

**Job insecurity, gender and work orientation:
an exploratory study of breadwinning and
caregiving identity**

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**GeNet Working Paper No.6
February 2005**

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Abstract

A grounded theory approach is used to explore the relationship between job insecurity, gender and work orientation. Job insecurity is useful for exploring the concept of work orientation because it has been hypothesised that the possibility of job loss may be experienced by some men as a threat to their breadwinning identity. Drawing on in-depth interviews with 28 participants, the paper develops a conceptual framework based on the studies of Hakim (2000) and Crompton and Harris (1999) to explore the themes of gendered choice and constraint in relation to work orientation. Results show that both Hakim and Crompton and Harris have generated descriptively meaningful concepts and that the polarisation of this debate into voluntarist and constructionist camps is not helpful. Furthermore, the paper argues that there is a need for contemporary conceptual and empirical research on men's work orientations.

Introduction

In the last 30 years, there has been interesting, if somewhat sporadic, research which shows that work orientation influences the experience of job insecurity. Research carried out after the 1930s depression in the USA suggested that men who were rigid and traditional in their outlook on divisions of labour were more likely to experience marital breakdown in conditions of job insecurity, economic uncertainty and unemployment (Liker and Elder 1983). Voydanoff and Donnelly (1988) surveyed married people from Dayton, Ohio and found that husbands experiencing job insecurity indicated a decrease in marital satisfaction associated with the adoption by their wife or children of 'bread-winning roles'. Burchell (1994) compared the General Health Questionnaire scores of men and women in the UK who became insecurely employed after a period of unemployment. In short, he found that the security of the new job was more important,

psychologically, to the men in this study than the women. One interpretation of these results, is that for many of these men, being a 'breadwinner' is central not just to their economic needs, but also to their sense of masculinity (Hood, 1993, Nolan et al 2000). In other words, job security is important to men not just because of income loss, but because it may also be tied in to broader cultural expectations of being a 'good provider'. More recently, however, Charles and James (2003), have suggested that men's orientations to work in situations of job insecurity are more heterogeneous than suggested by earlier research. Indeed, theoretical work on men's work orientations, prominent in the 1970s and 1980s, has largely been overshadowed in recent decades by an increased interest in women's work orientations.

The current debate on *women's* work orientations can broadly be divided into two positions: those who emphasize personal *choice* as their main explanatory factor (Hakim 1996, 2000) and those who emphasize role of social and economic *constraints* (Crompton and Harris, 1999, Ginn et al, 1996, McRae, 2003). Hakim suggests that there are three 'qualitatively' different types of women, each of which demonstrate a preference for a different type of work-family balance: Home-centred (20% of women), Adaptive (60% of women) and Work-centred (20%). Hakim suggests that while most women prefer some sort of 'work/family' balance, most men are 'work-centred'. Her estimates of the variation of work-lifestyle preferences amongst men are: Home centred (10%), Adaptive, (30%) and Work-centred (60%)

One of the most detailed responses to Hakim has come from Crompton and Harris (1999). Using interviews with 150 women in medicine and banking from five European countries, they developed their own typology that places a greater emphasis on women's constraints than their choices (see Table 1). Although more emphasis is placed on structural and ideological constraints than can be found in Hakim's account, there are, nevertheless, some interesting parallels between the two typologies. For example, in Crompton and Harris's classification, both the 'Domestic Life First', and the 'Careerists

Table 1 Crompton and Harris' occupational variation in types of employment and family-life management

Domestic life first	Satisficer	Maximizer	Careerists (by necessity)	Careerist (by choice)
Realized career goals to some extent but had definitely given priority to their domestic lives	Conscious scaling down of employment and/or family goals in order to achieve a 'satisfactory' combination	Refused to compromise and had sought to maximize their goals in respect of both employment careers and family lives	Women who felt constrained to give priority to careers as a result of divorce or other personal and/or economic crises	A deliberate decision to give priority to their employment careers, often deciding not to marry or have children

Adapted from Crompton and Harris (1999)

by Choice' categories, could be equated with Hakim's 'Home-centred' and 'Work-centred' groups. The big difference between the two approaches is that Crompton and Harris draw attention to the role of personal and situational constraints in their discussion of Satisficers, Maximisers, and Careerists by Necessity. That is, factors in individual life trajectories are foregrounded such as divorce, work overload or organizational restructuring.

Crompton and Harris (1999) do not explore work and family heterogeneity amongst men at all. And Hakim's typology in relation to men is highly speculative as she acknowledges that: 'we still know relatively little about the relative importance of children and family life verses career for men' (Hakim 2000: 257). Interestingly, however, Hakim makes no reference to the many studies on work orientation (if not work-family orientation) carried out by industrial sociologists and occupational psychologists. For example, the classic study by Goldthorpe et al (1969), suggested that men (on which their research had been based) were either 'expressively' or 'instrumentally' orientated towards their work. If they were instrumentally motivated, they worked 'just for the money' and if they were expressively motivated, they saw work as an arena for 'self-actualisation'.

Furthermore, Hakim makes only fleeting reference to the work of Joseph Pleck who, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, carried out a significant amount of research on men's orientations to work and family (Pleck, 1977, 1985, 1988). Pleck argued that many of the men in his research would like to move towards 'a new ideal of fatherhood', and to adopt more egalitarian sharing of household and childcare responsibilities. He suggested that men face structural demands at work, such as inflexible and demanding work schedules that make it difficult to meet family obligations (Pleck, 1985).

It seems therefore, that there is a real need to develop a deeper understanding of men's and women's work orientations by *simultaneously* considering both within and between group differences. This paper will attempt to contribute to this debate by exploring the way in which job insecurity influences the meaning attached to both paid and unpaid work.

The Study

Data were collected as part of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation project: *Job Insecurity and Work Intensification: Flexibility and the Changing Boundaries of Work* (Burchell et al 1999). As the focus of the project at the time of interviewing was job insecurity, it was felt that the sample should be based on sectors of the labour market that were experiencing the greatest insecurity, such as finance, construction and further education. Following this procedure would give greater insight into the processes that were central to the initial research aims of the project. Three hundred and forty employees were surveyed during 1997 and 1998 and a further 28 participants were re-interviewed in late 1998 and early 1999. It is the later sample on which this study is based. As can be seen from Tables 2 and 3 the sample does not represent all groups. Women and men in the 18 to 25 ranges are not represented, nor are disabled people or members of ethnic groups other than 'White' or 'Indian'. Despite these limitations, however, the group is heterogeneous, including women and men of different occupational types, educational background and marital circumstances

Table 2

Distribution of Sample by age, education, employment and marital status

Age	Education		Ethnicity		Marital status			
	M	F	M	F	M	F		
20-29	3	2	Degree 4	3	White 14	11	Married 12	6
30-39	5	7	A/O lvl 3	2	Indian 2	1	Divorced -	2
40-49	5	1	Voc* 7	5			Single -	3
50-59	3	2	None 2	-			Partner* 4	1
			Unknown -	2				

*Vocational *Cohabiting

Table 3

Distribution of sample by type of organisation and type of employment

	Female		Male	
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
Further Education College	3	2	2	2
Insurance Company	3	-	2	-
Benefits Agency	1	-	1	-
Banking Sector	1	-	2	-
Water Company	-	-	4	-
Construction and Manufacturing	-	-	3	-
Child-care assistant	-	1	-	-
Delivery driver	-	1	-	-

The subject matter of the interview was not fixed in advance, but the interviewers (five members of the research team, including the author) were given an aide memoir, to cover topics that were emerging as theoretically important following some preliminary analyses of the quantitative data set. Participants and interviewers discussed a number of topics but the two most relevant to this study were: i) the meaning attached to work and family and

ii) experiences of job insecurity. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity.

In the following sections a Grounded Theory approach was applied to the interview material. In Grounded Theory, a focus on conditions and consequences in individual biographies is emphasised in order to capture the interplay between macro and micro conditions (structure) and their relationship to actions/interactions (process) (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Thus, an attempt is made to demonstrate the role of both 'choice' and 'constraint' in constructing human action. This involves paying particular attention to 'negative cases', 'epiphanies' and 'turning points' in participants' accounts (Denzin, 1972; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Finally, taxonomies were developed, for women and men that represented the various responses to job insecurity in relation to both family and work 'orientation'. This highlighted the various *conditions* and the associated *consequences* of each response.

Women's orientation to work and family

Both Crompton and Harris (1999) and Hakim (2000) suggest that most women will be those seeking some sort of combination of work and family. However, both suggest that this group will, in itself, be heterogeneous. To recap, Crompton and Harris describe their middle group as either Maximisers or Satisficers. Maximisers are those who have refused to compromise on either career or family, fulfilling their goals in both domains. Satisficers have made certain compromises in one domain or the other in order to achieve a certain level of success in both. Hakim's middle group - Adaptives - include women who have planned to combine work and family, plus 'drifters', those who have no fixed career or family goals.

At a very early stage in the coding process, it became clear that, for most women in this study, some sort of combination of work *and* family also emerged as a common goal (see Table 4). The largest single category of women in this sample were what have been termed the *Balancers*. Broadly speaking, being a full-time carer or an out-and-out

‘careerist’ did not seem a priority for any member of this group. Other women, however, though not rejecting the idea of labour market participation altogether, seemed to have prioritised their domestic lives. Only two women were placed in the *Traditionalists* category each showing a strong attachment to homemaking. Finally, two single women showed a very strong interest in career advancement and were coded as ‘*Ambitious*’. However, neither could be described using Hakim’s notion of ‘work-centred’ as they had not ruled out the idea of starting families at a later stage. Each foresaw a time when they would expect to ‘compromise’ their employment aspirations to some degree.

Table 4 shows that there are noticeable differences between each group in terms of their family form, attitudes to the domestic division of labour¹ and occupational status². The first, descriptive, round of coding focused on the priority participants placed on either work or family. The ‘Balancers’ have a variety of family forms, occupations and gender role attitudes, the ‘Traditionalists’ were married with children, worked part-time and had a strong identification with traditional gender roles, and the ‘Ambitious’ were single, full-time professionals with a weak attachment to traditional gender roles. According to Hakim’s thesis this variation can be ‘explained’ because these women were, to a large extent, in a position to ‘choose’ from the wide variety of occupations, family forms and values available to individuals in modern societies. There is nothing wrong with highlighting the importance of choice per se, as the ability to choose is a key characteristic of human agency (Collier, 1994; Mouzelis, 1995). Nevertheless, it became clear during the second, interpretive, round of coding, which focused on the *conditions* and *consequences* of individual life trajectories, that labour market opportunity, support, and ideologies of care all interacted in a complex way to make the experience of job insecurity very different for each group.

¹ Attitudes to the division of labour were assessed using the following questions (respond on a 5 point scale ranging from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’):

- i) A man’s job is to earn the money; a woman’s job is to look after the home and family.
- ii) Men can have just as warm and secure a relationship with pre-school children as women can.
- iii) A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works.

² Occupational groups were measured using Soc Major Group. Although, again, there is some debate as to the ‘best’ way of measuring occupational ‘status’ (Blackburn and Prandy, 1997), the SOC classification was chosen as it is the classification favoured in the collection of census data.

Table 4 **Variation in family form, occupation and domestic division of labour for women**

	<i>Balancers</i> n=8	<i>Traditionalists</i> n=2	<i>Ambitious</i> n=2
Family form			
Married with children	4	2	-
Divorced with children	3	-	-
Long-term partner no children	1	-	-
Single	-	-	2
Occupation			
Part-time clerical and secretarial	-	1	-
Part-time care worker	-	1	-
Full-time clerical and secretarial	4	-	-
Full-time professional	4	-	2
Gender-role attitude			
Strong identification with traditional role	1	2	-
Weak identification with traditional roles	5	-	2
Non-traditional	2	-	-

Women’s experiences of job insecurity

The Balancers

As indicated, the Balancers were a diverse group with broadly three specific responses to job insecurity: i) those for whom job loss would initiate an immediate financial and personal crisis; ii) those who saw redundancy as a ‘way out’ of complex and exhausting lives; and, iii) those whose *past* exposure to job insecurity (their own or their partners) had been a ‘turning point’ in their lives and had left them determined not to be undermined by their present experience.

i) *Job insecurity as major crisis*

The three women in this group were all divorced, the sole breadwinners in their family and had school age children to support. Their overriding concern was with the *economic costs* of job loss. That said, however, they all emphasised the social losses they would have to contend with. For each of the women, some of their work colleagues had become key sources of support. One woman, a full-time FE lecturer with a 4-year-old child, had no contact with her ex-husband and was living at some distance from her parents and siblings:

I don't have local family around – the extended family – I don't have that here. So yes, my friends here relieve a lot of stress for me, they look out for me ... losing them would be a disaster.

In terms of both practical help and emotional support, her work colleagues had become 'like family'. However, although social support from her colleagues was crucial given the absence of family support, organizational support was less forthcoming. It is interesting to note here that she seems to bear a resemblance to Crompton's 'Careerist by Necessity'. While she had expressed a preference for a reduced hours schedule, an understanding of the impossibility of achieving that goal, not just personally, but organizationally, had 'forced' her into a breadwinning role and, with it, the corresponding worries about the financial consequences of job loss:

If I had a partner, say, who was very financially secure and I didn't have to worry, I think I would have gone to point 5 [a 30 hour week]. So I would have changed the situation, yes, if I could do it financially, I would do point 5 ... But I do have to worry ... yes, it's the money that's the real worry now, not having that partner for support.

ii) *Redundancy as a 'way out'*

Two women seemed to welcome the possibility of redundancy as a means of coping with increasingly hectic and complex personal lives. One woman's remarkably

frank interview demonstrates how a combination of pressures she faces at work, a deteriorating relationship with her husband, her primary responsibility for organising the home and child care, and a family history of depression have all left her in a very vulnerable psychological state. She had recently been referred to a psychiatrist. To date, she had displayed many of the qualities of a ‘company woman’: she worked for the same organisation for 18 years and stayed in full-time employment following the birth of her child (paying large sums in child care). However, having now achieved a relatively senior position she is becoming more ambivalent about her future ambitions, particularly because of the insecure nature of senior management jobs:

... [in] years gone by I've always wanted to get on. I've always wanted to have a senior position. Now I'm there, senior-ish, I wouldn't want to go any higher. No. I think probably the reason for that is: number one, increased pressure; number two, the higher you seem to go, the more easily you can get kicked out.

While in the past she has had career ambitions and remained very loyal to the company, she is now seeking a part-time job in another organisation. Both women in this group seem to bear some resemblance to Crompton and Harris’ ‘Satisficers’. That is, they were looking for satisfactory, rather than optimum, solutions to their situation. Satisficing was a term originally used by economists to refer to choices that achieve enough, but not optimal, well-being, given that ‘maximising’ is too difficult or costly to perform (Simon, 1956). Indeed, for both the women in this group, ‘maximising’ was too difficult for them because of both structural and ideological constraints. Structurally, because the lack of good quality childcare meant that both felt overloaded by the ‘second shift’ of full-time professional careers and childcare. Ideologically, because although both women had demonstrated some commitment to the notion of equality in the division of labour, both assumed that they, not their male partners, were primarily responsible for the care of their young children. As a number of commentators have pointed out, the dominant socio-political ideology in Britain constructs childrearing as an individual, and primarily maternal, concern rather than a collective responsibility (Brannen and Moss, 1998; Lewis and Cooper, 1995).

iii) *Past experiences of job insecurity as a turning point*

Finally, two women's previous experience of job insecurity, one through her partner, another through her own redundancy, had led to a shift in values which seemed to have generated a 'resilience' to current experiences. One woman, whose husband had been made redundant three times, discussed the difficulties he had in reconciling himself to her position as a key breadwinner, a role she, herself, had reluctantly taken on. Both, however, have come to terms with their new roles and learnt to accommodate insecurity as part of their lives.

Because he took it very, very badly really and unless you've been through it as a family, you can't imagine what it's like ... Because like I say, I thought he'd never accept the fact that I need to go back to work and he was always the breadwinner ... [but] now you count your blessings now, you think – health and happiness is very, very important. ... you take so much for granted ... it's put a lot of pressure on a relationship and families ... but we came out of it smiling. Now we know what's important.

As discussed earlier, there is some evidence from research carried out in the 1930s and 1980s that men can be particularly disturbed by insecurity when their partners take on breadwinning roles (Voydanoff and Donnelly, 1988; Elder *et al*, 1984). However, what that research *also* indicates was that those families who can *accommodate* economic stress of one sort or another (be it unemployment, loss of income or a reversal of roles) are more likely to cope than those who are more 'rigid' in their outlook. As this case illustrates, job insecurity, while difficult for individuals, can, in some instances, lead to more egalitarian roles within families, and possibly strengthen the family unit. In other words, change does not *inevitably* lead to deterioration in relationships. Many studies have shown how families can, under certain conditions, be strengthened by coping with crisis (McCubbin and Figley, 1983; Burr *et al*, 1994)

The Traditionalists

At first glance, for the Traditionalists, their attachment to the domestic sphere seemed to offer them some form of ‘retreat’ in the face of insecurity:

But I think if I lost my job, yes we would notice a big difference at home but it wouldn't be desperate. We would have to cut back on everything but we could cope. We did cope. I didn't work before. I had the children and we managed. And we would manage again and I think knowing that and knowing that really I like being at home, I like being a housewife, that it wouldn't worry me [if I did lose my job].

(Part-time care-worker, 2 children)

On the face of it, this respondent seems an example of what Hakim (1997) calls ‘the most visible pioneers of the new instrumental work ethic’ (p. 59). That is to say, women who are content to remain as secondary earners, and continue to rely on another person to be the principal wage earner. This, however, would be an unfair assessment of the *benefits* both women received from paid employment. Although, they acknowledged that they ‘could cope’ financially if they lost their jobs, when they reflect on their experiences of work, a different picture emerges.

it's developed me as a person, without a doubt. I was nothing like I am now years ago. I'm meeting people, having a place in society, having a place in life – yeah – and if I lost my job, that would be taken away from me ...

(Part-time administrator, 2 children)

if I did lose my job, that would [have been] very difficult to cope with. Whilst I was doing the best I could, and then losing my job that would have hurt a lot.

(Part-time care worker, 2 children)

So while Traditionalists may, to some extent, be less concerned about job insecurity than those who are full-time breadwinners, in that the financial costs were not so great to them, they still paid a price in terms of loss of status and social position. Again, there was no expectation that childcare support should be forthcoming from either the state, their employer or their male partners. Although emphasising her dislike of crèche facilities, one participant was, nevertheless, aware of the practical and financial constraints she has to face:

I don't want to be away from the children as much as I moan about them and that. I couldn't bear to put them in a nursery full time. It upset me enough looking round one just for one morning. I couldn't do it, I don't know what I'd do. But then I wouldn't have a high enough paid job to warrant it really. Because it costs so much to put them in somewhere. I think I'd need a job worth about twenty grand a year and no-one's going to pay me twenty grand a year to mess their business up.

Like some of the 'Balancers', then, Traditionalists were, to an extent, 'Satisficing'. Constraints in terms of their own lack of skills and good quality childcare had at least some influence on their 'choices'.

The Ambitious

This group discussed job insecurity principally in terms of the effect it would have on their own career prospects. Job insecurity has led to a loss of commitment in the organisation and led to a highly developed sense of self-interest, and an acceptance that they were now responsible for controlling their careers (Feldman, 1985):

Its insecurity in that I'm not going to find the right step into a new job at the right time ... I'm now less inclined to get involved in what I'd call extra curricular type jobs, or responsibilities. Unless it's to do with training and development ... which is what I want to do next ... then I'm not getting involved.

(Full-time manager, single no children)

There were strong echoes here of the development of a ‘careerist orientation’ (Feldman and Weitz, 1991). This concept was originally used to describe the transformation of the employment relationship from a relational to a transactional psychological contract. A relational contract describes the ‘traditional’ employment relationship, which was based on the values of good faith and fair dealing between employer and employee. A transactional contract, on the other hand, is thought to increasingly define the new employment relationship and is characterized by short-termism, with little involvement of each party in the lives and activities of the others (Rousseau, 1989; Rousseau and Parks, 1993). A careerist orientation has been shown to be negatively related to job involvement, organizational commitment and positively related to a disposition to change jobs in order to achieve career progression (Feldman and Weitz, 1991).

However, although the ‘Ambitious’ women (and indeed the ‘Balancers’ and ‘Traditionalists’), felt hurt and disappointed at the prospect of job loss they did not ‘transfer’ low trust values to their families, as suggested by Sennett (1998). Their main concern was with how they would be able to *provide* for their families:

I'm the youngest in my family, I've got an older brother but they've all provided for me in the past and I would want to ensure their welfare for the future ... Why? ... Simply because I love them and wouldn't want anything to happen to them.
(Full-time manager, single no children)

As far as ‘job’ insecurity goes, however, participants continued to care about their families both financially and emotionally *in spite of* feeling let down by their organization. This theme chimes through with many men’s experience of job insecurity too, as shall be demonstrated in the following sections.

Table 5 shows a summary of women’s responses to job insecurity. Overall, the table again confirms the importance of financial security. However, the importance of individual work-life biographies, structural and ideological constraints are also highlighted.

Table 5 **Conditions and consequences of women's experiences of job**

	Conditions contributing to experiences of job insecurity	Consequences
Balancers		
<i>Jl as crisis</i>	Divorced - sole breadwinner Lack of support network outside work	<i>Cost</i> loss of financial security and group support
<i>Jl as way out</i>	Full-time working partner Heavy demands in terms of childcare Lack of good quality childcare	<i>Cost</i> Loss of employment/ promotion opportunities <i>Benefit</i> Some relief from work overload
<i>Jl as reappraisal</i>	Previous exposure to job insecurity Partner's response to insecurity	<i>Cost</i> Difficulties with relationships In the short-term. <i>Benefit</i> More egalitarian roles Greater resilience to latest exposure to job insecurity
Traditionalists	Full-time working partner Low skills Lack of good quality childcare	<i>Cost</i> Loss of social contact and confidence <i>Benefit</i> Partner's salary acts as buffer
Ambitious	Sole earners Concern with extended families Financial well-being	<i>Cost</i> Loss of promotion opportunities Difficulties providing for extended family

Men's orientations to work and family

According to Hakim (2000), most men will be fully committed to employment activities, some men will want to combine work and family, and a tiny minority will want to dedicate themselves to family activities. Pleck, on the other hand, argues that many men

would like to spend more time with their families but that dominant ideologies concerning the breadwinning role, coupled with inflexible and demanding work schedules, prevent them from doing so. In the first, descriptive, round of coding it became clear that although none of the men expressed a desire to be a full-time, or even part-time homemaker, there were varying ‘degrees’ of identification with the ‘breadwinning’ role. By far the largest group of men were those who, although not necessarily seeking a ‘symmetrical’ relationship, saw family, rather than work, as their central life value. The phrase ‘work to live, not live to work’ was used repeatedly in this group. Fourteen men were placed in the ‘*Work to Live*’ group.

However, what is interesting about this group was that although they wanted to spend more *time* with their families, and to ‘help’ their wives and partners more, their main concern was with achieving a greater work-*life* balance as opposed to a work-*family* balance. Most expressed a preference for more *leisure* time with their family (and friends) rather than a desire to become more involved in the organization of childcare or domestic work per se. There were only two men who showed a very strong interest in career advancement: the ‘Ambitious’) Unlike the Ambitious women, who were single, the two men in this group were both in long-term relationships and aware of the tensions between their career ambitions and their personal relationships. Again, each group of men seemed to show discrete responses to job insecurity, though the subdivision of experiences amongst the ‘Work-to-Live’ group is less varied than was found amongst female ‘Balancers’. Table 6 shows the differences amongst men in terms of their family forms, occupational status and gender role attitudes.

The ‘Work-to-live’ group were very diverse, having a variety of occupations and gender role attitudes. However, all were married or in long term relationships; there were no divorced men, single fathers, or single men in the sample. The ‘Ambitious’ men were both full-time professionals, one having a strong, the other a moderate, identification with the traditional gender role. At the descriptive level, what is probably the most interesting thing to note is that few of the men could be classified using Hakim’s notion of ‘work-centred’, most wanted some sort of combination of work and family (though, as

mentioned earlier, this was a combination of time with family rather than becoming involved in the day to day organization of domestic work and childcare). During the second round of coding, the role of gender ideology and labour market opportunity were once again fore-grounded in each group’s account of the experience of job insecurity.

Table 6 Variation in family form, occupation and division of labour for men

	Work-to-Live n=14	Ambitious n=2
Family form		
Married with children	11	1
Long term partner no children	3	1
Occupation		
Part-time professional	2	-
Full-time professional	5	2
Full-time associate professional/technical	5	-
Full-time plant operator	2	-
Gender-role attitude		
Strong identification with Traditional role	5	1
Moderate identification with Traditional role	9	1

Men’s experiences of job insecurity

‘Work to live’

As with the female ‘Balancers’, the male ‘Work-to-Live’ group were very diverse. Overall, while most were concerned with the financial difficulties they would face should they lose their jobs, only some saw this as a threat to their ‘breadwinning’ identity. For others, the exposure to job insecurity initiated an ‘epiphany-like’ experience and was seen as an opportunity to become *more* involved with their families.

i) *Job insecurity as a crisis*

The eight men in this group worked full-time in both professional and manual jobs, all were married with children. As with the women, their overriding concern was with the economic costs of job loss, more specifically, however, they each discussed job insecurity in relation to their breadwinning identity. Each emphasised the importance of the relationship between a stable home life and a stable work life. By way of example, one full-time engineer, married with two children, noted that job security was important to him principally because he needed:

To have a reasonably stable situation at home, that's the most important thing. A stable home life and a stable situation and then obviously the work is tied in because you can't do it without money, really.

For each of the men in this group, it emerged that the threat to their identity as 'economic provider' was proving difficult for them to manage. One engineer, married with 2 children, whose wife works part-time, made the following reflections on his past experiences of unemployment, noting how this amplified the worries he had about losing his job again:

I felt that although I was still the father and the husband at home, whilst I wasn't working, I didn't feel that I was the provider ... I felt I was letting them down ... My work provides me with the wherewithal to give my family what I believe they're entitled to.

Mckee and Bell (1986) have noted that traditional beliefs that men should be the breadwinners are still pervasive and can have a profound effect on unemployed men and men facing imminent job loss. The men they interviewed discussed their wounded pride, self-image and loss of authority in the family. For some men, then, job insecurity seems to be another aspect of the 'masculinity in crisis' debates (Crompton and Harris 1999;

Dench, 1998). Yet as indicated earlier, the *identification* with the breadwinning role varied quite noticeably amongst our interviewees. Others discussed the way in which job insecurity created difficulties for them because they wanted to provide a stable geographical base for their families. Their concerns were not so much with the consequences of job insecurity to their identity as ‘provider’ per se, but with how they could continue to provide their children with a sense of continuity³. One engineer, married with one child, had been told that there was a possibility that he would have to move within his organization if he wanted to keep his job; he was, however, unwilling to consider this option:

I've closed my mind to leaving Countrytown because of my children ... I honestly feel that if I had to relocate, then I would have to say goodbye to WaterCo and find something else in this area.

Similarly, one manual worker, married with two children, had declined an offer of relocation should his plant be closed down. Again, he intended to look for alternative work in his local region, yet this ‘choice’ came at a cost:

You do end up compromising your salary, your job prospects, your ambition up to a certain extent. Oh yeah, you compromise alright.

As many other studies have shown, individuals sometimes adapt to changes in their organization by lowering their expectations and sense of entitlement. A sense of ‘resigned satisfaction’ develops as employees feel they have little power to alter their circumstances substantially (Beynon and Blackburn 1972). To use the words of this participant, people ‘compromise’. There was little sense in this group of men that were absorbed by work and endlessly ‘chasing power’ in the workplace, as Hakim (2000) seems to suggest most men do. Rather, to use Crompton’s terminology, they seemed to

³ There were no parallel mentions of the need for geographical stability in the JIWIS women’s accounts. However, other studies have found similar concerns amongst professional women (Cooper, 1996).

be ‘satisficing’, making decisions which gave them ‘satisfactory’ rather than ‘maximum’ benefits.

ii) *Job insecurity as a positive turning point*

The six men in this group talked of the shock they felt when the possibilities of job losses were announced, nevertheless, all saw it as an opportunity to become *more* involved with their family. This involvement, however, hinged around the desire to spend more *leisure* time with their family or to ‘help out the wife a bit’, as one participant put it. A typical example of this can be found in the account of an engineer, married with teenage children, whose hours of work had been reduced as the result of a restructuring exercise:

When you’ve been with a company for 19 years, you think they owe you some sort of loyalty, but with WaterCo, they’re a funny company, you’re just a number ... I will actually be working less hours now ... Financially I’m going to be worse off doing this, though. Home life is going to be better, I’m hoping. I want to take the lads to footie a bit more often, do a bit of gardening and that.

Interestingly, although there is a sense in which the psychological contract has been breached – ‘you think they owe you some sort of loyalty’ - he does not experience a subsequent spillover of mistrust into his home life. Rather, he reframes the change as a chance to get more involved with his older children. As with the ‘Ambitious’ women, who seemed to experience a similar breach in the psychological contract, his grievance remained fixed on the *organization*, and *did not* translate itself into a corresponding ‘distrust’ in his other relationships (as suggested by Sennett’s (1998) ‘Corrosion of Character’ thesis).

Once more, there is little evidence of Hakim’s (2000) ‘work centrality’ thesis amongst this group of men. Indeed several described how their ‘philosophy of life’, protects them from worry. Much has been written recently on the experience of individual ‘downshifting’ as a response to organizational ‘downsizing’ (see Drake (2001) for a recent review). For example, the following respondent, a professional banker,

married with a young child, does not equate the 'good life' with a heavy psychological investment in career:

We walked across the country, my wife and I. We had this deep and meaningful conversation sitting on our rucksacks in the middle of nowhere one day. Why are we in the rat race? We can live like this! You know. And that was what we've decided to do and plan for the future. So because of that, it won't have an immediate impact on my life if I lose my job.

Drake (2001) advocates a move away from a work-focused existence emphasising that there are alternatives to 'the extraordinary demands of today's downsized, re-engineered organizations' (p2). However, although the shift to a more simple life may be appealing for some, it involves difficulties of its own. Schor (1992) suggests that the will to shift away from 'conspicuous consumption' and the 'shop-till-you-drop' mentality is not always easy. While the men in this group seemed to embrace the possibility of a simpler, less work-dominated life, they were also aware that it would come at a cost. One white collar man with two teenage children notes that his children:

... come home and say there's a big trip on to the South of France with the school and it's £300.00, and I would love to be able to say here's £300.00 go and do it, but you just can't do it ... I mean there's lots of things because we'd like to have the latest computer because when Jonathan comes home he's talking about the Spanish Civil War and this sort of thing ... I'd love to be able to have enough equipment and money to be able to support him in what he does.

While it may be feasible for parents to contemplate 'downshifting' as one possible solution to job insecurity, the consequences for their children may make this idea difficult to actualise.

The Ambitious

There were few who openly admitted a dedication to work over and above any other life interest. However, two men, both professionals, one married with children, the other in a long-term partnership, were principally focused on career advancement. The importance of career for self-definition is paramount in this group. As the lecturer remarked:

It's one of those defining characteristics, you know, you become, in a job like this ... you become a lecturer or whatever and that's how people define you. It gives you something to locate yourself in ... I mean on paper, I think, you need to make time for such stuff, but it's usually friends and partners that go first. Work does always seem to take priority

Again, like the 'Ambitious' women, they demonstrated a shift to the 'transactional' contract. Once again, however, there was no evidence of a transfer of low trust values from one domain to the other. There was, however, some indication that 'reconciling' home and work was proving difficult for both men, though in different ways. The manager in this group, facing imminent redundancy, talks about conflicts at home prompted by his desire to move abroad and set up a new business. His wife, on the other hand, wanted to stay in the UK and maintain a stable family base. Unlike the 'work-to-live' group, mobility, as a response to job insecurity, seems to be a viable option:

Yeah. I think in the last couple of weeks all we've talked about in the evening is what am I going to do. And I'm the driver and she's the passenger and most of the stress is where I've said, 'fine, if you don't want to come you can stay here, I'll pay off the mortgage and I'll be moving.'

The driver/passenger metaphor certainly seems to emphasise his power and control over the family's future. His wife does not work and may therefore not be in a position to negotiate effectively for what she wants⁴. Espousing a strong attachment to the traditional division of labour, he sees himself as the chief decision maker in the family, and, throughout the rest of his interview, it emerges that the possibility of redundancy has brought him and his family to a crisis point.

For the lecturer in this group, on the other hand, job insecurity was difficult for him not just because of his own fears of an interrupted career, but because of the difficulties he faced in being supportive to his partner, who was also facing the possibility of job loss:

It's not only having me in a merger situation but having my partner also in a merger situation and the uncertainty of whether we'll be asked to move locations or get to a stage where stress is put on our relationship and I think because it is both of us, that adds to the pressure.

Furthermore, as an insecurely employed, dual-career couple, they were finding it difficult to decide on a good time to start a family. As Elder et al (1986) note, for many people, the transition to family formation often relies on the establishment of a secure income base. Yet for this couple, both of who were unsure of their future, they seemed aware that they were 'putting things off':

Yeah well, there's all the stuff about kids too. We're both in our 30s now, but it's difficult to know when's a good time to do it [start a family].

Other studies have found similar instances of job insecurity playing a role in delaying the onset of parenthood (Smithson and Lewis, 2000). Deciding on the 'right

⁴ Though as she was not interviewed, this can only remain speculation.

time' may be particularly difficult for professional couples who are both trying to 'navigate' their (insecure) careers (Frone et al, 1996).

Table 7 shows a summary of men's responses to job insecurity. As with the women, the importance of financial security is highlighted. However, the threat to 'breadwinning identity' resonates particularly strongly with those who respond to job insecurity 'as a crisis', and with one member of the 'Ambitious' group. As with the women, however, there are others who see the crisis as a chance for practical and positive change in their lives (though again, one not without costs, principally the difficulty for children of a parental retreat from 'consumerism'). The conclusion discusses these themes in more detail and set the findings within a broader explanatory framework.

Table 7 **Conditions and consequences of men's experiences of job insecurity**

	Conditions contributing to experience of job insecurity	Consequences
Work to live		
<i>Jl as crisis</i>	Strong to moderate identification with breadwinner role Main breadwinner (wife part-time) Low level of job satisfaction	<i>Cost</i> Loss of financial security Threat to breadwinning identity
<i>Jl as a turning point</i>	Partner's response to insecurity Moderate identification with breadwinner role	<i>Cost</i> Loss of financial security Shift to transactional contract <i>Benefit</i> More involved with family
Ambitious	High level of job dependency Moderate/strong identification with breadwinner role	<i>Cost</i> Loss of financial security Shift to transactional contract Difficulty coordinating careers Tension with partners

Conclusion

Bryman (2001) notes that the point of qualitative research is not to generalize to populations; rather, the point is to generalize to theory. To use the words of Mitchell (1983): ‘it is the quality of the theoretical inferences that are made out of qualitative data that is crucial to the assessment of generalizability’ (p. 29). Thus, one of the aims of this paper was to interpret the values and beliefs of *participants* at a *specific* point in time. Many interesting issues emerged, some of which resonate with previous research, others that offer new insights. It is important to emphasise, however, that this study makes no claim to be ‘proof’ of the existence of these themes in the population as a whole, rather it is an exploratory account of the experiences of this particular sample and offers a fertile base for further enquiry.

The key aim of this paper, however, was to explore the ways in which ‘work orientation’, or the meaning of breadwinning and caregiving, influenced participants’ experience of job insecurity. There were clearly gender differences for some participants in the priority attached to both work and family in situations of job insecurity, yet there were also some interesting points of commonality which are equally important to discuss. To recap, three groups emerged for women: ‘Balancers’, who wanted some combination of work and family, ‘Traditionalists’, who had prioritised home life and the ‘Ambitious’ who wanted to involve themselves principally in professional activities. The largest group, the ‘Balancers’ experienced a range of responses to job insecurity: some saw it as a major crisis, with the loss of both financial security and emotional support from colleagues. Others saw redundancy as a way out of increasingly demanding lives, though at the cost of employment and promotion opportunities. Finally, some used the experience to reassess their values and adapted their priorities accordingly. Amongst the ‘Traditionalists’, although buffered to some degree against financial worry because of their husbands’ salary, they nevertheless felt they would lose out on social contact. For the ‘Ambitious’, financial difficulties were, once again, prominent, but a decline in organizational commitment and an increasing sense of self-interest (in terms of career advancement) seemed important themes.

Amongst the men, 2 groups emerged: the 'Work-to-Live' group, men who saw family, rather than work as their central life value (though were not necessarily committed to becoming involved in the practicalities of home life) and the 'Ambitious', who placed a high priority on career. Amongst the Work-to-Live group, there seemed to be two distinct responses to job insecurity, like the women, they saw job insecurity either as a threat to their financial security, or as a turning point and opportunity for reappraisal. Furthermore, the threat to 'breadwinning' identity was pronounced amongst some men. Amongst the 'Ambitious' men, there was also some indication of the development of a transactional contract. However, there were also tensions at home because of both the possibility of relocation and the need to balance the demands of dual career couples.

The empirical work in this paper has shown that both Hakim's and Crompton and Harris' frameworks do seem to have generated descriptively meaningful concepts, one of the first tests of the utility of any theory (Layder, 1998). However, the in-depth interviews have also shown that there is a need to accept the fluidity and overlap of any such categorization. The accounts analysed here, show how orientations can *change* as a reaction to circumstance: job insecurity, organisational culture, personal relationships and the expectations of others each has a role to play. The life histories have revealed the influence of low skills and lack of family support on employment aspirations. Furthermore, the categories developed here hint at the importance of acknowledging heterogeneity in work orientation amongst men, as well as women. By claiming that all breadwinning men are, by definition, 'work-centred' Hakim has, perhaps, oversimplified the variety of ways in which men, too, vary in the importance they attach to the breadwinning role.

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