

Juggling Work and Home in a Post-industrial World: Case Studies of Dual Career Households

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ABSTRACT: *The UK economy operates with few, if any, formal barriers for women participating in the labor market on a basis equal to men, yet a gender wage gap persists. In order to understand how informal barriers might operate, I focus on dual career households, which form a sub-set of dual earner households, where the intertwining of home and work is likely to be particularly complicated since it may require the prioritizing of one partner's career at the expense of the other partner's career. In particular I draw on case studies of couples living in East Midlands, UK to highlight the ways in which working practices may adversely affect the career trajectories of members in dual career households with dependent children, and as such examine the ways in which working practices are 'beyond tolerance'.*

Introduction

Since the 1970s, the UK labor market has been casualized and feminized, and the service sector has grown to dominate the economy (Hardill *et al.*, 2001). Thus, while the number of men in formal employment has declined, perhaps the most significant component of the restructuring of the social organization of work has been women's emancipation (McDowell, 1991, 1997; Crompton, 1997). Moreover this labor market transformation has been facilitated by greater regulation of working life from the United Kingdom Government and since 1973, the European Union (EU). Equal treatment of men and women was laid down in Article 119 of the Treaty of Rome, which advocated equal pay for equal work. United Kingdom legislation, such as the Equal Pay Act, has been augmented by EU directives,¹ and it is the right to paid maternity leave that has made a

¹ Some key directives include the 1970 Equal Pay Directive; 1975 Equal Treatment Directive; 1992 Protection of Pregnant Workers; 1992 Childcare Recommendations; 1996 Parental Leave Directive. Not all EU legislation was well received in the UK and was often reluctantly accepted following campaigning or legal cases taken to the European Court of Justice by the Equal Opportunities Commission and trade unions.

significant difference, especially for women in professional jobs (McRae 1999; Townsend 1997; see Table 1, p. 50). The growth in the number of women in the UK labor force over the last twenty years is largely due to the influx of mothers with children (Pahl and Scales, 1999: 6).

Even though the UK economy now operates with few, if any, formal (i.e., legal) barriers for women participating in the labor market on a basis equal to men, when education achievements, age and other relevant labor market factors are controlled, it seems that women continue to earn significantly less than their ostensibly identical male peers, which evidences the persistence of 'obstacles' (Dascal, 2000) to the progression of women's careers. This widespread continued gender wage gap coupled with the lack of significant formal barriers has drawn researchers' attention to the range of possible informal, particularly domestic, barriers and responsibilities that might act to limit women's labor market value and/or participation rates. Men and women participate in the labor market on a very different basis, and their participation cannot be understood in isolation from their position in kinship and family structures, and their relationship to childbearing and reproduction (Horrell and Humphries, 1995). Indeed, women in paid work still do three times as much housework as men (Cabinet Office, 1998). While paid maternity leave has made a difference, other obstacles and barriers persist to impede the career progression of women.

For men or women in a co-habiting or married relationship, their work in the household or the labor market can not be fully conceptualized without a clear understanding of household arrangements, decision-making and strategies (Wheelock *et al*, 2000:1). In each household structure, a whole host of activities and social relations, beyond those associated with paid work, have to be accommodated and co-ordinated by partners, within particular temporal and spatial constraints. A key spatial constraint on men and women's lives is the fixed location of the home, within a particular locale (Hanson and Pratt, 1995; Jarvis, 1999). Household power relations, gender roles and ultimately household structure are deeply embedded within the 'household-locale nexus' (Jarvis, 1999). Hanson and Pratt (1995: 576) argue that the home-work relationship is both deeply gendered and intimately geographical.

Writers such as Sylvia Walby (1989: 214) have explored the different dimensions of patriarchy that shape women's lives. Patriarchy operates in a number of spheres, and Walby identifies several including: the patriarchal mode of production whereby a woman's labor is expropriated by her male partner within the family as well as patriarchal relations in waged work, where paid work is closed to women in some manner (*Ibid.*). The forms of patriarchy are changing in complex ways and they emerge as one of the most significant explanations of home-work relationships.

In order to understand how informal barriers might operate, I focus on dual career households where the intertwining of home and work is likely to be particularly complicated since it may require the prioritizing of one partner's career at the expense of the other partner's career. In such a setting, where the partners tend to begin their relationships with relatively similar levels of educational achievement, observations that suggest systematic differences in labor market outcomes between the male and female partners are likely to reflect gender-based cultural expectations regarding the division of domestic responsibilities and career priorities.

In this paper, a household focus is used to empirically examine the degree to which dual career households are egalitarian in the way decisions and compromises are made in relation to career development and career prioritization by highlighting the impact children have on careers. Both partners in dual career households mobilize their cultural and symbolic capital in the pursuit of a career; but can two careers be equally prioritized? I explore careers through the lens of the household, as a site of conflict (of gender roles, labor divisions, allocation of resources, etc.), and as a process being formed, dissolved and reconstituted. After this introduction, the paper is structured as follows. Section two explores the literature relating to the relationships between gender, career priorities, domestic expectations and responsibilities. Section three presents the research question posed and methods adopted, section four highlights the empirical findings and the final section presents a few concluding remarks.

Gender, Careers and Dual Career Households

Dual career households are households where both partners are salaried managers or professionals, sometimes with benefits such as company cars, private health insurance and performance-related pay. Although accounting for only 8 per cent of households (head aged 20-59 years) in the UK, their numbers seem set to increase (Hardill *et al.*, 1997: 314). They are arguably the most egalitarian, or potentially so, as both partners have invested in cultural and symbolic capital (of which education is a significant component), as well as having a deep commitment to the labor market as articulated through the pursuit of a career.

Careers are characterized by a high degree of commitment, and so have an intrinsically demanding character (Rapoport and Rapoport, 1976). Traditionally, the term 'career' implied some long-term progression, a ladder, or linear promotion, within an occupation, or through a series of occupations involving increasing levels of responsibility at each stage (Evetts, 2000). A career is built upon a knowledge and expertise base usually acquired in higher

education and/or vocational qualifications that are general, academic or job-related (Bourdieu, 1984). Linear promotion (thereby gaining social mobility) can be achieved through a combination of factors such as length of service, experience, ability and aptitude, and the acquisition of further vocational qualifications (Bailyn, 1993).

The 'typical' female career trajectory has been non-linear, complex and dynamic, characterized by access to fewer choices/options (spatial and temporal) and fewer material resources in their personal lives than men (Epstein *et al*, 1999). Moreover, women in dual career households, even childless women, are more likely to be the 'trailing spouse' with the 'follower'/ secondary career, which is unplanned and erratic (Bruegel, 1996; Hardill *et al*, 1997). Household migration thus ranks next to child rearing as an important dampening influence of the life cycle wage evolution of married women (Mincer, 1978: 771).

However, both men and women today in the UK are pursuing careers in a very different working environment than in the past (Figure 1, p.50). Employers have increased their flexibility by replacing permanent workers with those employed in non-standard employment (on a temporary or contract basis) (Beck, 1992), leading Sennett (1998: 120) to comment that a career can no longer be regarded as a 'well made road'. Uncertainty is a key defining feature of most people's career horizons (Sennett, 1998), and it is reshaping 'commitment' in the form of 'workaholicism'.

Careers are also 'lived' in increasingly globalized labor markets, but these flows remain strongly gendered, representing a gendered exclusion (Hardill, 2002). Economic restructuring, especially through the forces of flexibility and globalization, is resulting in a reconfiguration of spatial mobility (Figure 2, p.51). Mobility is demanded of salaried workers at a variety of scales of space and time. Increasingly there is a separation of activity from location, especially in regard to paid work from the domain of the workplace, with salaried staff practicing spatial and temporal flexibility with regard to the execution of their paid work tasks (Figure 2); this can include international travel in the form of a short business trip, an assignment abroad, or accepting a post abroad. The number of managers and professionals who are/have been/will be skilled transients is increasingly reflected in the international scale of job search strategies (Hardill, 2002).

Key Issues/Questions for Current Research

In light of the findings in the previous research and associated theoretical debates outlined above, key issues for current and future research on career prioritization in dual career households include:

- Do working practices adversely affect the career trajectories of members in dual career households with dependent children? And as such, are working practices ‘beyond tolerance’?

The Personnel Directors of five organizations based in Nottingham, in the East Midlands region of England, were approached to help in the identification of dual career households – including health service and higher education establishments, a major bank, and two large market-oriented private sector manufacturing companies (one engaged in the food and drink industry and the other in pharmaceuticals). In this way I gained access to employees in a relatively comprehensive range of managerial, professional and associated occupations. Each of the participating organizations has a different organizational structure and, hence, the internal labor market conditions are somewhat different. In each of the dual career households identified, at least one partner is employed at a Nottingham base by one of the five employers. The other partner could work for any employer (or, indeed, work in a self-employed capacity) in any location.

The in-depth interviews were preceded by a semi-structured self-completion questionnaire survey (for a fuller discussion of the methods see Hardill, 2002). The questionnaire schedule was in three parts, with sections on each career, including jobs held and places of residence since 1980, educational attainment and ‘their’ career (general household information). In most cases, the female partner completed the section on ‘their’ career. A sub-set of those who completed the survey element of the research also participated in the in-depth qualitative interviews. Each partner was interviewed separately (Pahl, 1989; Valentine, 1999).

Relative to other ‘work rich’ households, dual career households are more likely to:

- have both partners in full-time employment;
- travel longer distances to work;
- have two or more cars – two in three dual career households have two or more cars, compared with two in five other ‘work rich’ households, and one in five of all households;
- be characterized by both partners traveling to work by car;
- live in the owner-occupied sector;

(For further details regarding these characteristics see Green [1997]).

Using the results from the survey element of the research, we empirically tested the financial impact of being the ‘follower’ career in the 130 British

households that completed the self-completion questionnaires. Even after controlling for differences in human capital and job-specific characteristics and the number of hours worked, the average earnings of females are significantly lower than those of their male partners (Hardill, 2002). The prioritization of the male partners' careers significantly dampens the earning potential of the female partner, male partners being paid on average some £11,000 per annum more than female partners. Significant gender differences emerged regarding the degree of labor market attachment over the life course compounded by disruptions to female careers because of prioritization of male careers. Parity, in terms of decision-making and career development, is not the norm when childrearing duties have to be allocated. In addition, the earnings of females with dependent children are significantly lower than the earnings of other women in the sample. In the following section, juggling work and home following childbirth is explored using the in-depth interview material for a subset of 30 households.

Childbirth and careers

Childbirth greatly increases the unpaid caring work associated with 'home'. Nineteen of the 30 case study households had children and in 14 cases the female partner either took a career break or adjusted her working hours by working part-time. Some of the older women (in their 50s at the time of the interview) indicated that when they had been pregnant their employer had no maternity scheme; one was just expected to 'disappear'. Sarah,² for example, resigned her post when she was pregnant, "you have to think back to 1969/70; the whole attitude to women with children working was very different. When I think back, women who graduated with me... quite a few of them got married and went [straight] into part-time jobs and never had full-time jobs. That was the social attitude you had in the Sixties."

Only one male partner had taken a career break, and another was planning to (see below). A number of other male partners took a few days of their holiday entitlement around the time of their child's birth; most made no adjustment to their working pattern, which could be viewed as being 'beyond tolerance'. Sarah said, "James still pursues his career as if we had no children, indeed as if he was still single, all the give has been on my part." Paternity rights tend to be viewed negatively in the UK (Summerskill, 2000), as has been

² James (self-employed consultant) and Sarah (university researcher) are both in their early fifties, have two grown-up children, and have lived together for over 30 years. They met at school, they went to the same university (he was a couple of years ahead of her) and his job has always 'led' and as a result they have moved inter-regionally four times.

illustrated by the reaction of the Royal Opera House to self-employed opera singer Bryn Terfel's announcement in 2000 that he planned to take four months paternity leave when his third child was born (Reynolds, 2000).

Some women were employed on fixed term contracts when they were pregnant, like university researcher Diana.³

A year into my three year contract I became pregnant. I know that [the Head of Department] was most displeased. When he found out that I was entitled to maternity leave I think that upset him even more. He took the view that women are either a mother or a professional woman and you can't be both. He just felt that things were likely to become complicated where a woman had to juggle the responsibilities of a profession as well as looking after young children. He felt that the Department would be short-changed.

She went on to say,

....whilst I was pregnant I was doing more (work) than I should have done. I was taken into hospital for an emergency section because I developed hypertension. I'm sure it was all work-related, the stress that was on me really. I think words fail me when it comes to describing the pressures that were placed on me, not necessarily verbal. I suppose, like many women do who are pregnant or otherwise, we tend to over-compensate and really work flat out. I suppose I was working flat out at a time in my life I shouldn't have been.

Diana has since moved to another university and has secured a tenured lectureship. Although women now have far greater control over their own reproductive body, Sarah discussed miscarriages, "I didn't apply for maternity leave when I had my son because the previous pregnancy had miscarried." Health worries, therefore, prompted Sarah to resign her post and leave work before she was entitled to maternity leave to try and avoid another miscarriage.

One interviewee, Becky,⁴ was on maternity leave when she was interviewed, and while she intended to return to work she did express concern as

³ Diana (mid-30s, university lecturer) and Bob (mid-40s, further education lecturer) met when Diana was a student. They have a baby son and while they prioritize her career, they are very much equal partners. They employ a nanny to care for their son. Diana has held a series of fixed term contracts, but now has a tenured lectureship.

to how she would cope. Prior to their child's arrival Becky had done most of the unpaid work in the home, but Gary also helped, 'a lot'. On maternity leave she had slipped into a routine of having sole responsibility for childcare, acknowledging that she was making 'a rod for my own back'. Like a number of other women interviewed, Becky commented that it was during a period of maternity leave that she started doing more and more household tasks and assumed responsibility for most childcare duties. When she does go back to work she thought it would be hard to break the pattern and share the household work more equitably. Moreover, her job as a software consultant involves business trips away from home and she didn't think she would be able to do this. While Gary is a supportive partner, no way would he care for their son if Becky was away overnight on a business trip.

For some interviewees, committing to children through a career break/working part-time for a spell was a conscious choice to enjoy motherhood and they emphasized that they could not see the point in having a child and then not 'being there' for them. Responsibility to 'family' was stressed by Sarah, 'it's a family and you have a responsibility to keep a home and your children need a base'. Thus, for Sarah it was important that she invested time in the 'home'. James commented that now their children have left home, "Sarah's job is probably more important now than it's ever been in our relationship."

Some women felt by prioritizing home – because of the gender division of labor in their household – they had suppressed personal aspirations. Claire,⁴ for example, withdrew from the labor market for five years despite the fact that she had the larger salary, but in their 'traditional' household, Claire was the prime caregiver, with little help from Ian. Once the children were old enough, she started working part-time and now works full-time, but on a fixed-term contract. Ian is keen they have a third child but Claire is not, as it would necessitate her giving up paid work again. They have had bad experiences with child minders, and this has been a cause of tension in the relationship. This is being exacerbated by what Claire sees as Ian's slow recognition of the responsibilities of being a parent although she does accept that he is beginning, 'to grow into fatherhood'.

Only in a minority of households did both partners make career 'adjustments' for childcare. Both Nigel and Anne⁶ have taken time out to care for

⁴ Becky (software consultant) and Gary (accountant) are in their early 30s and met at university. They have a baby son and while they prioritize his career, until her maternity leave they both worked very long hours.

⁵ Claire (senior social worker) and Ian (self-employed surveyor) are in their early forties and have been together since University days; they have two teenage children. Ian's career has always 'led'.

⁶ Nigel (a part time lecturer with contracts with three employers) and Anne (a school teacher) are both in their early forties, and have been together for ten years. This is Anne's second

their daughter. Anne was prime caregiver for one year, "When I was pregnant with Becky, it was Nigel's first child. He hated his job [social work] and I wanted to get back to work and it was an obvious solution. He really wanted to look after Becky." Nigel said, "We actually role reversed as they call it...for me it was my first child, I felt that by going out to work I was missing out on something important." He went on to say that, "we don't particularly want both of us to be working full-time...the pressures attendant on two full-time careers would be enormous." Both partners in another household⁷ are planning career adjustments for a child they hope to have. Samantha indicated that, "we will probably try and have children next year. I will take maternity leave...at the end of those six months Simon will apply for a career break [5 years]. He can't wait - seriously - he cannot wait to give up work." Simon is feeling disillusioned with his current job.

Most of the households have commodified some of the tasks of 'home' (cleaning, etc.), and use is also made of labor saving devices. However, the lack of quality of their home life due to the hours they need to devote to paid work is the reason why some women began to work part-time; take Jane⁸ for example. Although she and Mark are an egalitarian household when it comes to decision making, they both work unpredictable hours, but while Jane works from a fixed base, Mark travels a lot within the country. When she first returned to work after maternity leave it was to her full-time post, but as Mark's hours were more unpredictable than hers, she was responsible for taking their child to nursery and collecting her in the evening. At work she used to get anxious that she would not be able to leave work with sufficient time to travel to pick her daughter up before the nursery closed. As a food technologist she worked on a production line and could never exactly predict when her working day would end. The pressures of this uncertainty resulted in her switching to part-time (21 hours a week), with hours she feels are 'about right'. She did comment that her employer is 'prejudiced against part-time work'. Thus, childbirth can impact negatively on career development, often because employers and/or colleagues interpret a career break/part-time work as committing to home rather than to work (Epstein *et al*, 1999).

marriage. Anne's two children from her first marriage live with them along with their eight-year-old daughter. Anne has the 'lead' career.

⁷ Simon (a Sales Executive) and Samantha (a Senior Analyst Programmer) are in their early thirties, and work full time for the same manufacturing company. They have been together for just over a decade, and met at work when they were both 'on a fast-track general management scheme'

⁸ Jane (food technologist) and Mark (sales representative) are in their mid-30s and have been together for about a decade. They have a young child who attends a private nursery.

Joanne,⁹ a General Practitioner, also talked about her decision to work part-time after the birth of her son.

The original agreement of the contract was that I would do half time until the child or children went to school and at that point I would have the option of going back full-time if wanted to. The average working week is 80 hours, I was not prepared to do that if I had a family, I didn't see the point in having children and leaving them with somebody else. I do 40 hours with the practice, the rest of the time I'm at home or doing my own thing, or doing paperwork for the practice, all this administrative stuff ... with nights and weekends it is 60 hours.¹⁰

Thus, even though she is part-time, the number of hours she devotes to the practice is 60 hours per week, considerably more hours per week than a typical full-time contract of 37 hours; Joanne created space for her family by working part-time.

Concluding Remarks

While in the last few decades management and the professions in the UK have been feminized, from the evidence collected in the in-depth interviews with partners in dual career households holding such posts, though both partners attach importance to and devote much energy to pursuing their respective careers, in most households, one career – generally the male career – tends to be prioritized. Those women members of dual career households often sacrifice their career to the wider needs of the household, a situation that indicates that the target of 'beyond tolerance' cannot be reached. For example, only in a minority of the surveyed households did both careers have equal weighting (especially in those with partners under 40 years of age), and these tended to be childless couples. 'Commitment', as expressed in holding a full-time job, working above contracted hours and no career breaks, results in higher earnings. In most households female partners 'juggled' home and work, and following childbirth the extra demands of 'home' resulted in the female career being particularly adversely affected. Working part-time or taking a career break, though done for short-term

⁹ Joanne (doctor) and Ken (regional sales manager) are in their early forties and met about a decade ago when they both had established careers. Joanne has been married before. They have a five-year-old son at a private school and they employ a nanny.

¹⁰ The official definition of part-time work in the UK is 29 hours per week.

convenience (such as wanting to prioritize home and be there for the children), along with moving to another part of the country/abroad for a partner's new job (becoming a 'trailing spouse'), is likely to significantly affect women's long-term finances, health, pension entitlements, etc. However, recent changes in divorce law in the UK relating to splitting pensions can be seen as a way of mitigating the negative effects of domestic duties that reduce women's earnings.

Achieving a balance between work and life has been the focus of a recent UK Government report (DfEE, 2000) and a measure of their commitment has been the creation of the Work-Life Balance Team. A range of policies, introduced since 1997, focus on women's growing independence and participation in the labor market; for example, the five year National Childcare Strategy and extended maternity rights. However, 'family friendly' employment policies are all too often equated with mother-friendly policies (Wheelock *et al*, 2000). While these policy statements and strategies are a step in the right direction, state funded childcare provision is not available on a scale to match the demands of the 24/7 economy.

The career histories described in this paper illustrate that because of the expanding temporal and spatial dimensions of the working environment in the UK (unpredictable hours, business travel, etc.), juggling work and home after childbirth, even in what had been egalitarian households, it is women rather than men who adjust their working hours, and consequently put their careers 'on hold.' While UK and EU employment policies have certainly begun to tackle patriarchy in the workplace, the new working environment of commitment, of giving more and more time to the job, means that the careers of men and women with children are following different trajectories. In this paper I have provided case study evidence of the survival of patriarchy in the homes of dual career households with the unequal sharing of the tasks of social reproduction. The target 'beyond tolerance', when applied to equality in the workplace and the home for partners in dual career households with children, cannot be achieved in the new economy.

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Table 1: Maternity/Paternity Rights in the UK

Maternity leave entitlement is 18 weeks, not linked to length of service with employer. Receipt of Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) payable for these 18 weeks is dependent on working for employer for 26 weeks plus 15 weeks prior to expected delivery date and paying National Insurance contributions. Additional leave of up to 40 weeks with the right to return to work may also be taken, but requires one year's continuous employment to qualify and applies only to the mother.

Maternity allowance for those employees not qualifying for SMP or who are self-employed.

Maternity grant for those in receipt of state benefits.

Parental leave may be taken, unpaid, by either parent, but they must have one year's continuous service with their employer, be the natural or adoptive parent, and give 21 days' notice to their employer. The child must be under 5 years of age. Up to 4 weeks may be taken in a year in periods of one week up to a total of 13 weeks over the 5-year period for each child.

Parents of disabled children may take time off in periods of one day, if needed, until the child is 18 years old.

Emergency leave may be granted if there is a sudden breakdown in care arrangements.

Source: UK; www.mymumworks.com

Figure 1 - The New World of Work

- A more highly qualified workforce, but with different demands: 'commitment', 'putting the job first', presentism ('being there') and willingness to be mobile, such as undertaking business travel at short notice, all of which are essential to ensure job retention/career success;
- More self-employment;
- More non-standard employment contracts;
- Externalization of labor and organizational restructuring;
- More labor market transitions, with periods of labor market disconnection; careers increasingly punctuated with investment in education capital through skills updating and skills enhancement;
- The centrality of IT skills;
- More remote ICT-based work: the use of laptop computers, fax machines, cellular telephones, etc., 'enables' salaried workers to work anytime, anywhere, including at home, while commuting, or on a business trip.

Source: adapted from Stanworth (2000: 23)

Figure 2 - Mobility, Careers and Flexible Capitalism

- An apparent expansion in the spatial horizons of managers and professionals for career development often necessitating international mobility;
- The blurring of business travel, short term business assignments and residential mobility;
- Trends in the re-arrangement of the spatial and temporal linkages between home and work, with tasks for paid work undertaken in a variety of locations such as while traveling, whilst at home, and whilst socializing;
- Residences increasingly chosen for their access to a number of labor markets (near to motorway hub, airports) or willingness to be a commuter couple.

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