

**Work Orientation and Wives' Employment Careers:
An Evaluation of Hakim's Preference Theory**

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ABSTRACT

This paper uses a nine-year period of work-life history data from the British Household Panel Survey (1991 – 1999) to examine married/cohabiting women's work trajectories. In particular, it tests some major contentions of Hakim's (2000) preference theory. Both supportive and opposing evidence for the theory has been found. First, concurring with Hakim's arguments, women who have followed a home-career path hold consistently more home-centred attitudes over time than women who have been committed to their employment careers. Moreover, it is found that presence of dependent children has little or no negative effect on a work-centred woman's chance of being engaged in full-time work. But the findings could not rule out the possibility that women's employment careers are still constrained. The most work-centred women (as revealed in their gender role attitudes in the nine-year period), despite having been committed mostly to a full-time work, still have displayed a certain degree of discontinuity in their career pursuits. Finally, contrary to corollary of the preference theory, the relationship between gender role attitudes and women's participation in labour market work is reciprocal rather than unidirectional. That is, women's work orientation is endogenous to their labour market experiences.

Work Orientation and Wives' Employment Careers: An Evaluation of Hakim's Preference Theory

This paper aims to provide an investigation into married/cohabiting women's work histories, their gender-role attitudes, and the relationship between their level of labour market participation and gender role attitudes. In particular, some contentions of Hakim's (2000) preference theory will be tested, and the usefulness of this theory as a tool for the examination of women's employment careers will be evaluated in the light of the findings.

BACKGROUND

The Debate about Work Constraints and Women's Work Choices

Hakim's (1998, 2000, 2002) controversial view that women's positions in the labour market are not much constrained but reflect their own preferences has fueled a debate among British scholars. The debate can be broadly divided into two camps: those who emphasize personal preferences (Hakim, 1998, 2000, 2002), and those who reinstate the role of social and economic constraints (Crompton & Harris, 1999; McRae, 2003).

Hakim proposes that there are three "qualitatively" different types of women, who differ among one another in their preferences about work and home: (a) the home-centred, who prefer a home life to labour market work, (b) the work-centred, of whom many are childless and all have strong commitment in their employment careers, and (c) the adaptive, who want to do some labour market work but do not commit themselves to their careers. She maintains that most women in modern affluent countries have genuine and unconstrained choices to choose between a home-career or a work-career according to

their preferences, and therefore their preferences determine their home life and career paths.

In arguing against Hakim, Crompton and Harris (1999) interviewed 150 women bankers and women doctors from five European countries, and developed a typology of women's career trajectories that places equal emphases on both choice and constraints. By comparing career paths of women bankers and those of women doctors, they concluded that both constraints and choices make an impact on women's behaviours in families and careers. Given differences in the opportunities and constraints of the banking and the medicine sectors, Crompton and Harris reported that bankers and doctors manage the demands from their careers and families differently. Women doctors generally have greater flexibility in their work arrangements than women bankers and are therefore more likely to change to part-time work or less demanding jobs when they have young children; women bankers, on the other hand, tend to change their career directions because of factors external to their families such as organizational restructuring (Crompton and Harris, 1999, p. 140).

McRae (2003) also argues against Hakim's claim that women's heterogeneous preferences determine their employment careers. She examined the career paths of a sample of first time mothers in the U.K. using longitudinal data collected in 1991, 1998 and 1999. She finds that only 10% of mothers have worked continually on a full-time basis in the following eleven years since the birth of the first child, while 90% of them either had had a combination of full-time work, part-time work, and no work spells, or concentrated mainly on part-time work, or stayed out of the labour market (McRae, 2003, p. 323). Nevertheless, unlike what is claimed by Hakim, these different groups of women

do not differ significantly in their gender role attitudes towards work and family. McRae then concludes that women do not have genuine, unconstrained choices about their careers; instead the constraints facing them explain the differences in their career pursuits.

This paper contributes to the above debate by testing empirically some major contentions of the preference theory using a nine-year period of work-life history data from the BHPS. In particular, the endogenous relationship between gender role attitudes and women's employment career will be investigated.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses will be tested:

Hypothesis 1

Firstly, following Hakim's contention that women are heterogeneous in their lifestyle preferences and her emphasis on women's freedom in choosing their home and work roles, it is hypothesized that women who differ in their levels of involvement in labour market work differ also in their preferences about work and home. Women who have worked on a full-time basis continuously in a long period will have more work-centred attitudes than women who have had intermittent employment career paths and those who have concentrated on family care responsibilities rather than labour market work.

Hypothesis 2

Secondly, Hakim asserts that work-centred women, who are usually childless although some do have children (Hakim, 2000, p. 164), are not much negatively affected

by childcare responsibilities in their employment careers compared with home-centred and adaptive women.

Wives who work only if their child care responsibilities allow them to do so are in effect fulfilling a prior choice of emphasis on homemaking as life's central activity. Child care responsibilities have little or no impact on the employment of work-centred women. (Hakim, 2002, p. 447)

To evaluate this claim, it is hypothesized that family constraints such as childcare responsibilities create less of a barrier to employment for work-centred women than for home-centred and adaptive women. That is, there will be an interaction effect between childcare responsibilities and home-/work-centredness.

Hypothesis 3

Thirdly, Hakim contends that women who move in and out of the labour market are fulfilling their preference for a home life over an employment career, or their lack of commitment to labour market work "from the start" (Hakim, 2000, p. 166 and p. 277). The crux of preference theory rests on the assertion that women's work behaviours are driven by their prior preferences about work, which implies that gender role preferences are exogenous to employment experience. This constitutes my third hypothesis.

TESTING THE HYPOTHESES

Data

This paper uses work-life history data from the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS). The BHPS is a longitudinal survey that interviewed all members of a random

selection of households in 1991, and re-interviews all the original household members, their natural descendants, and all their current household co-residents annually. The first wave interviewed about 5,000 households and 10,300 individuals. The BHPS contains comprehensive work and life history data in its panel, as well as detailed relevant retrospective information collected from respondents in Waves 2 and 3. The present study will use a nine-year period of work-life history data (1991 – 1999) from the BHPS.

Measures

Attitudes towards work and home

To test the above hypotheses, we will need a measure of women's preferences concerning work and home. However, from social science research, we cannot find a standard, widely accepted measure of women's gender role preferences. The economic tradition has assumed that preferences are dependent on, and also exogenous to, costs and opportunities available to individuals, and can only be revealed in behaviours. Sociologists, on the other hand, have usually focused on institutional and structural factors that constrain or enable individuals' career choices rather than individuals' work choices per se. Moreover, the BHPS, like other national longitudinal surveys, has not collected information about work choices directly. The best available proxies for women's gender role preference are a series of attitudinal items about women's roles in the home and in the workplace asked as a five-point scale in an agree/disagree format. Hakim (2000) criticizes the use of attitudinal questions to measure preferences, and contends that while attitudes to public beliefs are often volatile, lifestyle preferences, particularly in regard to gender roles, are "carefully considered and stable" (Hakim, 2000, p. 75). This paper avoids these criticisms by using the items Hakim employed before and

appears to have no disagreements with¹, and by using measures similar to that have been adopted in recent empirical studies arguing against Hakim's arguments (Crompton & Harris, 1999; McRae, 2003). I will measure women's attitudes towards home and work (as the best available proxy measure for their gender role preferences from the present data source) by six items about women's role in the home and in the workplace selected from the BHPS. These six items are used to construct a scale, ranging from -12 and +12, where larger values indicate more home-centred orientation and smaller values indicate more work-centred orientation, and 0 is neutral. The scale is also used to classify three groups of women: *home-centred*, *work-centred* and *adaptive*. The description of the six items and the coding of the gender role attitudes variable are provided in the Appendix.

Employment commitment and participation

To measure employment commitment and participation, I derive from the work-life history files of the BHPS the number of months that an individual has been in full-time employment, part-time employment, family care work and other non-employment activities for each year between 1991 and 1999. This information will then be used to classify the work trajectories of women respondents.

¹ Although Hakim asserts that women's preferences cannot not be captured by attitude-type questions (Hakim, 2000, pp. 75 – 77), as McRae rightly points out, she also cites findings derived from attitudinal data about gender roles to support her arguments. For example, Hakim uses nine questions about gender role attitudes from the 1991 wave of the BHPS to classify three groups of women – Modern, Ambivalent and Traditional (which correspond with the work-centred, the adaptive and the home-centred in her typology) – and shows that the labour force participation rate was the highest in the Modern group and the lowest in the Traditional group (Hakim, 1997, pp. 42 – 43, 2000, p. 78). Hakim cites these findings to support her assertion that women's heterogeneous preferences about work and home determine their labour market behaviours.

Analysis strategies

The preference theory does not provide a strong and coherent argument to explain the source of women's preferences about work and home. Instead it postulates a number of assertions about women's work choices and behaviours as mentioned in the above sections. A single statistical technique will not be adequate to test all these diverse arguments. Therefore, I will employ three statistical methods to test respectively the three hypotheses mentioned above.

Testing Hypothesis 1

To test the first hypothesis, I will use a sample of married/cohabiting women from Wave 1 (1991) of BHPS, and examine their work-life history from 1991 to 1999 ($N = 1,619$). The duration of observation is sufficiently long to reveal women's work commitment, as well as to maintain a reasonably large sample size. I will compare these women's employment career paths and their gender role attitudes between 1991 and 1999. Following Hakim, it is expected that women who have been continuously employed on a full-time basis would "from the start" and consistently display stronger work-centred values in the period compared with women who have worked intermittently or have been inactive in labour market work.

Testing Hypothesis 2

To test the second hypothesis, I will use a pooled sample of 1991, 1993, 1995, 1997 and 1999 of married and cohabiting women aged between 18 and 50 ($N = 12,008$). (The BHPS did not ask respondents about their attitudes towards gender roles in even-numbered years. These years of data are therefore not included in the pooled sample. Only women aged between 18 and 50 are selected because these women have not reached

the normal retiring age. The pooled sample will then be used for a set of multinomial logistic regression models that aim to examine the associations between women's employment career paths (*Continuous full-time work, Some full-time/part-time work, and Economically inactive*), their attitudes towards work and home, and childcare constraints. The equations for the multinomial logistic models take the following form:

$$\log\left(\frac{\pi_i}{1-\pi_i}\right) = \phi_0 + \phi_1 childcare_i + \phi_2 attitude_i + \phi_3 attitude_i * childcare_i + \sum_j \eta_j z_{ij} + \zeta$$

where for a respondent i , y_i is a dependent variable with value 0 or 1 and indicates the respondent's employment career, and $\pi_i = \text{prob}(y_i = 1)$. *Childcare* and *attitude* are dummy variables denoting the respondent's childcare responsibilities and gender role attitudes. z_{ij} is a vector of covariates of respondent i , where $j = (1, 2, \dots, J)$ and J is the number of control covariates. ϕ_0 , ϕ_1 , ϕ_2 and η_j are parameters to be estimated. ζ is an error term. The models control for age (since this may affect a women's employability and decisions about work and home), household size, housing tenure (since these factors will influence the financial constraints facing a household), cohabitation, and year of survey. The categories of the dependent variable are *Some full-time/part-time work* and *Economically inactive* (contrasting with *Continuous full-time work*).

It is expected that childcare responsibilities would reduce the likelihood of a woman being employed continuously full-time, and therefore the coefficient regarding presence of young children (ϕ_1) would be negative. However, following Hakim, it is expected that work-centred women will be less affected by the childcare factors than other women, therefore the coefficient for the interaction between childcare responsibilities and work-centredness will be negative and significant; in the same vein,

the coefficient for the interaction between childcare responsibilities and home-centredness will be positive and significant.

Testing Hypothesis 3

To test the final hypothesis, we will need a rich panel of data that allows us to observe the over-time changes in gender role attitudes and labour market behaviours. I will use the same sample as for testing Hypothesis 1, which contains married/cohabiting women who were first interviewed in 1991 and then were re-interviewed annually until 1999. Here the interest is to find out whether gender role attitudes influence the decisions on labour market work or/and vice versa. I will examine the relationships between labour market participation and gender role attitudes by a series of recursive structural equation models guided by the general principles of the graphical chain method (Cox & Wermuth, 1993, 1996). Central to this technique is that a series of regressions is presented as a graph, with variables being represented by nodes and edges with an arrow at the end connecting them representing causal relationships. The nodes (variables) are placed in boxes that are organized in sequence to represent the assumed causal order. Variables included in a box together are assumed conditionally independent given all variables to the right (i.e., they are on equal causal footing). This method allows us to compare associations between variables of theoretical interest in a neat manner. Although it cannot be used to prove causation, it is a useful tool for testing the hypothetical causal relationships (Finkel, 1995). So, for example, if employment activities are driven by gender role attitudes and the influence is unidirectional, we will observe consistently stronger associations between previous attitudes and the present level of employment participation than that between previous employment participation levels and the present

gender role attitudes. In contrast, if employment activities and gender role attitudes are to a certain extent endogenous to each other, we will observe that past employment activities have an effect on present gender role attitudes in a similar way as past attitudes do on present employment activities. To examine the dependencies between variables, I will run a series of cross-lagged regression models and compare the significance and the size of the standardized coefficients of the models. The equations of the models take the following form:

$$W_{it} = \mu_0 + \mu_{1t}age_i + \mu_{2t}cohab_i + \sum_{k=91}^{t-2} \theta_k A_{ik} + \sum_{k=91}^{t-2} \gamma_k W_{ik} + \xi_t$$

$$A_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_{1t}age_i + \beta_{2t}cohab_i + \sum_{k=91}^{t-2} \alpha_k A_{ik} + \sum_{k=91}^{t-2} \lambda_k W_{ik} + \varepsilon_t$$

where $t = \text{year} = 1991, 1993, 1995, 1997 \text{ and } 1999$. For a respondent i , A_{it} and W_{it} are dependent variables indicating her gender role attitudes and level of participation in labour market work in the year of the interview (t). age and $cohab$ are control covariates indicating the age and marital status (cohabiting = 1; married = 0) in 1991; A_{ik} and W_{ik} denote gender role attitudes and employment participation in the years preceding t , and $k = 1991, 1993, \dots, t-2$; $\mu_0, \mu_{1t}, \mu_{2t}, \theta_k, \gamma_k, \beta_0, \beta_{1t}, \beta_{2t}, \alpha_k$ and λ_k are parameters to be estimated. ξ_t and ε_t are the error terms of the above two equations. (Employment participation and gender role attitudes are regressed in alternate years because items measuring gender role attitudes were not collected in the 1992, 1994, 1996 and 1998 waves of BHPS).

In the above models, we are concerned mostly with the cross-effects coefficients (i.e., the effects of gender role attitudes on the level of participation in labour market

work and vice versa). Although we can gain greater insights into causal relationship from longitudinal analysis than we can with cross-sectional analysis, using repeated measures on the same observations may introduce the problem of biased estimation due to correlated errors. To deal with this problem, I follow the strategy employed by a recent study that investigated the relationships between political party support and economic perception (Evans & Andersen, 2004) of specifying “stability” coefficients connecting each of the repeated measures through time. This strategy is common for panel analysis (See Heise, 1970; Wheaton et al., 1977). Each of the models represented in the graphic chain contains a causal arrow connecting gender role attitudes at time t_1 to gender role attitudes at time t_2 , a causal arrow from gender role attitudes at time t_2 to gender role attitudes at time t_3 and the like. The same strategy is taken for the repeated measures of participation in labour market work. Although this strategy does not prevent biases in the coefficients from gender role attitudes at time t_1 to gender role attitudes at time t_2 , and that from labour market participation at time t_1 to labour market participation at time t_2 , these paths are not of substantive theoretical interest. As discussed in some literature on cross-lagged models (e.g., Lorenz et al., 1995; Shingles, 1985), this potential bias does not affect the cross-effects coefficients, which are the central theoretical interest in this study.

The assumption about the exogenous relationship between gender role attitudes and employment activities has not been tested empirically in past studies, partly due to the lack of suitable data. Since people might acquire skills and experiences and build up network resources through their employment, and these new resources may in turn increase one’s potential wage in the labour market, it is doubtful if their gender role

preferences will be unchanged in the wake of the change in their labour market experience. It is expected that, contrary to what is assumed in Hakim's theory and other theories of the gender division of labour, the relationship between employment participation and gender role attitudes is a reciprocal one.

FINDINGS

Hakim asserts that “employment careers are centrally important for only a minority of women” and “more than half of adult women accept the sexual division of labour and treat market work as an additional secondary activity to be fitted in with the demands of domestic life” (Hakim, 1996, p. 88), whereas in the case of men, employment careers are more central to their life goals. Before we move on to testing the hypotheses concerning her diverse arguments about women's preferences about home and work, it would be useful for us to have some ideas how women actually differ from men in their employment careers trajectories. Table 1 and Figure 1 compare married and cohabiting women's employment histories with that of married and cohabiting men between 1991 and 1999.

Table 1. Employment History of Married/Cohabiting Men (N = 1289) and Women (N = 1619), 1991 – 1999

	<i>Mean (SD)</i>	<i>Lower quartile</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Upper quartile</i>
<i>Women</i>				
No. of months in full-time work ^a	43.37 (44.38)	0.00	27.00	95.00
No. of months in part-time work ^b	30.31 (38.08)	0.00	10.00	56.00
No. of months in paid work (full-time + part-time)	73.68 (38.35)	44.00	91.00	107.00
<i>Men</i>				
No. of months in full-time work ^a	90.23 (30.44)	90.50	105.00	108.00
No. of months in part-time work ^b	2.65 (9.71)	0.00	0.00	0.00
No. of months in paid work (full-time + part-time)	92.88 (28.60)	96.00	106.00	108.00

Note: Data from British Household Panel Survey, 1991 – 1999. The sample contains married/cohabiting men and women who were aged between 18 and 50 in 1991.

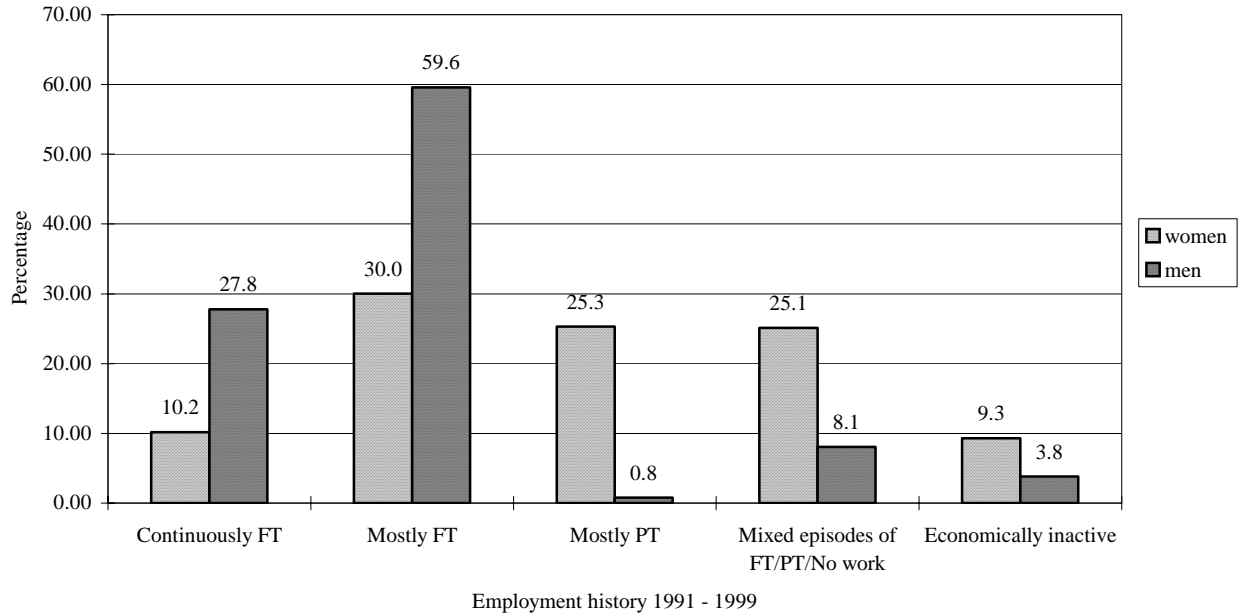
^aFull-time work is paid employment involving 30 or more work hours per week. ^bPart-time work is paid employment involving less than 30 work hours per week.

As we can see from Table 1, the data sample reflects some well-known differences between women and men in their employment participation. For example, women are more involved in part-time work than men: on average women in the sample spent 30.31 months in part-time work in the nine-year period of observation (i.e. 108 months), while the corresponding figure for men is only 2.65. Women are also found to

be less involved in full-time work: On average they spent 43.37 months between 1991 and 1999 in full-time employment, while men spent 90.23 months. Even when both full-time and part-time jobs are taken into account, women spent on average 73.68 months in employment, which is still significantly shorter than men do (the figure for men being 92.88 months). Figure 1 (over) presents five categories of employment trajectories of men and women: (a) *Continuous full-time work* (which includes people who had worked continuously on a full-time basis for all the 108 months of the study period), (b) *Mostly full-time work* (which contains individuals who had worked on a full-time basis for more than 54 months, i.e. half of the study period, but less than 108 months), (c) *Mostly part-time work* (which are individuals who had worked on a part-time basis for more than 54 months), (d) *Mixed episodes of full-time/part-time work and non-employment*, (these are respondents who had had some full-time or part-time work, but neither the number of months in full-time work nor that in part-time work is greater than 54 months), and (e) *Economically inactive* (which includes people who had not been involved in any full-time work or part-time work in the whole 108 months of the study period).

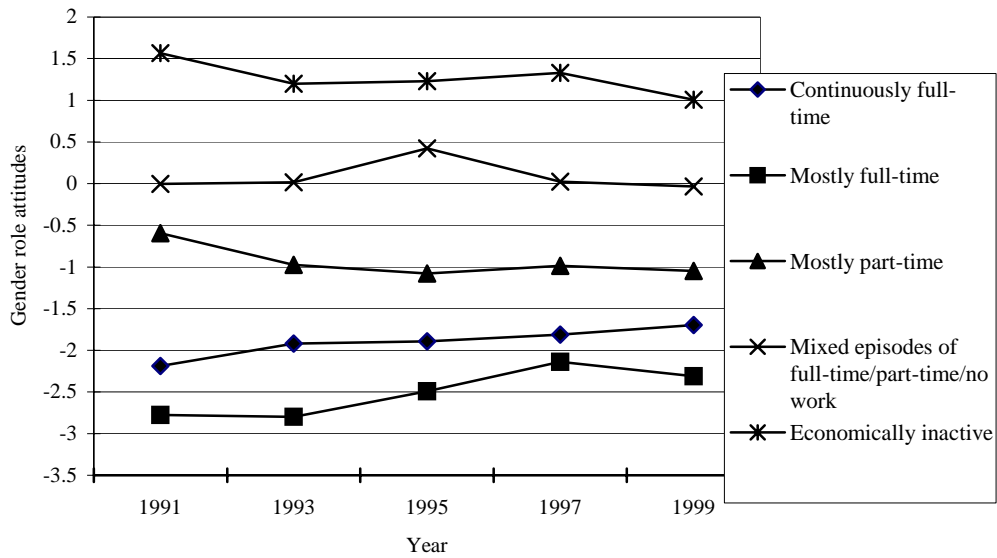
As we can see, most men in the sample fall into the *Continuously full-time* and *Mostly full-time* categories (over 87%) and very few of them had worked mostly on a part-time basis (less than 1%). In contrast, women are more evenly distributed among the five categories, with just above 10% of them having worked continuously on a full-time basis, 30% having worked mostly full-time, about a quarter having worked mostly on a part-time basis, another one quarter having experienced mixed episodes of full-time or part-time work or non-employment, and about 9% of them having remained totally outside employment in the period.

Figure 1. Employment History of Married/Cohabiting Men and Women, 1991 - 1999



These findings are perhaps not surprising, given the well-known gender gap in the labour force participation rate. They generally support Hakim's claim that women, compared with men, are more heterogeneous in the work-life histories patterns. Nevertheless, what is at issue here is that whether women who follow different trajectories also differ in their attitudes towards home life and employment career (i.e. Hypothesis 1). To answer this question, let us turn to Figure 2, which shows the mean scores of women's gender role attitudes by their employment trajectory and year.

Figure 2. Mean Scores of Women's Gender Role Attitudes by Employment History, 1991 - 1999



Hypothesis 1

As we can see from Figure 2, women in the five categories of employment trajectory display a clear pecking order in their gender role attitudes. The uppermost two curves represent those who had been completely economically inactive and those who had had mixed spells of full-time/part-time employment and non-employment. As expected, these two groups of women had more traditional attitudes than the other three groups. Their mean attitudes scores between 1991 and 1999 are generally above 0, indicating their home-centred orientation. The lower three curves depict gender role attitudes of women who had spent more than half of the period (54 months) in employment activities, including both part-time and full-time work. These women had negative gender role attitudes in all the years, showing that they had a greater work-orientation than women who had spent little or no time in employment activities in the

period. We can also see that the discrepancy in gender role attitudes among the five groups is the greatest in 1991; from 1991 onwards, it gradually narrows, with the two relatively economically inactive groups becoming slightly more work-centred over the years, and those had been active labour market work becoming slightly more traditional. The middle curve belongs to women who had been engaged mostly in part-time work. It is again within my expectation to find that these women had more traditional attitudes, in all years, than women who had worked on a full-time basis in most or all of the period. What is more surprising is that women who had worked continuously full-time appeared to have more traditional attitudes than women who had worked mostly on a full-time basis but had also been away from full-time work for some time. Women who had worked mostly full-time constitute 30% of the sample and included women who had taken breaks from their careers after giving birth to a child. (On average they spent 89.02 months in full-time employment, i.e., 82% of the whole period, $SD = 16.61$.) This finding goes against the corollary from Hakim's theory that women who have are committed to their careers are more work-centred than women who have intermittent career trajectories.

Apart from this exception, the findings generally support Hypothesis 1: Women who have followed different employment trajectories differ in their gender role attitudes, with those who have been inactive in employment activities having the most home-centred attitudes. Nevertheless, the only finding contrary to Hakim's prediction we have found here reveals the possibility that work preferences may not be interpreted fully through behaviours. Hakim places a strong emphasis on work-centred women. She asserts that work-centred women are usually childless although not exclusively (Hakim,

2000, p. 264), and unlike adaptive women and home-centred women, their careers are much less negatively affected by childcare and other family responsibilities. But the findings have shown that the most work-centred group (as revealed in their attitudes) are not those who have worked continuously, but are rather those who have had taken some breaks from the labour market (although this group of women have still committed mostly to a full-time job). That is, we have found that gender role attitudes are strongly associated with the employment careers of the less economically inactive women, but gender role attitudes alone fail to distinguish the employment trajectory of the most work-centred women from that of other economically active women.

Hypothesis 2

Turning to the testing of Hypothesis 2, it is hypothesized that family constraints such as childcare responsibilities create less of a barrier to employment for work-centred women than for home-centred and adaptive women. To test this hypothesis, I use a pooled sample of married and cohabiting women aged between 18 and 50 from the survey years 1991, 1993, 1995, 1997 and 1999 ($N = 12,008$) for a series of multinomial logistic regressions to test the associations between women's employment participation levels, their gender role attitudes and childcare constraints. The categories of the dependent variable are *Continuous full-time work* (which is the reference category, and represents 34.7% of women in the sample and includes women who worked continuously in the 12 months of the year of interview), *Some full-time/part-time work* (which constitutes 40.5% of the sample and includes women who had some full-time or part-time work in the 12 months of the year of interview, but the total number of months in full-

time employment is less than 12 months), and *Economically inactive* (which represents 24.8% of the sample and includes women were not involved in any full-time or part-time work in the year of interview). The independent variables of theoretical interests are gender role attitudes (*home-centred*, *work-centred*, or *adaptive* (reference category)) and presence of children aged between 0 and 4 (*Yes* = 1; *No* = 0), and presence of children aged between 5 and 11 (*Yes* = 1; *No* = 0).

Firstly, correlations and descriptive statistics for the independent variables in the multinomial logistic regression models are presented in Table 2 (see page 36).

Table 3 (see page 37 and 38) presents the baseline models and the baseline plus interactions models. The baseline models include all control variables, a woman's home-/work-centredness, and childcare responsibilities (whether having a child aged between 0 and 4 and whether having a child aged between 5 and 11). The baseline plus interaction models include all the variables in the baseline models and the interactions between home-/work-centredness and childcare responsibilities.

Let us first focus on the baseline models. The control variables behave in the expected ways. Controlling for presence of dependent children, household size (indicating presence of adult household members as potential wage earners) is negatively associated with a woman's chance of being continuously involved in full-time work; the coefficient in the *Economically inactive* Vs *Continuously full-time work* contrast and that in the *Some full-time/part-time work* Vs *Continuously full-time work* contrast are 0.52 and 0.28 respectively. Cohabiting women, supposedly having less commitment to a relationship and hence fewer constraints from the family, are more likely to be committed continuously to full-time work than married women; the coefficient in the case of the

Some full-time/part-time work Vs Continuously full-time work contrast is significant and equal to -0.17. Furthermore, compared with private accommodation owners and mortgage payers, council tenants and private accommodation renters are far less likely to be involved continuously in full-time work (the coefficients in the two models are all positive and significant). This observation is consistent with the conjecture that the financial demands of mortgages increase the likelihood of a woman participating continuously in full-time employment.

Turning to the variables of theoretical interest, we can see that home-centred attitudes decrease significantly a woman's likelihood of being engaged in full-time employment continuously, whereas work-centred attitudes significantly increase the likelihood. The coefficients corresponding to home-centredness in the contrast between *Economically inactive* and *Continuously full-time work* and in the contrast between *Some full-time/part-time work* and *Continuously full-time work* are 0.91 and 0.34 respectively. The corresponding coefficients for work-centredness in the two contrasts are -1.18 and -0.45. Moreover, the size of the coefficients is larger in the first contrast than in the second, indicating that the effects are greater in the case of the *Economically inactive Vs Continuously full-time work* contrast, than in the case of the *Some full-time/part-time work Vs Continuously full-time work* contrast.

As has been expected, presence of young children also has strong associations with women's employment activities. Having a pre-school aged child (aged 0 – 4) reduces significantly a woman's likelihood of committing continuously to full-time work (the coefficients in the two contrasts being 1.41 and 0.75); having a school-aged child

(aged 5 – 11) also decreases the likelihood significantly, although the effects are smaller (the coefficients being 0.35 and 0.60 respectively).

Of most interest in this section are the interaction terms. Let us refer to Table 4, which shows the likelihood ratio test results of the baseline plus interactions models.

Table 4. Likelihood Ratio Tests of Multinomial Logistic Regression Models of Employment Status of Married/Cohabiting Women (Baseline Plus Interactions)

<u>Effect</u>	<i>-2LL of reduced model</i>	<i>df</i>	χ^2
Home-centred*Have child aged 0 – 4	15728.85	2	11.28**
Work-centred*Have child aged 0 – 4	15757.34	2	39.76***
Home-centred*Have child aged 5 – 15	15732.29	2	14.72**
Work-centred*Have child aged 5 – 15	15732.40	2	14.83**

Note: Data from the British Household Panel Survey 1991 - 1999. $N = 12,008$. The dependent variables are *Some full-time/part-time work* and *Economically inactive*. The reference category is *Continuous full-time work*. The χ^2 statistic is the difference in *-2LL* between the final model and a reduced model. The reduced model is formed by omitting an effect from the final model. The null hypothesis is that all parameters of that effect are 0. The final model contains the interactions and the following independent variables: *Cohabitation*, *Council tenant*, *Private accommodation renter*, *Home-centred*, *Work-centred*, *Have child aged 0 – 4*, *Have child aged 5 – 15*, *Year*, *Household size*, and *Age*. $-2LL = 15717.57$, $df = 34$. ** $p < .01$.

The backwards elimination method is employed in order to test the interactions between home/work-centred attitudes and childcare responsibilities. As we can see from Table 4, the removal of the interaction between a woman’s work-centred attitudes and her status of having a child aged between 0 and 4 brings the most significant reduction in fit

of the model ($-2LL = 15757.34$, $\chi^2 = 39.76$, $df = 2$), that is, this interaction term contributes the greatest improvement in fit of the model among all the interaction terms. The removals of all other interactions between a woman's home/work-centredness and childcare responsibilities also make significant decreases in fit (χ^2 is greater than 11.00 in all other three cases, where $df = 2$). In other words, as hypothesized, childcare responsibilities have varying effects on women's employment activities, depending on their work/home-centred attitudes.

Returning to Table 3, we can see that the interaction terms in the baseline plus interactions model behave in a way that Hakim's theory had predicted. That is, the interaction of presence of pre-school aged children with work-centredness increases the likelihood of a woman being engaged continuously in full-time employment significantly, and the interaction with home-centredness decreases the likelihood significantly. The coefficients of the interactions with work-centredness are -0.91 and -0.74 respectively in the contrast of *Economically inactive* with *Continuously full-time work* and in the *Some full-time/part-time work* Vs *Continuously full-time work* contrast, indicating that work-centredness dilutes the effect of pre-school aged children. Most notably, these interactions, together with the influence of work-centredness itself, cancel out largely or fully the effect of pre-school aged children ($-0.91 - 0.77 + 1.63 = -0.05$ in the case of the *Economically inactive* Vs *Continuous full-time work* contrast; $-0.74 - 0.22 + 1.06 = +0.10$ in the case of the *Some full-time/part-time work* Vs *Continuously full-time work* contrast). The coefficients of the interactions between pre-school aged children and home-centredness are both positive in the two models, revealing the fact that home-centredness

adds to the effect of pre-school aged children, although the effect is significantly only in the case of the *Economically inactive Vs Continuously full-time work* contrast.

The interactions of home/work-centredness with school-aged dependent children (aged 5 – 11) have similar effects on women's employment activities. For example, the interactions with work-centredness, together with the effect of work-centredness itself, cancel out the effect of having children aged between 5 and 15 ($-0.50 - 0.77 + 0.36 = -0.91$ in the case of the *Economically inactive Vs Continuous full-time work* contrast; $-0.31 - 0.22 + 0.69 = +0.16$ in the case of the *Some full-time/part-time work Vs Continuously full-time work* contrast).

In sum, the results in this section are supportive of Hypothesis 2. Most notably, we have found that work-centred attitudes reduce the negative effect of dependent children on women's employment activities: Having dependent children has no or little negative effect on a work-centred woman's chance of being engaged continuously in full-time work. In other words, dependent children (a major family responsibility preventing women from taking part in labour market work) create less of a barrier to employment in the case of work-centred women than in the case of home-centred and adaptive women.

Hypothesis 3

Finally, I move on to results of the testing of Hypothesis 3. It is hypothesized, according to Hakim, that gender role attitudes will have an effect on women's labour market participation, but not vice versa. To test this hypothesis, I use the same sample as for the testing of Hypothesis 1. This sample contains information about

married/cohabiting women's employment history and gender role attitudes from 1991 to 1999 ($N = 1,619$). A series of recursive OLS models are employed to explore the causal relationships between gender role attitudes and women's labour market participation. The two dependent variables in the models are gender role attitudes (measured by the six-item scale used in the previous sections) and the level of participation in labour market work (estimated as the number of months in full-time work + 0.5 x the number of months in part-time work in the 12 months of the year of the interview, with values ranging from 0 to 12)².

The descriptive statistics for the cross-lagged models of participation in labour market work and gender role attitudes are provided in Table 5 (see over). The models control for cohabitation status (which constitutes 12.2% of the sample) and age in 1991.

Table 6 (see pages 39 and 40) summarizes the series of OLS regression models and Figure 3 (see pages 41 and 42) displays these models as a graphical chain. To recapitulate, each node in Figure 3 represents a dependent variable, gender role attitudes or participation in labour market work at time t , where $t = \text{year } 1991, 1993, 1995, 1997 \text{ and } 1999$. Attitudes and labour market work participation at a particular time t are put in the same box to assume equal causal footing, and each dependent variable is regressed with all the variables listed on the right.

² The measurement of participation of labour market work takes account of both full-time jobs and part-time jobs, since part-time jobs are common among women. The 0.5 value of weight given to part-time work is arbitrarily taken. However, I have found that the main conclusions will not be changed if different weights for part-time jobs (e.g. 0.0, 0.3 and 0.7) are used.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics (Means and Percentages) for Recursive Regression Models of Women’s Participation in Labour Market Work and Gender Role Attitudes (Standard Deviations in Parentheses)

Response variable	Year				
	1991	1993	1995	1997	1999
Participation in labour market work ($W_{91} - W_{99}$)	6.34 (4.78)	6.49 (4.86)	6.50 (4.81)	6.62 (4.82)	6.47 (4.81)
Gender role attitudes ($A_{91} - A_{99}$)	-1.07 (3.98)	-1.18 (3.73)	-.99 (3.79)	-.95 (3.69)	-1.05 (3.68)
Control variable					
Cohabitation	12.2%				
Age in 1991	35.95 (8.28)				

Note: Data from the British Household Panel Survey, 1991 – 1999, $N = 1,619$. $W_t = (\text{Number of months in full-time employment})_t + 0.5 \times (\text{Number of months in part-time employment})_t$, ranging from 0 to 12; A_t is measured by a six-item scale, ranging from -12 to +12, and 0 is neutral; $t = 1991, 1993, 1995, 1997, \text{ and } 1999$.

Here the assumed causal relationships are represented by edges with arrows, where solid lines indicate significant association and dotted lines indicate insignificant association. Not surprisingly, both employment participation and gender role attitudes are dependent greatly on their past statuses (i.e., the horizontal paths are highly significant at 0.1% level, see Table 6).

Of the main theoretical interest, however, are the cross-effect coefficients, which are represented by the diagonal lines. As we can see, the cross-effect coefficients are all negative, indicating that more traditional gender role attitudes are associated with a lower

level of participation in labour market work. According to Hakim, gender role preference determines decisions about labour market work. Hence, if Hypothesis 3 holds, the influence between gender role attitudes and participation in labour market work will be uni-directionally from attitudes to employment, i.e., the diagonal arrows pointing downwards (from gender role attitudes to employment participation) will be stronger and more significant than those pointing upwards (from employment status to gender role attitudes). Nevertheless, the results of the models do not entirely support this hypothesis. As can be seen from the Figure 3, the cross-effect coefficients from 1991 to 1997 are generally in favour of the hypothesis, such that the hypothesized effects of attitudes on labour market participation are stronger and more significant than those of labour market participation on attitudes. For example, the standardized coefficient of the path from attitudes in 1991 to labour market participation in 1993 is -0.09, which has a larger absolute value than the standardized coefficient of the path from labour market participation in 1991 to attitudes in 1993 (-0.06); the cross-effect coefficients between 1993 and 1995 and those between 1995 and 1997 are significant in the case of attitudes to labour market participation, but not vice versa. But the cross-effect coefficients concerning labour market participation and gender role attitudes in 1997 and 1999 go against Hypothesis 3. That is to say, the standardized coefficient concerning the association between labour market participation in 1997 and gender role attitudes in 1999 (-0.06) is significant and of a larger absolute value than that concerning gender role attitudes in 1997 and labour market participation in 1999 (-0.04), which is insignificant. These findings indicate that, gender role attitudes have a stronger effect on labour market participation rather than vice versa for a certain period (i.e., from 1991 to 1997 in the

present analysis), but when job experience has been accumulated through participation in labour market work in that period, it will in turn have stronger and more significant effects on gender role attitudes. In other words, there is evidence to show that the relationship between gender role attitudes and labor market participation is reciprocal rather than unidirectional. Contrary to Hakim's theory, the findings suggest that gender role attitudes are endogenous to labour market work.

CONCLUSION

The main tenet of the preference theory is that lifestyle preference, by which Hakim means the preference for an employment career vis-à-vis that for a home-career, is a determinant factor of women's employment careers. Highlighting the role of preference, which other existing theories tend to neglect or assume to be exogenous to behaviours, it offers a potentially promising, but challenging, approach to the understanding of women's employment trajectories. This paper has examined the major claims of the theory and has found both supportive and opposing evidence for it.

First, it is found that women following different career trajectories do differ in their attitudes towards home and work. Women who have followed a home-career path hold consistently more home-centred attitudes over time than women who have been committed more to their employment careers. In other words, there is some evidence to support the argument that gender role attitudes (as a best available proxy for preference) predict whether women will lead a more home-centred lifestyle or a more work-centred one.

But the preference theory has made far more ambitious assertions than the claim that women have heterogeneous preferences about home and work. Central to the theory

is the contention that preference is not only an important, but also a determinant factor to explain women's career paths. Hakim states that women in a modern and affluent society like Britain experience "no major constraints limiting choice or forcing choice in particular directions" (Hakim, 2000, p. 18), and that "women [have] genuine choices as to what to do with their lives" (Hakim, 2000, p. 273 – 274). Regarding this assertion, a strong supportive finding has been found: Whereas dependent children generally reduce a woman's likelihood of being engaged continuously in full-time employment, it has no or little negative influence on work-centred women. This finding reveals that work-centred women cope better than other women with both childcare responsibilities and an employment career. Nonetheless, this finding, albeit concurring with Hakim's contention, alone cannot prove that women are completely free from constraints from the family and the labour market. Childcare responsibilities are but one of the common constraints encountered by women. Women might well be constrained by other factors in the family and in the employment market that discourage them from committing to an employment career, such as housework responsibilities, glass ceilings in wage, sex segregation in occupations and so on. Do women really, as Hakim claims, have *genuine* choices in their employment careers? The findings presented in this paper do not rule out the possibility that women's employment careers are constrained so that their work choices cannot be wholly fulfilled. In testing the first hypothesis, I have found that the most work-centred women (as revealed in their gender role attitudes) are those who have committed mostly to a full-time work over a nine-year period. These work-centred women, however, still have a certain degree of discontinuity in their career pursuits. This finding suggests that

even women with work-centred attitudes may be constrained in some sense in their employment careers.

Finally, a major criticism of Hakim's preference theory is its lack of investigation into the nature of the causal relationship between gender role preference and labour market behaviours. Although emphasizing the role of preference in women's employment careers, Hakim has provided no substantive empirical evidence to show how preference actually influences women's employment. In her recent study, Hakim (2002), using cross-sectional data from a 1999 British survey, demonstrated that lifestyle preferences are associated with a woman's chance of having a full-time job or part-time job. However, her analytical approach is problematic because cross-sectional evidence cannot be used to establish causation. Employing a series of recursive regression models, I have found that the relationship between gender role attitudes and women's participation in labour market work is reciprocal rather than unidirectional. In other words, while work orientation affects labour market choices, labour market experiences (which are related to opportunities in the labour market) may also influence work orientation. As Becker (1991[1981]) puts it, human capital can be accumulated through investment in time at labour market work. Although Becker uses this argument to explain why men are mostly responsible for a work role whereas women mostly for a domestic role, it can readily be applied to the case of a career woman: She might acquire skills and resources from employment, which reinforce her employment career orientation; by the same token, constraints on employment might discourage her from devoting further to her work role, and hence she becomes less work-centred. A simplistic

notion that women's employment careers are due to their preferences, put forth by Hakim, is therefore defective.

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APPENDIX

The following six items from the BHPS are used to construct a scale to measure women's home-/work-centredness:

- a) A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works;
- b) All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job;
- c) A woman and her family would all be happier if she goes out to work;
- d) Both the husband and wife should contribute to the household income;
- e) Having a full-time job is the best way for a woman to be an independent person;
- f) A husband's job is to earn money; a wife's job is to look after the home and family.

In the BHPS, respondents were asked to indicate if they *strongly agree*, *agree*, *neither agree nor disagree*, *disagree* or *strongly disagree* with each of the statements. Responses to the above statements are recoded into a five-point scale, from -2 to +2, with higher values indicating more traditional values and 0 is neutral. Answers to the six statements are then added up to create a score ranging from -12 to +12, where higher values indicate more traditional attitudes and 0 is the neutral value. For women respondents in the wave one sample, $M = -0.77$, $SD = 3.87$ and Cronbach's Alpha = 0.69. Women respondents who attained or scored higher than the upper quartile of the scale (i.e., +2) are defined as home-centred, those whose scores are under the lower quartile (i.e., -4) are defined as work-centred, and the medium group who scored less than +2 and more than or equal to -4 are defined as adaptive.

Table 2. *Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for Independent Variables in Multinomial Logistic Regression Models of Employment Status of Married/Cohabiting Women*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Cohabitation	–												
2. Council tenant	.08***	–											
3. Private accommodation renter	.17***	-.12***	–										
4. Home-centred	-.09***	.00	-.02	–									
5. Work-centred	.11***	-.01	.03**	-.32***	–								
6. Have child aged 0 – 4	-.03***	.10***	-.01	.06***	-.05***	–							
7. Have child aged 5 – 15	-.20***	.13***	-.09***	.07***	-.09***	-.04***	–						
8. Year 1991	-.08***	-.01	-.01	.04***	-.03**	.01	-.01	–					
9. Year 1993	-.04***	-.01	.00	-.01	.01	.00	-.01	-.22***	–				
10. Year 1995	.00	-.03**	.01	.00	.00	-.01	-.01	-.22***	-.21***	–			
11. Year 1997	.03**	.03**	.01	-.01	-.02	.00	.01	-.24***	-.23***	-.22***	–		
12. Household size	-.26***	.18***	-.10***	.12***	-.14***	.28***	.64***	.00	.00	-.01	.01	–	
13. Age	-.36***	-.10***	-.15***	.07***	-.10***	-.34***	.14***	-.01	.00	.00	.00	.13***	–
Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
<i>M</i>	.19	.16	.08	.21	.27	.24	.44	.19	.18	.17	.19	3.46	35.98
<i>SD</i>	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1.21	8.29

Note: Data from the British Household Panel Survey 1991 - 1999. *N* = 12,008.

p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

Table 3. *Multinomial Logistic Regression Models of Employment Status of Married/Cohabiting Women (Contrasts with Continuous Full-time Work)*

Predictor	Baseline Models						Baseline Plus Interactions Models					
	Economically inactive			Some full-time/part time work			Economically inactive			Some full-time/part time work		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>e^B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>e^B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>e^B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>e^B</i>
Constant	-2.76***	.19		-.87***	.14		2.86**	.19		1.00**	.15	
Household size	.52***	.03	1.68	.28***	.03	1.32	.52***	.03	1.67	.27***	.03	1.31
Age	.00	.00	1.00	-.01*	.00	.99	.00	.00	1.00	-.01	.00	.99
Cohabitation ^a	-.11	.08	.90	-.17**	.06	.84	-.11	.08	.89	-.17**	.06	.84
Council tenant ^b	1.66***	.08	5.28	.71***	.08	2.03	1.68**	.08	5.38	.71***	.08	2.04
Private accommodation renter ^b	1.07***	.10	2.91	.50***	.09	1.65	1.05**	.10	2.86	.49***	.09	1.63
Year 1991 ^c	.10	.08	1.11	.13*	.07	1.14	.10	.08	1.10	.13	.07	1.14
Year 1993 ^c	-.03	.08	.97	.05	.07	1.05	-.03	.08	.97	.05	.07	1.05
Year 1995 ^c	.01	.09	1.01	.14*	.07	1.15	.01	.09	1.01	.14*	.07	1.15
Year 1997 ^c	-.09	.08	.91	-.02	.07	0.98	-.10	.08	.90	-.03	.07	.97
Home-centred ^d	.91***	.07	2.49	.34***	.06	1.40	.55***	.11	1.74	.29**	.09	1.34
Work-centred ^d	-1.18***	.07	.31	-.45***	.05	0.64	-.11	.11	.46	-.22**	.07	.81
Have child aged 0 – 4 ^e	1.41***	.08	4.08	.75***	.07	2.12	1.63**	.11	5.08	1.06**	.10	2.88

Have child aged 5 – 11 ^e	.35***	.08	1.42	.60***	.06	1.83	.36***	.09	1.43	.69***	.08	2.00
Home-centred * Have child							*			*		
0 – 4							.52*	.21	1.69	.16	.21	1.18
Work-centred *Have child 0 –							-			-		
4							.91***	.17	.40	.74***	.13	.48
Home-centred * Have child												
5 – 15							.55***	.15	1.73	.21	.14	1.23
Work-centred *Have child 5 –												
15							-.50**	.14	.61	-.31**	.10	.73
%N		24.8			40.5			24.8			40.5	

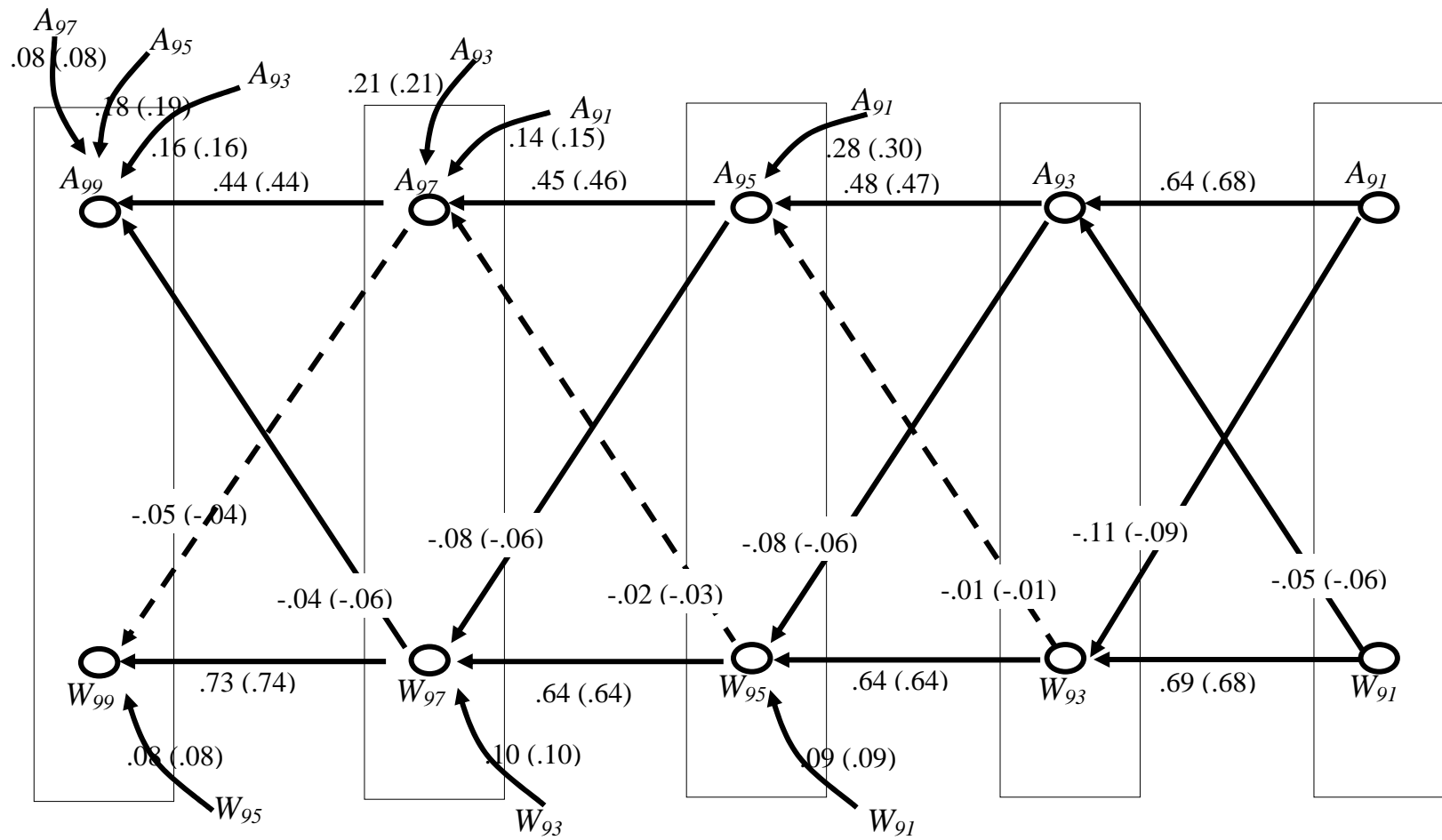
Note: Data from the British Household Panel Survey 1991 - 1999. $N = 12,008$. The dependent variables are *Some full-time/part-time work* and *Economically inactive*. The reference category is *Continuous full-time work*. ^aOmitted category = Married woman. ^bOmitted category = Property owner/mortgager. ^cOmitted category = Year 1999. ^dOmitted category = Adaptive. ^eYes = 1, No = 0. For the baseline models, $-2LL = 15809.24$, $df = 26$. For the baseline plus interactions models, $-2LL = 15717.57$, $df = 34$.
 $*p < .05$. $**p < .01$. $***p < .001$.

Table 6. *Coefficients for Equations from OLS Models of Women's Participation in Paid Work and Gender Role Attitudes*

Response variable	Explanatory variable								R ²
A ₉₉	A ₉₇	A ₉₅	A ₉₃	A ₉₁	W ₉₇	W ₉₅	W ₉₃	W ₉₁	.61
B	.44***	.18***	.16***	.07**	-.04*	.02	-.01	.03	
SE	.02	.03	.03	.02	.02	.02	.02	.02	
Std. B	.44	.19	.16	.08	-.06	.03	-.01	.04	
A ₉₇	A ₉₅	A ₉₃	A ₉₁	W ₉₅	W ₉₃	W ₉₁			.56
B	.45***	.21***	.14***	-.02	.03	-.01			
SE	.02	.03	.02	.02	.02	.02			
Std. B	.46	.21	.15	-.03	.04	-.01			
A ₉₅	A ₉₃	A ₉₁	W ₉₃	W ₉₁					.52
B	.48***	.28***	-.01	-.02					
SE	.03	.02	.02	.02					
Std. B	.47	.30	-.01	-.03					
A ₉₃	A ₉₁	W ₉₁							.50
B	.64***	-.05***							
SE	.02	.02							
Std. B	.68	-.06							
W ₉₉	A ₉₇	A ₉₅	A ₉₃	A ₉₁	W ₉₇	W ₉₅	W ₉₃	W ₉₁	.66
B	-.06	-.01	.03	-.01	.73***	.09**	-.01	.01	
SE	.03	.03	.03	.03	.02	.03	.03	.02	
Std. B	-.04	-.01	.02	.00	.73	.09	-.01	.01	
W ₉₇	A ₉₅	A ₉₃	A ₉₁	W ₉₅	W ₉₃	W ₉₁			.59
B	-.08**	.00	-.01	.64***	.10***	.05			
SE	.03	.03	.03	.02	.03	.02			
Std. B	-.06	.00	-.01	.64	.10	.05			
W ₉₅	A ₉₃	A ₉₁	W ₉₃	W ₉₁					.56
B	-.07*	-.06	.64***	.09***					
SE	.03	.03	.02	.03					
Std. B	-.06	-.05	.64	.09					
W ₉₃	A ₉₁	W ₉₁							.52
B	-.11***	.69***							
SE	.02	.02							
Std. B	-.09	.68							

Note: Data from the British Household Panel Survey, 1991 – 1999, $N = 1,619$. The models control for age and cohabitating relationship in 1991 (omitted from the table). $A = \textit{Gender role attitudes}$; $W = \textit{Participation in paid work}$. Subscripts represent year.
 $*p < .05$. $**p < .01$. $***p < .001$.

Figure 3. Graphical Representation of Participation in Paid Work and Gender Role Attitudes of Women, 1991 – 1999



Note: Data from the British Household Panel Survey, 1991 – 1999, $N = 1,619$. The models control for age and cohabitating relationship in 1991. Paths display coefficients; figures in parentheses are standardized coefficients. Solid lines indicate significant coefficients; dotted lines indicate insignificant coefficients. $A = \textit{Gender role attitudes}$; $W = \textit{Participation in labour market work}$. Subscripts represent year.