time employment, and was used to rationalise differential promotion opportunities over actual performance and skills. The conflation of cumulative years within a firm with suitability for increasingly senior roles thus restricts progression in the early stages of careers. Often, contradictory discourses obscured structures of inequality. For example, Deborah (Director, Law) described how lower performing, less-experienced men would attain partnership before herself due to their greater PQE. Like several women faced with these ceilings, Deborah left the organisation to facilitate this movement. Natalie (Associate, Law) further explored the contradictions of meritocracies undermined by PQE. Her organisation valued her performance, telling her "my ability was better than my PQE." However, when applying for promotions she was told "she couldn't be promoted because on paper I didn't have the right PQE":

“But if you are telling me I am doing the work of someone at the next level I don’t understand why that should make a difference? That annoyed me!”

Women skills are undervalued and superseded by masculinities despite equal performance, marginalising careers, and obscuring structures of inequalities where meritocratic conditions are emphasised. This is exemplified further where the social relationships of men are valued higher than the skills of women. Despite high performance in narrowly defined performance measure, participants described men being favoured for promotion opportunities due to their connections. Three participants explored these barriers to promotion in depth.

First, Shannon (Trainee Solicitor, Law) cited difficulties securing training contracts within her firms despite billing “higher, maybe twice as high” as male colleagues. The firm was one known for internally promoting and training solicitors, with Shannon being explicitly told “don’t go anywhere”. Thus, she continued to sustain high performance but continuously saw promotion opportunities offered to men “simply because they were blokes”. Critically, Shannon believed the social relationships between men were used to justify the disproportionate rewards despite her high performance.

“My face didn’t fit, and I wasn’t a bloke. I think if I had had been, I would have gotten the job, gotten the promotions.”

Similarly, Michelle (Head of Change, Finance) found pay disparities between herself and colleagues in the same role despite “doing the same job if not a harder one because I had more clients...we had the exact same level of responsibilities, but I was performing over and better than some of the others.” Like Shannon, Michelle exhibited skills in masculinised performance policy failed to attain the benefits afforded to men. Instead, alternative factors were introduced that superseded women’s performance: for Shannon, this was social relationships; for Michelle, pay disparities were justified in meritocratic terms through colleagues’ longer tenure in the firm.

Finally, Sarah (Senior Associate, Law) explored how she was recognised by her organisation as performing above her job title and equally to those in partnership levels but failed to attain the benefits of this. Sarah found herself consistently compared to a male counterpart “who was always higher than me in seniority and in salary” without the intention to promote her. Sarah was asked to cover for her senior counterpart when he had to take time off work due to illness, being told “it was a great opportunity”:

“...but I wasn’t on the partnership track, right? I did his work, and it went really well. He became a partner a couple of months later and I had to move to a new law firm because I was so unhappy because it brought nothing to me. After being so vocal for so many years, seeing a guy who didn’t deserve it but became a partner there: I decided to move.”

For Shannon, Michelle, and Sarah, the benefits of high performance in masculinised performance criteria were unattainable. Exhibiting the behaviours constructed as central to career success failed to challenge the hegemony of men’s; they could be embodied but not fully attained (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Thus, direct penalties are observed through the explicit within-role wage gaps, the failure to reward work completed at a higher pay grade and restricted of promotion opportunities. However, wider inferences can be made to organisational gender pay gaps. In all cases described, the participants left their respective organisations to facilitate promotions and pay rises. Thus, contributions are made to gender pay gap literature in the failure to retain highly skilled women who intended to move into senior management positions within elite-city based firms. Women’s underrepresentation in senior positions is therefore reinforced, maintaining men’s dominance in highly paid positions.

### 7.2.3 Moving the goalposts of women’s performance

Even when performing highly in masculinized frameworks, women’s performance was challenged as illegitimate, often having objective measures then moved to vague, subjective measures. Hegemonic masculinity is therefore maintained through multiple means. The need to conform to a masculine norm persists, in which performance is only seen within one means

that cannot be challenged. However, women wages are penalized through the reconstruction of performance targets failing to reward high performance through wages and bonuses received and promotion opportunities.

The challenge of women's performance as illegitimate undermined skills and abilities. For example, Deborah (Director, Law) described incurring penalties through lesser wages and a stagnated career trajectory early in her career through a 'moving of the goalposts.' Despite outperforming male colleagues, this was publicly challenged as incorrect and penalised:

"Our chargeable targets were discussed in a group meeting every Monday morning in front of support staff. I was recording a hundred and fifty to a hundred and sixty percent of my chargeable target's week in week out. These two were doing fifty to sixty percent, week in week out. Instead of them being told to pull their socks up I was publicly told I must be recording my time wrong."

Furthermore, the targets of high-performing women were reconstructed, penalising wages and restrict equal rewards. For example, Heather (Chief Financial Officer, Finance) described incurring penalties to bonuses received through a moving of the goalposts. Despite meeting financial targets, bonuses were penalised by managers who argued she lacked the social skills. Heather was told she was aggressive and rude to staff and, after apologising despite believing this was untrue, was told "it was absolute bollocks...but that was allowed to go against me and decrease my bonus."

A 'moving of the goalposts' indirectly incurred penalties across the carer span, enacting ceilings on career progression. For example, Suzanne (Director, Law) described this process being used by a previous firm to justify not promoting her into director roles despite being the most suitable candidate. Although the attainment of leadership positions being framed upon financial performance, demands were shifted to "*soft skills*" to justify the ceiling placed upon her earnings:



“I came out of that promotion course going “okay, what are my billable targets?” “Oh, you don’t need a billable target. Your development points are this, this, and this.” I’m going how do you want me to demonstrate them? “Well, we don’t know. That’s up to you because part of being a director and showing leadership, so we want you to show leadership.” How would you like me to show leadership? What target do you want me to meet to get promoted? “No, no, no. It’s not about billable hours, it’s all about showing that you are an important and valued part of the time.” I’m sitting there thinking ‘oh god, I give up’”.

Hegemonic masculinity is therefore maintained through the challenge and delegitimization of women’s performance (Castilla, 2008; Joshi et al., 2015), where organisational policy was reconstructed instead of rewarded (Connell, 2005). Contributions are made in identifying the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity in high-performing women. This section proposes that pay inequalities are sustained by the movement of performance measures to subjective, vague frameworks with difficult to achieve targets. Pay penalties are incurred directly through reduced bonuses compared to equally performing men, and indirectly where performance measures are used to rationalise unequal opportunities in promotions.

### 7.3 Masculinized cultures and the incongruence with femininity

The following section argues that a masculinized culture of financial and legal sectors demands an assimilation into a hegemonic masculinity that places femininity as secondary throughout careers. Furthermore, gendered work remains present throughout the financial and legal professions, subjecting women to subordinated roles that fail to provide equal opportunities over the career span. Although women were able to leverage benefits, their position in the sector was consistently going against the “default thinking”: femininity is perceived as subordinate, requiring women to outperform men to be seen as equally competent. Novel contributions are made in defining a hegemonic femininity in careers: the appropriation of hegemonic masculinities that attain some, but not all, benefits afforded to men whilst failing to challenge the structural and cultural inequalities faced. Wage penalties are then identified across the career span that contribute to the gender pay gap through the marginalization of femininity in the workplace.

### 7.3.1 Hegemonic femininity and the reproduction of inequalities

Throughout interviews, participants centered hyper-competitiveness, aggression, individualism, and a middle-class masculine self-presentation as demanded cultural behaviours. Workplaces were “very alpha-male, people being told to do press ups in the middle of the floor – quite an aggressive place to work” (Heather, Chief Financial Officer, Finance), whilst an industry culture was defined by assumptions of middle-class, white masculinity.

“Investment banks and the larger private equity companies were fairly cutthroat, and it can be quite grizzly...[these] are not areas where I really flourish. It's very aggressive and very self-serving. It doesn't necessarily think about the broader good.” Diane, Director, Finance.

“The building societies in the U.K. that existed are very old, very traditional. Your senior leadership team, you could pretty much have drawn a picture of a guy in his mid-fifties, maybe nearing sixty in a suit, white guy: that was the senior leader for every single building society that you could go up and down the country. They all pretty much looked the same.” Michelle, Ex-Head of Change, Finance.

“The firm that I got physically marched out of it was “we don't talk about being stressed because it doesn't really happen.” It was such a fearful place to work, it was horrendous. Certainly, no mentoring, no support, no junior lawyers' gang, there's a lot of backstabbing and it's just an unpleasant way of working but you just have to get on with it... The cultural background to the gender pay gap is what needs to move on significantly.” Deborah, Director, Law.

“It's improved overtime but personally, especially when I first started in London, it was... I stood out like a sore thumb! It was funny, I was just speaking to a friend of mine who is still in one of the large four and she is actually the only black woman in her department. It does impact your sense of confidence and feeds into things like imposter syndrome and stress – it holds one back from actually getting what they deserve because you end up feeling like a bit of a victim.” Jodie, Programme Manager, Finance.

These descriptions reflect the masculine cultures described in Chapter 4. However, they are used here to define a hegemonic femininity occurring in the financial and legal sectors. Success in financial and legal careers requires an assimilation into a hegemonic

masculinity to attain some advantages afforded to men without unilaterally attaining equal opportunities to earn equal wages. Rather, a hegemonic femininity leverages power based on further marginalization (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Hamilton et al., 2018). Thus, the assimilation into a hegemonic masculinity failed to challenge the underlying structures of inequality, subordinating femininity within the workplace – to be discussed in section 7.3.2.

“You know there's been plenty of tears in my career, but I think you need to just be able to get past all of those things and just get on with your work. Being someone who takes those things to heart, a bit too much can probably suffer that kind of role and it's not it's not probably the long-term career path for you if you're going to take each of those knock backs as something that really stops you in your tracks. That and just kind of... hard work.” April, Partner, Law.

Hegemonic femininity was observed across the careers of participants. As described by Deborah (Director, Law), women would need to “act like one of the boys and be quite demeaning of other women” to gain higher value caseloads. As shall be discussed later in this chapter, legal and professional careers are narrowly defined with assumptions of masculinity that fail to recognise a diversity of experiences and behaviours. The need to conform through a hegemonic femininity therefore failed to challenge these cultures as structures of inequalities. For example, Paula (Senior Lawyer, Auxiliary) critiqued women’s networks aiming to assist in career progression for relying upon a “lean-in strand of feminism” that failed to recognise the structures of inequality faced by women in the sector. To achieve career success, “you need to behave like the men.”

“The issues they focussed on the successful women in the firm showing how they had done it but that basically involved showing women who had acted like the men and sacrificed plenty out of work for their careers. If that was their choice, that’s what they wanted to do, I couldn’t be happier for them. But it very much left me feeling like the only way to succeed as a woman was to act like the men. There were less discussions given to all the other ways you can make this work and how traditionally female traits can benefit the workplace.”

Building upon Hamilton et al. (2018), hegemonic femininity is therefore defined as the appropriation of hegemonic masculinity to leverage workplace benefits not equal to men, but greater than non-conforming individuals. This inherently fails to challenge both the power of men and the structures of inequalities in the legal and financial professions. Thus, structures of inequalities occurring across careers are further obscured, congregating power within a minority of men and women. The following sections explores how hegemonic femininity penalises the wages of non-conforming women.

### 7.3.2 Gendered work in the financial and legal professions

The rejection of a hegemonic masculinity placed women's role as secondary, to support the careers of men rather than challenge their dominant positions. Despite working within tightly defined occupations, gendered work persisted that subverted the skills and abilities of women. "Feminine work" or "dirty work" such as administration in meetings and upkeep of the office space was expected of women than men were "too good to do" (Heather, Chief Financial Officer; Deborah, Director, Law; Shannon, Trainee Solicitor; Law). For example, Deborah (Director, Law) described having to consistently justify her position in the legal profession. After becoming an industry expert on a specialist topic, giving seminars and training sessions internal and external to her firm, "a few men would still ask me to make them a cup of tea or coffee – which I actually did!" Similarly, Heather described having to "always take notes in meetings, even though I am the CFO... that man there is working for me, ask him to do it." Even when more senior than male colleagues, women were still assumed to undertake gendered work. Critically, this was positioned as restricting progression within firms, requiring the relocation to different specialisms or to external firms to facilitate progression. For example, Shannon (Trainee Solicitor, Law) argued that her non-conformance with gendered work directly penalised her career, placing ceilings on her career trajectory:

"They would walk into office and ask for a coffee. If they asked me for that I would say no. I am a fee earner in my own right. I have as much right to be at my desk as you do. If you want a coffee go and make it yourself...I know my worth. I know I am good at my job. You are going to treat me like I am good at my job. I don't really think they liked that because I didn't conform to the norm of what they wanted."

Furthermore, the reduction of women to sexual objects was evident across careers. Gender roles ascribed to women undermined their abilities to instead construct value added to the firm based on how women's sexuality could assist in business development: "young women are being told the dress sense required: wear more make-up, wear higher heels because the clients like it" (Deborah, Director, Law). Mary (Chief of Staff, Finance) outlined how her own abilities and industry experience was undermined by her firm, being positioned as a "trolley dolly" rather than someone who could meaningfully contribute to business development:

"They were looking for a female, vaguely attractive, young person who would go wine and dine the fund administrators. I thought 'god, I've got good academics, I've fought in the army, I'm not really up for just – what was the point of all of that if I'm just being ogled at, and that doesn't feel sensible.' So, I hated that for ten months, until I found another job."

Hegemonic masculinity is therefore maintained through ascribed gendered labour in the professional services: that although occupations are tightly defined, the assumptions of women's work fails to provide them the opportunities to demonstrate the skills and abilities demanded in successful careers. Hegemonic masculinity marginalises women's position in the workplace, prescribing roles supportive of men's careers rather than equal to them. Two considerations can be made to the gender pay gap. The first reflects a contribution throughout this chapter: that women relocate out of firms, specialisms, or the financial and legal sector entirely to navigate the barriers faced, reinforcing men's dominance in elite, city-based firms. Secondly, the ongoing barriers faced that enact ceilings on progression and earning potentials across the career span. Where women are ascribed and undertake gendered labour, they are less likely to be seen as suitable for promotion into higher paid, senior positions.

### 7.3.3 Marginalisation of femininity

The following section describes the penalties incurred as a result of a marginalised femininity. Across interview data, femininity was constructed as auxiliary, demanding the assimilation into a masculine culture. Thus, participants described their position as “going against the default thinking”: women were perceived as lesser skilled and often inappropriate for the occupations held, having to excel in order to be seen as equal to men.

Women who rejected dominant masculinities had their own skills and abilities challenged by the firm, positioning them as inappropriate for occupations held (Maria, Solicitor, Auxiliary; Michelle, Head of Department, Finance). Marginalisation relies on the external validation of hegemonic masculinity (Kerfoot & Knights, 1993): that women who rejected a hegemonic masculinity are subordinated by a socially constructed femininity ascribed to themselves rather than actual skills and abilities. Women were assumed to be incompetent compared to male colleagues until proved otherwise, whilst skills were assumed as innate to men had to be explicitly demonstrated by women (Deborah, Director, Law; Michelle, Head of Department, Finance; Heather, Chief Finance Officer, Finance). Women had to “constantly prove myself first before they allow you to pass” (Michelle, Head of Department, Finance). Similarly, Deborah (Director, Law) described how her age and gender were consistently used against her to question her abilities and skills:

“...prove that I deserved where I was whilst the men get a firm handshake and talk about the rugby. That’s it. Their technical abilities never get questioned because they look a certain way... for a male, they do know something until they prove that they don’t.” Deborah, Director, Law.

Age persisted as a proxy to undermine senior occupations. Diane (Director, Finance) and Mary (Chief of Staff, Finance) described controversy around the recruitment of younger staff into senior roles due to a perceived lack of experience due to their age. Diane was assumed as “too young to be what I was doing,” whilst Mary positioned herself in a “quadruple whammy to try and come in” as a young woman moving into a leadership role for

a global firm. Critically, participants positioned a need to 'prove themselves' as more competent than men before being accepted as equal.

Furthermore, women's skills and abilities were often challenged as illegitimate by the firm with direct implications on wages and bonuses and indirect penalties on career progression. Deborah (Director, Law) described having her performance publicly challenged as incorrect when billing higher than male colleagues, eventually leading to her leaving the firm. Throughout the accounts of women interviewed was a demanded masculinity required to achieve career success: a masculinity unattainable for women. Thus, the behaviours traits centred as desirable in the professional services were rewarded when exhibited by men but did not guarantee benefits for women:

"But I think there are two main things that go against women, is the supposition or the presumption that you are going to be a mother at some point and that will materially affect your performance in a negative and also women being viewed through a certain lens makes their behaviours considered bitchy, or whingey, or strident or whatever. The same qualities that make a man, or allows a man to be considered a leader, or a challenger, or a maverick thinker." Heather, Chief Finance Officer, Finance.

Deep contradictions existed in demanded masculine cultures. Although some could utilise this to attain a hegemonic femininity, participants described how embodying masculinities were challenged as illegitimate. Demanded behaviours were overtly gendered, marginalising women who both appropriated and rejected them. For example, Suzanne (Director, Law) argued that the masculine cultures of the legal sector acted as an explicit barrier to her career progression. She described her behaviours challenged as inappropriate, being enrolled in training to "make me less aggressive but more assertive, more amenable." Similarly, Andrea (Risk & Auditing, Finance) explored a position in which women were placed as secondary within social interactions: "you don't back chat; you are not assertive." Women were unable to progress at the same rates when not embodying masculinities, but are concurrently challenged as illegitimate when doing so:

“What I can tell you is if do behave in those hyper masculine ways, you still won’t get promoted. You are fucked either way.” Suzanne, Director, Law.

Thus, implications for the gender pay gap are two-fold. First, indirect penalties occurred across the career span through restricted development opportunities. Women faced fewer promotion opportunities than male counterparts despite higher performance, specialisms, and greater human capital accumulation. However, further contributions are made in the strategies employed by women to navigate penalties. As noted in the work of Tomlinson et al. (2013), women relocated into lower-paid firms, specialisms or even industries to facilitate promotions. Thus, a second implication is identified when considering firm- and industry-specific gender pay gaps. The relocation of women out of firms into lower-paid functions to facilitate promotions reinforces men’s overrepresentation in highly paid occupations. Thus, the marginalisation of femininity is identified as a critical practise of hegemonic masculinity in the gender pay gap. The sector demands a need to conform to dominant masculinities that fails to challenge the structures of inequalities, where rejection requires a relocation out of male-dominated sectors:

“That is the default. You are constantly going against the default thinking.” Heather, Chief Finance Officer, Finance.

#### 7.4 Narrowly defined careers and the emergence of “glass bubbles”

The concluding section of this chapter builds upon the pre-established discussions to argue that the narrowly defined career path in the financial and legal professions demands a conformance in specific cultural and institutional practises and experiences. Careers that attain highly paid positions requires the accumulation of a narrow human capital rooted within male-dominated specialisms, that assumes continuous, full-time employment. By framing career success upon meritocratic conceptions, penalties incurred are obscured, legitimising men’s dominant positions and resisting progress on the gender pay gap, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 8. Penalties are incurred across careers that contribute towards the gender pay gap in the divergence from narrowly defined careers.



Although previous discussions have explored penalties incurred through the rejection of cultural and institutional norms, this following section makes contributions to the gender pay gap literature in critically analysing the structure of careers themselves as a central practise of hegemonic masculinity. A further novel contribution is made to wider management and human resources literature, proposing the emergence of “glass bubbles”: highly skilled occupations isolated from organisational hierarchies and wider industry career trajectories, offering little to no promotion opportunities whilst incurring pay penalties.

#### 7.4.1 The singularity of careers in the professional services

The path to promotion into the highest paid roles assumes particular notions of masculinity, tightly defined in masculine behaviours and the accumulation of experience in male-dominated specialisms and firms. Furthermore, despite policy within firms addressing persistent work/family conflicts to be discussed in Chapter 8, expectations of continuous, full-time employment persist throughout careers.

Promotion into the highest paid positions in the legal and financial sector demanded specific industry experience within often male-dominated specialisations and firms. The need to attain male-dominated occupations was recognised by participants regardless of gender to progress careers. For example, Thomas (Operational Risk Manager, Finance) made the rational choice to work for a Big Firm accounting firm to “stand out a little more” when applying for future roles, whilst Mary (Chief of Staff, Finance) described “ticking the boxes” of male-dominated roles. Critically, the demands of experience in male-dominated specialisms and firms enacted ceilings on earning capacities for women. Men’s overrepresentation in leadership positions is reinforced through recruitment based upon the career histories of past workers. Thus, women’s experiences and abilities are inherently undervalued if not conformed with narrowly defined careers. For example, Mary (Chief of Staff, Finance) described a stagnated career trajectory, missing promotions where hiring managers were more likely to hire “the safest candidates and not the best candidate.” Similarly, Kimberly (Change Director, Finance) described a ceiling enacted on her earning capacities. The natural progression of her career was to move into a chief operations officer role. However, the

perceptions of her current job and lack of experience in male-dominated roles were incompatible with a demanded human capital. She described a recruitment policy that favoured “finance background,” where a “snobbery around those back-office,” female-dominated departments existed.

Furthermore, there was an expectation that career norms consisted of continuous, full-time employment. Thus, where women reduced working hours, ceilings were placed upon their earning abilities. This wasn't restricted solely to senior roles. Rather, participants explored how expectations of continuous, full-time employment restricted movements into the sector alongside progression throughout. For example, Carol (Risk & Auditing, Finance) discussed initial barriers of entry to the industry, where part-time work was restricted to low-paid occupations with little career progression opportunities (i.e., Nightingale, 2018). To move into the sector, Carol “had to go full-time – I was not in a position to go full-time, but I had to because I had no choice.” Although it had not directly penalised their careers, Heather (Chief Finance Officer, Finance) and Deborah (Director, Law) emphasised the expectations of full-time work. Women were “grilled” on childcare plans in interviews to ensure they wouldn't work reduced hours, whilst part-time experience was used to challenge women's suitability for senior leadership positions: “I'd see male fee earners being made head of departments above a more experienced, female senior associate because she needed to work part-time” (Deborah, Director, Law). Even when assuming equal human capital accumulation but reduced hours working was required, ceilings were imposed on earning capacities of women:

“You have got somebody who is working part-time who is billing more than somebody who is working full-time, and you promote him, not her. Why? By any objective standard she is outperforming him but suddenly those were not the objective standards that applied. It was a feature that they would shift your targets to make sure. You couldn't meet them if they didn't want to promote you.”

Penalties were therefore incurred where careers diverted from a narrow definition rooted within masculine assumptions of work. The experience of women that deviated from masculine norms constructed as necessary to fulfil the most senior, high-paid roles restricted

promotion opportunities across careers. There was a tendency to match “safe candidates” who match masculinised criteria. Diane (Director, Finance) emphasised the problem that recruitment into leadership and director roles “are reliant upon head-hunters who are not searching hard enough for a 50/50 split [of women and men candidates]”. Women were positioned as “cannon fodder” on recruitment shortlists to meet diversity targets before recruiting men (Adam, Director, Finance). Mary (Chief of Staff, Finance) explored her own difficulties faced before moving into her current role, emphasising a stagnating career trajectory. Positioning her career experiences as “wacky that didn’t fulfil the criteria of recruiters or any of their requirements,” she argued that she was only considered for roles when recommended by her network “who have confidence in me” or when put forward as a “wildcard”:

“Hiring managers quite often hire, not only on how good a candidate is, but on the risk of hiring that person. You’ll often find that hiring managers, particularly after crisis, crashes, or issues – anything that’s gone wrong – will hire the safest candidate and not the best candidate. Again, a really big male female thing, right? Because then if that candidate is shit, they can then go “Oh, but they’ve got the MBA! They did this, they’ve got this experience. On paper I can’t be blamed because you’d of made the same decision of me.” They don’t go “I had these two candidates, and this one was the one that had the potential as opposed to this one who had the experience.” When you’re someone like me with a really wacky CV, I don’t fulfil the criteria of recruiters on any of their requirements.”

The construction of careers in the financial and legal progressions upon masculine norms that fails to consider wider experiences and skills therefore acts as a central practise of hegemonic masculinity in the gender pay gap. Where women’s careers fail to attain industry experience in male-dominated specialisms or firms, or undertake reduced-working hours, promotion opportunities are restricted and earning capacities limited compared to men.

#### [7.4.2 The institutional failure to support returning mothers](#)

Wage penalties incurred by mothers are an integral factor in the British gender pay gap (e.g., Gangl & Ziefle, 2009; Grimshaw & Rubery, 2015; Tomlinson et al., 2011). The following section

contributes to this literature by exploring a more multifaced understanding of the penalties incurred by mothers over their careers. Legal and financial firms failed to support returning mothers into the workforce, with participants finding their skills undervalued, being overqualified for their occupations, or restricted from returning to the same level of employment prior to maternity (e.g., Mandel & Shalev, 2009; Tomlinson et al., 2011). Even when not primary caregivers, the return from maternity incurred penalties. These included undermining assumptions of working abilities, stalled career development, or having to restart careers entirely.

“No – do you get offended by swearing? It was a fucking nightmare. Coming back from maternity was a fucking nightmare. It’s awful. There’s no upside. It’s absolutely catastrophic and I don’t know anyone who’s come back from maternity leave and not found it catastrophic. On every level it’s awful. I cannot emphasise how bad it is. I think again, it’s why so many women come back and then stop. Oh god, where to start.”  
Mary, Chief of Staff, Finance.

Negative assumptions and biases of working abilities incurred indirect penalties across the career. Job resources and demands were removed from jobs due to assumptions that mothers weren’t able to fulfil the responsibilities held prior to maternity leave. For example, participants explored inherent biases that assumed mothers were not as committed to their work as those without children, implying they needed greater support at work (Heather, Chief Finance Officer, Finance): “they accidentally assume that you are not as committed because there is a historical culture of presenteeism, but it’s the opposite: you are way more committed than the person who doesn’t have any hurdles to get there” (Mary, Chief of Staff, Finance). Furthermore, negative assumptions on work and caring responsibilities resulted in firms reducing the work demands of women, consequentially impacting their abilities to perform at an elevated level:

“People would be like “maybe you shouldn’t be working, maybe you should leave.” I am absolutely fine! People judging you and saying “can you cope with the pressure? Can you manage the workload? You need to take it easy.” Do not patronise me. I’ll tell you if I need a break.” Andrea, Risk & Auditing, Finance

Considerations are therefore made to the gender pay gap are made through a stalled or stagnated career trajectory that enacts ceilings on earning capacities. Undermining assumptions of caring responsibilities were conflated with an inability to undertake the level of responsibilities held prior to maternity leave. Thus, work demands were removed from mothers in an attempt to reconcile work/family conflicts without prior notice. Mothers are unable to perform at the same level as male counterparts, incurring penalties where they are not perceived as equally suitable for promotion opportunities. For example, justifying the logistics of parental responsibilities undermined Mary's performance when returning from maternity leave. She was perceived as "not working quite as hard" or "not quite as committed" when fulfilling her job requirements without engaging in long-hours cultures: "Bullshit, I'm way more committed than the guy that has no pull on their time. It's really easy to turn up if you've got nothing else to do." The assumptions of her commitment and effort undermined her promotional opportunities when managers "assume you need extra help." This stalled development experienced was common across mothers interviewed. For example, Sarah (Associate Solicitor) experienced "people wanting to spare me" and thus not "giving me the opportunities that I wanted...I was really frustrated."

England et al (2016) describe how the temporary departure from the workforce incurred penalties through missed human capital and client development in a sector that experiences substantial amounts of wage growth in small amounts of time. Further contributions are made, however, identifying the failure of organisational policy support mother's reintegration into the workforce that allows them to continue the career trajectory from the point of departure. Additional penalties are identified through mothers having to restart their careers at a more junior stage upon return to work (Jacqueline, Senior Associate, Law). For example, Linda (Head of Business Development, Finance) described returning to work meant "coming back and finding my job gone, and then having to keep finding ways to keep myself relevant." The temporary departure meant that the client base she had developed was initially delegated to colleagues, before being permanently given away. This led to an eventual permanent departure from the firm "partly because all of my sales relationships were given away and I had to find something to do...every part of my job was given away." Similarly, Sarah discussed how her career trajectory was undermined upon re-

entry due to the negative assumptions of work/family conflicts. Reflective of the experiences of men described in Chapter 6, she was placed on a secondment framed by her firm as beneficial to her career. Immediately, however, she found herself “really bored, I didn’t learn a lot.” The secondment lasted for eight months and was “wasted time” that acted as a “break in the progress I could have made”. Thus, indirect penalties are identified occurring through the failure to support mother’s re-entry to the workforce. Negative assumptions of caring responsibilities undermined pre-established career progression, stagnating progress made prior to maternity and requiring women to restart their careers at a more junior stage.

Finally, it is worth noting that penalties incurred did not apply to all mothers interviewed. Three participants emphasised the importance of family undertaking caring responsibilities to facilitate minimal time out of the workforce that enabled them to move into their current positions (Vickie, Director, Finance; Mary, Chief of Staff, Finance; Deborah, Director, Law). Yet the incompatibility of successful careers and childcare was still evident. Parental roles in the financial and legal professions persists as sole earners and a primary caregiver; although women can fulfil the sole earner responsibilities, it remains a masculinity to be normatively mimicked by mothers (Cahusac & Kanji, 2014; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005):

“There is a kind of role reversal which a lot of women in the city, and certainly the more successful ones, probably do.” Mary, Chief of Staff, Finance.

However, mitigating motherhood penalties relied upon family or the financial abilities to outsource childcare. The cost of childcare represented a large percentage of income and proved problematic to careers (Nicole, Solicitor, Law; Ruth, Claims Handler, Insurance; Andrea, Risk & Auditing, Banking). Where welfare states fail to support the cost of childcare (i.e., Mandel & Shalev, 2009), mothers questioned their ability to continue working full-time, moving to reduced hours or relocating out of the sector entirely. Throughout Carol’s interview (Risk & Auditing), she emphasised the difficulties faced as a single mother with additional caring responsibilities for a parent. She struggled to engage in the long hours demanded to

continue in her role rather than barriers to upward mobility<sup>13</sup>. Despite her intentions to move into more senior, higher paid roles, the lack of financial ability to outsource caring responsibilities required a reduction in hours, incurring further financial losses to reconcile competing demands. This strategy was commonly employed to mitigate motherhood penalties: reduced wages to reconcile childcare demands. The institutionalisation of long-working hours penalised the earnings of mothers who didn't have the financial capabilities to continue full-time employment. Thus, current returner policies are a central practise of hegemonic masculinity. Mothers' careers are penalised through a combination of factors that may lead to a relocation out of the full-time labour market of the financial and legal sectors.

#### 7.4.3 Divergence to "glass bubbles"

Finally, this section proposes a critical contribution in the emergence of 'glass bubbles': occupations that exist as isolated from wider organizational hierarchies offering lower pay and prestige with little career progression routes or opportunities for further advancement. The term 'glass bubbles' was first used by Paula (Solicitor, Auxiliary) when discussing promotion opportunities in her current position. However, upon completed data analysis the term was fully defined and conceptualized. In distinct contrast to aligned concepts such as glass ceilings, motherhood tracks, and occupational gender segregation, glass bubbles offered no promotion opportunities where they existed as auxiliary to traditional career paths. To achieve promotions, an individual must restart careers at a more junior position. Although wider contributions can be made to management and human resources literature, glass bubbles are a central contribution to understanding hegemonic masculinity in the gender pay gap through the direct and indirect penalties incurred through a loss of earnings accumulated over careers.

"There are some very rigid boxes that need to be ticked to get to partner and a very clearly defined career profession to get there. One you do something different.... If I wanted to go for partner, I could but I would have to go back to me fee earning role and start climbing that ladder. There is only one ladder." Paula, Senior Lawyer, Auxiliary.

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<sup>13</sup> To be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

'Glass bubbles' were identified as working reduced hours, the relocation to in-house legal and financial roles outside of sectors, or the redirection to female-dominated specialisms within the sectors. Critically, this divergence from the "traditional route and the 'normal' career progressions" to leadership roles lead to a "dead end" (Nicole, Solicitor, Auxiliary). Careers and occupations existed in an isolated space entirely separated from the legal and financial career path. This isolation both restricted promotion opportunities but offered no means to integrate back into the career path "once you step off" (Paula, Senior Solicitor, Law). To re-join the 'path to partnership,' an individual would have to restart careers at a more junior level than previously held (Maria, Lawyer, Auxiliary).

Compounded with an often-immediate pay penalty when relocating away from traditional careers, highly skilled women still working in a financial and legal occupations were paid comparatively lower over the career span (Paula, Solicitor, Auxiliary). For example, Catherine (Solicitor, Auxiliary) identified that the movement away from private sector law enacted ceilings on her earning capacity in addition to incurring a pay cut: "magic circle firms would have been a completely different ball game. When I stop working, I will be on a fraction of what a trainee at a magic circle firm gets." Glass bubbles remain as highly skilled occupations, yet when removed from the traditional career path no longer demand conformance with the cultural and structural factors that present barriers discussed throughout this chapter. Thus, despite the pay penalties incurred, glass bubbles were seen to greater align with the working demands of participants but with greater implications for future career goals.

"On average, I would say 99% of the women who work in the council, not just legal, are mothers. I think that just comes to the flexibility of the job. I guess it's because when we make that decision to go into the local authority we are obviously going for less money. We don't get paid what the private sector gets paid, but we have the flexibility which we would never have in the private sector."



Importantly, large contributions can be made here to understandings of firm-specific gender pay gaps. Despite working still within legal and financial occupations, bonus policies benefited client-facing, income generating roles. Bonuses were observed but not benefited from by those in glass bubbles (Kimberly, Change Director, Finance; Vickie, Director, Finance). For example, Rose (Director, Finance) explained the only time bonuses in her specialisms were comparable to male-dominated traders were when “they hadn’t performed well” but was justified because “he makes the money for the firm... I don’t make money.” Finally, Vickie (Director, Finance) problematised how bonus policies penalised women within glass bubbles. Those in the male-dominated client-facing, income-generating specialisms were rewarded through higher salaries further compounded by favourable bonus policies:

“Even the more junior investment people or even the support teams in the investment teams, would still have higher bonuses than the teams I’ve signed off outside of that investment floor” Vickie, Director.

Thus, glass bubbles exists as a result of narrowly defined careers in the financial and legal professions that fail to integrate alternative experiences and skills as equally valuable to traditional’ roles. In this section, I therefore argue that the structure of careers as a critical practise of hegemonic masculinity in the gender pay gap of the financial and legal sector. Careers demand a conformance within dominant masculinities, which penalises rejection and deviation. Thus, any challenge to structures of inequalities is inherently restricted where the power to enact change is congregated in those who have appropriated a hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This is exemplified in the success achieved by women in the present sample, who identified an assimilation into masculine norms throughout careers. Critically, glass bubbles therefore exist as the result of the divergence from narrowly defined careers rooted within assumptions of masculinity:

“I think the missing piece of the puzzle is what you were saying earlier about what is the default normal? The default normal is that you are a full-time worker. The default normal of what is expected of a partner is what is expected of a full-time partner.”  
Jacqueline, Senior Associate

## 7.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I argue that the culture and structure of careers in the financial and legal sectors represent a major contribution to the gender pay gap that penalise women's wages directly and indirectly over the life-course. The working practices and a need to conform to dominant masculinities enacts ceilings on promotion opportunities and earning capacities on those individuals who reject or fail to embody demanded behaviours. Critically, careers in the financial and legal professions are tightly defined and fail to recognize the value in diverse experiences and behaviours. Thus, hegemonic masculinity is maintained through a need to conform within a masculinized culture that obscures structures of inequality. Rejection of hegemony often results in a relocation out of the sector into lower-paid sectors whilst remaining in a legal or financial occupation. Thus, cultural, and structural inequalities are reinforced through a failure to be challenged. Several contributions are therefore made.

First, considering gender pay gap literature, contributions are made through the identification of direct and indirect wage penalties incurred across the career span. The arguments made in this chapter respond to the calls of Grimshaw & Rubery (2015) and Lips (2013b): to use qualitative data to provide a deeper understanding of inequalities occurring in working lives that cannot be captured through quantitative data alone. First, direct wage penalties are identified through the social construction femininity and negative perceptions of women's labour. This chapter argues that work in the financial and legal professions is constructed as masculine, failing to provide women the equal opportunities to embody notions of ideal workers. Women's wages and bonuses are therefore penalized when are assumed as lesser than men's despite actual performance. Furthermore, barriers to progression are implemented where women are not seen as equally suitable for promotional opportunities despite skills and performance due a need to conform to dominant masculinities. Secondly, indirect wage penalties are identified across the career span with implications on the earning potential of women. Despite several participants attaining partner and director roles, this often occurred later in the career after experiencing a stagnated development. Ceilings were enacted on progression due to an existent hegemonic masculinity (to be discussed below), restricting the earning potentials compared to men. A central

contribution is made to understandings of firm- and industry-based gender pay gaps in the strategies to navigate cultural and structural inequalities. To facilitate promotions, women are likely to relocate out of the sector, often into lower-paid specialisms, firms, or industries, concurrently reinforcing the dominance of men in highly paid segments of the professional services.

Further contributions are made in understanding hegemonic masculinity in both the gender pay gap and in careers in the professional services. Several practices are identified that reinforce men's dominance based on the marginalization of women. This includes notions of ideal workers constructed upon masculinized working practices, persistent gendered labour that prescribes women's work as supportive to men's careers rather than equal to, and subordination of women's skills and abilities when challenged as illegitimate. Additionally, contributions are made to understandings of hegemonic femininity. Building upon the work of Hamilton et al. (2018), hegemonic femininity continues to exist as the conformance to dominant masculinity to attain power not equal to men, but above those who do not conform. Thus, cultures and structures of inequality remain unchallenged through the legitimacy of masculinity and marginalization of alternative behaviours. Critically, this marginalization is not based upon the direct exertion of power. Rather, power is exerted implicitly. Structures of inequality are legitimized through a need to conform to succeed, obscuring the challenges faced by those marginalized.

Finally, a central contribution of this chapter is made wider human resource management literature in the conceptualization of "glass bubbles." Glass bubbles provide an insight into the persistent underrepresentation of women in senior positions and barriers faced within work. Promotion opportunities are entirely absent where occupations exist as isolated from the wider organisational hierarchy, often incurring pay penalties. Critically, this isolation offers no means of integration back into the traditional career path of the financial and legal profession.

## Chapter 8: The Role of leadership in facilitating and/or resisting change

This chapter explores the initiatives implemented in the financial and legal sectors to reduce, or eliminate, firm-based gender pay gaps. The chapter combines document analysis of publicly available gender pay gap reports with semi-structured interviews to argue that senior leaders play a significant role in facilitating or resisting progress on the gender pay gap. The Gramscian foundations of hegemony in the theoretical framework used throughout this thesis positions senior leaders as critical actors in challenging or maintaining men's dominance where power imbalances within institutions persist (Connell, 2005; Gramsci, 1971; Yang, 2020). In this chapter, I therefore argue that existent ambivalence from senior leaders places the gender pay gap as periphery to business strategy, failing to challenge the barriers faced by women throughout their careers. Ambivalence is proposed as an implicit practise of hegemonic masculinity in the gender pay gap: that the marginalisation of women is not through the direct exertion of power, but through the rationalisation of inaction. Contributions are therefore made through the proposal of further institutional factors of the gender pay gap through (a lack of) enacted policies. Where current policies fail to challenge the cultural and structural inequalities occurring throughout the financial and legal sectors, I argue that senior leaders contribute towards the maintenance of the gender pay gap.

The chapter is structured as follows:

First, the effectiveness of policy responses to mandatory reporting will be explored. This is initially interrogated through document analysis of publicly available gender pay gap reports, complemented, and contrasted with the lived experience of participants. Combining both sets of data provides insight to policies employed, and any barriers to their successful implementation. The section demonstrates how firms rely upon a narrow framework of policies that rarely evolve despite stagnated progress on the gender pay gap.

This argument is built upon to argue that contradictions between organisational narratives and materialised actions facilitate a sense of apathy towards the gender pay gap. Reflective of Ashley & Empson's (2016b) depicted 'convenient fictions' of diversity initiatives, gender pay gap narratives rarely challenge the underlying structural causes of inequality. Rather, a false notion of transparency obscures a lack of progression. These contradictions enable firms to prioritise mandatory reporting above the implementation of policies, rationalising inaction on the gender pay gap.

The role of senior leaders within the [lack of] organisational policies is then explored. As central actors in maintaining or challenging hegemonic masculinity, this section identifies senior leaders as key agents in rationalising inaction within firms through the disproportionate power congregated towards the top of institutions. Thus, I argue that apathetic engagement undermines initiatives to reduce the gender pay gap. Although this section demonstrates the explicit/active resistance of men, I also identify a more implicit, tacit resistance through a 'blocked reflexivity' (Carter & Spence, 2014) that subverts the value of policies.

Finally, the chapter explores the facilitation of effective gender pay gap responses. The critical role of senior leaders in challenging hegemonic masculinity to reduce the gender pay gap is once again centralised. I argue that the meaningful engagement of senior leaders allows a mainstreaming of the gender pay gap through all aspects of work that is critical to the successful implementation of initiatives that move beyond sole compliance with mandatory reporting. Building upon Kelan & Wrantil (2018), the chapter further proposes that if apathetic or indifferent perceptions exist, men directly benefit from their gender privilege through the failure to tackle the gender pay gap. Thus, the motivation to implement effective initiatives may be stimulated external to the firm through procurement, public relations, and reconceptualised legislation.

## 8.1 The transparency, effectiveness, or absence of policy responses

Despite mandatory reporting of gender pay gap data stimulating modest progress (Blundell, 2021), the professional services report the highest gender pay gap figures across all industrial sectors (Office for National Statistics, 2021). To understand the effectiveness of current policies in reducing a firm's gender pay gap, participants were asked to describe any organisational initiatives currently employed in their respective companies. This was supplemented by the publicly available gender pay gap reports of twenty-two of the largest professional service firms based on employment and turnover. The policies identified to reduce the gender pay gap rarely expanded beyond four central themes: talent pipelines, parental responsibilities/work life balance, unconscious biases, and sponsorships & mentoring. Furthermore, organisational responses over time denoted a lack of evolution. Organizations relied upon specific themes consistently despite stagnated progress on the gender pay gap. The average five-year change of firms analysed was -2.1%, with only five companies reporting a decrease greater than -5%, and four firms reporting increased gender pay gaps: see Table 5.

Talent pipelines broadly covered policies aimed at improving the recruitment, retention, and promotion of women into senior positions. Firms stated a commitment to analysing and understanding talent pipelines to support women's careers and to address gender imbalances across the organisation. Policies explored included commitments on improved promotion and pay transparency (e.g. Barclays, Santander), reconceptualised recruitment processes towards a gender-neutral approach (e.g. Clifford Chance, Freshfields, Grant Thornton, Santander, and Slaughter & May), investment into training and development programmes for underrepresented demographics (e.g. Ernst & Young, Freshfields, HSBC, Linklaters and Morgan Stanley), succession planning for director and senior leadership positions (e.g. Deloitte, DLA Piper; Ernst & Young, Morgan Stanley), and explicit quotas and diversity targets within high earning roles (e.g. Deloitte, Grant Thornton and HSBC). Firms recognised and identified several barriers faced by women across their careers that require interventions to reduce their gender pay gap.

Table 5: The five-year gender pay gap across firms analysed

	Gender Pay Gap Figures (mean)%						Gender Pay Gap Figures (median)%					
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Change	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Change
ALLEN & OVERY SERVICE COMPANY LIMITED	19.8	20.0	17.1	16.1	13.2	-6.6%	27.4	32.8	31.8	28.7	27.5	0.1%
ASHURST COMMERCIAL SERVICES LTD*	0.0	12.4	11.8	6.4	9.3	9.3%	0.0	9.4	12.3	12.0	9.1	9.1%
ASHURST BUSINESS SERVICES LIMITED*	24.8	24.6	28.5	27.9	23.9	-0.9%	32.7	29.4	18.8	21.5	12.0	-20.7%
BARCLAYS BANK UK PLC*	26.0	25.8	26.1	24.5	24.1	-1.9%	14.2	14.9	14.5	14.1	13.5	-0.7%
BARCLAYS BANK PLC*	48.0	49.3	47.4	42.1	43.2	-4.8%	43.5	44.1	39.9	34.0	34.5	-9.0%
THE BOSTON CONSULTING GROUP UK LLP&	26.4	22.8	27.5	26.8	0.0	0.4%	35.2	29.1	33.2	30.7	0.0	-4.5%
CLIFFORD CHANCE LONDON LIMITED&	20.3	21.8	20.0	19.1	0.0	-1.2%	37.2	37.0	37.0	39.6	0.0	2.4%
DELOITTE LLP	17.0	16.4	17.1	16.7	14.4	-2.6%	12.1	12.3	12.1	12.0	12.1	0.0%
DLA PIPER UK LLP&	17.8	17.8	14.5	15.7	0.0	-2.1%	12.2	15.8	14.1	16.8	0.0	4.6%
ERNST & YOUNG SERVICES LIMITED&	19.7	18.6	18.2	15.3	0.0	-4.4%	14.8	13.8	13.8	10.4	0.0	-4.4%
FRESHFIELDS SERVICE COMPANY&	13.9	5.7	3.8	-1.1	0.0	-15.0%	13.3	6.2	7.8	3.9	0.0	-9.4%
GRANT THORNTON UK LLP&	26.5	25.3	23.4	25.0	0.0	-1.5%	24.3	22.5	20.9	23.5	0.0	-0.8%
HOGAN LOVELLS SERVICES&	15.3	12.3	18.7	31.7	0.0	16.4%	26.0	27.3	36.6	42.9	0.0	16.9%
HSBC UK BANK PLC*&	0.0	0.0	32.0	32.9	30.5	-1.5%	0.0	0.0	18.7	20.2	19.3	0.6%
HSBC GLOBAL SERVICES (UK) LIMITED&	31.0	30.0	28.6	28.9	26.7	-4.3%	33.0	31.0	31.4	32.6	31.6	-1.4%
JPMORGAN ASSET MANAGEMENT (UK) LIMITED*	28.0	29.0	25.8	27.3	0.0	-0.7%	22.0	24.4	23.9	26.3	0.0	4.3%
JPMORGAN CHASE BANK NATIONAL ASSOCIATION*&	25.0	23.6	23.7	22.1	0.0	-2.9%	23.0	23.3	21.9	21.1	0.0	-1.9%
KPMG UK LIMITED&	22.3	21.7	18.6	16.5	0.0	-5.8%	22.1	22.6	18.6	13.9	0.0	-8.2%
LINKLATERS BUSINESS SERVICES	23.2	20.8	19.5	20.7	18.8	-4.4%	39.1	33.9	35.7	38.8	34.5	-4.6%
LLOYDS BANK PLC*	37.6	36.1	34.9	33.5	32.6	-5.0%	42.7	41.7	40.5	40.2	40.9	-1.8%
LLOYDS BANKING GROUP PLC*	32.8	31.5	30.9	30.5	29.9	-2.9%	32.8	32.8	33.5	33.6	34.2	1.4%
MCKINSEY & COMPANY, INC. UNITED KINGDOM&	25.2	25.1	20.9	24.1	0.0	-1.1%	16.2	16.3	15.6	18.2	0.0	2.0%
MORGAN STANLEY UK LIMITED&	24.0	25.9	19.9	19.0	0.0	-5.0%	24.6	23.6	22.0	19.7	0.0	-4.9%
PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPERS LLP	33.1	31.2	29.9	30.9	28.3	-4.8%	34.4	32.3	31.7	31.3	30.5	-3.9%
SANTANDER UK PLC	37.1	35.6	31.4	30.7	32.6	-4.5%	29.1	28.6	26.6	27.0	30.4	1.3%
SLAUGHTER AND MAY SERVICES COMPANY&	14.3	14.4	16.2	17.1	0.0	2.8%	38.5	38.7	38.6	44.6	0.0	6.1%

\*Several firms report differential figures for different segments of the firm. This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 8.1.1.

&Due to the suspension of gender pay gap reporting in during the COVID-19 pandemic, several firms had not reported 2021 figures at the time of submission. Thus, change is calculated on the previous year's figures.

“Over the last year we redesigned our director promotion process. We have moved from a pure assessment centre approach to a longer term ‘development journey,’ resulting in a 52% increase in the number of female promotions to director. More recently we have adopted the same approach for partner promotions.” Deloitte, 2018.

“Focusing our efforts on tracking movement in the firm by gender and applying a proportional approach to promotion to create a strong pipeline of female talent, at all levels, which we believe will, in time, have a positive impact on the gender-balance in leadership positions across our firm. DLA Piper.” 2020.

“To accelerate the progress of change we have developed a number of programmes aimed at improving the representation of ethnic minority and female talent within our organisation. Each programme focuses on identifying and overcoming some of the barriers to progression that our upcoming talent identifies with. Further investment will be made in these programmes in the coming year to expand their reach to even more of our talented professionals. Of note is our newly refreshed Future Leaders Programme, which is targeted at our high potential ethnic minority senior managers – the future leaders of EY. This programme aims to identify, retain, and advance our ethnic minority talent to leadership roles. Importantly, the programme is supported by a number of senior allies within the business.” Ernst & Young, 2018.

Reconciling parental responsibilities with working demands were a feature across reports. Building upon the arguments outlined in Chapter 7, the incongruence was further emphasised when considering current promotion to partnership models. Policies structured around parental responsibilities were diverse in approach, but broadly aimed at minimising the impact on careers from time out of work, whilst challenging negative perceptions of motherhood.

“For so long, organisations have been built around a ‘breadwinner’ model where one person in a relationship stays at home and the other has a career. The biases associated with this have an impact from day one of a woman’s career – in fact even before she starts. Even those who don’t have a family can find themselves battling the biases” -- Allen & Overy, 2019.

“Traditional perceptions of gender roles in families are changing, and more families than ever have two parents working full time. So, we are enhancing our maternity and paternity policies, as part of a wider project to make our suite of family policies more supportive, competitive, and progressive. We continue to offer maternity and parental coaching for individuals taking maternity/parental leave to help support them through this transitional period. This is already proving to have a positive impact on our ability



to retain working mothers following a period of maternity leave. Coaching is also offered to partners/managers to support the transition and facilitate an effective return to work.” DLA Piper, 2018.

Policies were structured upon increased maternity leave (e.g., DLA Piper, Hogan Lovells, Slaughter & May), shared parental leave (e.g., Ashurst, Ernst & Young, and Linklaters), subsidised childcare facilities (e.g., Allen & Overy, JP Morgan, and Morgan Stanley), and motherhood returner programmes (e.g., Deloitte, Grant Thornton, and Santander,). Flexible and part-time working (e.g., HSBC; KPMG; Morgan Stanley) were further integrated within wider approaches to support parental responsibilities. Although internal policy documents were not available, there was a distinct difference in their portrayal in gender pay gap reports. Several firms described extensive policies or specific case studies: for example, JP Morgan (2020) describe a ‘Re Entry Programme’ that “offers experienced professionals on a career break the support and resources needed to relaunch their careers” through recruitment into Associate and Vice President positions. In comparison, other firms relied solely upon encouraging or promoting existing policies in line with, rather than moving beyond legal requirements (e.g., Barclays, Boston Consulting Group, Freshfield and Morgan Stanley).

Furthermore, implicit bias in structural and day-to-day interactions was recognised as problematic for women’s careers. However, policies were relatively limited. For example, several firms appointed diversity champions to address the underlying bias across careers (e.g., Barclays, Clifford Chance). When expanding beyond this, policies centred on unconscious bias training within recruitment and promotion (e.g., Boston Consultancy Group, Deloitte, Morgan Stanley, Santander), [voluntary] training to address negative assumptions or exclusionary behaviours (e.g., Allen & Overy, Barclays, DLA Piper, KPMG, McKinsey), and management and leadership training to support the needs of diverse employees (e.g., Clifford Chance, Ernst & Young, Freshfields, Grant Thornton, Hogan Lovells). The portrayal of policies differed once again. A small number of firms solely relied upon vague descriptions of “unconscious bias training” (Allen & Overy, 2020) and “appointing diversity champions” (Barclays, 2019), whilst other firms provided more in-depth discussions of implemented policies:

“We launched Conscious Inclusion training for all staff, teaching individuals to understand their own biases, build empathy for others, and take action to challenge exclusion. We have also launched Authentic Conversations, which are regular events (organised by volunteers) that bring individuals together to discuss culture, identity, and other topics to build awareness and understanding. In Q4 2020, we ran four different sessions on racism, with more than 100 employees in attendance at each session”. Boston Consultancy Group, 2017.

“Inclusive Leadership To help create a sense of belonging in our organisation, 3,000 of our people — from interns to Partners — have taken part in our Inclusive Leadership training. The programme is designed to highlight the dynamics of insider and outsider group behaviour and interrupt unconscious bias. It also helps our people to talk more fluently about ethnic minority and gender diversity.” Ernst & Young, 2018.

“Many job descriptions inadvertently contain gender bias surfacing in the style and language they are written in. Gendered wording (i.e., masculine, and feminine themed words) can have an effect on job appeal and ultimately narrow the candidate pool. At SCUK, we are reviewing our job descriptions and are taking steps to ensure they are gender neutral to help combat gender inequality. Mitigating any bias at the recruitment stage should ensure our jobs appeal to both men and women.” Santander, 2019.

Finally, sponsorships, mentoring and networks featured centrally. Although it is worth considering how mentoring schemes may rely upon ‘fixing’ women into a hegemonic masculinity, this was integrated into a number of responses. Mentoring programmes were employed with the intention to eliminate barriers to progression by pairing women with senior managers to provide guidance (e.g., Ashurst, 2020; Deloitte, 2018; DLA Piper, 2020; Freshfields, 2017). Additionally, reverse mentoring was mobilised in an attempt to raise awareness of barriers to career development faced (e.g., Allen & Overy, Ashurst, Clifford Chance, Deloitte, Freshfield, Santander, and Slaughter & May). The utilisation of networks within organisations and across industries attempted to address differential support and guidance accessible between men and women (e.g., Barclays, BCG, Clifford Change, Deloitte, Freshfields, Hogan Lovells, HSBC, and Morgan Stanley). Although it is difficult to understand the effectiveness of these policies through document analysis alone, several firms outlined action plans (e.g., BCG, Clifford Chance, JP Morgan).

Our Women In... events are designed for undergraduates across EMEA and provide audiences with the opportunity to meet with some of our most influential and inspirational leaders at J.P. Morgan. These events provide the perfect opportunity for students to learn more about the firm, our businesses, and our culture. They showcase female role models and male allies in Investment Banking, Markets, Asset & Wealth Management, Quantitative Analytics, Software Engineering and Corporate teams. They share their experience of working at J.P. Morgan alongside insights into specific lines of business and activities to simulate the work done in that area. Over the course of the event, students are provided with an in depth look at the firm, an overview of the diverse opportunities we provide, and an understanding of how to make a meaningful contribution to our community, culture, and global mission.” JP Morgan, 2020.

It is important to note that this thesis does not propose an empirical relationship between communicated policies and a reduction in a firm’s gender pay gap. However, the relative heterogeneity of policy responses has coincided with stagnated reductions on the gender pay gap across the sector. Furthermore, policy approaches broadly reflect those of the Government Equality Office’s (2017) recommended actions to close the gender pay gap: “[to] include women in shortlists for recruitment and promotions; skills-based assessment in recruitment; structured interviews for recruitment and promotion; encourage salary negotiations with transparency; transparency in promotion, pay and reward; diversity managers.” Thus, current strategies are inferred to rely on adopting those already employed across the industry that may be ineffective in reducing the gender pay gap, rather than the internal evaluation of data to conceptualise effective policies. Reflective of Ashley (2010), the adoption of industry-wide policy trends does little to challenge the cultural and structural inequalities which drive the gender pay gap.

#### 8.1.1 The effectiveness of mandatory reporting in facilitating change

The document analysis outlined provides a modest but important insight into how the professional services are signalling responses to the gender pay gap. However, as externally facing communications, they fail to explore how policies are translated into practise. Thus, participants were asked about the policies and initiatives within their relative firms. Critically, those outside of leadership positions explored an absence of policies. The policies outlined by

externally facing reports failed to materialise into meaningful practises internally, with participants describing a lack of transparency in strategies to reduce the gender pay gap:

“No. No [there isn’t any]. And there is no transparency in terms of how we are remunerated as well.” Carol, Risk & Auditing, Banking.

“There are many policies – explicitly around the gender pay gap though, I don’t know!” Thomas, Operational Risk Manager, Finance.

“No [there isn’t anything being done]. They fundamentally think, now, that everything is okay...it’s not even mentioned. It hasn’t been for the last two years so nothing is going to change.” Kimberly, Change Director, Finance.

“In terms of in our firm, there’s nothing really formal. It’s something they’re looking to kick off again now to try and tackle gender inequality and increase racial diversity. That is something they’re looking to do now. There is nothing that is particularly formal.” Helen, Associate, Law.

Where policies were implemented, participants outlined approaches described previously: unconscious bias training, increased representation for women in senior leadership, returner programmes for mothers, and flexible working. Critically, however, policies were perceived as superficial and ineffective. Organisations were seen to “tinker” with minor policies that had minimal impact rather than taking the required “bold actions which take time” (Adam, Director, Finance). For example, Diane (Director, Finance) argued that approaches “took me back fifteen years.” Strategies reliant upon conscious inclusion and unconscious bias were “old school,” entirely removed from the underlying causes of the gender pay gap but persistent as a central feature.

Participants critiqued organisations for relying upon data that fails to holistically understand the gender pay gap (Rachel, Inclusion & Diversity Manager, Law; Mary, Chief of Staff, Finance). Despite existing gender pay gap data stimulating engagement within firms, its simplistic nature is more representative of women’s participation in the workforce and provides a false sense of transparency. Participants argued that firms relied upon mandatory reporting alone, rarely attempting to understand any underlying inequalities (Suzanne, Director; Kimberly, Change Director, Finance; Rachel, Inclusion and Diversity Manager, Law).

Furthermore, the assumptions of transparency achieved through gender pay gap reporting obscured any lack of progress. The lack of incentives to commit to policies enabled firms to rely upon industrial trends with minimal critique regarding stagnated progress:

“I read so many reports of firms whose commentary around their gender pay gap report or on their website is “we have signed up for the women in finance charter and we are doing really well.” “We have signed up for the diversity project. We are doing this, and we are doing that... and by the way, down here are the figures we are quite embarrassed about.” I suspect of a lot of leadership it has created a problem.” Adam, Director, Finance.

Concurrently, the failure to honour policies was correlated with the prioritisation of mandatory reporting of the gender pay gap (Alicia, Senior Associate, Law; Charlotte, Associate Solicitor, Law; Veronica, Director, Finance). Although participants stated the value of reporting in instigating initial change, this has since stagnated and there was increasing difficulty in progressing policies beyond legal compliance. This was explored by Kimberly (Change Director, Finance), who viewed that the “gender pay gap reporting definitely made a difference to the company” but “it’s really disappointing off the back of that, nothing has happened.” Kimberly recognised the initial benefits afforded but argued legislation has since failed to maintain engagement:

“Capital investments is a really good demonstration to the fact that it did and then nothing’s happened since. So, it’s not enough. Now there needs to be that second wave of like you’re now reporting and you’re reporting at a 40% gap: that’s not okay. So, no we’re going to say it can only be a 10% gap and you need to find out whatever suits your business to get that gap down. Because reporting it, the shame is now not enough. Businesses got shamed, everyone felt bad about it and then we’re not making it better.” Kimberly, Change Director, Finance.

Thus, participants problematised existing legislation in its ability to facilitate meaningful change. As described by Mary (Chief of Staff, Finance), “it’s a really good start. We’ve never had anything like it before, but is it the end goal? Absolutely not.” Similarly, Jaqueline (Senior Associate, Law) saw mandatory reporting as a “really good first step.”

Reflecting Cowper-Cowles et al. (2021), mandatory reporting was critiqued for a lack of accountability regarding commitments to reduce their gender pay gap through honoured policy commitments. The required data fails to observe the barriers faced by women, “the maternity leave, shared parental leave, the family friendly side of things” (Rachel, Inclusion & Diversity Manager, Law), instead constructing snapshot representations that had “no intrinsic value that informs decision making” (Mary, Chief of Staff, Finance).

Finally, several participants explicitly critiqued existing legislation for loopholes exploited. A small number of participants worked within firms not required to report gender pay gap figures due to falling below the required employee levels. Not only does this mean a large proportionate of the labour market are missed (Cowper-Cowles et al., 2021), but further eliminates transparency of initiatives in these firms. Participants observed the rational processes to misrepresent gender pay gap figures through such loopholes<sup>14</sup>. First, companies were segmented into smaller entities. Low-paid, female-dominated occupations such as professional support staff were employed within separate subsidiaries of an organisation in comparison to higher-paid, male-dominated roles. Thus, separate gender pay gap figures are reported rather than a singular, holistic representation for a firm, obscuring actual representations of the gender pay gap<sup>15</sup>. Finally, several organisations exploited that reporting doesn’t require partners to be included within gender pay gap figures. Thus, employee levels could be taken below the required threshold, or the highest earners could be removed from data to present a more egalitarian pay structure.

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<sup>14</sup> To ensure anonymity, participant information has intentionally been omitted from this discussion where firms and individuals could be identified through knowledge of specific practises.

<sup>15</sup> For example, Santander were included as part of the document analysis but registered five different sets of gender pay gap reporting with no clarity as to the segmentation of these. Similarly, JP Morgan registered five differential sets of data with a similar lack of distinction between firms, compared to KPMG who had registered one.

## 8.2 An underlying apathy towards the gender pay gap

Underlying organisational responses was an ambivalence to the gender pay gap as a business concern. The legal requirement to publish gender pay gaps meant compliance with mandatory reporting was prioritised over the implementation of policy commitments. Thus, narratives were often contradictory to actualised policies that rarely evolved beyond superficial commentaries. This manifested in the perception that interventions were not required. Rather, firms believed the gender pay gap would close naturally over time, or that enough was already being done through legal compliance. Furthermore, the deeply entrenched financialisation of the professional services undermined the implementation of policies that required long-term, financially resourced strategies.

### 8.2.1 Contradictions in organisational narratives and materialised actions

Throughout interviews with participants, major contradictions existed between the strategies communicated by firm's and what was achieved. Organizational narratives positioned the gender pay gap as a dogged inequality that demanded long-term, multifaceted strategies. Narratives, however, were perceived as superficial that failed to represent the actual behaviours of the firm. Comparisons are drawn with Ashley & Empson's (2016) description of diversity initiatives as 'convenient fictions'; easily accessible and replicable narratives that have minimal impact upon gender inequality. Organisational narratives were contradictory with materialised actions, maintaining hegemonic masculinity through a false transparency of committed policies that failed to eliminate the barriers faced by women whilst continuing business as usual.

For many firms, actions beyond reporting mandatory reporting of the gender pay gap had "fallen off the agenda" (Kimberly, Change Director, Finance). The gender pay gap were seen as "a perception management issues, not something to be seriously addressed" (Vickie, Director, Law), where firms tended "to say that they are making changes, but nothing has actually change" (Suzanne, Director, Law). For example, Michelle (Head of Change, Finance) described her firm's tendency to "say things reputationally outwardly to anybody as 'we are

good, we are compliant, we've got all the policies and procedures and we promote anyone' ... that wasn't necessarily what happened in practise." Similarly, Paula (Senior Lawyer, Auxiliary) explored how the partnership within her previous private sector firm were "very good at talking about fixing it but less so about actually walking the walk," whilst Mary (Chief of Staff, Finance) argued that "a lot of lip service is paid to it, and I think people forget why we are doing it." Reflective of the previous discussions, organisational narratives were prioritised over the implementation of meaningful policies. Thus, progress on the gender pay gap is restricted by the constructed belief that organisations are undertaking the necessary steps to address gender pay gaps that are undermined by passive interventions. For example, Linda (Head of Business Development, Finance) proposed her firm had a "dichotomy between an amazing approach to diversity and a willingness to trust women." The firm was positioned as one with robust diversity and equality initiatives with an underlying irony that relied upon "paying a lot of lip service to it" where an "compromising work environment" for women isn't challenged:

"We do really care about it, and we walk the walk and we do promote people, we do put people in charge of staff...but then we kind of leave them to flounder ". Linda, Head of Business Development, Finance.

As described in the work of Ashley (2010), narratives constructed a false urgency to tackle the gender pay gap through multiple initiatives yet failed to challenge the underlying barriers and damaging culture faced by women throughout their careers. Firms identified cultural and structural inequalities occurring but failed to implement the required policies (Suzanne, Director; Kimberly, Change Director, Finance): "off the back of the first report was a list of all the things we're going to do – none of that gets done" (Kimberly, Change Director, Finance). This was explored in detail by Vickie (Director, Finance), who argued narratives are critically undermined by an underlying ambivalence from organisations to honour policy commitments:

"Going back to talking about how we're looking at and the 30-30 initiative, we're looking to get "X" percentage of females on the board by 2025. If you go to some of these companies that say they are progressing to that, look at their websites. You look



at the senior management team. Still all males. How can you say that you're working towards that, and you still haven't appointed someone? It's very, very difficult to believe some of these companies that they're committed to it." Vickie, Director, Finance.

At its core, organisational narratives constructed bold statements that contradicted the internal behaviours and actions. Contributions are then made in understanding resistance to progress on the gender pay gap. Publications and mandatory reporting rarely reflected the strategies employed internal to firms, resisting progress on the gender pay gap through a failure to address the barriers faced by women throughout their careers. It is important to note that participants often believed that the firms did perceive the gender pay gap as a legitimate business concern. However, this was undermined by a perceived ambivalence that fails to honour policy commitments or to implement strategies that go beyond legal compliance. Firms demonstrated a reluctance to enact policies that implemented meaningful change that often required long-term strategic planned and resources.

"They know it's the right thing to do. They absolutely agree that they don't like it. Do they want to do any of the big bold steps to fundamentally make a difference? No. They don't want to spend a load of money collecting data on our diversity stats on recruitment so we can make it better. They don't really want to do quotas to make more women at the top of our business. They don't really want to talk about it anymore because all it does it call out the fact that they haven't made enough change. They're quite happy how they are at the moment. They don't really want to change that." Kimberly, Change Director, Finance.

### 8.2.2 A rationalised inaction within firms

These contradictions rationalised a relative inaction from firms. Senior leaders held inherent beliefs that the gender pay gap would naturally close overtime due to the increasing participation of women in the workforce or changing societal attitudes and values. A contributing factor was that with the profit-driven ethic of the professional services, there was no justification for interventions. This broadly reflects the failure of business case rationales in stimulating change within professional service firms: equality measures contradict meritocratic business models and are subverted by prioritised client-based work

(Ashley & Empson, 2016b; Kornberger et al., 2010). Compounded by the absence of external pressures from legislation and trade bodies to honour policies to reduce the gender pay gap (Cowper-Cowles et al., 2021; Kelan & Wrantil, 2018), a central form of hegemonic masculinity can be inferred: women's careers are marginalised through a rationalised inaction where firms justify a lack of interventions to address structures of inequality.

Contradictions between narratives and actions are centred upon a notion of apathy. This is underlined by beliefs from senior leaders that gender pay gaps would naturally close through the increasing number of women in the workplace and changing societal beliefs (Diane, Director, Finance; Jacqueline, Senior Associate, Law; Suzanne, Director, Law). Despite talent pipelines being a commonly outlined strategy explored in section 8.1, participants believed that the reliance upon emerging women in the workplace failed to recognise the structural inequalities faced throughout their careers. Although narratives committed to improving practices connected to recruitment, retention, and promotion of women throughout their careers, this may be interpreted this as a justification for inaction:

“My worry is that people go "the gender pay gap thing is there, we know what the issue is - we just need more senior women. There aren't enough of them around. This is going to take the next 15 years to resolve". So, it's no longer an issue; we're just going to have to let it carry on and see what happens over time.” Diane, Director, Finance.

The rationalised inaction inferred a sense of ambivalence rather than undertaking proactive steps to support women's careers. Participants emphasised the belief within their respective firms that once male-dominated partnerships retired they would be replaced women (George, Partner; Matthew, Partner). These narratives, however, fail to identify or challenge careers in the professional services constructed within a masculine ideology. The passivity of firms doesn't challenge disadvantage faced by women, risking the replication of men's dominance in increasingly senior roles:

“If we wait for your generation to come through, we are going to be waiting an awful long time and its high risk because as we have seen in generations that if all your female

intake just leaves the industry after five years, we have made no progress at all.” Adam, Director, Finance.

Furthermore, participants proposed that relative inaction emerged from the rationalisation of ‘justifiable’ gender pay gaps: “the pay gap was measured, it was known, it was excused” (Suzanne, Director, Finance). Mandatory reporting was again prioritised over internal actions with a clear absence of motivation to move beyond legal compliance. Although legislation, media and trade pressures may have stimulated initial positive change within firms (Blundell, 2021; Bennedsen et al., 2019; Wahl, 2014), the failure to maintain this momentum – including the suspension of mandatory reporting through the COVID-19 pandemic – facilitates a sense of organisational ambivalence. Firms attempt to justify their gender pay gap rather than undertaking commitments to reduce them. For example, Andrea (Risk & Auditing, Finance) observed a focus upon explaining figures “within this percentage tolerance, so it’s okay.” Thus, any policies enacted were restricted in its scope to stimulate change as the gender pay gap had already been rationalised: “governance was put in place, but will we actually do anything with it? I’m not sure.” This was further justified through the historical gender segmentation of the professional services (Julie, Partner, Law): occupational segregation in senior positions was seen as inevitable. Rachel (Inclusion and Diversity Manager, Law) described a perception across the sector that “the nature of a law firm means you are always going to have a pay gap because that’s the nature of the industry.” The responsibility of the firm to intervene is dissolved and in the absence of external pressures to stimulate change, an apathetic approach is enabled in firms:

“We’re a classic business of we won’t do anything about it until we’re made to. Fundamentally, our CEO’s, our founders have other things they want to spend their time and energy thinking about. They don’t think we have a big enough issue that they’re worried about.” Kimberly, Change Director, Finance.

The socially constructed ‘nature’ of professional service firms further justifies passive approaches. The profit-driven ethics of the sector conflicts with sustained gender and equality initiatives. Participants believed that firms were reluctant to forgo “short-term profits for longer gains” (Alicia, Senior Associate, Law; Heather, Chief Financial Office, Finance). The

approaches between the public sector and private sector were differentiated by participants employed in in-house capacities, with common assumption that the public sector was better equipped to implement meaningful change (Maria, Solicitor, Auxiliary; Paula, Senior Lawyer, Auxiliary; Catherine, Lawyer, Auxiliary). Specifically in the private sector however, this was centred upon the resources required to implement policies and initiatives:

“They’re not going to invest in it, they’re not going to spend money, they’re not going to spend resources on trying to tackle something they genuinely don’t see as a problem.” Deborah, Director, Law.

Critically, the resources required conflict with income-producing work in the professional services. Reflective of Ashley & Empson (2016b), equality initiatives are inherently limited in firms with an individualistic focus upon performance based upon long-working hours and client-based sales. Organisational narratives are undermined where the time and monetary resources were perceived as better utilised in fee-earning functions: “it isn’t business critical in that sense, particularly now [throughout the COVID-19 pandemic]” (Jacqueline, Senior Associate, Law). Thus, an apathetic sense of ‘business as usual’ is facilitated. The gender pay gap, and wider gender and equality initiatives, are constructed as peripheral to overall business goals, rationalising inaction. As explored by Matthew (Partner, Law), the gender pay gap tended to be constructed as tangential, aligned with corporate social responsibility rather than being “mainstreamed” within work: “it needs to be right in the middle.” This was emphasised by George (Partner, Law), who proposed a critical difficulty in implementing policies on the gender pay gap is the belief that this contradicts work in the professional services:

“We have to try and find a way of getting people past the idea that those kinds of events are in some way not important enough to take people away from their work where they are trying to get the money in.” George, Partner, Law.

### 8.3 Senior leadership as a site of resistance

Underlying the discussions hitherto is a proposed apathy towards the gender pay gap that maintains men's dominant positions through the failure to challenge the structural and cultural advantages afforded to them throughout careers. Retaining the Gramscian conceptions of hegemony, senior leaders are central to these perceptions and narratives (Connell, 2005; Gramsci, 1971; Yang, 2020). They are well placed to reconstruct cultures and challenge the practises through to unequal distribution of power towards the top of organisational hierarchies (Humbert, 2019; Thomas, 2021). Thus, the following section argues that leaders represent critical actors in the resistance to or facilitation of meaningful gender pay gap initiatives. This expands upon the arguments of Cortis et al. (2020) and de Vries (2015), to make contributions in the gender pay gap literature by proposing the agency of senior leaders to enact change is constrained where men may look to defend existing structures from which they have benefited. This is not to state that all senior leaders unilaterally resist progress on the gender pay gap. Additionally, this resistance is rarely an explicit exertion of power. Rather, this occurs through an implicit that shaped organisational narratives of the gender pay gap as peripheral. The following section therefore builds upon Whitehead's (2001) notion of 'blocked reflexivity' to argue that the restricted ability of senior managers to problematise the cultural and structural benefits afforded to themselves contributes to stagnated progress on the gender pay gap.

#### 8.3.1 Apathy and allyship

As previously outlined, the gender pay gap fails to be perceived as a legitimate business concern that requires long-term, well-resourced strategies. Rather, firms rely upon legal compliance with mandatory reporting and mimicking the strategies employed by alternative firms. The gender pay gap was "not a problem" (Carol, Risk & Auditing, Finance; Charlotte, Senior Solicitor, Law), nor "a priority" (Helen, Associate Solicitor, Law; Charlotte, Associate Solicitor, Law) for firms. It wasn't "screaming urgency" nor seen as "business critical" (Jacqueline, Senior Associate, Law). It had "dropped down the list" (Rachel, Inclusion and Diversity Manager, Law) where mandatory reporting was prioritised above honouring policy

commitments (Alicia, Senior Associate, Law; Charlotte, Associate Solicitor, Law; Veronica, Director, Finance).

Thus, the organisational apathy is centralised upon senior leaders. Moving beyond the contradictions explored in section 8.2, the effectiveness of implemented policies stagnates where senior leaders fail to meaningfully engage. For example, Rachel (Inclusion and Diversity Manager, Law) explored difficulties in implementing policies to provide deeper understandings of her firms' gender pay gap. She described initial engagement from colleagues that she wanted to capture and build upon. However, this was restricted by falling support from senior leader: "a lot of people were asking a lot of questions: 'what does this mean?' 'What are we going to do about it?' I wanted to build on that...but as I say, no one at management level has asked me about it since." This was emphasised by Adam (Director, Finance), who argued that the failure to meaningfully engage with policies subverting their value:

"A leader that says, "diverse shortlists in recruitment" and then doesn't see it through more often than not means that at a recruiter level they are going out and finding the seven Dave's that can do the job and then finding some cannon-fodder in diverse candidates, so they are meeting the stats." Adam, Director, Finance.

Participants reflected on their own positionality to the gender pay gap, all stating a commitment to equality with many men explicitly aligning themselves as allies. However, their ability to instigate change was restricted by apathy shaped by senior leaders. A collective shift to recognise the gender pay gap as part of 'everyday work' was required, occurring in a top-down function. This was emphasised by Vickie (Director, Finance), who argued that having "completely passionate" individuals throughout organisations wasn't enough to instigate change where "people will only listen to what comes from the top down". Partners and directors were explicitly named as critical actors in shaping collective buy-in: "if they don't care, why would you think that the firm cares? They are the face of the company, the partners" (Leslie, Associate, Law). Despite an allyship to gender equality existing across the sector, hegemonic masculinity is maintained through apathy:

“You absolutely need buy in from the top otherwise it’s just pointless. You just put in a lot of work in and then no change is going to happen unless you’ve got buy-in from senior leadership. Because ultimately, they’re – you need to put money and time into this, and they’ve got to see that as valuable.” Michele, Associate, Law.

Apathetic perceptions are therefore proposed as a hegemonic masculinity in the gender pay gap: men’s dominance maintained through inaction. Contributions are thus made in identifying institutional resistance on progress that may explain sector-specific unaccounted for factors. The construction of the gender pay gap as not a business priority enables the apathetic perceptions which rationalise the inaction and contradictions. Engagement from senior leaders is critical in instigating the transformational change required to address the barriers faced by women throughout careers: “unless the founders, the CEO’s really care about it and take it on board, it doesn’t have the trickle-down effect. It’s really important that the top of your business gets it and wants to deliver against it” (Kimberly, Director, Finance). The primary responsibility to addressing the gender pay gap is centred upon senior leadership. At present, this is lacking:

“I think we could talk all day about individual steps but as a general rule those are the things that need to sit with the management. It can’t sit off at the side. It needs to be constantly focussed on and it needs to be something that if it doesn’t change, then the management suffer.” Matthew, Partner, Law.

### 8.3.2 Explicit resistance

Although senior leader apathy represented the predominant site of resistance, an explicit exertion of power was evident. This most often occurred within middle-management. Reflective of Cockburn (1991), the translation of organisational policy throughout organisations was limited by [male] middle-managers who failed to implement policies, instead looking to retain the structures from which they have benefited. This further demonstrates the hegemonic practises that hinder progress on the gender pay gap: men explicitly delegitimising policies introduced to reduce the gender pay gap.

Explicit resistance wasn't common throughout interview data. Rather, it was a rare occurrence from a minority of men that had a disproportionate impact on the ability to instigate progress. Resistance occurred from "a few sticks in the mud" that failed to see the benefits in policies and thus obstructed their implementation: "they just didn't understand you wouldn't have a woman at home looking after your kids, and therefore that you mix need more flexibility around work and childcare" (Jacqueline, Senior Associate, Law). Collective agreements to "progressive ways of work" were undermined by a minority of men who failed to see this as valuable (Michelle, Head of Change, Finance). Thus, resistance through the exertion of direct power is engendered as a hegemonic masculinity. As described previously, George (Partner, Law) positioned himself as an ally to gender and racial equality, as someone with "very trenchant, progressive views" who can support and facilitate meaningful change. Yet he observed explicit resistance from other men throughout his firm "who don't have those views."

"Most of my colleagues are not really interested in any of that. That's not their approach to the world. It's how do we break through to those people that really matter? It's how to break through to those who actually do hold a lot of power but aren't engaged in this." George, Partner, Law.

George built upon this to explore how explicit resistance stagnated progress. He recognised a difficulty of engaging men in multiple initiatives; their time was believed as better applied in more 'valuable' areas of work such as client-development. Similarly, Maria (Solicitor, Law) described the "odd person who is still racist and sexist" who explicitly blocked the facilitation of organisational policies. Furthermore, Kimberly (Change Director, Finance) explored how flexible working policies were undermined by middle-managers who "knew it was the right thing to do, but behind closed doors they were against it." Flexible working was perceived as incongruent with the socially constructed norms presenteeism and thus opposed due to negative assumptions on the impact of firm performance.

This explicit resistance emphasised the critical role of middle-management and men in facilitating change. Small populations of men are able restrict progress on the gender pay



gap through delegitimising policies. The specific masculinity embodied in the sector contradicted the ethics of gender pay gap initiatives. There was a need to “break through to those who don’t have those views” and the “antediluvian, old fashioned geezers” who hold power throughout the sector (Cockburn, 1991). This was emphasised by Adam (Director, Finance), who stated the growing importance of engaging middle-management and ensuring that any policies conceptualised understood and implemented effectively:

“In recent years, or in the last year, has got me thinking and increasingly realising that if we are going to make great progress, we need to bring more men into this conversation. Particularly, middle management men and senior men. Get them to realise what they can do and why it is important to them... I think – without senior and middle management men actually – senior men implementing bold policies to change things and recognising that when they – whatever they implement or say they are changing at the top, they need to make sure that actually it is understood and implemented in the right way at the ground floor level.” Adam, Director, Finance.

### 8.3.3 Blocked reflexivity

Finally, underlying the apathetic perceptions of senior leaders was a lack of understanding of the barriers faced by women throughout careers in the legal and financial sectors. The following section argues that the failure of senior leaders to identify and challenge institutional and cultural inequalities is a practise of hegemonic masculinity in the gender pay gap. Critically, this is centred upon a notion of ‘blocked reflexivity’: the inability of men to problematise the engendered cultures and structures that have benefited them throughout careers (Carter & Spence, 2014; de Vries, 2015).

Building upon the discussions in Chapter 7, men who were interviewed differentiated themselves from other men in the sector. They perceived themselves as allies, proposing that a critical challenge in enacting change was convincing other men to engage in gender pay gap initiatives (i.e., Daniel, Partner, Law). For example, George (Partner, Law) reflected upon himself as a potential site of resistance to the gender pay gap, however. Despite describing himself as someone with “very trenchant, progressive views,” he “confessed” a lack of understanding to the firm’s responses and consequentially inability to support these:

“I mean to my shame, as a partner – here you go, here’s a confession – as a partner and therefore one of the owners of the business, I haven’t engaged with what the stats are really saying about the gender pay gap, I just kind of assume it’s there and I will do anything that I can to help address it. But maybe the fact that I haven’t really looked at the data and really engaged with what it is saying is an indication that I am not taking it seriously enough” George, Partner, Law.

A ‘blocked reflexivity’ is therefore developed. Similar to George’s admission that he wasn’t “taking it seriously enough,” men were problematised for an inability to identify the gender pay gap as a business concern. For example, Phillip (Operations Manager, Finance) argued that the overrepresentation of men in senior positions creates a blocked reflexivity that fails to identify the under-representation of women as problematic: “they probably won’t see that there aren’t enough women in the industry and therefore probably won’t see that there is a gender pay gap problem.” Similarly, Alicia (Senior Associate, Law) proposed that the overrepresentation of “old white men” in decision making means they can’t recognise the “subtle biases” that penalise women’s careers. Therefore, they are not in a position to understand and implement meaningful policies:

“If it’s a few female decision makers, they probably have more of an understanding that you need to ensure there is no gender pay gap. The leadership team is so far removed from you, and they have the power. We are still in a time where it is mainly old white men.” Alicia, Senior Associate, Law.

As noted in the work of Whitehead (2001) and Carter & Spence (2014), ‘blocked reflexivity’ was the result of socialisation into careers in the profession services that reproduce inequalities. The taken-for-granted assumptions about working patterns and culture were not problematised as major barriers faced by women. The normalisation of long-working hours, the primary focus upon client development and expectations of continuous full-time employment restricted the effectiveness of organisational responses to the gender pay gap where these are uncritically reproduced as central to career progression (Helen, Diversity & Inclusion Manager, Law; Nicole, Solicitor, Law; April, Partner, Law; Heather, Chief

Finance Officer, Finance; Daniel, Partner, Law). For example, Yvonne (Director, Finance) argued that the working practises within the sector needed to be problematised and challenged to enact change. However, the 'blocked reflexivity' maintains hegemonic masculinity, again through the absence of policies that challenge structural and cultural inequalities. Senior leaders were positioned to be socialised throughout careers in a way that fails to problematise the assumptions of work that penalise women:

"I feel that therefore cannot rely on managers who started their careers in a boys' club -- especially within an insurance, law and the financial sector -- we cannot rely on management to do anything because they are managers for the same reasons that their managers were managers" Ruth, Claims Handler, Finance

Finally, a common theme across interviews was the incongruence of childcare responsibilities expected of women and full-time work in the sector. As previously described, Jacqueline (Senior Associate, Law) argued that flexible leave policies within her firm were undermined by senior leaders perpetuating the sexual division of childcare and placing women as sole caregivers. Despite the predominance of parental responsibilities and flexible working arrangements outlined in Section 8.1, participants argued the inability of senior leaders to deconstruct gendered assumptions of childcare undermined such policies. Heather (Chief Financial Officer, Finance) and Veronica (Director, Finance) both described the persistent expectation that women will take time out of work for caregiving responsibilities whilst husbands act as sole earners, whilst Sarah (Senior Solicitor, Law) and Michelle (Head of Change, Finance) critiqued a complete absence of women's healthcare issues in organisational responses to the gender pay gap. Furthermore, current iterations of shared parental leave were problematised for reinforcing traditional gender roles. Paternity leave remained significantly shorter than maternity leave (Alicia, Senior Associate, Law), in which men were argued as "needing to step up on take on much more responsibilities" to challenge this (Heather, Chief Financial Officer, Finance). A 'blocked reflexivity' by men throughout firms, not solely within senior management, to challenge notions of gendered parental responsibilities was argued as central to tackling gender pay gaps. At present, this undermined those policies aimed at addressing maternity penalties:

“It's encouraging men to actually take on, whether it's more paternity leave or making it more okay for men to take on more childcare... people have a different view of when a man does it versus a you know when a woman does it. I think breaking things like that down to that actually by the partner can do that and it's not necessarily just a women's issue.” April, Partner, Law.

Thus, the inability of men to problematise and challenge the gendered assumptions throughout work is proposed as contributing to the overall apathetic approach. Contributions are therefore made in identifying resistance as a factor to sector-specific gender pay gaps and may explain why the professional services report the highest across all industrial sectors. Furthermore, the explicit role of men in masculinity in the gender pay gap is identified. Meaningful policies constructed by predominantly male senior leaders that challenge structures of inequality remain absent, where any responses are perceived as superficial. In this section, I therefore argue that apathetic approaches further stem from the failure to recognise the barriers faced by women legitimate where they haven't personally been experienced. Therefore, there is no justification for intervention. Participants emphasised a consistent need for men and senior management to engage more in the gender pay gap to facilitate this problematisation of gendered assumptions and working practises. Without this, hegemonic masculinity is inherently maintained through further inaction:

“Society and we as men have got a role to play in being more understanding why having less reticence to be involved and standing up and point out when things are wrong. That could be as an individual level or at a big level. It is about us as well. We have seen the benefits of that.” Adam, Director

#### 8.4 Facilitating progress on the gender pay gap

The chapter thus far has explored how ambivalence from senior leaders resists progress on gender pay gaps due to the disproportionate power held to instigate change. However, by centralising senior leaders as critical actors of resistance, the reverse remains true in facilitating positive change. Extending the arguments of Kelan (2020) into the gender pay gap, the following section argues that progress is facilitated by leaders who recognise the value in rationally undertaking steps to problematise their own assumptions and biases. The change

needed to challenge the structures of inequality that incur wage penalties across the career span demand long-term, financially resourced strategies underlined with collaboration rather than isolated change agents (Kelan & Wrantil, 2018). Thus, the following section explores how senior leaders, often responding to the external environment, can facilitate change to instigate reductions of the gender pay gap.

#### 8.4.1 The role senior leadership

At the end of interviews, all participants were asked what was required to reduce the gender pay gap. In firms perceived as responding well to the challenges of the gender pay gap, this was centred upon meaningful engagement from senior leaders. For example, Jacqueline (Senior Associate, Law) observed how changing leadership styles facilitated change towards more gender inclusive working environments: previous management perceived as “sticks in the mud” no longer acted as barriers to the successful implementation of policy. Vickie (Director, Finance) emphasised that any sustainable reduction on the gender pay gap had to “come from the top” from “completely passionate senior leaders”. Furthermore, Vickie described how a change in leadership gave greater legitimacy to initiatives already enacted: “it’s really encouraging to see people on the floor being able to actually have an impact.” Senior leaders became involved in networks, allowing policies to be conceptualised across the firm rather than restricted solely within management functions where change could be overtly observed:

“The chief-exec when she joined made it clear, and the networks had always been there but probably hadn’t had the buy-in or the commitment from the executive level, although each network has an executive sponsor. But as soon as soon as the new CEO joined, she said this whole D&I is part and parcel of our DNA and we will change things. That’s really where the entire networks got engaged. The whole agenda and seeing what was changed there was great.”

Furthermore, participants explored how senior leaders facilitated change on a more granular level. For example, Maria (Solicitor, Auxiliary) argued that having a manager described as a “huge activist in equality” who “had to fight quite hard to get to where she is”

meant she didn't have to overtly address the barriers faced throughout her career. She proposed that leadership moved beyond challenging discrimination in pay, but also in the day-to-day challenges faced to ensure an equality of opportunities: "she wants equality for all her staff in the sense that she doesn't want us discriminated against just because we are women and aren't getting the cases." Similarly, Michelle (Head of Change, Finance) described discovering that she was paid "substantially less" than her male equivalents within the same occupation, but the responsibility in addressing this was undertaken by her manager to resolve the discrepancy.

#### 8.4.2 Procurement and Public Relations

Furthermore, there is increasing importance of a changing external environment in stimulating internal progress on the gender pay gap. The apathy of senior leaders is challenged by a changing external environment that professional services had to react to maintain their image as elite firms. This argument reflects Kelan & Wranitil (2018), that although senior leaders may be well placed to implement meaningful equality and diversity initiatives, the motivation to do so many emerge from external pressures. These pressures were outlined as prospective client demands and media attention:

"It's People recognizing overall that it's beneficial, but then also having a lot of external pressure in terms of what's going on in the media, what clients are focused on and that naturally means that your more junior lawyers and people within the firm kind of step up the pressure on making sure that these types of initiatives are kind of implemented a bit better within the firm." April, Partner, Law.

Participants emphasised the relevance of clients and procurement in stimulating change within professional service firms. On the assumption the senior leaders hold apathetic or ambivalent perceptions towards the gender pay gap that fails to incentivise change, the profit-driven motivations of the sector are proposed as an increasingly important external pressure. To continue elevated levels of financial performance, participants highlighted how clients are starting to drive progressive change on the gender pay gap within firms:

“What’s really interesting now is clients are saying “I want a woman partner on this matter, I want a woman involved in this project. If you are not bringing senior women into pitches, you are not bringing senior women to engagements, you are not going to get the work.” Daniel, Partner, Law.

April (Partner, Law) reiterated Daniel’s experiences, arguing that prospective clients are increasingly requesting diversity statistics and strategies before engaging in business. Thus, in order to maintain profitability, her firm are reacting to the under-representation of women. This was further emphasised by Vickie (Director, Finance), who argued that business development can no longer rely solely upon entrepreneurial skills, and increasingly firms are required to demonstrate genuine commitment to diversity and inclusion strategies:

“I know that clients are asking questions when they are doing requests for proposals. They're saying, “what are you doing about gender pay gap? Where can I find out more information about it? Can you tell me how you arrived at the figures?” I think some companies, probably will have that as an issue now if they haven't started working on it now.” Vickie, Director, Finance.

Underlying participants’ responses was the notion that policies implemented was the reaction to an already occurring change in alternative industries reflecting societal demographics with which the professional services hadn’t kept pace. This was succinctly described Charlotte (Associate, Law), who argued that firms are “starting to change for no other reason than they have no other choice because the worlds is moving on.” Thus, change can be facilitated where gender pay gap figures are seen as “bad PR issues” that are “really embarrassing for firms” (Mary, Chief of Staff, Finance). Kimberly (Director, Finance) explicitly stated that for “a company like hers” an external incentive to change is required. She described the how the large volume of negative press attention upon initial gender pay gap reporting stimulated internal change to retain their image as an elite firm.

### 8.4.3 Reconceptualising mandatory reporting

Finally, the value of mandatory reporting requirements was recognised by participants but its ability to instigate change is stagnated. To stimulate further engagement, current legislation needed to be reconceptualised beyond current mandatory reporting requirements. As described by Mary (Chief of Staff, Finance), “it’s a really good start. We’ve never had anything like it before, but is it the end goal? Absolutely not.” Similarly, Jaqueline (Senior Associate, Law) saw legislation as a “really good first step.” Thus, to capitalise on the initial momentum afforded by legislation, participants believed further action is required to stimulate future progress.

Mandatory action plans were proposed to address the tendency for firms’ commentaries in gender pay gap reports to directly contradict actual behaviours of the firm as explored in Section 8.2.2. It aimed to generate external pressures to firms to comply with their own statements and take actual measures to address gender pay gaps instead of “hiding” behind figures and commentaries (Adam, Director, Finance; Diane, Director, Finance). Linked in with mandatory reporting was the notion of accountability and penalties for failure to reduce gender pay gaps. Although these were positioned as “extreme,” firms were believed to only “change voluntarily” if penalties or lost revenue were incurred (Michelle, Associate, Law; Amanda, Senior Associate, Law; Deborah, Director, Finance).

“You have to put yourself in a position to be held to account, because the brutal truth is people are not incentivised aside from through altruism unless they are held to account. There needs to be meaningful accountability going through the management of a business. The only way of getting that is by measuring things and setting targets, making it clear that things need to change then repeatedly measuring and publishing information.” Matthew, Partner, Law.

Finally, independent regulators were proposed as required alongside any existing or reworked legislation on gender pay gap reporting to provide the required recourses to function as a new external pressure. Ideally, participants perceived regulators – be it existing or a new, independent regulator – could act as a “bigger stick” in legitimising required actions



(Deborah, Director, Law), question firms that contradict reported figures with statements and intentionally misrepresent data (Vickie, Director, Finance), but also to celebrate success and provide evidence-based policy ideas to firms (Adam, Director, Finance).

“I think it needs to be more than just publishing. You need publishing with – if you haven’t made any improvement – you know, if you’re clearly at this level which isn’t good enough and you’ve made no improvements, or it’s gotten worse then there should be a financial penalty. People tend to do stuff when it’s going to cost them money. Or to give them significant reputational damage. If you’re shielded from that because everybody in your sector is basically the same, you’re probably not that motivated to correct the issues.” Michelle, Associate, Law.

## 8.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored how effectively financial and legal firms are responding to the gender pay gap, centralising on the role of senior leaders as change agent. When meaningfully engaged with and mainstreamed throughout the firm, leaders can capture buy-in to implement strategies that challenge cultural and structural factors of inequalities. Throughout this chapter, I therefore argue that at present, senior leaders act as a central site of resistance. An underlying ambivalence exists, placing the gender pay gap as periphery to overall business strategy. The profit-driven ethics of the sector were incongruent with the requirements of strategies, with resources deemed as more valuable within client facing functions. Thus, contradictions between communicated policies and the actual behaviours emerge. Implemented policies rely upon wider industrial trends, whilst responses internal to organisations rarely evolve beyond legal compliance with mandatory reporting. Organisations were positioned to implement superficial policies that fail to challenge structures of inequality, or to rationalise a lack of interventions. Hegemonic masculinity is therefore maintained through the inaction of senior management reliant upon mimicking the policies of alternative companies that have minimal impact on already stagnating gender pay gap figures. Several contributions are therefore made.

First, hegemonic masculinity in the gender pay gap is explained through the ambivalence and 'blocked reflexivity' of senior leaders. By obscuring stagnated reductions on the gender pay gap through false narratives of progressive policies, the gender pay gap is placed as auxiliary to business strategy. Thus, there is an inherent failure to implement meaningful policies that challenge the structures of inequalities faced across careers. Hegemonic masculinity here is not the direct exertion of power: rather, men's dominance is maintained through implicit means. The failure to recognise structures of inequality and implement strategies to reduce the gender pay gap inherently resists progress and maintains pay inequalities.

Building upon this, a second contribution is therefore made where this resistance may explain industry-specific factors of the gender pay gap. Observing policy responses to the gender pay gap demonstrates a relative heterogeneity of strategies that fail challenge the structural and cultural factors of the gender pay gap. Furthermore, the failure to evolve policy responses overtime has coincided with stagnated reductions across an industry that records the highest gender pay gap across all sectors of the British economy. However, future comparative research across industries would be beneficial to validate these claims.

Finally, the findings in this chapter contribute to strategies in reducing gender pay gaps. By identifying resistance as a crucial factor of the gender pay gap, challenging this through increased engagement from senior leaders can facilitate meaningful progress. As suggested by Cowper-Coles et al. (2021), this may be captured through reconceptualised legislation which improves accountability. Furthermore, this may be achieved by the need for firms to react to a changing external environment to maintain the image of an elite industry. At its core, I argue that the financial and legal services are lacking behind alternative industries in equality and diversity initiatives and must look outwards to address their gender pay gap.

## Chapter 9: Discussion

In this thesis, I aimed to better understand currently unaccounted-for factors of the gender pay gap through the problematization of the power held by men in the financial and legal sectors. Despite consistently reporting the highest gender pay gaps across all industrial sectors, traditional explanations are limited where sector-specific factors are relatively under researched. The effects of human capital may be dampened due to the demands of narrowly defined educational attainment and job experience to achieve career success (e.g., Ashley et al., 2015; Ashley & Empson, 2017; Cook et al., 2012), whilst institutional factors fail to capture the structures and cultures of the professional services. Thus, this thesis utilizes a theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity to explore these research gaps. The practices which maintain men's dominance, iteratively subordinating women's work and pay, are identified, and mechanisms of resistance to progressive policies explored. Modelling the gender pay gap therefore moves beyond the identification of economic differences between women and men captured at a specific moment in time. Rather, this thesis frames the gender pay gap upon penalties and privileges that occur across the career span to explain differential pay at an individual level, and on resisting the challenges to those structures that have benefited men at an institutional level. Three research questions were therefore proposed.

R1: What wage penalties can be identified across women's career span in the professional services that explain current unexplained factors of the gender pay gap?

R2: Are current firm-level strategies to reduce the gender pay gap effective?

R3: What roles do men hold in the reducing or maintaining the gender pay gap?

Drawing upon narrative life-history interviews, I argue that the cultural and institutional structures penalize women's careers comparative to men, influencing the occupations undertaken and consequential earnings. Direct and indirect wage penalties are identified to explain the immediate differential wages received and an inequality in opportunities to allow women to perform to the same level as men. The need to conform within a hegemonic

masculinity obscures structures of inequality, restricting the ability of senior leaders to instigate challenges to the structures they have benefited from. In the following chapter, I outline the contributions made in this thesis. This concludes with a brief discussion intersectionality broadly omitted from empirical chapters.

## 9.1 Thesis contributions

Theoretical contributions are made to gender pay gap, hegemonic masculinity, and careers in the professional services literature. First, the thesis provides a methodological contribution to gender pay gap research. Reflecting the calls of Grimshaw & Rubery (2015), qualitative methodologies are employed to allow for a more holistic conceptualization of discrimination in work and private lives. Secondly, the thesis explores the practices of men that penalize women's wages. Although this thesis does not present an exhaustive typology, it identifies several dominant trends. Thirdly, I argue that the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity obscures the structures of inequality throughout the professional services. The need to assimilate into masculinized cultures normalizes discriminatory practices, and the socialization of senior leaders in the sector acts as an implicit resistance to challenging those structures they have benefited from. This implicit resistance may have implications upon the understandings why gender pay gaps have stagnated. Finally, I propose a notion of "glass bubbles." The narrowly defined careers of the professional services can push highly skilled women out of the sector into lower-paid, isolated occupations with a complete absence of promotion opportunities.

### 9.1.1 Diversity of methodological approaches in gender pay gap research

First, the thesis provides a methodologic shift away from traditional paradigms of data collection in the gender pay gap (e.g., Blau & Kahn, 2007; Grimshaw & Rubery, 2001; Olsen & Walby, 2004). Qualitative data collection on the gender pay gap, at present, is non-existent or at best minimal (see Table 3). Thus, this thesis reflects the calls of Grimshaw & Rubery (2015) for a diversity of data collection methods to provide a holistic understanding of the complexity of inequalities faced in work and private lives. In utilizing life-history interview

techniques, the differential mechanisms of support and penalties incurred across careers which impact earnings can be identified. Therefore, more effective interventions can be conceptualized to assist in supporting the careers of women and reducing the gender pay gap. This thesis does not call for a complete paradigm shift in gender pay gap research. Rather, I advocate the increase in complementary qualitative data collection that explores those discriminations not observed in purely economic data.

### 9.1.2 Men and masculinity in the gender pay gap

Secondly, this thesis explores the role of men and masculinity in the gender pay gap. It problematizes taken-for-granted assumptions of work in the professional services deeply engrained with masculinities. Understandings of the gender pay gap therefore moves beyond hours and earnings, instead observing discrimination and inequality across the career that underly unexplained differences in snapshot representations. Considering R1, direct and indirect wage penalties occurring across the career span can therefore be identified.

Critically, I argue that the singularity of careers in the professional services presents barriers to progression in women's careers that need to be integrating into the understanding of the gender pay gap. Central to the theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity is that the dominance of men relies upon the marginalization and subordination of women (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2018). Although this is not a universal and women may attain power through the appropriation of hegemonic masculinity (Hamilton et al., 2019; Yang, 2020), career success relies upon conformity into a masculine career path. The ability for men to engage with masculinized practices engrained as desirable in 'ideal workers' enables access to training, development, and promotion opportunities. In contrast, women's position in the sector is socially constructed to support the careers of men, not to challenge them. Thus, considering men's position in the gender pay gap, three broad factors are proposed as significant through the empirical findings: constructions to masculinized cultures, the subordination of women's work, and a "blocked reflexivity" from senior leaders."

The findings presented here build upon a several strands of literature outlined in Chapter 2. Human capital theories of the gender pay gap are evident throughout the empirical findings. Rather than arguing that human capital explains wage differentials between women and men (e.g., Joshi et al., 2007; Oemichen et al., 2014; Olsen & Walby, 2004), the arguments of Lips (2013b) are extended with empirical evidence: that human capital is used to rationalize men's dominance by presenting themselves as better suited for senior leadership. As explored in Chapters 6 and 7, women faced explicit barriers to promotion into senior roles where experience in male-dominated occupations is demanded. Furthermore, notions of ideal workers shift from technical competencies to entrepreneurial skills and extreme working patterns as a person increases seniority (Carter & Spence, 2014; Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2007). Therefore, I argue men's dominance in senior positions is reinforced by shifting targets towards increasingly masculine traits. Gender pay gaps are maintained where women face difficulties progressing their careers due to a lacking human capital in male-dominated occupations, or movement of performance metrics to obscure, qualitative targets.

This ties neatly within understandings occupational segregation. Women's progression into senior positions are explored through multifaceted barriers not experienced throughout men's careers and shall be explored in greater detail in Section 10.2. Additionally, an understanding of horizontal occupational segregation is developed beyond observations of the overrepresentation of women in low-paid roles (e.g., McGuinness & Pyper, 2018; Olsen et al., 2018; Olsen & Walby, 2004). Instead, this can be understood through the notion of "glass bubbles" to be discussed in Section 10.1.4: the relocation of highly skilled women into lower-paid functions despite still undertaking relatively reflective occupations as male-dominated work.

Finally, motherhood and part-time penalties are extrapolated upon in tandem with the demands of full-time work. Successful careers in the professional services run in a direct contradiction of reduced hours working and parental responsibilities (e.g., Bessa & Tomlinson, 2017; Cooper et al., 2021; Tomlinson & Muzio, 2018). The increasing neoliberalism of the sector has demanded a near constant commitment to the firm and the birth of "client

is king” mentalities (Anderson-Gough et al., 2004; Collier, 2015). Thus, the normalization of long-working hours within the path to partnership (e.g., Gorman, 2005; 2015; Kornberger et al., 2011) penalizes the careers of mothers unable to reconcile childcare demands. The success of mothers remains dependent upon conformity with masculine working patterns. As explored in the Chapter 7, “you either work full-time and your children get outsourced”: to succeed in the sector, mothers are reliant upon fathers, family members for paid nannies to undertake the primary childcare responsibilities. If undertaking reduced working hours, the value of their labor was undervalued due to the centrality of billables in performance metrics, and mothers were consequentially passed up on for promotion opportunities. Furthermore, the support offered for mothers often undermined career trajectories. Thus, contributions are made to the gender pay gap literature where wage penalties are identified across the career span through ceilings enacted on progression. For several participants, this led to a movement out of the sector despite incurring further losses in earnings.

The context of the financial and legal sectors is critical in the interpretation of findings. The sector is one deeply engrained with assumptions of middle-class white masculinity. Entry into elite-firms relies upon an institutional capital (e.g., Ashley et al., 2015; Ashley & Empson, 2017; Rivera, 2016) that impacts who progresses into highly paid partnership and director roles (Aulakh et al., 2017; Tomlinson, 2018). Concerns of cultural fit within a wider masculinity outweighs a person’s skills and performance (Ashley & Empson, 2016b; Cook et al., 2012; Rivera et a., 2012), whilst the increasing neoliberalism of the sector has shifted demanded skills towards entrepreneurial abilities (Empson, 2007; Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2007; Spence & Carter, 2014). Ensuring the meaningful integration of industrial context furthers an understanding of the role of men and masculinity within the gender pay gap. As argued by Sheehan & Lineham (2018), the organizational structures firmly place women as outsiders throughout their careers. Considering R1, I therefore demonstrate how the barriers faced within the financial and legal sectors, and consequential strategies to navigate these, have a consequential effect on the occupations undertaken by and earnings of women.

This thesis observes the gender pay gap beyond economic differentials between men and women, to argue that discriminations faced throughout day-to-day interactions and within organizational structures underlie snapshot measurement of the gender pay gap. Women are not afforded the equal opportunities to attain equally paying occupations as men, influencing consequential economic modelling of the gender pay gap that is currently missed. Men and masculinity play a central role in the gender pay gap through the social construction of women's careers as secondary, the legitimization of a masculine culture that demands conformity to succeed, and through the failure to challenge to culture and institutional structures of inequality.

### 9.1.3 Reproducing hegemonic masculinity and the stagnating gender pay gap

In this research, I propose that hegemonic masculinity is maintained through a demanded conformity within masculinized cultures. Masculine power is obscured within the financial and legal sectors, where structures and cultures are imbued with masculine norms (North-Samardzic & Taska, 2011). Thus, the assimilation into male norms further replicates structures of inequality rather than challenging them (e.g., Sheehan & Lineham, 2018; von Hippel et al., 2015). To attain reflective career success, women must mimic the behaviors of successful men (e.g., Cahusac & Kanji, 2013). Although this may afford an elevated level of power this is rarely equal to men's and is based upon further marginalization of others (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Gramsci, 1971; Hamilton et al., 2019). The structures of inequalities are legitimized and obscured in reframing individual success upon problematic notions of meritocracy (Amis et al., 2017; Hodgins & O'Connor, 2021).

As explored in Chapters 6 and 7, success in the sector required the assimilation into a masculine culture and often the acceptance of a socially constructed femininity that placed women as secondary throughout careers. Women were able to obtain relative power, but rarely that of men whilst further legitimizing the structures of inequality. Thus, I argue there is little scope to challenge cultural norms without iteratively marginalizing oneself. Instead, there is an inevitability that success relies upon the replication of men's behaviors despite double-bind penalties. Alternatively, women can 'play-the-game' (i.e., Sang et al., 2014;



Tomlinson et al., 2013) to emphasize a socially constructed femininity. Critically, this fails to challenge hegemonic masculinity, reproducing structures of inequality without attaining a masculine power (Hamilton et al., 2019; Yang, 2020). It is important to note that this is not a new claim. Tomlinson et al. (2013) outline the strategies employed by women in male-dominated occupations. The success of women presented in this thesis broadly reflects that of Tomlinson et al.'s framework: assimilation, playing the game or embodying femininity, or the rejection and relocation out of the sector. Critically, these strategies still fail to challenge hegemonic masculinity.

The arguments made help to answer research questions two and three: are current firm-level strategies effective at reducing the gender pay gap? And what roles do men and masculinity hold in reducing and maintain the gender pay gap? Leaning upon Carter & Spence's (2014) utilization of a "blocked reflexivity" (Whitehead, 2001), I propose an ambivalence from senior leaders maintains the gender pay gap. Policies enacted reflect that of Ashley & Empson's (2016b) 'convenient fictions': easily replicable narratives that do little to challenge the underlying structures of inequality. In Chapter 8, I demonstrate how the absence of external pressures allows organizations to obscure progress where communicated discourses are not realized within firms. Following hegemonic masculinity, if power is predominantly congregated into a minority group as male-dominated senior leadership, ambivalence towards the gender pay gap inherently maintains pay inequalities and acts as an implicit site of resistance. The subordination of women is not the direct exertion of power but is reproduced through the inaction of senior leaders to challenge the structures of inequality.

The reproduction of hegemonic masculinity contributes to literature in several means. First, I extend the argument that gendered power is reproduced through conformance and relocation out of the sector (e.g., Cooper et al., 2021; Tomlinson et al., 2013). Furthermore, this corroborates empirical findings of Kelan & Wrantil (2018) and de Vries (2015): that although senior leaders are well positioned to enact change, they may be reluctant to do so or unable to deconstruct their own privileges that have benefited them (Humbert, 2019; Thomas, 2021). Thus, contributions are made in the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity

and the gender pay gap. As explored in Chapter 9, senior leaders implicitly resist meaningful initiatives on the gender pay gap through ambivalence. The reproduction of hegemonic masculinity obscures structures of oppression, and the congregation of power to those socialized into these systems creates an ambivalence to the drivers of the gender pay gap that go unchallenged. Thus, I propose that stagnated progress in a sector that consistently reports the highest gender pay gaps across industrial sectors coincides with a heterogeneity in responses that do little to challenge underlying causes. Further contributions are therefore made to sector-specific gender pay gaps: that an ambivalence fails to recognize and challenge structures of inequalities in the financial and legal sector are legitimized as working process stagnates progress.

#### 9.1.4 Conceptualizing Glass Bubbles

Finally, a central contribution is made in the conceptualization of ‘Glass Bubbles.’ Similar to Tomlinson et al. (2013), I argue that women who deviate from ‘traditional’ out-or-out careers may withdraw from full-time work in the financial and legal services. There is little scope to challenge the structures of inequalities, and individuals who reject cultural consensus are marginalized (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Gramsci, 1971). Thus, I propose when deviating from a narrowly defined career path, an individual may find themselves within a ‘glass bubble’: occupations isolated from organizational hierarchies and sector-wide career trajectories, offering highly skilled labor with comparatively lower pay and a complete absence of promotion opportunities. They exist as periphery to a very narrow, yet linear career path, often continuing to support the labor of those in “traditional” functions. Critically, skills and experiences in glass bubbles roles are not as transferable back into the traditional career path. No scope exists for lateral movements into nor vertical progression within firms, requiring an individual to restart careers if reintegrating back into the career path:

“Once you do something different.... If I wanted to go for partner, I could but I would have to go back to my fee earning role and start climbing that ladder again. There is only one ladder.”

'Glass bubbles' offers new insight into the relocation of women out of the full-time labour market. Tomlinson et al. (2013) describe the relocation or prospective withdrawal of women's labour to more accommodating working conditions that Cahusac & Kanji (2014) root within the masculine culture of professional service firms. Women's success relies upon mimicking the behaviours of successful men, where non-conformance can lead to a relocation out of the sector to lower paid, lower status occupations. Similarly, Sheehan & Lineham (2018) outline a masculine promotion path that penalises women through double bind penalties, being viewed as incompetent leaders and pushed towards back-office roles. Thus, Cooper et al. (2021) describes mothers who reject masculine cultures of investment banking as "[seeking] refuge away from direct market relationships in service roles that were off the steep earnings and seniority trajectory of a 'successful' career in investment management".

In proposing 'glass bubbles,' I offer new insight into women's work when rejecting the cultures of male-dominated workspaces to identify the occupations undertaken after relocation. As demonstrated in Chapter 7, women may continue working within legal and financial occupations, but outside of the sector itself. Relocation places women off the traditional career path, incurring wage penalties and entirely removing prospects of promotions into the highest paid roles. In the legal sector for example, solicitors continue to fulfil the work demands of a solicitor but outside of the sector itself. It is here where 'glass bubbles' exist as isolated: "stepping off that ladder" removes a person from the predefined career path where experiences and skills in new occupations are not seen as transferable back into the industry.

Furthermore, 'glass bubbles' are aligned with several existing theoretical concepts but offer new distinct insights into inequalities at work. Comparisons to glass ceilings may naturally be made. However, the findings do not describe the invisible barriers faced to promotion into senior roles (Atkinson et al., 2016; Christofides et al., 2013; Fortin et al., 2017). Rather, it is the explicit isolation of occupations after the rejection of masculine cultures, where there is a complete absence of promotion opportunities available to women. A barrier to promotions isn't experienced; rather, there is no job to be promoted into. Similarly, it is

worth differentiating from ‘mommy tracks’: the slowed career trajectories of a mother post-childbirth, often coinciding with reduced working. It important to note that ‘glass bubbles’ did not solely occur in mothers: approximately half of the participants describing these occupations had no children. To reiterate again, the career trajectories outlined are not slowed, but instead existing in isolation where promotion is not possible and lateral movements are problematic. Finally, ‘glass bubbles’ are closely aligned to “glass escalators” but in opposing means. Defined as the tendency for men to be promoted at an accelerate rate in women-dominated occupations, often due to a perceived compatibility in constructed masculinities and management responsibilities (Williams, 1993; Wingfield, 2009), glass bubbles describe the opposite for women in male-dominated occupations. The incompatibility of work in the professional services and the social construction of femininity does not push women up. Rather, women are pushed out.

## 9.2 The singularity of careers and the gender pay gap

A central argument throughout this thesis is that the construction of careers in the professional service upon narrow masculinities in linear “up-or-out” trajectories function as a critical practice of hegemonic masculinity in the gender pay gap. Work and labour in the professional services are underlined with assumptions of masculinity. Success relies upon the embodiment of specific cultural, social, and human capital (e.g., Cook et al., 2012; McDowell, 2001; 2010). Working patterns are underscored with assumptions of continuous, full-time employment and extreme working hours (e.g., Gorman, 2005; 2015; Kornberger et al., 2011), and performance is rooted within entrepreneurial abilities and business development (e.g., Anderson-Gough et al., 2000; Carter & Spence, 2014). Skills, experiences, and behaviors outside of these constructs are undervalued and marginalized even when contributing to business goals. Success therefore relies on the assimilation into masculine expectations; rejection equated to a stunted career trajectory, incurring wage penalties across the career span.

The deviation from the singularity of careers occurred in several forms: reduced working hours, business support roles, the relocation out of the legal or financial sector, or

through the explicit rejection of masculinities. Considering R1, consequential wage penalties came in two forms. Direct wage penalties were identified through differential wages and bonuses received. These were incurred due to the social construction of femininity and negative perceptions across the careers that failed to provide women equal opportunities to embody notions of ideal workers. Indirect wage penalties were then identified through inequalities in promotion opportunities available. Promotion to senior roles were constructed within narrow, masculinized human capital and specialisms outside of entrepreneurial skills were undervalued. Furthermore, the accumulated experiences of women were often overlooked in favour of a desired masculinized human and institutional capital. To facilitate promotions, women were likely to relocate out of the sector into lower-paid specialisms, firms, or industries. It is important to note here the consequential bonuses afford to men throughout careers. Although men represented a minority of the sample, the benefits incurred from their own masculinity despite any positionality as an ally to gender inequality was observable. This occurred through explicit privileges aligned with the masculine cultures and structures of the financial and legal professions, or by simply not incurring penalties aligned with femininity.

Critically, assimilation does not assume equality of pay and opportunities. Rather, indirect pay penalties were inferred through restricted career trajectories. As explored in Chapter 7, women's labour is constructed as incongruent with work in the professional services. Even when performing equal to men, women's performance is challenged as illegitimate, or shifted towards vague, subjective measures. Furthermore, when assimilating into the demands of masculinized social networking, women were subject to sexualization and isolation. Social networking occurred with the backdrop of the "old boys' clubs," alongside sexist banter, the sexualization of women, and the direct sexual harassment. Women's positions are constructed as secondary in the sector to support the careers of men even when assimilating to cultural norms (i.e., Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Assimilation fails to challenge these structures, and although it may afford privileges, is based upon the reproduction of masculine power and marginalization of others (Hamilton et al., 2019). The embodiment within the singularity of careers in the professional services still present specific, unique barriers to women's career progression not experienced within men.

Successful careers in the professional services exist as a relative singularity. Occupations are narrowly defined and are assumed as highly skilled, demanding long-working hours and a near continuous commitment to the firm. Thus, several traditional explanations are limited. In this thesis, I therefore argue that the narrow, linear career path within the professional services marginalizes women throughout their careers, restricting opportunities to proceed upwards into highly paid roles as they become increasingly masculinized. Specifically, the arguments made throughout this thesis critiques the demands for conformance into a hegemonic masculinity that fails to provide reflective success. The assimilation into masculine norms still socially constructs women's careers as secondary, challenging their skills and experiences as illegitimate. The rejection of these incurs explicit pay penalties, often placing women into 'glass bubbles'. For the legal and financial sectors to meaningfully address the gender pay gap, careers need to be reconceptualized to recognize a diversity of experiences and center performance upon more human-centric behaviors.

### 9.3 A note on intersectionality

A limitation of the thesis is the perhaps near absence of intersectionality in empirical findings. As discussed in Section 5, it is recognized that intersecting penalties and privileges influence a person's career and consequential earnings in a sector underlined with assumptions of middle-class, white masculinity. White, privately educated men dominate partnership within large corporate and city-boutique law firms (Tomlinson et al., 2019), whilst BAME women are 55% less likely to be promoted to partnership in large corporate firms compared to 47% of white women (Aulakh et al., 2017). Literature within hegemonic masculinity and the professional services overlap in the impact of intersecting privileges and penalties in male-dominated sectors. As referenced throughout, success in the sector relies upon an embodiment of a specific cultural and social capital (e.g., Ashley & Empson, 2016b; Bolton & Muzio, 2007; Carter & Spence, 2014). Although white middle-class women may be able to appropriate a hegemonic femininity that affords power over a marginalized other without challenging patriarchal structures whilst the unilateral domination of men over women is rejected (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Hamilton et al., 2019; Messerschmidt, 2018).

Intersectionality in the gender pay gap was a common topic discussed throughout interviews. Participants regardless of race, gender and sexuality emphasized a need for an intersectional approach to the gender pay gap. However, the intersecting impact of race and class on careers in the financial and legal sector emerged in data collection. People of colour were a minority in the sample and only two men in the overall sample disclosed their sexual orientation as gay<sup>16</sup>. Frustratingly, the constrained time resources impacted by COVID limited the scope for in person networking, which might have facilitated a snowball sampling targeting underrepresented demographics. However, it is worthwhile to tie these together briefly to explore how the impact of hegemonic masculinity has a wider ranging impact on careers than purely upon gendered constructs.

Although racial and gender minorities are making greater inroads to the sector, diversifying the boardrooms of the professional services, these are often still individuals who have been educated, trained, and socialized in the same fashion as the predominant middle-class, white male predecessors (Ashley & Empson, 2016a). Thus, the scope to challenge the underlying systems of power and oppression may remain limited. Racism and assumptions of white masculinity are strife throughout work in the sector. People of color regardless of gender explored a restriction of workplace opportunities due to isolation from professional and personal networks. As explored in Section 7, networking occurred on the backdrop of the *'old boys' club'*; the normalization of drinking cultures in bars, strip clubs and sports events to build personal and professional connections. Success in the sector required an acceptance of racist language and humor, further isolating those who rejecting the accumulative experiences of persistent sexism. Participants regardless of gender expressed a difficult engaging with networking in a culture centered upon alcohol where they explicitly didn't drink for religious reasons or felt uncomfortable in these environments.

Working class identities existed as a barrier to navigate. Reflecting existing literature, barriers were presented in the initial movement into the sector (e.g. Crawford & Wang, 2019; Rivera & Tilcsik, 2016), the types of firms worked in (e.g. Aulakh et al., 2017; Tomlinson et al.,

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<sup>16</sup> Although they did state this hadn't had an impact on their career.

2018), and undermining assumptions of a person's capabilities in the sector (e.g. Cook et al., 2012; Rivera et al., 2012). As explored in Chapter 6, class privileges supported entry into the sector and the consequential roles worked. Access to professional networks afforded placement, vacation schemes and work experience. Similarly, this afforded financial stability to offset childcare costs or to work within low-paid sectors. The accumulation of a social and cultural capital afforded through these class benefits were relatively restricted from participants who described a working-class background. The pre-existing social networks described in Chapter 6 had to be built, where many participants had little to no connections to support their movement into the sector. Thus, the types of firm's working-class participants worked within represented a stark difference: often working within small, regional firms that were presented as barriers to progression where upward mobility to high earning roles is constrained.

Furthermore, prospective employees may self-select out of elite firms where they feel they may not be accepted due to middle-class self-presentation (Ashley et al., 2015; Ashley & Empson, 2016b). Participants explored how their own differences from the "polished" culture of the professional services undermined their own skills and abilities. In elite firms, Northern accents or working-class dialects were equated with a lack of capability. Participants had to justify their own position in the sector before being seen as equally capable as middle and upper-class counterparts. Similarly, working-class participants explored an explicit barrier in networking, where their own interests and experiences were positioned as dramatically different to that of the cultural norm.

The marginalization of careers through a hegemonic masculinity in the professional services extends beyond purely gendered considerations. Frustratingly, there hasn't been the space nor resources to explore this meaningfully. Furthermore, it is difficult to fully state how intersectional penalties and privileges have occurred (i.e., Tomlinson et al., 2019). Despite this, the unique experiences occurring through intersectional identities emphasizes the core argument derived from empirical findings: that a successful career in the professional services relies upon the embodiment of a middle-class, white hegemonic masculinity. Rejection places



an individual as a marginalized 'other' with markedly different careers and earnings. Yet assimilation does not guarantee equality of pay. Rather, individuals had to justify their position in a sector that socially constructs their labour as secondary. Those outside of a white, middle-class masculine identity are assumed as less competent until proven otherwise:

“You are constantly going against the default thinking” Heather, Chief Financial Officer.

## Chapter 10: Conclusions

The gender pay represents multiple, often intertwining inequalities occurring across the career course. Despite recent changes in legislation requiring firms to disclose gender pay gap figures, progress has relatively stagnated: in 2021, the gender pay gap for all employees was 15.4 per cent, a reduction of only 4.5 per cent in the ten year period prior, and an increase of 0.5% upon the previous year. This stagnation is especially true in the financial and legal sectors which consistently report the highest gender pay gap across all industrial sectors: 32.2 per cent in the financial services and 24.9 per cent in legal and accounting activities, a reduction of only 3.4 per cent and 1 per cent respectively since the introduction of mandatory reporting. Although the gender pay gap can often be modelled upon human capital factors (i.e. Blau & Kahn, 2007; 2017), occupational segregation (i.e. Grimshaw & Rubery, 2001), and motherhood and part-time penalties (i.e. Gregory & Milner, 2009; Tomlinson, 2011), these explanations are relatively limited in a sector where individual success is framed upon meritocracy (Ashley, 2021, Longlands, 2019), extreme working patterns (Anderson-Gough et al., 2000; Reid, 2015), and narrow-definitions of demanded human capital (Bolton & Muzio, 2007; Cook et al., 2012). Furthermore, where the research traditions of gender pay gap assume pay inequalities are driven by market factors and productivity (i.e., Rubery et al., 2005), women's careers are differentiated from an assumed 'normality': a normality rooted within masculinity but rarely problematized as such.

In this thesis, I therefore demonstrate how practices of hegemonic masculinity in the financial and legal sectors represent a significant factor contributing to the gender pay gap. I argue that careers are constructed upon narrowly defined, linear trajectories underlined with a need for conformance to middle-class, white masculinity. To reject or deviate structural and cultural norms incurs wage penalties not currently conceptualized in the gender pay gap. Penalties are identified across the career path through stagnated career developments, inequalities in promotion opportunities, lesser bonuses received, or the relocation to lower-paid occupations and sectors. Critically, assimilation into a hegemonic masculinity does not guarantee equality of pay. Rather, structures of inequality are reproduced, further marginalizing those who are oppressed (i.e., Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Hamilton et al.,

2019; Yang, 2020). Thus, the thesis explores how men both contribute and maintain the gender pay gap through hegemonic masculinity.

The thesis addresses the research gap in unexplained elements of the gender pay gap through a holistic account of discrimination occurring over careers. This is explored through a secondary research gap: an understanding of how men and masculinity contribute to the gender pay gap. Thus, the research problematizes the power retained by men within the financial and legal services, rather than understanding the differences between women's careers from an assumed normality.

The research gap was explored through comparative life-history interviews between men and women working in the sector. Undertaking a methodological and philosophical paradigm shift, the thesis observes the gender pay gap as the consequence of privileges and penalties occurring over an individual's career rather than a snapshot representation of economic differences. This allowed an understanding of the unique barriers faced by women over their careers not conceptualized in quantitative research. Critically, the methodology employed aims to underpin and expand upon quantitative measurements of the gender pay gap rather than to replace it; to explore the discrimination difficult to conceptualize in economic data.

I do not aim to propose universal truths in this thesis, nor are findings a complete account of hegemonic masculinity in the professional services. Rather, the claims made are based upon the shared patterns of meaning occurring across the narrative accounts of participants. Furthermore, the structures of inequalities identified in this thesis are not necessarily new claims but make new contributions when integrated into the gender pay gap.

This thesis aimed to understand and explore the role of men and masculinity in the gender pay gap. A consensus existed across all participants that men had a critical role in closing the gender pay gap, and that men's position was as significant as women. Thus, with

this thesis I provide a call for action for men throughout the financial and legal sector to become more engaged in equality initiatives; to recognize and challenge these structures of discrimination in work and labor they have benefited from.

## 10.1 Policy recommendations

The presented research has wider implications for policy makers to support effective interventions on the gender pay gap. Although the introduction of mandatory gender pay gap reporting has stimulated positive, albeit minor change (Blundell, 2020), progress has stagnated. Despite the increasing numbers of women entering the sector (i.e., Aulakh et al., 2017; Tomlinson et al., 2019), inaction risks reproducing structures of inequality.

First, the research reflects the calls of Cowper-Cowles et al. (2021) for a reconceptualization of the Equality 2020 (Gender Pay Gap Information) 2017 legislation. The disclosure of gender pay gap data can capture meaningful legitimacy to stimulate change (e.g., Bennedsen et al., 2019; Blundell, 2020; Wahl, 2014). However, the reliance upon notions of transparency to motivate firms in reducing their gender pay gap has faltered in recent years. There is little in existing legislation to instigate change beyond altruistic intentions. As explored in Chapter 8, current reporting requirements allows the gender pay gap to become an auxiliary function of work rather than integrated into day-to-day operations. Aligned with the proposals of participants, the thesis advocates for the introduction of mandatory action plans and financial penalties for firms that do not honor commitments. Additionally, the establishment of an independent regulator (or additional function of an existing regulator) can be formed to track gender pay gap data, support firms, and celebrate best practices.

Furthermore, senior leaders must meaningfully engage with gender pay gap initiatives. As explored in Chapter 8, existing legislation allows firms to obscure progress, presenting narratives of progressive policies whilst actions rarely move beyond legal compliance. Senior leaders are best positioned to enact meaningful change in organizations

due to the disproportionate power congregated to the top of hierarchies (Kelan & Wrantil, 2018; Thomas, 2021). Thus, to meaningfully address the gender pay gap, senior leaders must deconstruct their own privileges across careers that are obscured by notions of meritocracy (de Vries, 2015). Critically, the thesis positions the financial and legal sector as 'playing catch up' to alternative industries progressing on the gender pay gap at a higher rate. Senior leaders must implement firm-specific strategies that effectively address the underlying causes of their gender pay gap rather than adopting industry-wide policies. Thus, the thesis advocates for greater investment into gender diversity initiatives, observations of best practice case studies from alternative sectors, or the instigation of greater links between industry and academia.

The research does not call for quotas or board diversity targets. Rather, there is an urgent demand for diversity of behaviours and experiences in financial and legal careers. Reconceptualizing performance metrics and promotion criteria to recognize a greater diversity of skills and experiences may support the movement of women into senior leadership and the retention of women in the sector. Recentring work and labor on more human-centric behaviors can support the careers of highly skilled workers where specialisms fall outside of narrow masculinities.

## 10.2 Recommendations for further research

Scope for future research emerges from this thesis. These relate to limitations recognized in the study, whilst further research from emerging concepts would be beneficial.

First, further qualitative research to complement existing quantitative methods can further the collective understanding of wider inequalities in work and private lives in the gender pay gap (Grimshaw & Rubery, 2016). Additionally, replicable research in the professional services can corroborate or expand upon the presented findings. Similarly, comparative studies between sectors may identify specific industrial factors that influence the gender pay gap. However, a diversity in qualitative methodologies has the potential to

explore existent research gaps in greater detail. As explored in Chapter 5, this thesis was initially envisioned as comparative ethnographic case studies of professional service firms. Data collection aimed to understand specific drivers at a local level, exploring the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity through interviews, participant observation and document analysis. Undertaking such a methodology may address a critical limitation in the presented research: utilizing reported gender pay gap figures alongside internal pay data as a platform for specific qualitative enquiries into organizational realities of inequalities.

Secondly, there is scope for further research in “glass bubbles”. At present, this remains an emerging concept based upon the experiences of a minority of participants. Future research should explicitly explore specific ‘glass bubble’ occupations to understand the rationales or circumstance leading to movements into these roles. Additionally, wider research can be conducted within and external to the professional services to identify further occupations aligned with glass bubbles. To fully conceptualize these roles with greater data collection will provide insight into workplace inequalities related to women’s work in male-dominated industries.

Third, the integration of intersectionality within further research could expand upon hegemonic masculinity in careers beyond a solely gendered perspective. As explored in Chapter 9, it is recognized that the lack of intersectionality is a limitation in the presented research. The sample was predominantly white, middle-class, heterosexual, and able-bodied individuals. Despite this, unique barriers emerged from intersecting identities of participants when explored outside of a solely gendered lens. Further research integrating an intersectional approach can explore the intertwining inequalities faced throughout careers in a sector underlined with assumptions of middle-class, white masculinity. This has further scope to align the gender pay gap with wider racial and class-based pay gaps, Furthermore, intersectional approaches may provide theoretical insight into hegemonic femininity (Hamilton et al., 2019; Yang, 2020). First, this may provide insight into interlinking class and racial pay gaps. Secondly, where the gender pay gap has stagnated despite increasing

numbers of women in the professional services, further research could explore the constrained power of senior leaders to enact meaningful change on inequalities at work.

### 10.3 Closing remarks

The overarching aim of this thesis was to problematize the power held by men and masculinity as a significant factor in the gender pay gap. It aimed to explore the wider inequalities and discrimination in work and private lives not yet conceptualized in the gender pay gap (Grimshaw & Rubery, 2015; Lips, 2013a).

The empirical findings presented in this thesis expand upon several strands of literature. Observing the penalties and privileges occurring across the career span underlines existing economic understanding of the gender pay gap. Thus, the unique barriers faced by women in attaining the reflective occupations and consequential pay compared to men can be identified. This allows for a greater integration of wider feminist literature difficult to conceptualize in traditional research paradigms of gender pay gap scholarship (Alkadry & Tower, 2006; Lips, 2013a).

To reduce, if not eliminate, the gender pay gap, the financial and legal sectors need to evolve beyond current strategies. At present, policies reflect that of Ashley & Empson's (2016b) 'convenient fictions': replicable narratives that do little to challenge underlying structures of inequality. Senior leaders must be able to deconstruct their own privileges to challenge the structures that have benefited them throughout careers (Kelan & Wrantil, 2018; de Vries, 2015). However, where apathy persists towards the gender pay gap, the motivation to do so may have come externally: be that through reconceptualized legislation, trade pressures, or further media attention.

At its core, this thesis argues that to fully understand and address the gender pay gap, the responsibilities of men need to be meaningfully understood; that men hold an equally

significant responsibility in the gender pay gap, and their increasing participation facilitates change. To reiterate a bell hooks quote used previously to explain my own rationale for undertaking this research better than I ever could:

“This does not mean that [men] are better equipped to lead feminist movement; it does mean that they should share equally in resistance struggle. In particular, men have a tremendous contribution to make feminist struggle in the area of exposing, confronting, opposing, and transforming the sexism of their male peers” (hooks, 1984, p.81).



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## Appendix 1: Interview Structure

Welcome & thank the participant for agreeing to the interview. Provide individual research information sheet, participation information sheet and an informed consent form. Quickly run through what will be required from them:

- Signed Informed Consent Form.
- Consent to being recorded.
- Consent for the researcher to transcribe this recording and use in future research in line with confidentiality agreements i.e. no real names of individuals or companies will be used and no confidential information such as customers or secret business practises will be used.
- State that the transcript will be available to themselves if they wish; this provides them the ability to retract any statements.

Finally, state the interview around 50 minutes and predominantly cover questions about the company and their career trajectory. If we have change and time, it would be useful to run through what equality initiatives are being offered within the company.

Before starting, allow the participant an opportunity to ask any questions about the research, interview questions, informed consent etc.

### 1. Organisational Gender Pay Gap

- 1.1. Is gender pay gap a problem in this organisation?
- 1.2. What does the participant believe causes the gender pay gap?
- 1.3. Does the participant believe that anything needs to be done to address the gender pay gap?
- 1.4. Are there any activities/policies in place addressing gender pay gap? Or planned?
  - 1.4.1. Who was the driver of those?
- 1.5. What work is currently being done within the company to address the gender pay gap?
- 1.6. Does the participant believe that reducing the gender pay gap is a high priority?
- 1.7. Is the issue of the gender pay gap widely discussed within the organisation?

### 2. Comparative life-history interviews

#### 2.1. Current Role:

- 2.1.1. Could you briefly tell me a little about your current role?
- 2.1.2. Do you have part-time or flexible work arrangements available?
- 2.1.3. Were you appointed to the role internally or externally?
- 2.1.4. What skills and experiences do you think helped you achieve the role?
  - 2.1.4.1. How did you obtain these skills? Were they educational, through intrinsic training?
- 2.1.5. Has there been any external factors you believe helped you achieve this role? Mentoring etc.

#### 2.2. Career Trajectory:

- 2.2.1. Could you tell me about your career progression prior to this role?
  - 2.2.1.1. Potentially ask them to start at the current role and work backwards.
- 2.2.2. Have you always worked within a similar role or function?
- 2.2.3. Have you always worked within the firm?

- 2.2.4. What challenges has the participant faced in their career and how did they overcome these?
- 2.2.5. Does the participant believe they have had any help in achieving their current position?
  - 2.2.5.1. Not only help from a mentor etc. but perhaps educational and training opportunities; how did these arise?
- 2.2.6. Has there been any external factors the participant believes has affected their career I.e. time out of work for any reasons?
- 2.2.7. Does the participant believe that their career experiences are common throughout the industry or unique to themselves?

### 3. Gender and equality within the organisation:

To Senior Management & Human Resource Officials:

- 3.1. What skills and traits are seen as desirable for success within the organisation?
- 3.2. Is shared parental leave available within the organisation?
  - 3.2.1. If so, are there any perceived barriers to uptake?
  - 3.2.2. Who are the individuals most likely to take shared parental leave within the organisation?
  - 3.2.3. Are there any beliefs that taking parental can affect an individual's career?
- 3.3. Are flexible working arrangements available within the organisation?
  - 3.3.1. If so, what is the scheme and how is it offered?
  - 3.3.2. Who are the individuals most likely to engage in flexible working in terms of occupation, parental status, and gender?
  - 3.3.3. Does the participant believe that flexible working arrangements can affect an individual's career
- 3.4. The nature of part-time work:
  - 3.4.1. Who are the individuals most likely to work part-time in terms of occupation, parental status, gender etc.?
  - 3.4.2. Why does the participant believe individuals would choose to work part-time hours?
  - 3.4.3. Do part-time workers have similar training opportunities as their full-time counterparts?
  - 3.4.4. Do part-time workers have the same career progression opportunities as their fulltime counterparts?
  - 3.4.5. Do part-time workers have the opportunity to move to full-time employment if requested?

To Part-time and Flexible Workers:

- 3.5. Why has did the participant choose to work part-time/flexible arrangements?
- 3.6. Do they believe they have the same training opportunities as their full-time counterparts?
- 3.7. Do they believe they have the same career progression opportunities as their full-time counterparts?
- 3.8. Do they believe working part-time/flexible hours has impacted their career?
- 3.9. Do they see themselves working part-time/flexible hours for the rest of their careers?

- 3.9.1. If not, ask if they have tried to move into full-time hours and if there have been any difficulties in doing so?

#### 4. Socialisation

- 4.1. Are people willing to openly discuss their salaries when asked by colleagues?
- 4.2. What are the typical conversations that occur within the office?
  - 4.2.1. Are there any specific topics that you believe you cannot engage with?
  - 4.2.2. Is there any language or terminology used that you believe you cannot engage with?
- 4.3. What are the typical social events and who often attends?
  - 4.3.1. Does the participant believe attending these can positively or negatively affect their career?
  - 4.3.2. Do part-time and flexible workers have the same opportunities to attend social events?
- 4.4. Are there / are you a part of any specific workplace networks or groups?
  - 4.4.1. What do these networks or groups do and why were they formed?
  - 4.4.2. Do you believe being a part of this group has helped your career?
- 4.5. Does the participant have a close relationship with their colleagues or managers?
  - 4.5.1. How was this relationship formed?
  - 4.5.2. Do they believe that their relationship with their colleagues or managers has ever helped or created a barrier to career development?

#### Ending the interview

Thank the participant for their time and ask them if they have any further questions. Ask the participant if they can think of anyone within the firm who may be interested in an interview? This can also be with someone external to the firm. Remind them of the withdrawal procedure should they require this and make them aware that once the interview has been transcribed, the transcript can be provided for approval.

*Note: this is a rough guide for semi-structured interviews. Not all sections will be appropriate for all participants and additional questions surrounding these topics may be required. Additionally, further questions will be included within interviews to provide greater depth in topics arisen. For example, questions may arise in understanding promotion structures, pay scales, or bonus policies.*



## The Gender Pay Gap in the Legal, Financial and Professional Sectors *Call for research participants*

The legal obligation to report gender pay gaps has highlighted positive and negative aspects of gender equality within the professional sectors where reducing, if not eliminating, the gender pay gap remains a large aspiration. This research hopes to understand those existing policies that attempt to address the gender pay gap and any problems organisations have in their successful implementation. Furthermore, it hopes to explore any social aspects of work that may act as barriers to career progression for the increasing number of women into a sector once traditionally seen as “men’s work”.

### *What is required from me?*

Interviews will be conducted through video-communication (Zoom, Skype, etc.) or by phone call. Interviews can be arranged at a time that suits you and outside of traditional working hours if required. There is no strict structure to the interview, but it hopes to understand career histories, the nature of socialisation within your industry and, if applicable, strategies to address the gender pay gap.

### *For more information, please contact:*

Jack Daly,  
Postgraduate Researcher,  
Centre for Employment Relations,  
Innovation and Change  
Leeds University Business School.  
[busjdal@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:busjdal@leeds.ac.uk)

All research is subject to internal ethical approval from the University of Leeds. The anonymity of participants is ensured. Data will be held following internal University of Leeds data protection policies. Data collected and required informed consent will be accessible only to the lead researcher. This is an independent research project undertaken by Jack Daly in fulfilment of the requirements of the PhD. The doctoral project is being supervised by Dr. Ioulia Bessa, Dr. Vera Trappmann and Professor Jennifer Tomlinson. Research funded by Leeds Doctoral College.



## The Gender Pay Gap in Professional Services

### Participation Information

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#### Project Aims

The professional services sector, including finance and law, remains one of the largest employers within the UK's economy and has spearheaded its transformation into a modern economy contributing £190bn in gross value added (Barry, 2019). Innovative strategies, transformative cultures and positive community-based initiatives positions the sector as one of the most popular for recent graduates. This has attracted an increasing number of workers, and the increase of women into the sector has challenged what was once traditionally seen as “men’s work”.

Reducing, if not eliminating, the gender pay gap remains a large aspiration for many companies. Recent amendments to the Equality Act (2010) requiring mandatory gender pay gap reporting has highlighted both positive and negative aspects of gender equality within the professional services sector. Internal strategies employed by companies, supported by governmental policies and research, has taken positive steps towards this. The presented doctoral research aims to understand the existing policies that assist in achieving equal pay. Furthermore, it hopes to identify further barriers that may affect easy implementation or identify underlying sociological factors that need to be understood.

#### What is required from yourself?

An interview will be conducted between yourself and the researcher. Whilst there will be no strict structure to the interview, it aims to understand your opinions on strategies to address the gender pay gap. Additionally, it aims to provide insight into your career including how you achieved your current position, any difficulties you overcame, and any future goals you may have. Finally, they will explore the nature of social interactions and how these may have affected your career. Any interviews will be conducted at a time and location that is suitable for yourself.

#### What are the benefits of taking part?

This aims to provide an impartial research report into any sociological factors that assist in eliminating, or present barriers to reducing, the gender pay gap within organisations. This can then be communicated back to yourself through a disseminated report. This includes all impartial observations and recommendations to assist in reducing gender pay gaps based upon conducted interviews.

How will my data be used?

Collected data will primarily contribute towards the researchers' doctoral thesis and a case study provided back to your organisation. All interviews will be digitally recorded and then transcribed by the researcher; once transcribed, digital recordings will be deleted. Interviews will be analysed across multiple organisation to understand any factors that may assist in reducing the gender pay gap. This analysis will contribute to the doctoral thesis and may be used in conference or journal publications; this may include anonymised quotes from interviews. Any information relating to yourself will be accessible only to the researcher and will be provided pseudonyms to ensure you are not identifiable.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

All data collected will be held in accordance with the internal University of Leeds data protection policies. Data collected and required informed consent will be stored on the University of Leeds secure drive and will only be accessible to the lead researcher.

Who is organising and funding the research

This is an independent research project undertaken by Jack Daly in fulfilment of the requirements for his PhD. The doctoral project is being supervised by Dr. Ioulia Bessa, Dr. Vera Trappmann and Professor Jennifer Tomlinson. The doctoral programme is funded by Leeds Doctoral College.

Ethical Review

All research is subject to internal ethical approval from the University of Leeds. The anonymity of participants and participation of organisations will be ensured. Data will be held in accordance with all data protection regulation and internal university policies.

For any further information, please contact:

Jack Daly,  
Postgraduate Researcher,  
Centre for Employment Relations, Innovation & Change,  
Leeds University Business School  
Email: [busjdal@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:busjdal@leeds.ac.uk)  
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Dr. Ioulia Bessa,  
University Academic Fellow,  
Centre for Employment Relations, Innovation & Change,  
Leeds University Business School.  
Email: [i.bessa@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:i.bessa@leeds.ac.uk)

## Appendix 4: Recruitment materials - example newsletter

### **The gender pay gap in the legal, financial and professional sectors: call for participants**

The legal obligation to report gender pay gaps has highlighted positive and negative aspects of gender equality within the banking and finance industries where reducing, if not eliminating, the gender pay gap remains a large aspiration. This research aims to understand those existing policies that attempt to address the gender pay gap and any problems organisations have in their successful implementation. Furthermore, it hopes to explore any social aspects of work that may act as barriers to career progression for the increasing number of women into a sector once traditionally seen as “men’s work”.

Individuals are invited to participate in interviews exploring career histories, the nature of socialisation within the industry and, if applicable, organisational responses to the gender pay gap. Interviews will be conducted through video communication (Zoom, Skype, etc.) or by phone call. Interviews can be arranged at a time that suits you and outside of traditional working hours if applicable.

For further information, or to signal your interest in participating, please contact:

Jack Daly,  
Doctoral Researcher,  
Centre for Employment Relations, Innovation and Change,  
Leeds University Business School.

busjdal@leeds.ac.uk

## Appendix 5: Recruitment materials – social media posts

Twitter:

*“Work in finance, law, or the professional services & have an hour to spare for an interview as part of research in the gender pay gap? Further info below. Email me at busjdal@leeds.ac.uk if interested or have any questions!*

*#womeninlaw #womeninfinance #genderequality #Diversity #DiversityAndInclusion  
#womeninbanking #lawtwitter #finance #Accounting”*

LinkedIn:

**\*\* RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS FOR RESEARCH INTO THE GENDER PAY GAP IN LAW, FINANCE, AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICE FIRMS \*\***

*Work in the legal, financial and professional service sectors and have an hour to spare to take part in research exploring the gender pay gap? Currently particularly interested to hear from*

*men within senior leadership positions, but participation is open to anyone within the sectors. All interviews will be conducted over Zoom or by telephone and can be arranged at a time that suits you*

*If you're interested in taking part, send me an email at [busjdal@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:busjdal@leeds.ac.uk) or send me a message!*

[#genderpaygap](#) [#genderequality](#) [#diversity](#) [#diversityandinclusion](#) [#womeninbusiness](#) [#womeninfinance](#) [#womeninlaw](#) [#iwd2021](#) [#finance](#) [#investing](#) [#legal](#) [#lawfirms](#) [#lawyers](#) [#accountant](#) [andaccounting](#) [#management](#) [#business](#) [#maleallies](#)

## Appendix 5: Recruitment materials – approaching industry-based networks

To whom it may concern,

I hope you are well.

I am currently conducting research into the gender pay gap within the legal. The research hopes to understand the complexities of gender pay gaps focussing on sociological factors that may impede women's career development compared to their male counterparts. I am writing to you today to see if a call for participants could be distributed amongst your members.

I am also hoping to understand how networks such as [NETWORK NAME] offers support to women to help women throughout their careers, in attaining leadership positions and in addressing inequalities such as the gender imbalance at partnership levels. If anyone is available to have a quick conversation about this, it would be greatly appreciated.

I have attached the Call for Participants and a Participant Information sheet. Ideally, interviews would be conducted to explore participants career histories: how they achieved their positions, if they utilised any external support and any barriers they had to overcome. Additionally, they would explore any organisational responses to the gender pay gap if applicable.

Thanks in advance for any help you may be able to offer. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Kind regards,

**Jack Daly**

Doctoral Researcher  
Work and Employment Relations  
Leeds University Business School

## Appendix 5: Individual consent form



<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Consent to take part in 'the Gender Pay Gap in Professional Services'.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Add your initials next to the statement if you agree</p>
<p>I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 29<sup>th</sup> June 2020 explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.</p>	
<p>I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences until two months after the research end date. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.</p> <p>During your interview, you will have the opportunity to provide a pseudonym, memorable phrase or numerical sequence to provide anonymous identification of your data. If you wish to remove your data, please contact the lead researcher on the contact details overleaf. Any data to be removed, either specific sentences or entire interviews, will be withdrawn from any analysis conducted and deleted from any relevant data bases.</p>	
<p>I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.</p>	
<p>I agree for the data I provide to be archived within the Research Data Leeds Repository.</p>	
<p>I understand that other researchers may use my words in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.</p>	
<p>I understand that relevant sections of the data collected during the study, may be looked at by auditors from the University of Leeds where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my records.</p>	
<p>I agree to take part in the above research project and will inform the lead researcher should my contact details change during the project and, if necessary, afterwards.</p>	

Name of participant	
Participant's signature	
Date	

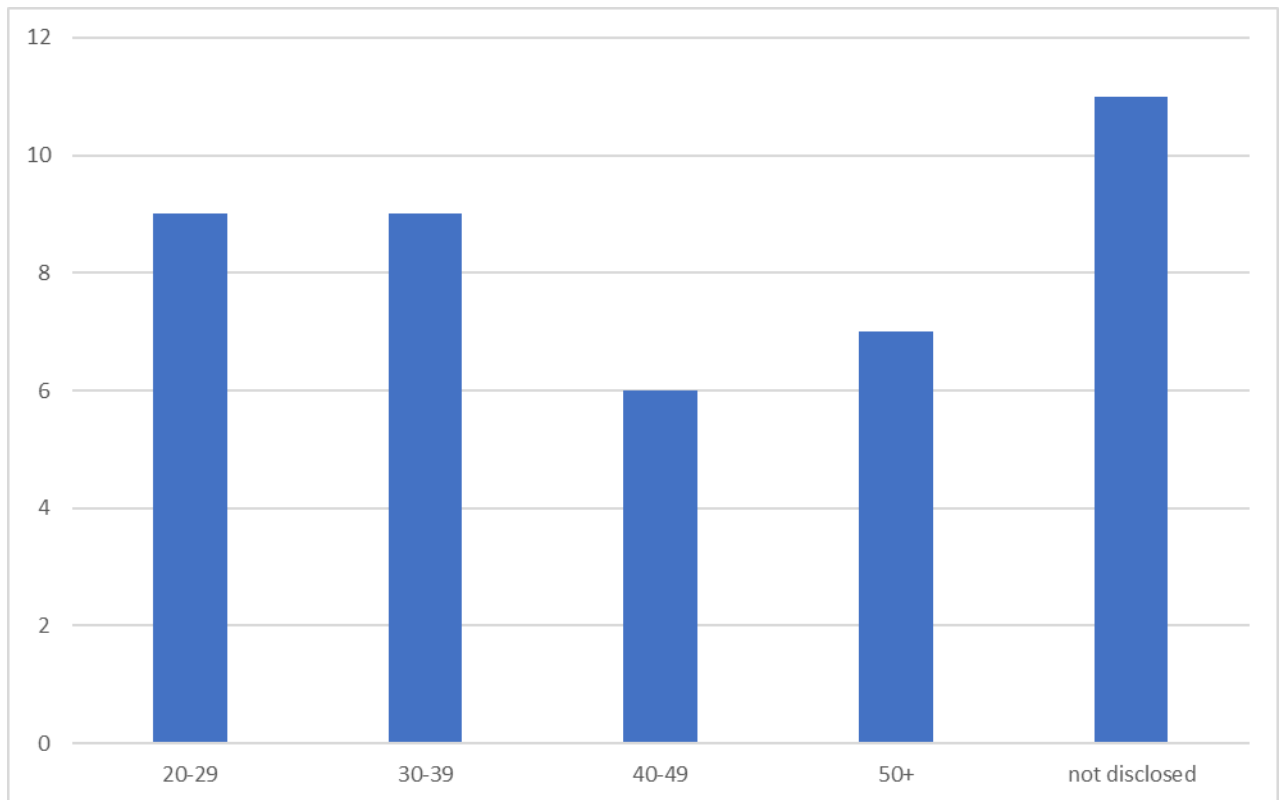
Name of lead researcher	
Signature	
Date*	

For further information, please contact:

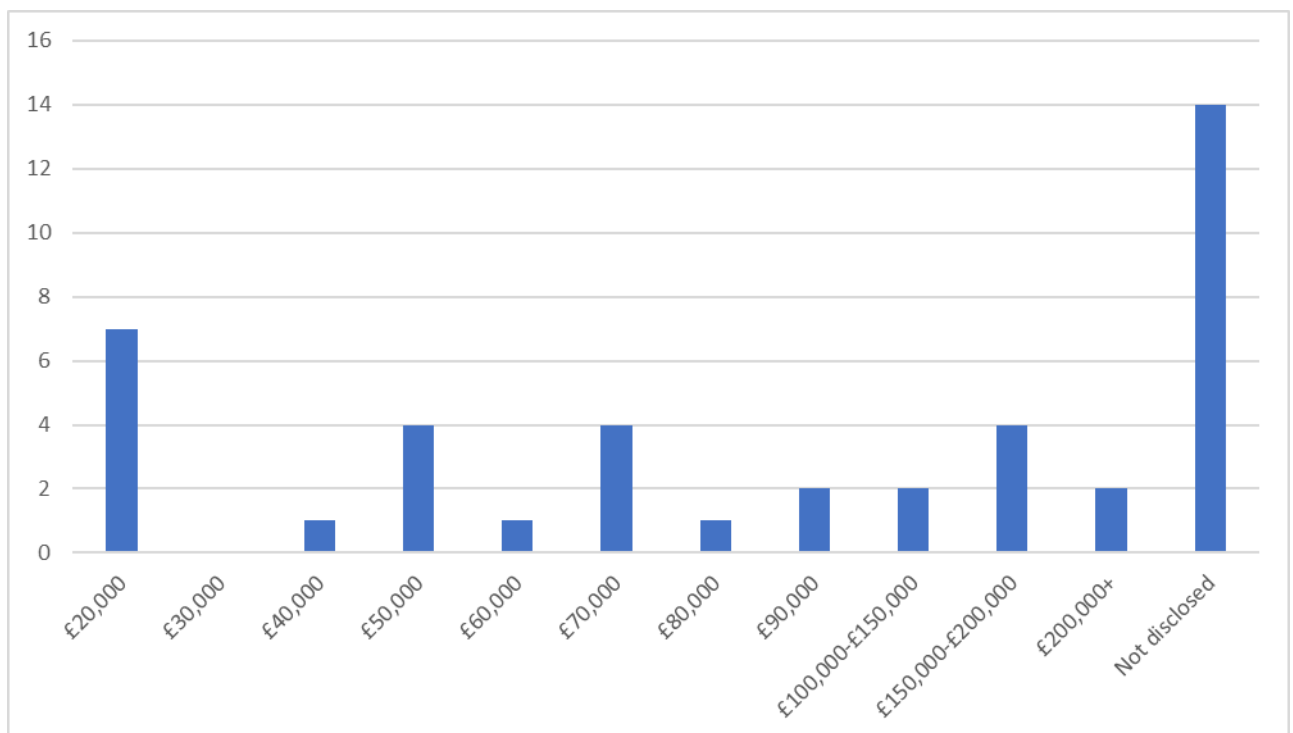
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### Appendix 7: Further demographic information – age

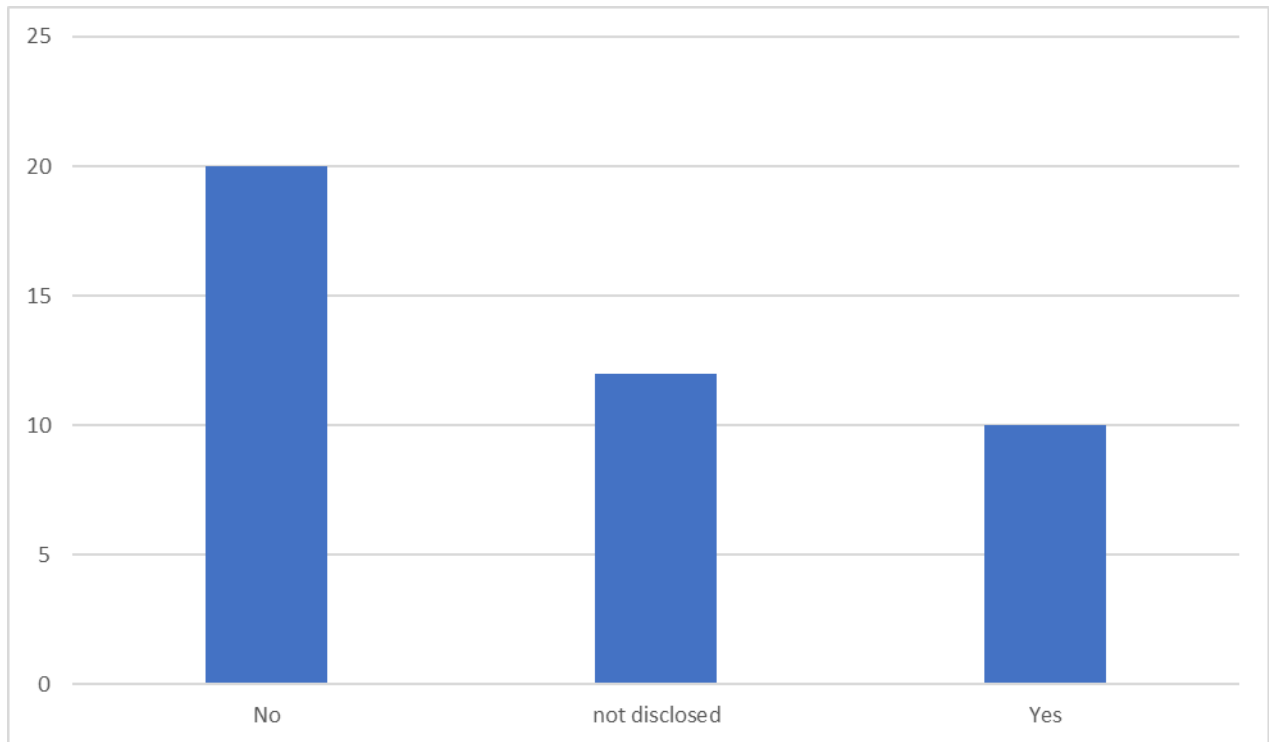


### Appendix 8: Further demographic information – pay





### Appendix 9: Further demographic information – dependent children



### Appendix 10: Further demographic information: ethnicity

