

ESRC Gender Equality Network

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'Class, gender, employment and family' (Project 7)

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Introduction

The original research proposal identified two key questions to be investigated via our project:

1. How have a range of employment sectors and professions adapted to women's entry in respect of (a) career development and (b) work-life integration?
2. How do class differences affect possibilities of achieving work-life balance, and what are the consequences for gender equality?

In relation to the overall scientific programme as described in the original application, this project will focus on the tension between the increase in professed gender egalitarianism within a context (in Britain) of rising material inequalities, and the consequences of this tension for gender equality.

Certainly, support for egalitarian gender relations is growing (Tables 1 and 2). The proportion of BSA respondents thinking that 'A man's job is to earn money, a woman's job is to look after the home and family' has declined from just under a third to just under a fifth, and the proportion thinking that women should be at home with school age children from two thirds to under a half.

Table 1: "A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family", 1989-2002

% who agree	1989	Base	1994	Base	2002	Base
Men	32	587	26	448	20	852
Women	26	720	21	536	15	1108
All	28	1307	24	984	17	1960

Table 2: Women should stay at home when there is a child under school age, 1989-2002

% who think women should stay at home	1989	Base	1994	Base	2002	Base
Men	67	587	60	448	51	852
Women	61	720	51	536	46	1108
All	64	1307	55	984	48	1960

Source: British Social Attitudes surveys.

Note that tables 1 and 2 suggest that men remain more gender conservative than women. A quasi-cohort analysis (see Crompton et al 2003) demonstrated both period

and cohort effects. That is, older respondents were still more gender conservative than younger respondents, but the attitudes of the older respondents had nevertheless become more gender liberal over time.

The original Project 7 application was developed rather more than two years ago. Since then, we have continued to work on a series of ESRC projects that have generated partial answers to the research questions identified in this project, particularly relating to the issue of class.

How do class¹ differences affect possibilities of achieving work-life balance, and what are the consequences for gender equality?

Since 1979, Britain has experienced a dramatic, and most unusual, increase in the extent of income inequality (Hills 2004). During the 1960s and 1970s, all income deciles benefited from rising incomes, with those of the lowest rising fastest. Between 1979 and 1994/5, on average, real income in the UK grew by 40%. However, incomes for the highest tenth rose by 60-68%, for the median, by 30%, and, after allowing for housing costs, incomes for the poorest tenth were 8% lower in 1994/5 than in 1979. Since the election of 'New Labour' in 1997, the very poorest have to some extent caught up with the middle, but the incomes of the highest decile have continued to rise disproportionately. Thus there has been no overall decline in income inequality (Hills 2004 p 20ff).

Intuitively, and against this background of rising income inequality, it might be anticipated that the problems of achieving work-life 'balance' will be most difficult for those who are worst off. For example, Robert Taylor, in a *Future of Work* working paper, has asserted that:

Any sensible approach to work-life policies cannot ignore the ...phenomenon of occupational class in the amount of access and take-up of work-life balance entitlements. Women in managerial and professional jobs with higher incomes and benefits are in a much better position to achieve a balance than their much lower-paid and insecure counterparts employed, for example, in the retail trade and textiles (Taylor 2002: 18).

However, as we shall see, the situation is more complex than this. Issues related to work-life 'balance' (in fact, we prefer to use the term 'work-life articulation') are not just a matter of material resources alone. In particular, we will draw attention to two other issues: first, the levels of stress experienced by individuals (and households) in achieving an articulation between employment and family life, and second, whether the pressures of work-life articulation mean that some groups (particularly women) are less able to realise their capabilities than others.

Remaining for the moment with the broad question of material inequalities: there are broad class differences in household strategies of work-life articulation that will, in aggregate, increase class inequalities. As Rake et al (2000, Chapter 3) have demonstrated, low and mid-skilled mothers are more likely to reduce their employment than mothers with higher skills, thus the cost of motherhood (in foregone earnings) is greater amongst these women. As low and mid-skilled women are likely to be in partnerships with similar men, then the practical work-life articulation

strategies in lower class households will increase material inequalities at the level of the household, as is indicated by Table 3.

Table 3: Household employment status by occupational class,² couple households only, BHPS 2001

	Registrar General Social Class (5 category)					
	Prof/man agerial	Skilled non- manual	Skilled manual	Partly skilled occupptns	Unskilld	Total
Both ft	52	45	41	35	23	45
Man ft, woman pt	26	36	35	38	43	33
Man ft woman no job	13	8	19	15	15	14
Woman ft man pt/no job	5	5	2	4	3	4
Pt/no job only	3	6	3	9	15	5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
N	2673	1505	1418	942	295	6833

As can be seen from Table 3, professional and managerial households are more than twice as likely to have both partners in full-time employment, and in unskilled households, the woman is nearly twice as likely to be working part-time than in professional and managerial households (a similar pattern was found in the BSA 2002 sample).

However, this class variation in couple working strategies will mean that in aggregate, hours of total employment are lower in less advantaged households. As Table 4 demonstrates, weekly reported hours of work are lower for both men and women routine and manual employees (most particularly women) than those reported for other class groupings. The low mean hours for manual women will reflect the predominance of part-time work in this category.

TABLE 4: Respondents working hours by sex and class. BSA/ISSP 2002³, all employees.

	Professional/mgr		Intermediate		Manual		Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
N	310	295	150	174	229	198	689	667
Mean	46.23	39.00	46.41	31.88	42.36	27.53	44.98	33.73
S.D.	11.34	12.63	16.12	12.76	11.36	10.88	12.65	13.13

Men only x class: ANOVA F = 7.518; df=2; p<.01; Scheffe's post-hoc tests showed that professional/managers and intermediates both worked significantly longer hours than manual workers (p<.01).

Women only x class: ANOVA F = 55.378; df=2; p<.001; Scheffe's post-hoc tests showed that all classes were significantly different from one another (p<.01).

Men v women: men in all 3 classes worked significantly longer hours than women in the corresponding class (all at p<.001).

TABLE 5: Combined couples' working hours x class x sex. BSA/ISSP 2002, all employees.

	Professional/mgr		Intermediate		Manual		Total	
	M resp.	F resp.	M resp.	F resp.	M resp.	F resp.	M resp.	F resp.
N	160	185	73	105	94	119	327	409
Mean	79.26	81.62	79.07	76.29	77.81	72.13	78.80	77.49
S.D.	17.27	17.82	23.21	18.14	15.41	15.56	18.23	17.71

Male respondents only x class: ns.

Female respondents only x class: ANOVA $F = 11.232$; $df=2$; $p<.001$. Scheffe's post-hoc tests showed that couples where the wife was professional/managerial worked significantly longer hours than couples where the wife was intermediate ($p<.05$) or manual ($p<.001$).

All respondents x class: ANOVA $F = 7.357$; $df=2$; $p<.01$; Scheffe's post-hoc tests showed that couples where the respondent was professional (male or female) worked significantly longer hours than couples where the respondent was manual ($p<.01$).

Table 5 describes the total of working hours reported by respondents in couple households in the BSA/ISSP sample. It can be seen that professional and managerial women report nearly ten working hours more than routine and manual women do for their households. Lower working hours in manual groupings of course carry with them a financial penalty. However, we would suggest, they are likely to make a major contribution to the lower levels of work-life stress that were reported amongst manual and intermediate employees in Britain.

A work-life stress scale⁴ was constructed using four items from the ISSP survey (respondents were asked to indicate for each item whether this occurred several times a week, several times a month, once or twice, or never. Higher scores indicate higher work-life stress)

I have come home from work too tired to do the chores which need to be done.

It has been difficult for me to fulfil my family responsibilities because of the amount of time I spent on my job

I have arrived at work too tired to function well because of the household work I had done

I have found it difficult to concentrate at work because of my family responsibilities

As can be seen from Table 6, reported levels of work-life stress vary by occupational class. The contrast between managerial and professional, as compared to routine and manual, women is particularly striking.

Table 6: Mean worklife stress scores by sex and occupational class. BSA/ISSP 2002, all employees.

Sex	Occupational class	Mean	s.d.	N
Men	Managerial and professional	7.68	2.18	243
	Intermediate	7.47	2.48	36
	Routine and manual	7.08	2.34	173
	Total	7.43	2.34	452
Women	Managerial and professional	8.25	2.37	246
	Intermediate	7.17	2.15	111
	Routine and manual	7.14	2.36	171

	Total	7.66	2.38	528
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A multiple regression (not reported here) demonstrated that hours of work, whether employed full-time or part-time, whether or not there is a child in the household (for women only), and sex all had a significant impact on reported levels of work-life stress. In this analysis, occupational class did not have a statistically significant impact – doubtless because of the overwhelming impact of hours of paid work (that vary significantly by occupational class) on work-life stress scores.

At the aggregate level, women are only moving rather slowly into the higher-level occupational categories, despite the continuing improvement in women’s levels of qualification and enhanced labour force participation. For example, between 1991 and 2000, women’s share of managerial employment increased from 31% to only 33% (Dench et al 2002 53). This suggests that women are failing to realise their capabilities to the same extent as men. The British version of the ISSP Family 2002 survey included a question on career aspirations (‘Speaking for yourself, how important is it that you move up the career ladder at work?’). Over a half of male respondents (53%), but only a third of the women, felt it was important for them to move up the career ladder at work. There were also significant variations by social class (managerial and professional employees were more likely to say that promotion was important than other groups), full-time vs part-time working, and age. In a logistic regression (not reported here) wishing to be promoted had a significant (but relatively small) impact on levels of work-life stress for men, but not for women.

Unpacking the relationships between sex, class, promotion aspirations and stress, however, revealed some rather interesting findings. We found that aspirations for promotion *did* have a significant impact on work-life stress for managerial and professional women who wanted to be promoted. They were (a) significantly more stressed than managerial and professional men, and (b) significantly more stressed than managerial and professional women who did not want to move up the job ladder (Table 7).

Table 7: occupational class, sex, and the impact of promotion aspirations on work-life stress (full-time employees only).

Work-life stress scores:	Managerial and professional men	Managerial and professional women
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
‘very’ or ‘fairly’ important to move up the job ladder	7.74 (2.11)	8.78 (2.4)
‘not very’ or ‘not’ important to move up the job ladder	7.59 (2.2)	8.03 (2.31)
t-value	.511	2.095*
Df	217	170

* p<.05

These findings relating to the relative significance and impact of promotion aspirations have obvious implications for gender equality. At the same occupational level, women are less likely to want promotion than men, and women who do have

promotion aspirations have higher levels of work-life stress. This is not a particularly new, or surprising, finding (see eg Becker and Moen 1999). However, there is some evidence that these factors are particularly relevant to the British context. One other ISSP country (Portugal) asked the same additional questions (relating to promotion) as were asked in Britain. In Britain, employment relations are highly individualised and relatively unregulated. This is in some contrast to the Portuguese case, where employment relations are highly regulated (OECD 1999) and promotion, for example, is semi-automatic for those with the right credentials, as once was the case in traditional bureaucracies in Britain (Crompton and Jones 1984). We found that in Portugal, professional and managerial women reported considerably shorter working hours (over four hours a week less) than British women in the same occupational category. Promotion aspirations are not a source of stress in Portugal given the highly structured nature of organisational mobility. The reported level of work-life stress of professional and managerial Portuguese women (mean 7.42) is considerably lower than that of similar British women.⁵

The nature of the employment relationship is likely to have an impact on work-life stress and thus capacities to achieve work-life articulation. Employment relations in Britain are not only individualised but increasingly, characterised by ‘high commitment’ (or ‘high performance’) management strategies. These seek to obtain greater discretionary effort from employees via teamworking, training and individualised career development, performance appraisals and performance-related pay. A recent British survey (White et al 2003) has demonstrated that ‘high commitment’ management practices have a negative impact on job to home spillover, particularly insofar as they increase working hours and work intensity. British managerial and professional women who wish to be promoted are constrained to behave ‘like men’ (in fact, managerial and professional women who wished to be promoted were slightly more (62%) likely than similar men (55%) to think that it was necessary to ‘put in longer hours’ in order to move up the job ladder), and this will have negative consequences as far as the articulation of their work and family lives is concerned.

In summary: class-associated differences in couple working arrangements relating to work-life articulation in Britain will serve to deepen material class inequalities, in that women are more likely to withdraw from employment, and/or work part-time, in less advantaged households. However, reported levels of work-life stress are closely associated with working hours, and routine and manual respondents report lower levels of work-life stress. In particular, professional and managerial women who wish to be promoted report the highest levels of work-life stress. In 2006, Project 7 will carry out a repeat of a version of the ISSP Family 2002 survey. This survey will enable us to develop further the work we have described above. In addition, we will, using previous BSA surveys, carry out a quasi-cohort analysis of trends in gender role attitudes and their variation by class (although not reported in this paper, there are persisting class variations in gender role attitudes that we intend to explore further).

How have a range of employment sectors and professions adapted to women’s entry in respect of (a) career development and (b) work-life integration?

The employment sectors/professions that have been selected are retail, banking, accountancy and medicine. This selection is intended to reflect occupational class

differences. In the light of our discussions in the previous section, we intend to shift our focus somewhat and explore in some depth the management of employment relationships in these sectors/professions (it is possible that there may be synergies with the corporate governance projects here). Previous qualitative research (see Crompton et al 2003) suggests that there may be a growing tension between different aspects of corporate policy. Many employers are now offering enhanced work-life policies. However, the same organisations are also engaging in work intensification and organisational restructuring in their efforts to be economically competitive. These two aspirations may come into direct conflict with each other.

‘Cellbank’ is a major clearing bank with good work-life policies. For example, paid carers’ days have been recently introduced, and women are now offered extended maternity leave, opportunities to return to part-time work, opportunities for job sharing, etc. However, despite these opportunities, they were not seen as being compatible with managerial employment. Flora was a relatively senior manager who had returned to a job share after the birth of her children. However, she had just taken voluntary redundancy as the last wave of re-organisation would have meant a move to a full-time job: ‘There were ten of us, and with the reorganisation three of us had to go. Realistically, to do the whole (new) job on 28 hours a week (her current hours) would be just an absolute nightmare. ...I would have to have done it full-time. They hadn't said that, but I know how big my job is now. And with twice the patch, twice the size, I just couldn't have done it and I wasn't prepared to go full-time’. Flora continues:

As much as the bank encourages job share and the home/work life balance, realistically it doesn't work. The higher up you go, the responsibility you've got ...the higher up in the bank you go, it just gets harder for the bank to be family friendly. They've still got the same policies there and I can still take advantage of the same policies that everyone else has, but it's harder for me to do that. ... So there is a cut-off point where it becomes more difficult to be family friendly.

Besides organisational/occupational case studies, our qualitative research will also include interviews with male and female parents in each sector. This part of the research is very much at the planning stage and we would appreciate any help and advice (and access!). The interviews will be attempting to establish:

- What are the differences between men and women in the emphasis given to (a) employment and (b) family?
- How important are *women's* aspirations (for women and their partners)? Also, how important are *men's* aspirations (for men and their partners)? The question of identity will (whether primarily ‘work’ or primarily ‘family’) will be relevant here, (see Wacjman and Martin 2002, also Duncan et al 2003). We also want to explore the persistence of the ‘ideology of domesticity’ amongst men and women. This topic links to the questions to be explored in the attitude survey. Are there systematic variations by class, as well as gender?
- If there are differences in emphasis, how do these impact on the practicalities of work-life arrangements? (and what are the practicalities of work-life arrangements amongst these mothers and fathers). To what extent are there genuinely ‘dual’ career arrangements amongst the people we interview?
- How do they impact on individual career aspirations and development?

- Have employers acted so as to positively facilitate work-life arrangements? Does (a) the availability and (b) the take-up of work-life policies vary by job status?
- Have organisational/occupational demands constrained work-life arrangements? How do these demands vary by job status?
- Are there systematic variations by occupational group, and what are their consequences? Here we will be exploring class variations in the importance attributed to work/job. Work is expected to be more important to professional/managers: higher paid, better quality, more challenging, more identification with work, higher investment in work, possibly more autonomy/flexibility; also more demanding, pressurised; longer hours expected; results-based. We will also be focusing on the extent to which individual job-specific professional qualifications (in medicine and accountancy) facilitate ‘family friendly’ working arrangements (for both sexes), and the extent to which these arrangements compromise career development.

The organisational case studies will involve gathering information from key informants (ie, the relevant managers). We will require descriptive data (eg number of employees, job status, gender/grade distribution) as well as information on employee management strategies including the presence or absence of ‘high commitment’ strategies (career development, teamworking, whether targets or other forms of employee monitoring are used), and the availability of ‘work-life’ policies.

Theoretical implications: the point has often been made that there is frequently a disjunction between ‘grand theories’ relating to general social processes, as well as universally applied policies, and the actual practices of the individuals and groups whose behaviour is supposed to be explained, or influenced, by these theories and policies (Hakim 2004, Duncan and Irwin 2004). We do not see this as a reason to reject ‘grand theory’, but neither do we see our research as making a significant contribution in this area. Rather, we see ourselves as making a contribution to what Merton (1957) has famously described as ‘middle-range theory’. We hope to develop a theoretically-informed categorisation of individual and household adaptations to the combination of employment and family life, and their outcomes for gender equality. This categorisation will involve a dual focus on both contextual factors as well as values, beliefs, and norms.

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¹ In this discussion, the concept of 'class' will be used in a rather loose fashion. We will discuss data relating to occupational 'class' classifications, as well as income classifications. We will also use the term more generally, that is, to refer to broad income/occupational/cultural groupings.

² The RG social class of the household has been assigned to that of the 'main earner'. There are a number of social class schemes currently available. In the analysis of the ISSP survey, the three-category version of the NS-SEC classification (see *The National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification User Manual*, Office for National Statistics, April 2002) is employed. Our analyses using this scheme do not usually include the 'Intermediate' category. This is because the NS-SEC classification places the majority of self-employed men in the 'Intermediate' group. As the ESRC/ISSP questions were asked of employees only, women are over-represented in the 'Intermediate' group. The BHPS data uses a 5-category version of the Registrar General's Social Class classification, which has been superseded by the NS-SEC. Nevertheless, the 'Managerial and Professional' category largely corresponds to the 'Managerial and Professional' category of the NS-SEC. 'Skilled non-manual' and 'Skilled Manual' categories mesh broadly with NS-SEC 'Intermediates', and the three 'Manual' categories to the 'Routine and Manual' NS-SEC.

³ Survey carried out in 2002 (BSA/ISSP Family 2002). In Britain, it generated 2312 cases, 1094 of who were in employment.

⁴ Cronbach alpha .73, eigenvalue 2.2, 56% of variance

⁵ The fact that Portuguese professional and managerial women are much more likely to have access to paid domestic help than similar British women will also be likely to be making a contribution to lower levels of stress.