

Negotiating Futures:  
Young Women's Stories of the Space and Place of Work and Family.

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Abstract

Whilst the right to pursue higher education and to engage in non - traditional occupations has become a taken -for-granted reality for many women, their right to enjoy both a career and a family remains one of the most controversial and complex issues in Australian society. Mainstream debates of career and family are locked within the dichotomous choice of 'to have' or 'not to have'. Drawing on a recent series of in -depth interviews with young women (Year 12) who plan on having both a professional career and a family, this paper explores young women's views on: relationships; meanings of 'career'; family formation and family responsibilities; and the balance between work and family life. The findings that emerge suggest that, integral to the young women's future aspirations is a commitment to the idea of multiple selves, multiple realities and the negotiation of possibilities. Rather than a linear progression of career then family, the young women imagined their futures as encompassing a diverse array of experiences within which they see themselves as having the capacity to enjoy both family and a career. From a policy perspective the findings suggest that, in order to avoid current tensions which many women experience when trying to balance career and family, future social and economic policy frameworks must reflect and facilitate the diversity, creativity and flexibility which young women demand.

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