

Gender Inequality in Production and Reproduction: A New Priority Research Network

**Jacqueline Scott
University of Cambridge**

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Direct Correspondence to:
Jacqueline Scott
Faculty of Social and Political Sciences
University of Cambridge, Cambridge,
United Kingdom, CB2 3RQ

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Abstract

This paper describes a new priority research network that has been funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council to study gender inequality in production and reproduction. A core aim of the network is to produce theoretically informed high quality empirical research that illuminates three inter-related aspects of gender inequality in production and reproduction, namely changes in the life course processes of men and women; resource allocation across different socio-economic contexts; and policy responses. All three strands pay careful attention to how individual outcomes are influenced both by linked lives and the resource base and institutional circumstances in which lives are set. By paying attention to *both* dimensions the Network will provide a more robust understanding, than has been achieved to date, of the dynamics of gender inequalities. I briefly present some relevant findings about gender inequalities in Britain in order to highlight key research questions that are yet to be answered. I argue that progress in understanding the dynamics of gender inequalities in production and reproduction demands imaginative use of longitudinal data and innovative quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches. I suggest that one way to overcome existing disciplinary and methodological divides is to bring disparate research traditions to bear on the common goal to examine changing lives and structures – both how lives/structures are changing and how policy can intervene effectively to promote change towards greater equality.

Keywords: gender inequality production reproduction

Background and Overview

With the demise of the male breadwinner family, there has been something of a ‘paradigm shift’ in gender relations. But will this shift bring more or less equality? Major labour market change, particularly in respect of women, together with dramatic changes in parenting and partnership, and greater recognition of gender equality issues in the policy arena, have served to break apart the traditional gender-role division. The expectation on the part of UK and EU policy makers today is increasingly that women will be fully ‘individualised’ in the sense of economically autonomous, although policies are often ambiguous on this score. Social reality is more mixed; women are still disproportionately in part-time employment, and still do the bulk of unpaid care work.

Shifts in gender equality have been very uneven across ethnic groups, age, and geographical regions; and often far slower than many of the conventional theories of human capital would suggest. The gender ‘wage gap’ has proved stubborn and new pay inequalities between women are emerging. The life chances of women, men and children are increasingly polarized by educational attainment, but it is far from clear whether and under what circumstances a convergence in human capital will result in reductions in gender inequalities.

In October 2004 a major new research priority network will be launched in Britain that is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council to study gender inequality in production and reproduction (GeNet). Priority Networks are a relatively new funding mechanism that bring together a network of projects lasting three to five years on a specified area of research. In making a bid for Priority Network funding, researchers themselves must have first formed a network of up to ten linked projects

and selected their own co-ordinator to manage the network (the author of this paper is co-ordinator of the GeNet). By building on existing and developing new academic co-operation, the scheme aims to provide added value over and above stand alone research projects.

A core aim of the GeNet is to produce theoretically informed high quality empirical research that illuminates three inter-related aspects of gender inequality. The first concerns life course analysis of individuals across time, including gendered pathways to adulthood, different aspects of biographical agency and developmental outcomes, and gendered pathways to adulthood. Second, we examine resource allocation in (re)productive activities and gender, ethnic and class inequalities, including gender differences in time allocation; within-household inequalities of income and power; ethnic and migrant differences in gender division of labour in the service sector; and attitudinal preferences and employment choices in feminised or feminising labour market sectors. Third, we analyse policy responses including corporate governance and reflexive law approaches to gender inequalities, and UK and EU initiatives addressing tensions of work and care.

All three strands pay careful attention to how individual outcomes are influenced by (i) linked lives and (ii) the resource base and the institutional circumstances in which lives are set. By paying attention to *both* dimensions, our Network will provide a far more robust understanding, than has been achieved to date, of the dynamics of gender inequalities.

Linked lives refers to significant others, timing, age, and asynchronies. The Network will investigate how gender differentiates the way significant others affect life chances; how the timing and sequencing of home, school and workplace transitions affect men and women's subsequent career pathways; and how asynchronies between individual life experiences and institutional change affect gender inequality (e.g. how does institutional inflexibility about work hours constrain choice about (re)production?). The resource base refers to individuals' family, workplace, and neighbourhood, including access to assets and social capital. Such resources crucially shape, restrict and facilitate individual choice and action. Men and women, in different birth cohorts and of different national, ethnic or geographical backgrounds experience very different family circumstances, educational opportunities, and economic conditions. But how have these changing contexts affected access to resources? How does the gender convergence of some resources affect inequality? How is gender inequality affected by problems of co-ordinating the space-time dilemmas of work, home and place?

The Network will use the life course approach, which emphasises the timing and sequencing of macro-level change, historical change, and micro-level individual experience. It will also contribute to the developing theoretical and empirical work associated with the capabilities approach (Sen 1999). As the capability approach is less familiar in sociology, it worth briefly elaborating the core concepts. The approach takes as its focus what people are effectively able to do and to be. Sen makes a conceptual distinction between functioning and capabilities, between the realised and the effectively possible. This conceptual distinction poses challenges for the operationalization of capabilities. The Network will help advance ways of

examining and explaining the reciprocal relations of capabilities and functioning, over time and place.

In the subsequent sections of this paper I briefly examine relevant knowledge about gender inequalities in the UK in order to highlight the key research questions that are yet to be answered. Progress in understanding the dynamics of gender inequalities in production and reproduction requires the imaginative use of longitudinal data and the application of innovative methodological approaches that span both quantitative and qualitative research. In this paper, I argue that one way to overcome existing disciplinary and methodological divides is to bring disparate research traditions to bear on a common goal. Here we are examining changing lives and structures – both how lives/structures are changing and how policy can intervene effectively to promote change towards greater equality.

The interface between social science and policy is not an easy one. Portes (2000) is surely right to insist that social sciences' contribution to the building of a just society lies in careful analyses of social processes, awareness of their concealed and unintended manifestations, and sustained efforts to understand the interplay between actors and their situations. However, questions about the implications of social research for pressing policy concerns are not ones that can be dodged. The UK Economic and Social Research Council has to be able to demonstrate the usefulness of research in order to justify its slice of the science budget.

The usefulness of a multi-level dynamic account of change and continuities across different aspects of gender inequalities concerning reproduction and production, as they intersect with age, class, ethnicity and region is easy to justify. A nuanced account of changing inequalities in lives and structures that pays attention to individual experiences and interpretation is crucial for assessing and anticipating the deliberate and unintentional gender effects of policies.

For policy makers, there is an ongoing tension between enhancing individual or group rights and paying adequate attention to the relational aspects crucial to individual and group wellbeing. There are many practical implications resulting from these tensions and the evidence-base for decision-making is often poor. For example what are the policy-relevant gender specific parameters that affect the distribution and use of resources within households? What would be the effects on life time earnings for men and women of different generations, of cash subsidies or tax incentives that compensate family care?

The tension between individual utilities and inter-dependencies created in people's lives across time and place is manifest in existing theories and methodologies. For example, relevant economic theories concerning the gender division in productive and reproductive spheres, including the home economic approach, emphasise rational choice and human capital. However, economic logic is driven by assumptions about individual utilities which are at odds with the inter-dependencies created in people's lives across time and place. To examine inter-dependencies across time and place in the context of changing resources and institutional structures requires a multi-disciplinary approach and use of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

In the following section I briefly introduce the research questions that the nine different project teams that constitute the GeNet will address. All project members (see Appendix 1) have made substantial contributions to the content of this introductory paper which draws on our funding application as well as on previous research by Network participants.

Theme 1: Pathways to Adult Attainments

Production and reproduction are necessary activities to sustain human society, but it is often supposed that for women, participation in advanced economies and the bearing of children are incompatible (Joshi 2002). The increase in economic opportunities for women has been offered as an explanation of low fertility, and maternal responsibility as an explanation of women's underachievement compared to men in the sphere of paid work. A key question to investigate is how men and women and children's lives intersect across generations and over time in the changing processes and outcomes associated with production and reproduction. As if the question was not complex enough, very different patterns occur by race, class and geographical regions.

The task is a daunting one, but there is much existing research on which to build. For example, the first project, CAREERS, builds on previous analyses of the 1946, 1958 and 1970 sequence of British birth cohort studies (BCS). The BCS are a great source of evidence for relevant economic and demographic as Table 1 indicates. Between those born in 1946 and 1970 the level of educational attainment changed markedly, especially for women. Table 1 shows a rise from 11 percent to 32 percent in the proportion of women with higher educational qualifications. This includes all post-school qualifications, but considering University degrees alone, the proportion rose from 3 percent to 17 percent. Thus women's educational attainment was rapidly catching up with men's (at some levels overtaking them). In the labour market female disadvantage was also rapidly diminishing. Women in the labour force from the 1946 cohort, at age 26 in 1972, were paid on average 63 percent of the hourly wage received by their male contemporaries. In 1981, when the 1958 cohort were age 23, the wage ratio had risen to 84 percent, and by 1996, the women in the 1970 cohort were receiving over 90 percent of men's wages. This increase may be partly attributable to the relative rise in education and the accumulation of labour force experience, but the earlier and bigger increase also reflects the introduction of the Equal Pay Act in 1975. Meanwhile women in their twenties were experiencing an even more marked change in the proportion becoming mothers (a decline from 72% of women born in 1946, to 30% born in 1970). Entry to childbearing was and still is highly differentiated with respect to educational qualifications and at age 26 there was a gap of around 50 percentage points in the proportion of each cohort who had become mothers between those with no qualifications and those with tertiary qualifications.

Table 1 Key Indicators of Economic and Demographic Change: Evidence from the British Birth Cohort Studies¹

Indicator	Survey and year of birth			Source ^a
	NSHD 1946	NCDS 1958	BCS70 1970	
% with no educational qualifications				
Women	42	14	5	For BCS70 Joshi and Paci 1997
Men	43	12	7	
% with tertiary qualifications				
Women	11	25	32	
Men	22	28	31	
Ratio of women's to men's wage at age 26 (23 for 1958 cohort)	0.63	0.84	0.91	Joshi and Paci 1988
% of women who were mothers by age 26	72	50	30	Macran, Joshi and Dex 1996 Joshi and Paci 1997
By educational quals:				
None	81	69	53	
Mid-level	65	47	36	
Higher	31	18	10	
% of women employed in their early 30s				
Full-time	25	37	51	
Part-time	29	32	23	
Median gap in employment after 1st child (years)	5.5	2.2	n.a	Macran, Joshi and Dex 1996
Sample size at age:	32	33	30	
Males	2751	5583	5447	
Females	2875	5786	5772	

¹ Source: Table 1 Joshi 2002

^a Unless otherwise stated source is Ferri, Bynner and Wadsworth 2003

Note: NSH: Medical Research Council National Survey of Health and Development? NCDS: National Child Development Study: BCS70: 1970 British Birth Cohort Study.

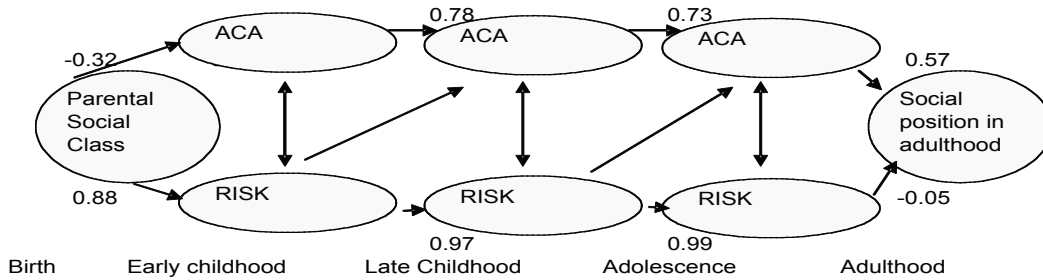
Despite this educational and the marked improvement in the ratio of women's to men's pay, remuneration is still far from equal and valuable female skills are being under-used by the British economy. This point was forcefully argued in the Kingsmill Review (2001). Denise Kingsmill on behalf of the British government undertook an independent review into women's employment and pay. She writes that "the fact that women are still clustered in low status and indeed lower paid job and are critically under-represented at all levels of management is an indication that the UK is failing to use and develop the talents of its people to the full".

In post war-Britain, motherhood typically led to part-time jobs and, after an employment break, mother often returned to employment at lower occupational levels than before. By the end of the century, provision for maternity and parental leave has improved. There have been initiatives to facilitate combining work and family life. Child-care provision has increased. Employers have also attempted to improve the retention of women employees by offering better deals to returners (Dex and Smith 2002). What we don't know, however, is what effect if any these steps have had and whether maternal job downgrading has changed?

The British Cohort Studies (supplemented with the Millennium Cohort) will allow the career mapping of up to 2000 successive generations of mothers and fathers, as well as allowing an examination of differences in career profiles between parents and non-parents of both genders. Charting men and women's occupational trajectories across time will allow the CAREERS research team to examine how various policy initiatives and employer practices make a difference to women and men's occupational and organisational careers and its intersection with childbearing and family formation. For example has the implementation of the part-time work directive in Britain led to a decline in the part-time pay penalty? Are men and women's penalties for career breaks similar to each other and similar across the generations? What are the main drivers of men and women's career success and how have these changed over time? The CAREERS project will examine both occupational status and earnings in the light of educational attainment and social background. A further aim is look at gendered effects of geographical relocation on individual careers.

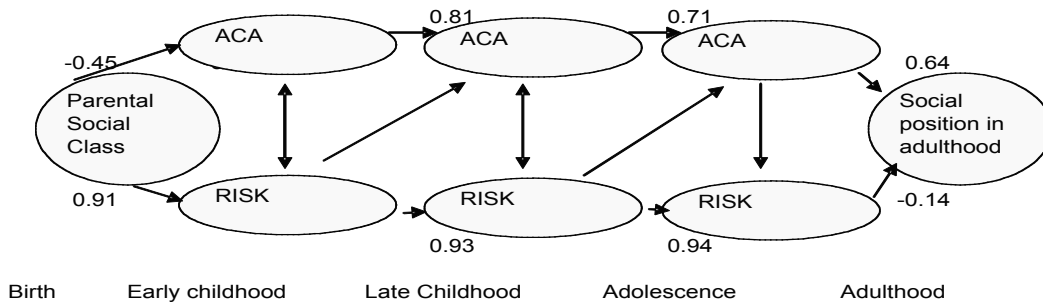
Our second project on BIOGRAPHIES builds on previous ESRC funded research on risk and resilience in the life course in which individual aspirations were identified as a key factor stimulating long-term positive adjustment despite the experience of adversity during childhood (Schoon et al. 2002). Comparing the 1958 and 1970 British birth cohorts an interesting pattern emerges as to the effects of socio-economic risk and academic adjustment on occupational attainment in early adulthood (ages 26/33). For both cohorts there is a high consistency across risk and academic adjustment at different ages. However as Figures 1 and 2 show the best predictors of attained status in early adulthood are the accumulated measures of academic adjustment (ACA), confirming the crucial role of education in determining adult attainment. The experience of accumulated risk at age 16 has a small but significant direct effect on the attainment of social status in both cohorts, and this direct effect has nearly tripled in size for the later born cohorts ($\beta = -.05$ for NCDS and $\beta = -.14$ for BCS70). Thus despite the fact that cohort comparisons show clearly that material conditions have improved over time, socio-economic background continues to be a barrier for individual achievements and increasingly so.

Figure 1: NCDS 1958 Accumulation of Risk



NCDS=National Child Development Study; ACA=Academic Adjustment; RISK=socio-economic risk

Figure 2: BCS70 Accumulation of Risk



BCS70=British Birth Cohort 1970 Study; ACA=Academic Adjustment; RISK=socio-economic risk

Source: Schoon et al 2002

This earlier research did not specifically address issues of gender, yet given the rise of educational and occupational aspirations among young women, in particular, there are grounds for supposing that gendered biographies will have converged over time. The BIOGRAPHIES project will examine the personal and contextual factors that influence changing aspirations of over 10,000 young men and women over the last three decades. Data will include the 1958 and 1970 Birth Cohorts together with a new longitudinal study of young people sponsored by the Department for Education and Science that begins in 2004/5.

Our third project on gendered PATHWAYS also addresses consequences of childhood disadvantages and how these differ by gender. However, whereas BIOGRAPHIES focuses particularly on the role played by agency and intention in pathways to adult attainment, the PATHWAYS project analyses the link between childhood precursors and the timing of important transitions. There are potentially endogenous transitions during adolescence such as early parenthood or leaving home that are linked with subsequent disadvantage. The project will use matched groups to assess whether differences in later outcomes can be explained by selection into the ‘treatment’ group as opposed to having experienced the treatment. This provides crucial information on whether early adult transitions are gateways to disadvantage or another step in a path that began long before. This has policy ramifications regarding the timing of appropriate interventions.

The three projects each have a somewhat difference emphasis reflecting in part their disciplinary orientations. CAREERS utilises econometric approaches; BIOGRAPHIES incorporates a social and developmental psychological perspective and PATHWAYS is informed by social demographic approaches and social exclusion concerns. All three projects adopt a life course perspective and examine the different processes by which pathways of individuals are affected by early and later family contexts, including intra and inter-family distributions of paid and unpaid work.

Our second theme shifts focus from individual pathways to resource allocation in production and reproduction. The main analytical goal switches from the micro concern with individual pathways to examining gender inequalities at the meso level of household or employment organisation.

Theme 2: Resource Allocation In (Re)Production: Gender, Ethnic and Class Inequalities

Project 4 on TIME-USE consists of a series of investigations organised around a key hypothesis. The hypothesis states that a substantial part of the gender gap in wages that persists, beyond the successful operation of workplace-based equal opportunities policy, is to be explained in terms of day-to-day practices of unequal division of responsibility for production and caring within private households.

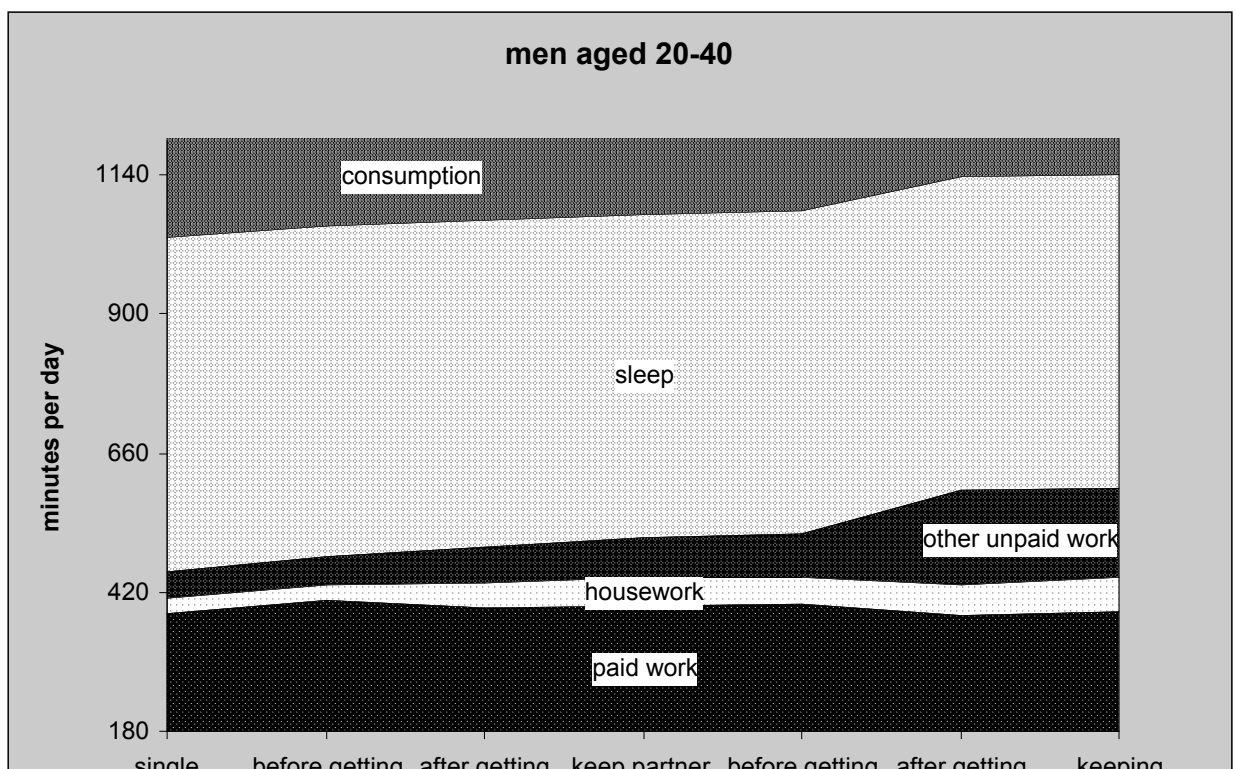
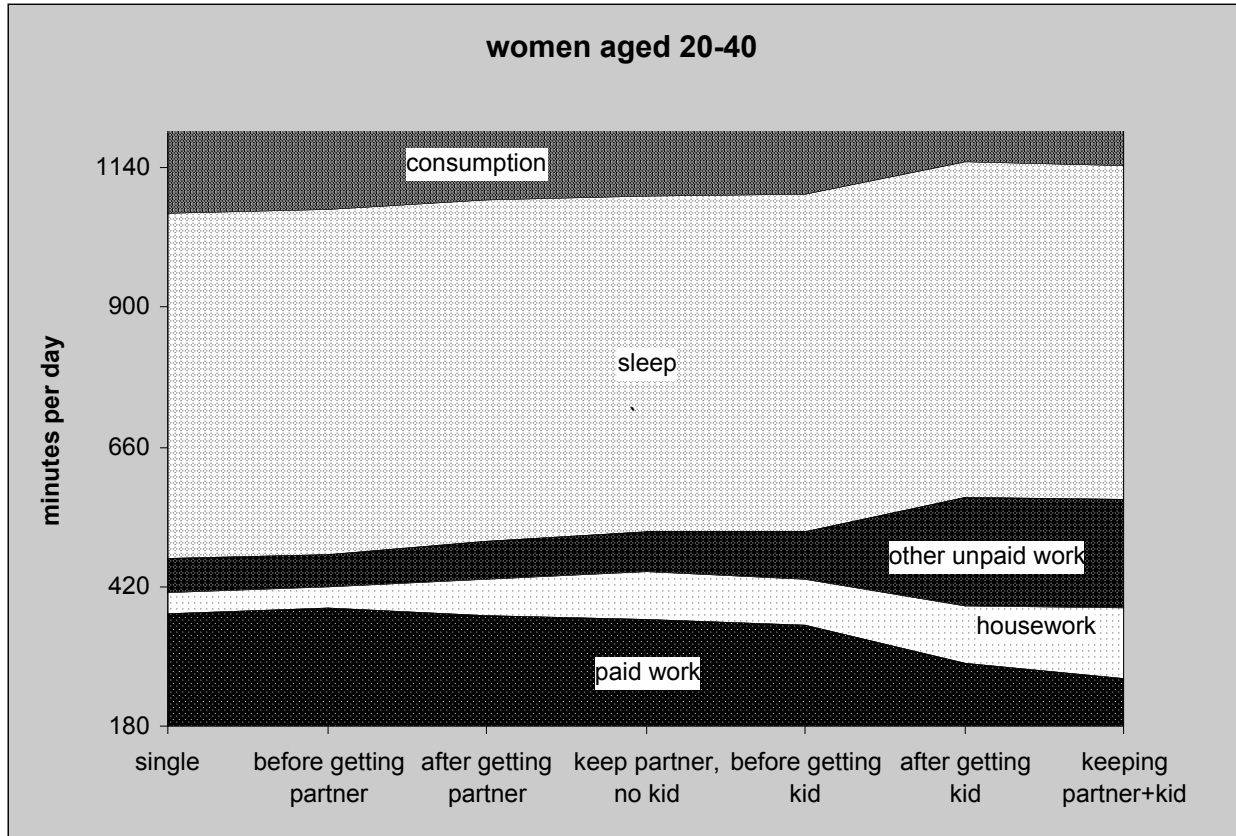
The hypothesis that a gendered division of domestic labour leads to a gendered wage gap relies on the assumption that women who specialise in non-waged work reduce their paid work hours and participation rates leading to a reduction in their rate of human capital formation. This is a recursive process: initial differentials in human capital and attitudes to gender-roles may be the starting basis for bargaining over the distribution of paid and unpaid work roles within a heterosexual partnership. If one partner differentially specialises in unpaid work, her (rarely his) human capital declines relative to the more paid-work-specialised partner, leading to an intensification of work-role differentiation over time.

The degree and continuity of commitment to the labour market is dependent also on public regulation. A given division of domestic labour has varying potential effects on partners' paid work participation, depending on various regime attributes. Normal weekly hours of paid work, levels and costs of childcare provisions, temporal service accessibility, parental leave rights, parental-leave-related employment protection, and so on, all have major consequences for participation in paid work. Regime provisions interact with the private household norms and circumstances to determine the outcome of negotiations over work-roles.

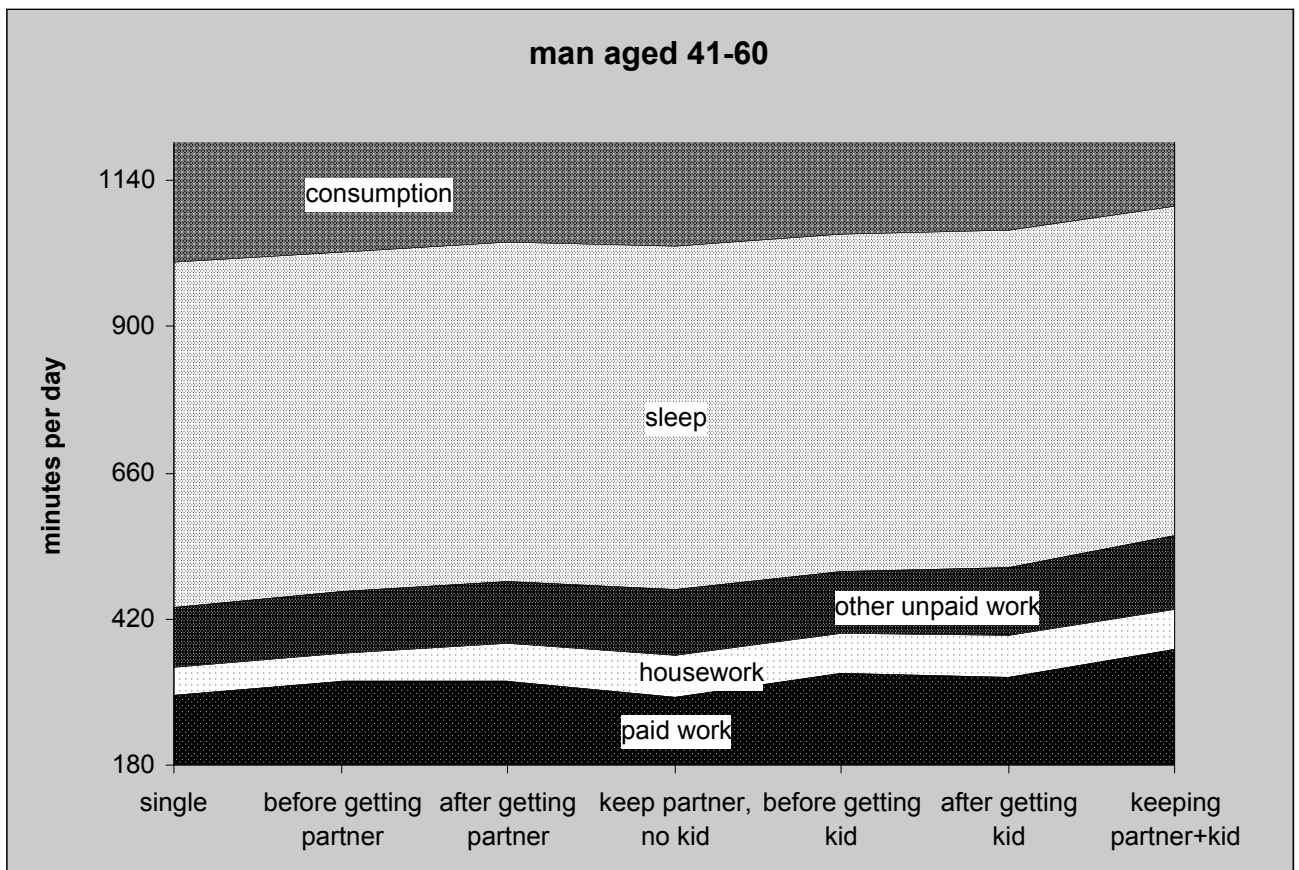
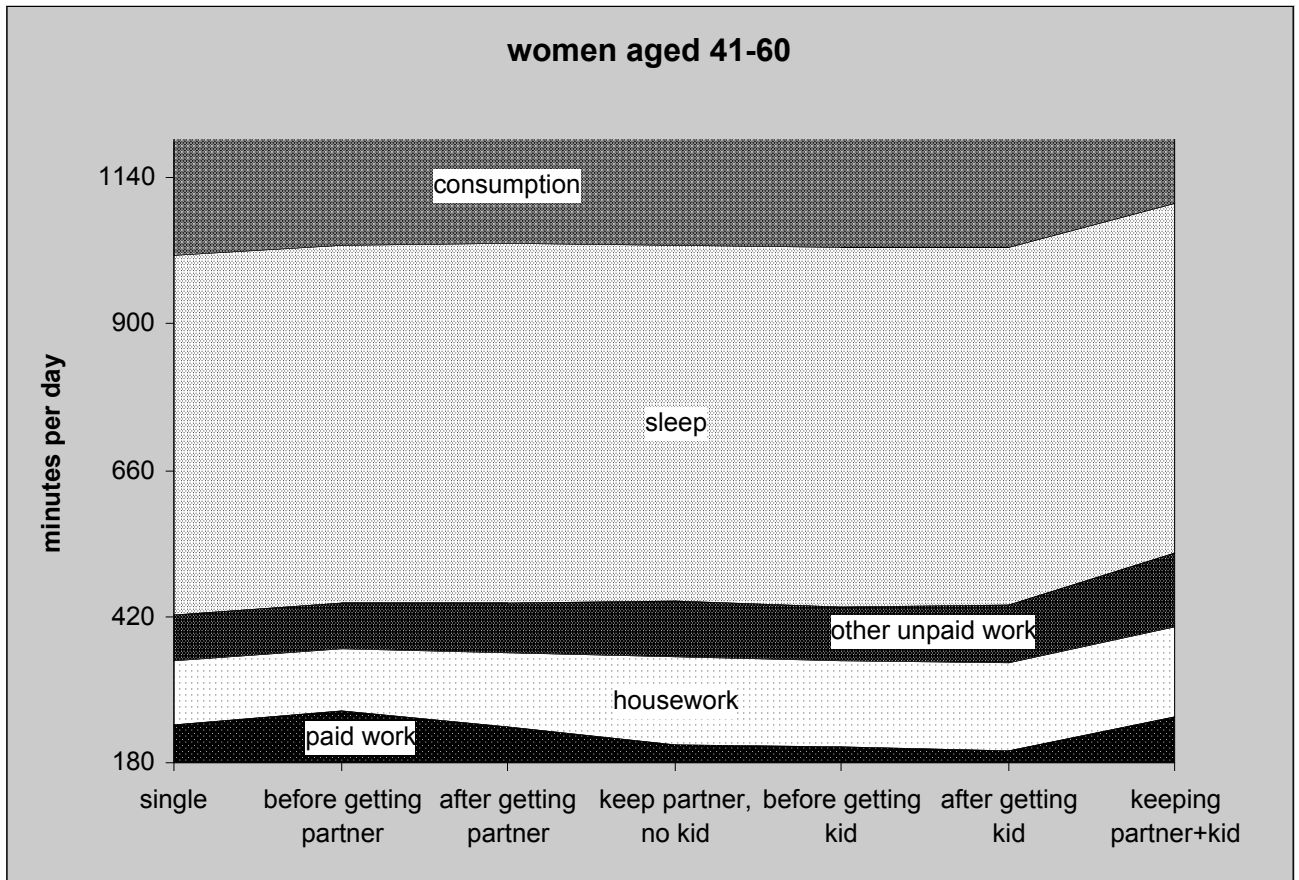
Establishing the recursive process between couples time use allocation and changes in the shadow wage of men and women requires the innovative use of longitudinal data. Gershuny (2004) has produced some interesting results looking at time use through the life course in families. There is a statistical problem in focusing on family-related changes in time-use. The interesting family transitions for the purpose of studying the relationship between family conditions and individuals time use are also *rare* ones. Using the British Household Panel which follows 5000 households across time, it is necessary to pool successive pairs of years to get a larger sample.

Even then numbers are sufficient only to look at time-use associated with the most common transitions – acquiring a partner, the birth of a first child, grown up children leaving home. Figures 3 and 6 show the time use-consequences for men and women aged 20-40 and 41-60 of status transitions associated with pairs of years around a given family status transition.

Figures 3 and 4 (Source: Gershuny 2004)



Figures 5 and 6 (Source: Gershuny 2004)



It can be seen that through both norm-driven and rationality processes, men do progressively less unpaid work and more paid work across the family formation sequence. If the partnership dissolves then he has built up his human capital while she the domestic work and caring skills. As Gershuny observes: 'he wins and she loses', in that marketable work skills earn the income that gives the life-chances.

The TIME-USE project will use British data to test and develop a recursive human capital model of wage differentials. It will also use the Harmonised European Time Use Study to examine how regime effects (state benefits, rights and services) influence men and women's time allocation between paid and unpaid work and wage differentials.

Project 5 on INCOME-ALLOCATION is concerned with household inequalities of power, status and income. It is now widely acknowledged that any analysis conducted at the level of the household obscures the effect of gender inequalities within households. In particular, treating household income as pooled obscures 'hidden' poverty within households and the gendered inequalities in the control of household resources. Gender sensitive policy analysis is needed to go 'beyond the front door' to open up the 'closed box' of the family/household unit (Daly 2000; Lister 2000). The case for examining within-household inequalities is persuasive, not only on moral grounds but also to improve policy design (Jenkins 1994).

However, a practical approach to analysing the effects of policy on within-household inequalities has yet to be developed. Qualitative research has shown that the source, purpose and recipient of means-tested benefits influence access to resources within low-income families (Goode *et al.* 1998). Bargaining models suggest 'gender specific parameters' (Folbre 1997) which could affect the relative power of men and women in controlling household resources (Chen and Wooley 2001; Vermeulen 2000). But the informational requirements of such models have limited their empirical use and they have rarely been applied to the gender analysis of policy.

The INCOME-ALLOCATION project will use both quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate the potential influence of gender-specific parameters associated with recent policy changes in the UK on household decision making and resource allocation. In particular the New Tax Credits that have been favoured by the current Labour government, such as the Child Tax Credit, are part of the growing emphasis on making the family the target for re-distribution. This policy creates tensions and contradictions, particularly for women. As Jensen (1995) points out it is crucial to distinguish between women and mothers, when thinking about economic consequences of policies. Policies designed to alleviate the pauperisation of childhood (and motherhood) can be at odds with policies to improve women's financial autonomy.

We know little about how men and women's perceptions about entitlements and intra-household distributions of resources depend on the source and recipient of income and how these inter-relate with gender norms, preferences and practice. The INCOME-ALLOCATION project will carry out qualitative research to investigate the gender specific parameters that affect household resource allocation. Quantitative research, informed by the interview work, will use UK household micro-data sets to explore whether 'before' and 'after' patterns of household consequences of New Tax benefits

can be discerned in representative samples. Micro-simulation models using POLIMOD – the tax-benefit model of the Cambridge micro-simulation unit – will be used to explore the gender effects of current and potential policy changes on individual resource allocations and incentives.

The INCOME-ALLOCATION project, with its multi-method explorations of the gendered parameters that influence household resource allocation, will go some way to test the applicability of the rational choice model that is implicit in the TIME-USE project. How far do households act with respect to division of labour with specific objectives in view? What enhances or limits a household's capacity to adapt to new opportunities for gender equality in paid and unpaid work? What form does household bargaining take? How far do gender specific parameters that influence household decision-making reflect household specific factors such as the relative education and income of the couple? And how far do they reflect regime influences such as tax and benefit rules, or care provision for children and elderly?

Project 5 on the SERVICE-SECTOR in London is the first of two projects focussing on specific employment sectors. The new service-dominated labour market is an increasingly polarized one (McDowell 2001). This polarization affects the ways in which the relationships between gender, generation and occupational status are being recast. As Castells (2000), Sassen (1991) and others have argued, there is a growing division in the employment structure of advanced industrial societies. Highly paid and skilled occupations at the top end of the service sector and in the information economy as well as poorly paid and unskilled 'servicing' jobs at the bottom end of the occupational hierarchy are the fastest growing parts of the labour market. This division, between what Castells calls 'self-programmable labour' and 'generic labour' parallels one that Brush (1999) has aptly termed the 'high tech' and 'high touch' occupations that increasingly dominate advanced industrial economies. It is a division that in large part maps onto emerging gender divisions – both between men and women, and between women. The high tech occupations require the possession of high level educational and professional credentials now being acquired by growing numbers of women who are challenging men's previous domination of high status occupations. The high touch jobs on the other hand, in retail, entertainment, commodified personal and health care, use the traditional feminized skills of empathy, care and servicing, and draw growing numbers of women into waged work in poorly-paying jobs.

The SERVICE-SECTOR project will use quantitative and qualitative methods in order to explore the interconnections between the economic restructuring of London's hospitality and health sectors and the life opportunities of male and female employees. A goal is to assess the impact of new forms of work on domestic divisions of labour. Large scale data, including the 2001 Census, can help explore the changing patterns of employment segmentation and how the two-tier service sector relates to gender, migrant and ethnic divisions. A particular focus of analysis will be to explore how relations between employment, gender and ethnicity that reflected earlier in-migration from Ireland and the 'new Commonwealth' are being disrupted. Migrants from areas such as Latin America, parts of Asia and Eastern Europe now compete in London's labour market, both as skilled and unskilled workers. However, little is known about the new patterns of in-migrant employment, nor of the multiple and diverse forms of opportunity and disadvantage that new migrants face.

The project will collect new interview from two sources (i) key decision makers, representing employers and management within the two types of organisations and (ii) male and female employees 'matched' according to their different occupational positions in hotels and hospitals and on relevant biographical criteria. The research will assess how human resource policies of hospital and hotel employment sectors enhance the capabilities of ethnic and migrant groups, within a highly differentiated sector.

Project 7 on FEMINISED OCCUPATIONS will explore the conflicts of family and career by carrying out case studies of four feminised or feminising sectors and professions (retail, banking, accountancy and medicine). The two main project aims are (1) to examine how a range of employment sectors and professions have adapted to women's entry in respect of career development and work-life integration; and (2) to investigate how class differences affect possibilities of achieving work-life balance and consequences for gender equality.

The class 'fates' of men and women in the same occupational category have been different as a consequence of both women's conventionally assigned responsibilities for caring work as well as institutional and organisational discriminatory structures. Recent evidence suggests that, despite policies to promote work-life balance, work has intensified, with no relaxation of long hours needed for career building. Moreover, capacity to achieve work-life balance has a significant class dimension (Taylor 2001). Previous research has demonstrated that women managers, in particular, find difficulties in combining employment and family life (Crompton 2001). However, women and men with professional qualifications are enabled to work flexibly whilst retaining a reasonable level of income and without loss of occupational status.

The new case studies will examine how these feminised or feminising occupations and professions have responded and developed with the entry of women. Have occupational changes reduced or reinforced gender and class inequalities? To what extent have the actions of the employees themselves brought about change? The selection of cases have been based on existing empirical and theoretical knowledge to facilitate useful case comparisons. For example in the UK, medicine and accountancy generate an important contrast between public and private sector managerial and professional employment. The feminisation of medicine, General Practice in particular, has led to occupational restructuring and options for reduced hours. By contrast, accountancy is market driven and possibility of practitioner pressure for change is relatively limited. In both banking and grocery retail, major employers have been at the cutting edge of the development of both equal opportunity and work-life integration policies. However, the shift towards individualised career development in both sectors may make 'take-up' problematic for individuals seeking upward occupational mobility. The project will investigate such issues through a detailed case study that will update contextual information on organisational policies, employee recruitment, retention and promotion and conduct new in-depth work life interviews with matched parents of young children drawn from each sector.

Changes in employment behaviour are taking place within a context in which there are rapid developments in normative assumptions relating to men's and women's roles (Crompton 2002). For the most part, the Network will not be funding new

large-scale data collection. However, one exception will be to repeat in 2006 the 2002 British Social Attitudes supplement exploring family and career tensions. Together with existing time series data from the British Social Attitudes and the International Social Survey Programme concerning family and gender roles it will be possible to examine cohort, gender and class attitudinal changes across eighteen years.

The third Network theme relates to policy responses to gender inequalities. Although the two projects under this theme have an explicit policy focus, all nine projects are shaped by and will contribute to policy concerns. What is distinctive about these two projects is their macro-level focus on EU and UK policies concerning corporate social responsibility on the one hand, and policies concerned with equality and work-life balance on the other.

Theme 3: Policy Responses

Project 8, CORPORATE GOVERNANCE, focus on the interaction between managerial strategy on gender equity issues and the mechanisms of corporate governance. The use of corporate governance mechanisms in this context is new and much of the research is concerned with processes and perceptions, rather than outcomes at this stage. The project's empirical work is guided by two hypotheses: (1) since good employee relations are a source of value for the corporation, shareholders increasingly see it as in their interest to press for adoption of progressive Human Resource Management practices, including gender equity issues (this was the position of the Kingsmill review on Women's Employment and Pay), but (2) there may be significant blockages both internally and externally (information costs, institutional rigidities, uncertainty of outcomes) to this process occurring.

These hypotheses are directly of relevance to *listed* companies, but the project will also look at some privately-held companies and public-sector organizations to examine how far a similar logic of corporate governance engagement with gender equity issues arises under different forms of ownership.

The project will connect the findings from its qualitative research with managers, employees and investors, with theoretical issues, specifically, the literature on 'responsive regulation' and 'reflexive law' which considers the effectiveness of the type of regulatory techniques suggested by Kingsmill, and the related literature on Sen's 'capabilities' approach. The capability concept has numerous applications to issues of gender and quality of employment, including mobility of workers within and between enterprises; efforts to reconcile work and family life; access to social protection of various types; and measures to promote employability and access to the labour market.

Project 9, WORK & CARE, provides analysis of policies developed to address an issue that is key to the empirical research of the Gender Inequality Network: the gendered divisions of work and care. Policymaking in this area has been considerable in recent years, and the study will explore the way in which the problems have been framed and how far they address the real issues that exist. It will do this through three inter-linked studies (i) of policy trajectories in respect of gender equality at the UK and EU levels; (ii) by an examination of the way in which equality has been conceptualised by the three statutory bodies in the UK: the Equal Opportunities

Commission (EOC), the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) and the Disability Rights Commission (DRC), and (iii) by detailed investigation of a similar policy initiative at EU and UK levels: that of promoting work/life balance.

At both the EU and UK levels, more attention has been paid to gender equality in relation to employment than in relation to care (in the case of the EU, this reflects in part its legal competence). Welfare state restructuring had recast the work/welfare relationship with a firm emphasis on labour market activation and making work pay (CEC 2000; DSS 1998; Goodin 2001; Lewis 2002). The first report on gender mainstreaming (CEC 2002) suggests that little has yet occurred and that there has been even less activity to combat the inequalities faced by black minority ethnic women (and men). In particular, there has been very little recognition accorded to the dynamics of work and care or to how the unequal way in which these are shared between men and women fundamentally impacts on gender equality.

The pursuit of equality has long been recognised as encompassing tensions between ‘same treatment’ on the one hand, and recognition of difference on the other; and between the individual and the group. These issues are central to the problem of addressing the gendered divisions of work and care. While the EOC and the CRE were set up to work with equality as sameness and with the individual as the reference point, the DRC has taken a rather different approach. These tensions become additionally important given the debate about the possibility of a single statutory equality body in the light of the new EC Directives and Human Rights legislation.

As more emphasis has been placed by policymakers on the importance of achieving an ‘adult worker model family’ (Lewis 2001), so the need to address care work has been increasingly recognised. But this involves major choices between policies that ‘de-familialise’ and ‘commodify’ carework; gender-neutral policies that value informal care; and policies that promote the sharing of care work by, for example, addressing working hours or by ‘forcing’ men to take parental leave. In addition, intra-gender equality issues are raised when class and ethnicity are put into the equation, for example by the growing numbers of low-paid women in the formal care sector (whether in respect of children or elderly people), who are disproportionately from minority ethnic groups, and who often facilitate the work of highly educated women. Historically and in comparison with other continental European countries, the UK has focused more on caring for elderly people than for children. Recent policy has focused primarily on childcare, but it is increasingly recognised in the empirical literature and within the Commission that the gendered division of informal care for older people seriously affects women’s capacities to remain in the workforce.

The project’s approach to the study of policy making derives from the literature on problem definition, which offers a robust conceptual framework for understanding policy formation and change. The literature stresses the particular importance of policy actors in defining policy problems, the key role of ideas in the policy process, and the relationship between problem definition and policy solution. The role of actors in the defining the policy problem will be explored via documentary analysis and interviews. The WORK & CARE team will carry out semi-structured interviews with recent and current senior civil servants in relevant UK government departments, with senior officials in the EOC, CRE and DRC, and with interest groups.

The project will explore the meaning of equality in EC policy documents and for the UK statutory bodies. The role of ideas in particular as drivers in the policy making process has been highlighted (e.g. Braun and Busch 1999). The source of ideas may or may not be 'evidence-based'. The developing agenda on equality, manifested in the EC's Directive on race and ethnicity in June 2000, and followed quickly by a Directive on age, disability, religion and sexual orientation, signals the importance of exploring the meaning of the concept underpinning the developing strategy. Similarly, in the case study of work/family, work/life balance, the ideas shaping definition of the policy problem require attention. How far, for example, does care include attention to the issue of informal care for the old as well as the young? The team will therefore undertake close documentary analysis, using historical methods, to identify shifts in meaning and turning points.

Next Steps

This paper has argued that for significant progress to be made in understanding the dynamics of gender inequalities in production and reproduction bridges have to be built across disciplines and across methodological divides. The Economic and Social Research Council's Priority Network schemes are intended to facilitate such co-operative research. The Network begins in October 2004 and both the success of the individual research projects and the 'value added' contribution of the Network lie in the future. However, it is not too early to identify the processes and mechanisms by which 'value added' hopefully can be achieved.

The process of drafting the application itself was an example of how a wide range of researchers from different disciplinary backgrounds (sociology, psychology, economics, demography, geography, social policy, management and law) and different theoretical and methodological traditions could sharpen and broaden their collective ideas. The application went through many iterations – gradually correcting the flaws of miscommunication that result from different assumptions about what matters in understanding gender inequalities; different understandings of terminology; different ideas of methodological rigour; and different expertise, knowledge and experiences of collaborative practice. Perhaps the focus of this Network on gender inequality brings together an unusually motivated and co-operative set of academics but nearly everyone participated enthusiastically in the iterative process, and benefited from the batting back-and-forth of criticisms, questions and suggestions. Whether or not the Network is best characterized as interdisciplinary or multi-disciplinary I am not sure, but what matters for understanding gender inequalities in production and reproduction is creating the incentives and time for the cross-fertilisation of ideas.

A main academic objective of the Network is to move forward the theoretical understanding of gender inequality in production and reproduction and to provide new substantive evidence of the dynamic inter-links between life course processes, resource constraints, and policy contexts. The three interlinking strands of the Network (Pathways, Resources and Policy) provide a conceptual framework for linking projects. In addition, the Network co-ordinator will be responsible for implementing practical mechanisms that enable projects to inform each other and, in the latter stages, to synthesise individual Project research findings.

Networking arrangements and activities should add value above that provided by 'stand alone' projects in three main ways. First, the individual Projects are pursuing research across a wide range of areas and disciplines that have natural synergies, but that no one project team can cover alone. If synergies can be successfully developed, then this will result in both individual projects being strengthened and in the Network achieving more wide-ranging and ambitious objectives through collaborative effort. Second, the support provided by the co-ordination team plus the enticements and strict deadlines imposed by participation in group activities and outputs will help the Projects to develop their research in a more timely and effective manner. Third, dissemination will be broader and more thorough than individual projects could accomplish. The Network will have the critical mass, diverse expertise, and time and resources needed to ensure that the resulting dynamic and contextualised account of gender inequalities helps shape both mainstream social science theoretical and substantive discourse, and policy thinking and practice.

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