Caring and counting

The impact of mothers' employment on family relationships

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Introduction

This report examines the impact of the full- and part-time employment of partnered mothers, with pre-school children, on family relationships. Within the past two decades, mothers of young children are increasing their participation in the labour market as a result of a range of social, demographic, economic and political factors (Walby, 1997; Bower, 2001). While the government is encouraging more mothers into paid work, however, it acknowledges the need for initiatives to enable parents to reconcile work and family life (Home Office, 1998; DTI, 2000). Measures aimed at helping working parents balance employment and family life include the introduction of the National Childcare Strategy, the European Union's Working Time Directive, the implementation of the Parental Leave and Part-Time Work Directives, as well as changes to women's maternity rights and working parents' rights to time-off for dependants (see Dex and Smith, 2002). The government is also promoting family-friendly working arrangements, beyond the statutory minima, but these are most likely to be adopted by organisations within particular sectors and with particular types of workforce. Family-friendly practices are more common in public sector and larger private organisations, and those with a high proportion of women employees and recognised trades unions. They are also more likely to be available to a highly educated workforce on a discretionary basis (Forth et al, 1997; Dex and Smith, 2002). Such government initiatives and organisations' policies and practices are centrally concerned with 'family time' (rather than family income).

Concern about the effect of mothers' working on the quality of family relationships still remains, however. Some see these effects as detrimental, while others are more optimistic. In the face of such divergent opinions, it is especially important to listen to the perspectives of people who are directly affected: working mothers and their partners. The study on which this report is based explored how mothers and their partners understand the impact of the mothers' employment on their couple relationships, their relationships with their children, and wider kin and friendship relationships, as well as on themselves as individuals. In particular, it considered the effect of the nature of the mothers' employment, examining workplace ethos and the level of autonomy and control they have in their jobs.

Mothers' increasing labour market participation

The proportion of mothers of dependent children in employment is increasing, with two thirds now having jobs and this trend is expected to continue. This expansion has been especially marked among mothers whose youngest child is aged under five, over half of whom are now in employment (Table 1.1).

These developments are taking place within the context of changes that point to the increasing need for mothers to reconcile the demands of work with family life:

Table 1.1: Employment rates of mothers of dependent children (1990 and 2000) (%)

	1990	2000
Mothers of dependent children[a]	62.4	65.0
Mothers of pre-school children[b]	41.0	54.4

Notes:
[a] Up to 16 years old, or 18 if in full-time education.
[b] Below 5 years.
Source: Spring 2000 LFS (Bower, 2001)

Table 1.2: Employment rates of partnered and lone mothers of pre-school children (2000) (%)

Partnered mothers of pre-school children	60.5
Lone mothers of pre-school children	31.6

Source: Spring 2000 LFS (Bower, 2001)

- Although the majority of mothers work part-time, increasing numbers are working full-time even when they have very young children. In 2000, 35% of mothers of pre-school children worked 31 hours or more (Bower, 2001). Around a third of all women, who had worked while pregnant, now return to full-time jobs within 11 months of childbirth (Hogarth et al, 2000), compared with around a quarter in 1996 and only one in six in 1988 (Callender et al, 1997).
- In addition, parental employment is unequally distributed leading to a growth of 'work-rich' dual earner families in comparison with families dependent on a single male breadwinner or without any employment (ONS, 2000). Employment rates for partnered mothers of pre-school children are double those of lone mothers (Table 1.2), where partnered mothers do not need to earn a 'family wage' in the same way as lone mothers, and may draw on their partners for childcare support.

So, we are not only seeing more mothers with young children in paid employment, but these mothers are increasingly likely to be working full time and also to have a partner in full-time work too.

Dramatic increases in mothers' employment are likely to have important effects on family life. If the trends continue, mothers will account for an increasing share of the labour force and an increasingly high proportion of them will be mothers of pre-school children. Of all mothers, those with young children highlight the effects of working on family life.

Research on women and the labour market has brought to the forefront the notions of gender inequality and the sexual division of labour, and firmly established the links between paid employment, domestic work and family life. Studies have explored the impact of mothers' employment on family life for issues such as childcare, decision making and the domestic division of labour, and have shown the links between employment, household arrangements and women's attitudes to paid work and mothering (examples include Brannen and Moss, 1991; Gregson and Lowe, 1993; Ferri and Smith, 1996; Hardill et al, 1997). These studies have not explored the impact of mothers' increasing labour market participation on the meaning and quality of family relationships, however, which has become a topic of debate.

Debates about the implications of mothers' employment for family relationships

Women's increasing participation in the labour market is seen by many social commentators as having brought about major changes in personal relationships within families – for good or ill. Mothers' employment is posed as a key aspect of a growing trend towards individualisation[1]. Ideas about individualisation highlight the way that mothers become 'commodified' as they undertake paid employment. As mothers 'sell' themselves in the labour market (commodification), they start to think of themselves as a self-sufficient individual whose identity is focused on their work life (individualisation), rather than someone whose identity is defined relationally, by their home life of relating to and caring for a husband and children. Linked to this, separate, often employment-based, friendships become of more importance for women, rather than embeddedness in family-based friendships. So, the nature of couple and parent–child relationships is said to have changed in contemporary society.

In the 'for ill' version of the effect of individualisation on family relationships, the emphasis is on people being driven by rampant selfish interest. Commitment and obligation to family life are said to be undermined. It is suggested that people no longer work hard at relationships, and families break up. Those who

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[1] Such ideas have longer roots, and individualisation has not always been linked to mothers' increasing labour market participation in the way it is in recent debates (Jamieson, 1998; Crow, 2002). Furthermore, not all discussions are polarised into 'good' or 'ill' versions but can draw on aspects of both.

argue that individualisation is harming family relationships suggest that mothers put themselves first instead of their responsibilities to their family, and see fathers as losing a sense of their purpose in family life. As a result, children become wayward and do not respect their parents' authority (see, for example, Davies, 1993; Halsey, 1993; Dench, 1994; Morgan, 1994; Murray, 1994; Phillips, 1999). In this view, the 'mass' entry of women into the labour market is seen as creating untenable stresses in couple and parent–child relationships because of the lack of time to devote to family life.

In contrast, the 'for good' version of the effect of individualisation emphasises the way that people are able to build more equitable partner relationships. Traditional notions of how a couple 'should' relate to each other no longer have any purchase. Instead, a 'good' couple relationship is now focused on notions of a mutually satisfying intimacy, and values of autonomy and respect. The emphasis is on partners talking about and revealing their inner thoughts and feelings, and empathising with each other. Relationships are continued only in so far as both partners feel that it delivers enough emotional and intrinsic satisfaction for them to stay together (see Giddens, 1991, 1992, 1998; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Beck, 1997).

Similarly, automatic parental authority is said to have been replaced by a stress on child-centred communication. Family life has become organised around children's 'inner' emotional, not just material and practical, needs (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). Parents can seek to avoid overt conflict with their children because 'family time' is limited by their employment (Denick, 1989). While mothers' increasing labour-market participation has not changed views of the nature of emotionally involved 'good mothering', 'good' fathers are now becoming (or should become) more 'sensitive' and involved in childrearing (Burgess, 1998).

From a somewhat different perspective, but linked to ideas about individualisation, Catherine Hakim (1996, 2000) has argued that there is an increasing polarisation between women who choose full-time employment and who have 'work-centred' identities, and those who choose part-time or no employment and want 'home-centred' identities and lives. Thus Hakim suggests that women's employment patterns are not a consequence of the institutional and/or structural disadvantages suffered by women, but rather, reflect attitudinal factors and are an outcome of: their varying work–lifestyle choices; preferences; aspirations and motivations.

Hakim identifies three 'qualitatively different' types of working mothers, each of which exhibit different work–lifestyle preferences. First, there are 'work-centred' mothers who invest in educational qualifications and training because employment is their main priority: "motherhood never provides their core self-identity … [they] have children as an expression of normality, and as a weekend hobby" (Hakim, 2000, p 164). In contrast, the second group, 'adaptives', who form the bulk of working women, want to combine work and family without either taking priority. These mothers "transfer to part-time jobs … often in less demanding jobs in the local labour market which offer convenience factors attractive to women" (Hakim, 2000, p 167), such as, relatively low and fixed hours, a close location to home, or a convenient journey to work, instead of pay and promotion characteristics attractive to men. Those in professional and managerial occupations who cannot find part-time work commonly only have one child as a strategy for combining full-time work and family life. Most 'adaptives' regard themselves as secondary earners and become financially dependent on their partner to some degree. Thus these mothers work part time and adapt their work around their family commitments, and view work as a job rather than a career. Finally, there are the 'home-centred' women who prioritise family life and children over employment and prefer not to work.

The prevalence of individualisation in contemporary social relationships has been questioned, however. In an extensive review of the literature, Lynn Jamieson (1998) concludes that assertions of individualisation are difficult to sustain as a depiction of either the current state of family relationships, or the direction in which such relationships are moving (see also Crow, 2002; Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards, 2002). Feelings of closeness and affection in couple relationships are not necessarily accompanied by a dialogue of mutual disclosure. More practical forms of love and care can be just as, if not more, important than knowing and empathetic understandings of each other through talk. Similarly, parent–child relationships encompass a broad span of feelings and activities, and there

can be class and ethnic differences in how mothers manage the balance between intimacy and authority.

Furthermore, many assert that deep rooted structural constraints are still an issue. There continue to be gender differences in household divisions of emotional, practical, and material activities, with mothers still devoting more time to and taking the main responsibility for these (Irwin, 1999). Such commitments often limit mothers' options in taking up full-time paid work, rather than a 'secondary earner' or 'home-centred' choice (Ginn et al, 1996).

In another direction, there are arguments that it is not merely that employment may leave little time for family life, but more importantly that conceptions of children's emotional and intellectual needs and the parental time investment needed to meet them have expanded (Furedi, 2001).

Much of the debate about the effects of mothers' working on family relationships is carried out at the level of rhetoric. The evidence is more complex and equivocal. For example, while around a quarter of mothers who return to work full time after having a baby have been found to experience marital breakdown (although three quarters did not), the relationships of those who returned part time were more stable than mothers who gave up paid employment (McRae, 2001). A key question for this report, therefore, is how do mothers and fathers themselves understand the impact of the woman's employment?

Widening the focus: work ethos, autonomy and control

One serious drawback in the debates about the impact of mothers' increasing labour market participation on family life, and indeed often in studies of mothers' employment, is the unproblematic use of the term 'employment' or 'work'. There is little consideration of how different aspects of mothers' working, such as organisational ethos and job dynamics, might affect family relationships.

Organisations, and indeed particular departments or groupings within them, can work in different ways. Dominant ethos or sub-cultural formal and informal beliefs and values, authority hierarchies and employment conditions, and material, linguistic and professional practices, can vary between and within workplaces, and employees themselves can engage with them to different extents (see Brown, 1995, for an overview of the issues). This means that mothers can experience their employment very differently. Most studies of organisational ethos and culture, however, are concerned with its implications for efficient and competitive performance. There is little attention to questions of whether and how this may spill over into employees' family life. Certainly, some recent work has shown that workplace stress and job insecurity are linked to tense family relationships (for example, Cooper, 1996; Burchell et al, 1999).

Research on the 'work–family interface' does address the ways that aspects of employment can affect family life, as well as vice versa. There is, however, no demonstration of causality in most of these studies (see review in Edwards and Rothbard, 2000). Moreover, they are overwhelmingly concerned with measuring effects and abstracting linking mechanisms, and rarely place these in the context of the broader shifts in familial and social relationships identified in individualisation debates. The meanings that mothers and fathers themselves give to the impact of the mother's employment on the quality of family relationships in such a context thus remain underexplored.

Pierre Bourdieu (1998) has alluded to the effect of various work cultures, and particularly employees' autonomy and control over their jobs, on the nature of family relationships. Indeed, levels of autonomy and control within occupations have been incorporated in the development of a new social class classification (Rose and Pevalin, 2001). This places the emphasis on the content and dynamics of employment, rather than merely on occupation as a status category. The extent to which mothers are able to plan and take responsibility for their own and others' work, or have this specified for them and their work supervised, is thus important. This study takes into account the nature of mothers' jobs in exploring if and how they and their partners see their employment as impacting on the meaning and quality of family relationships.

The study

Aims and objectives

The main aim of our study was to assess the impact of mothers' increasing labour market participation on family relations. Specifically, we set out to:

- consider the characteristics of work in different workplaces and ascertain their impact on family relationships;
- assess the impact of these characteristics on couples' material and emotional relationships, their parenting roles and relationships, their relationships with wider networks and sense of self;
- highlight the implications for social policies and policy development.

Methodology

Our study is based on qualitative interviews, which were carried out in 2001, with 37 mothers and 30 fathers in couples who had at least one pre-school child. The mothers and fathers were interviewed separately to gain 'her' and 'his' perspectives on the impact of the mothers' employment on family and wider social relationships. All of the mothers were working full time or part time for at least 16 hours a week in one of two organisations: a hospital and an accountancy firm, both in the London area.

Women's employment is overwhelmingly concentrated in service industries, such as, health and finance (Bower, 2001), and the hospital and accountancy firm were selected on this basis. They represent different sectors and types of workforce. The hospital is a public sector organisation with a large female-dominated workforce, while the accountancy firm is a private sector organisation with a large male-dominated workforce but medium-sized branches. Both of these organisations have well-structured professional employment hierarchies, which involved different levels of autonomy and control in daily employment practices. Each, however, had quite different and contrasting workplace 'cultures', as discussed in Chapter 2.

In both the hospital and the accountancy firm, our sample was accessed by approaching human resource managers, or their equivalent, and asking them to put us in touch with mothers who met our criteria (that is, with a partner and at least one pre-school child). In some cases, they directly selected mothers for us to approach, and in others put us in touch with managers of other departments who then identified relevant women. We also 'snowballed' from mothers who agreed to take part in the research, asking them if they knew of other mothers who we could interview.

In this selection and approach process, we were guided by our aim of interviewing mothers working in a range of higher, intermediate and lower status occupations in both workplaces. In doing this, we assumed that the different status occupations would demonstrate different degrees of autonomy and control, as aspects of employment experience that would affect the mother's experience of paid work and potentially impact on their family relationships. Not only was this approach more relevant to our concerns, it was also more practical. For example, in lower status jobs, at a low level of autonomy and control, we could not match job category for job category across the two workplaces. While the hospital employed its own cleaning and catering staff, the accountancy firm contracted out these support services and such staff were members of a separate organisation rather than being encompassed within the workplace cultures of the organisation that bought their services. In contrast, we could easily select our sample within each organisation on the basis of jobs with low levels of autonomy and control without exact matching of job type.

The sample of mothers and fathers interviewed

The resultant sample contains a spread of mothers working full or part time in both workplaces and across jobs involving high, medium and low levels of autonomy and control (see Table 1.3). In addition, while both the hospital and accountancy samples contain women from a range of ethnic groups, the mothers working in the hospital tended to be older, and to have more children than those working in the accountancy firm. The mothers in the hospital were thus more often talking about the impact of their work on relationships with school age as well as their pre-school children.

Table 1.3: Mothers' characteristics, by workplace

Characteristics	Hospital	Accountancy firm
Employment:		
Full-time	13	8
Part-time	9	7
Extent of autonomy/control:		
High	8	6
Medium	7	5
Low	7	4
Age:		
<35	8	9
=35+	14	6
Ethnicity:		
White UK	13	13
White Other	1	–
Black Caribbean	3	1
Black African	3	–
Indian	1	1
Pakistani	–	–
Bangladeshi	1	–
No of children:		
1	6	12
2	10	3
3 or more	6	–
Total	**22**	**15**
Ages of children:		
<1	4	3
1-5	30	13
6-11	11	1
12-17	2	1
18+	2	–

Table 1.4: Fathers' characteristics, by mothers' workplace

Characteristics	Hospital	Accountancy firm
Employment:		
Full-time	13	8
Part-time	–	7
Unemployed	2	
Student	–	
Extent of autonomy/control:		
High	4	6
Medium	6	5
Low	5	4
Age:		
<35	8	9
=35+	7	6
Ethnicity:		
White UK	11	14
White Other	–	–
Black Caribbean	3	–
Black African	1	–
Indian	–	–
Pakistani	–	1
Bangladeshi	–	–
Total	**15[a]**	**15**

Note: [a] The base for the number of fathers interviewed (15) is lower than that for the number of mothers interviewed (22) for the hospital sample because not all of the mothers' partners in this workplace participated in the research.

The fathers were largely employed full time (see Table 1.4). The partners of the mothers working in the hospital were often in jobs with similar levels of autonomy and control to the mothers, but the partners of the mothers working in the accountancy firm tended to be in jobs involving a higher level. Overall, the fathers tended to be of the same ethnicity as the mothers, but there were a few mixed ethnicity partnerships among the hospital sample.

Not all of the fathers were willing to be interviewed. Where this was the case, it was confined to the hospital sample (seven fathers). This reluctance may well be related to the propensity for these mothers to 'bring home' particular aspects of the hospital's organisational ethos, which we discuss later in this report, leading to their partners constructing boundaries around their 'private' lives.

The interviews

The interviews were broadly concerned with eliciting the mothers' and fathers' own perspectives on the nature of the mothers' employment, the quality of their family relationships, their social lives, and the mothers' sense of self. These views are important and valid in their own right. We were not concerned with measuring affective bonds or outcomes for children, or with children's own views on the effects of their mothers working[2]. Supplementary interviews were also carried out with senior human resources personnel in the hospital and accountancy firm in order to gain an insight into the 'espoused culture' of the workplace, as well as the 'culture-in-practice' provided by the mothers' accounts of their workplace experiences.

[2] We originally proposed to include children's perspectives on their mother's employment in the study, but this aspect of the research was not funded.

Structure of the report

The report is divided into seven further chapters.

- Chapter 2 provides a brief overview of the two organisations where the mothers we interviewed worked. It is concerned with highlighting the organisational cultures and ethos of the hospital and the accountancy firm. It forms the context for understanding the impact of the mothers' employment on their family and wider relationships.

- Chapter 3 turns to the mothers' own accounts of the meaning of work and the levels of autonomy and control they had in their workplaces. The espoused workplace culture and the external assessment of the level of autonomy and control involved in their job did not always reflect the mothers' own perspectives on these features of their employment. Thus, this chapter addresses the mothers' views on the organisational culture-in-practice, the nature of their jobs, and their sense of identity at work.

- Chapter 4 then addresses the mothers' perceptions of the nature of family life and their role and identity within this. In order to understand how they see the impact of their employment on family relationships, we explore their perceptions of the needs of their children, partner and other family members, and assess the extent and ways in which they felt their identity was bound up with, or separate from, these needs.

- In Chapter 5 we continue our focus on the mothers' assessments of how their employment may affect the meaning and quality of their familial relationships, in particular focusing on the extent and ways in which they separate or connect their work and home lives, and the implications of this. We also consider the factors underlying these separations and connections.

- Chapter 6 then turns to the fathers' perspectives on how their partner's employment impacts on family relationships. We explore their views on the implications for the mothers' ability to meet the fathers' own needs, along with those of their children, and wider family members. We also examine the extent to which the fathers supported their partner's connection or separation of work and family life.

- Chapter 7 focuses on the fathers' perspectives on the impact of their own employment. It looks at what family and work mean to them, and how they see work as part of their own responsibilities for meeting family needs.

- Finally, in Chapter 8, we bring together the different perspectives on the impact of the mothers' employment on family relationships in order to assess the implications of the study for current debates about mothers' increasing labour market participation, and for the development of policies that can help families balance work and family life.

2

Mothers' work organisations

Introduction

This chapter describes briefly the two organisations where the mothers we interviewed worked, namely, the hospital and accountancy firm. It highlights the nature of these two organisations and their general workplace ethos and cultures. As we will show in later chapters, these aspects of the mothers' workplaces form an important context for understanding the impact of their employment on their family relationships.

As noted in the introduction, the workplace and an organisation's work culture are part of what is commonly understood by the term 'employment' or 'work'. Yet, beyond a concern with long hours, when issues about the impact of work on family life or the work–life balance are discussed, these aspects of work are rarely explored, especially in relation to their potential effect or influence on family relationships.

The nature of the organisations and their work

Both the hospital and the accountancy firm are large organisations, situated in inner and central London respectively. As mentioned in Chapter 1, we selected these organisations because they represent two contrasting sectors and types of workplaces. The hospital is in the public sector and its workforce is female-dominated, whereas the accountancy firm is in the private sector and its workforce is male-dominated. The hospital's workforce has strong union representation while the accountancy firm has no union representation.

Similarities between the two organisations also exist. Both are in the service sector, employ large numbers of employees, and have well-defined employment structures and hierarchies. In addition, both employ staff across a diverse range of professional and non-professional occupations, which involve different levels of autonomy and control in daily employment practices.

Table 2.1 shows the organisations' differences and similarities. It reveals their gender composition. Women make up three quarters of the hospital's workforce but only a third in the accountancy firm. This gender variation in the make-up of the workforces is significant because, as existing research demonstrates, it is likely to influence the workplace culture, attitudes towards working mothers, and the range of

Table 2.1: Key characteristics of the hospital and accountancy firm

	Hospital	Accountancy firm
Location	Inner London	Central London
Number of staff	2,500	4,700[a]
Gender distribution of staff	77% women	35% women[a]
	23% men	65% men[a]
Ethnic breakdown of staff	60% white	90% white[a]
	40% black/minority ethnic	10% black/minority ethnic[a]
Mission statement	Serving the community	Dedicated to client satisfaction

Note: [a] Figures apply to Greater London workforce.

family-friendly policies and practices available for parents (Forth et al, 1997; Dex and Smith, 2002).

Another significant difference in the hospital and accountancy firm's workforces is their ethnic mix. The hospital has a much more ethnically diverse workforce. It mirrors the ethnic composition of London, unlike the accountancy firm. In part, this can be explained by the fact that the hospital recruited many of its staff from the local labour market. In contrast, the accountancy firm recruited nationally, with many staff travelling longer distances to work there (see Chapter 3 for our sample). As we will see, this in turn, was reflected in the overall missions and dominant cultures of the hospital and the accountancy firm, to which we now turn.

The workplace ethos and culture of the organisation

There are very marked differences between the hospital and accountancy firm in terms of their workplace ethos and their organisational culture.

The hospital

At the heart of the hospital's workplace ethos and culture is the idea of public service, and especially the key themes of connection, community and caring. The hospital is self-contained, yet is connected to its local community, and is concerned with caring for members of this community. These themes are encapsulated in the hospital's mission statement: "serving the community".

Indeed, the hospital itself could also be described as a 'mini-community'. In addition to the main hospital services, there are several businesses and shops situated on the hospital's premises. For example, the hospital site has a grocery shop/newsagent, hairdressers, two coffee shops, postal/cash machine facilities and a chapel.

There is a strong ethos of care within the hospital. This extends beyond just caring for patients drawn from the local community. It essentially drives the modus operandi of the hospital, despite the increasing emphasis on managerialism and accountability within the hospital (see Clarke et al, 2000). It encompasses caring for the staff

working at the hospital too. In line with NHS policy, the hospital has a family-friendly advisor whose role is to develop policies and working practices aimed at encouraging mothers to work at the hospital, and to help them combine paid work with their domestic responsibilities. Thus, the hospital has developed a range of 'family-friendly' policies and practices such as flexible working, flexi-time, career breaks, special leave, job sharing and paternity leave. It also has an on-site work crèche for staff.

Mothers, especially those in the higher and intermediate status jobs, tend to have good employment conditions. All of the mothers we interviewed in these sorts of jobs were employed on permanent contracts, and had access to a wide range of staff benefits such as those mentioned above. In contrast, all but two of the interviewed mothers in lower status occupations were on short-term temporary employment contracts, and had limited access to staff benefits.

There is a clearly defined and rigid hierarchical management structure in the hospital. The lines of management and responsibility are sharply articulated. For instance, each occupational group within the hospital has a dedicated staff handbook outlining their terms and conditions, and this occupational segregation is reinforced by clearly defined salary bands.

The accountancy firm

In contrast to the hospital, the accountancy firm's workplace ethos and culture is dominated by profit making, client satisfaction and external accountability to clients. Once again, like the hospital, this ethos is neatly reflected in the firm's mission statement: "dedicated to client satisfaction".

The accountancy firm is a multi-national company with several sites in London and numerous sites throughout the UK and the rest of the world. Its workplace culture and ethos can be characterised as being largely fragmented, dispersed, and individualised. For instance, the London office, where the mothers we interviewed worked, shared their premises with other unrelated organisations in a large multi-storey building. Other branches of the company are dispersed throughout the UK and even in London, are situated in very different parts of the

city both in central and greater London. Thus the fragmented location of the company's offices meant that the working environment and cultures across the organisation varied from one location and office to another.

The accountancy firm has a flat, fragmented, and loosely defined organisational and management structure. Staff work in teams, and the membership of these teams and their management vary depending on the nature of a particular project or account. The overall organisational and management structure, therefore, facilitates the flexibility required to accommodate such changes and the demands of the business. However, this loose management structure also has to be balanced with the imperative of external accountability to the company's clients.

The individualised nature of the accountancy firm's work culture is further reflected in the relationship between work and pay. Pay levels, across a broad spectrum of occupations within the company, are based on an individual's performance through performance-related pay. In addition, employees' pay is affected by the company's overall performance. For instance, staff are paid an annual bonus, the size of which depends on the company's year-end profits.

The organisation's dominant workplace culture and ethos also influence the company's commitment to supporting the needs of working mothers. The firm employs a diversity manager for the UK, who is responsible for a range of equal opportunity issues, including the needs of working mothers. It has put in place a range of policies and practices such as equal opportunities, a working time policy, flexible working, and a dignity at work policy. Given their firm's commitment to maximise company profit, the business case for these family-friendly working practices is a feature of their introduction and implementation.

Summary

The key contrasts between the two organisations where the mothers we interviewed worked are:

- The hospital is a public sector organisation. Its workplace ethos and culture are based on the relational themes of connection, community and caring.
- The accountancy firm is a private sector organisation. Its workplace ethos and culture are dominated by the profit motive, client satisfaction, and external accountability to these clients.

We now turn to the ways in which the mothers' interpreted their respective workplace cultures, and how these shaped their understanding of employment.

Mothers' perspectives on their work and workplace

Introduction

This chapter explores the mothers' own views about the meaning of work, and their perceptions of the levels of autonomy and control they have in their workplace. It examines the extent to which these are influenced by the organisational ethos and culture of their workplaces described in the previous chapter. As we will show in subsequent chapters, these dynamics are important for how the mothers and their partners understood the impact of the mothers' employment on their family relationships.

The meaning of work

The mothers' perspectives on what work meant to them were shaped by their contrasting workplace cultures, their differing levels of autonomy and control in the workplace, and how they understood their work in relation to their family relationships.

The hospital

The mothers working at the hospital had a strong investment in a public service commitment to caring for the local community. Their views accorded with the hospital's workplace ethos, framed around the notions of connection, community, and caring. They talked about their work as "making a difference" and/or "playing a part" in improving the lives of people within their local community and wider society:

"I've always wanted to work in the NHS from when I left school. I never wanted to work for a huge profit organisation. I wanted to work for a hospital because it's giving something back to the community." (Annie, senior manager, higher status)

"I'm always seeing mothers and their babies I delivered or been involved with antenatal care. They come up to me and show me their babies or I'll see a child years later, that gives me such a good feeling knowing that I've played a part in bringing a life into the world." (Helen, senior nurse, intermediate status)

"My last two children were born here and it's nice to know that I'm working here and giving something back to the hospital because I got excellent care here." (Denise, clerk, lower status)

Many of the mothers were very committed to their work and their particular workplace. This was bolstered by the localised and community nature of the hospital, its supportive culture, and its family-friendly workplace practices.

Furthermore, the mothers both worked and lived in the local community they served: it was "their" hospital, both as employees and as potential patients. All lived within a five-mile radius of the hospital. As other studies of working women have found, working locally made it easier for the mothers to juggle their work and domestic commitments, especially as all of them had children aged five or under:

"The beauty of work is that if I get a call from the school or the childminder saying that one of the children have taken ill I can be there in 40 minutes. If you've noticed there's lots of women with young children at the hospital, and it's got a nice family

atmosphere and I think that lots of women stay here for a long time because they can juggle family demands such as family emergencies that call you away from work. It would be harder to do that if I was working somewhere like [a central London hospital]." (Fiona, nurse, intermediate status)

The mothers' commitment to the hospital, and their tending to be older than the sample of mothers in the accountancy firm, was evidenced by the fact that they had mostly worked for the hospital for relatively long periods of time. Their average length of service was eight years compared with an average of four years for mothers in the accountancy firm.

As is often the case, however, the mothers in lower status occupations tended to have shorter lengths of service than those in higher and intermediate status jobs, as well as poorer employment conditions. Indeed, a few of the mothers in lower status occupations who were on short-term contracts and/or worked anti-social hours did take a more instrumental view of work, focused on the wages that they received from their employment. As we will see, this stress on financial reward was prevalent among the mothers in the accountancy firm, extending beyond those with poorer conditions of service.

The accountancy firm

Work had a very different meaning for the mothers in the accountancy firm. In contrast to those working at the hospital, their relationship to work was far more individualistic. It was framed around the personal benefits they received from their employment, especially the monetary rewards such as cash incentives and bonuses, rather than its social value. The mothers' views on the meaning of work also accorded with their workplace ethos, which was framed around private business and profit making. They accorded with their company's strong emphasis on organisational achievement and success based on individual endeavour and enterprise:

"I like working for a company that has an international reputation for being one of the best in the business. If you work hard for the company and bring in business then it looks after you. There are some out there that don't care about their staff but I think

[this organisation] values the hard work and commitment I give them." (Cynthia, director, higher status)

"I'm a valued employee and I'm good at my job and I've built up a reputation with the clients of being productive, efficient and I respond to their needs.... If you've got deadlines to meet you put the hours in because that's the nature of the job, that's the downside of what I do, but the positives are that I'm rewarded for it financially. I'm on a pretty decent salary and of course the company rewards you at other times with cash bonuses for meeting your targets." (Wendy, auditor, intermediate status)

Mothers in the lower status occupations were particularly likely to view work exclusively in relation to its monetary rewards, and tended to have a weaker commitment to their workplace compared with mothers in the higher and intermediate status occupations.

"Even if you take out your travelling expenses it still pays more working here, so it's the money that is keeping me. Ideally I would like to work closer to where I live but it's hard to find jobs where I live that pay as much. I'm on a much higher salary working in the City. I don't feel that I'm being challenged in the job and so it does get boring at times but the money keeps me here." (Jeanette, secretary, lower status)

In the accountancy firm, the mothers' place of work and the domain of home/family life were spatially separate from each other. They all lived a minimum of 10 miles from their office and had to commute to work. This had implications, for instance, for the way the mothers thought about and organised their childcare arrangements. In contrast to the hospital mothers, their company did not have a workplace crèche. Nor did these mothers use childcare facilities close to their workplace. Instead, their company provided those in high and intermediate status jobs with childcare vouchers so that they could purchase childcare close to their homes.

As noted above, the mothers in the accountancy firm had relatively short lengths of service compared with those working in the hospital, as well as being younger. Like the hospital workers, however, their average length of service varied by

their occupational status. Again, in part, this can be explained by the fact that mothers in the lower category tended to be employed on short-term temporary contracts.

Workplace ethos and identity

The mothers' views on work were not only concerned with their workplace ethos and its organisational culture – whether they worked in the hospital or for the accountancy firm. As other research has shown, work was important for giving them a sense of purpose, identity and status, and for socialising (Jahoda, 1982). It is here that we can also start to see how the mothers felt their work impacted on family relationships, which we pursue in detail in subsequent chapters:

"I work because I think I personally need my own identity, I enjoy my work, I enjoy interacting with people and I'm good at what I do and therefore I would be frustrated and feel it would be a waste to be at home. I've worked very hard for this, I've studied for my degree and professional qualifications. I think I'm actually a better person and better mother for working and having my own outside interests." (Diane, senior manager, higher status, hospital)

"I can't stand the constant drudgery you do when you're at home all the time. Going to work means that I get a balance in my life, it's more tiring but in a funny way I prefer it. I appreciate the children more when I'm working because you know that you've only got a certain amount with them." (Nancy, manager, intermediate status, accountancy firm)

Nevertheless, workplace ethos and occupational and personal identity were not necessarily separate issues for the mothers. Caroline provides a good case study of the complex interweaving of these features. She had previously worked full time for an accountancy firm (not the organisation represented in this study), before moving to part-time work at the hospital in a senior management position because she was starting a family and wanted more flexible working conditions:

"[My old employers] say that you can work part time but that's not possible once you reach a certain level ... you're not seen as taking your career seriously or putting clients' interest first.... I knew that if I was serious about this children business then I'd have to get out and find a job where I'd be able to work and still have time for the children, and that's why I came [to the hospital]." (Caroline, senior management, higher status, hospital)

Caroline's account reveals how her professional and personal identity was framed around the "profit-efficiency" ethos of an accountancy firm, but was also beginning to incorporate the caring ethos of the hospital:

"I'm organised, some would say I'm sometimes too organised, and I'm logical, and accounting has had a lot to do with that.... Work challenges me and I like the work I do. I love [my daughter] but I couldn't stay at home with her all the time because there wouldn't be the challenge in that. I get a real kick out of being able to solve a problem, it makes me feel really motivated and that I'm achieving something. I'm quite competitive and work is an outlet for that. Well, it used to be. It's a lot less competitive environment [at the hospital] but it's still challenging in its own way.... People are not used to working under pressure and with tight deadlines to meet. It's two different worlds. There's the culture difference because if you had targets to meet [at the accountancy firm] and you had your deadlines then you bloody well stayed and did the work until the deadlines were met.... [In the hospital] we're constantly reacting to things instead of being proactive and there's this laid back approach.... Once I'd've been tearing my hair out but working [at the hospital] forces you to be patient and more tolerant and recognising not everyone works at the same pace as you." (Caroline, senior management, higher status, hospital)

Autonomy and control

In this section we examine the mothers' understandings of autonomy and control in their

workplace and consider how these influence their workplace relationships and practices. In the next two chapters we will explore how these can be apparent in their family relationships.

As noted in Chapter 1, our interest in autonomy and control within the workplace stems from several factors. First, focusing on levels of autonomy and control employees have within the workplace is important in 'unpacking' the notion of employment, and thus for exploring how mothers combine work and family life. Second, these two dimensions of employment are now regarded as important components in classifications of social class, which are based on occupations. Finally, there are suggestions that an employee's autonomy and control in the workplace can affect the nature of their family relationships. Thus, the extent to which mothers are able to plan and take responsibility for their own and others' work may impact on the meanings, practices and the quality of their family relationships.

As discussed in Chapter 1, we selected mothers working in different status jobs in the hospital and accountancy firm based on the assumption that mothers in higher status occupations would have greater degrees of autonomy and control in their jobs than those in lower status occupations. We have understood autonomy to mean the amount of self-determination and flexibility employees have in deciding how to spend their time, on what, with whom, and where. Complementing this, we have understood control to be about the extent to which employees manage resources and staff, and have leadership or strategic roles within their organisation. These different dimensions are often integrated in the mothers' own accounts of their experiences of work.

Time: a key dynamic of autonomy and control

The mothers saw time as an especially important resource in their workplace, and issues of autonomy and control infused their accounts. They talked about time in terms of:

- being limited:

 "There's no time to do anything properly and so things are getting a bit out of control. I'm constantly reacting to things because

there's no time to plan for things." (Esther, senior nurse, intermediate status, hospital)

- being monitored to varying degrees, that is, heavily monitored or hardly at all:

"My time is not my own here, there's always somebody telling you what you do. I clock in at 7.00 am and [the senior supervisor] tells me what to do, and when I can have my break, I'm not free here." (Gloria, supervisor, lower status, hospital)

"I really manage my own time and that's a real benefit to the job. I know that I have a set of things that require my attention but it's my decision as to the time I give to each thing." (Beverley, senior manager, higher status, accountancy firm)

- charging for their time, which applied specifically to mothers in the accountancy firm:

"Everything is written down so that I can bill my client for my time. Billing for your time is all important here, it's a way of effectively monitoring how your time gets spent and what area of your work is given priority." (Wendy, auditor, intermediate status, accountancy firm)

- and the demands on their time changing:

"What I like least about my job is that increasing amounts of my time is spent on paperwork which leaves less time for patient care." (Catherine, senior doctor, higher status, hospital)

"A lot of my time is now spent convincing senior partners and our board members that it's the right thing to do to have equal opportunities. We want to achieve an organisation where, regardless of their differences, [minority ethnic and disabled people] can come into the organisation." (Cynthia, director, higher status, accountancy firm).

These mothers' thoughts on time reveal a key and dynamic aspect of the concrete experience of the extent of autonomy and control in the workplace. We now move on to their more explicit perceptions of these features of their employment.

Mothers' experiences of autonomy and control: 'external' and 'internal' assessments

When we selected mothers to take part in our research, we assumed that those in higher status jobs would have high levels of autonomy and control, determining for themselves how they managed their work tasks and/or having managerial responsibility for others and for strategic policy making within the organisation. We saw mothers in lower status jobs as experiencing inflexible working patterns, and as being heavily managed and supervised, with the mothers in intermediate status jobs occupying a middle position. These were our 'external' assessments of levels of autonomy and control.

In the interviews, however, we asked the mothers to give an account of their work, and to tell us about their levels of responsibility, authority, and flexibility within their jobs – an 'internal' assessment. As Figure 3.1 shows, generally, the majority of mothers' 'internal' perceptions of the amount of autonomy and control they had in their jobs reflected our 'external' definitions:

"I enjoy the freedom in my work, I'm given something to do such as a new policy to write or a policy report to draft, and I'm just left to get on with things." (Cynthia, director, higher status and high autonomy/ control, accountancy firm)

"We have to clock in at 8.00 am and then the supervisor checks we're all in and our uniforms are clean and we're wearing our hairnets because of health and safety things. I am given my list of things to do for the morning, normally the supervisor checks to see if everything ok, then I have lunch and I get another list of things to do for the afternoon, but if it's a busy day and I don't finish my morning tasks then I'll sit down with the supervisor and we organise things so that I can catch up from the morning." (Amy, assistant, lower status and low autonomy/control, hospital)

As Figure 3.1 also shows, however, there were some mismatches between the amount of autonomy and control we might expect the

Figure 3.1: 'External' and 'internal' assessments of autonomy and control
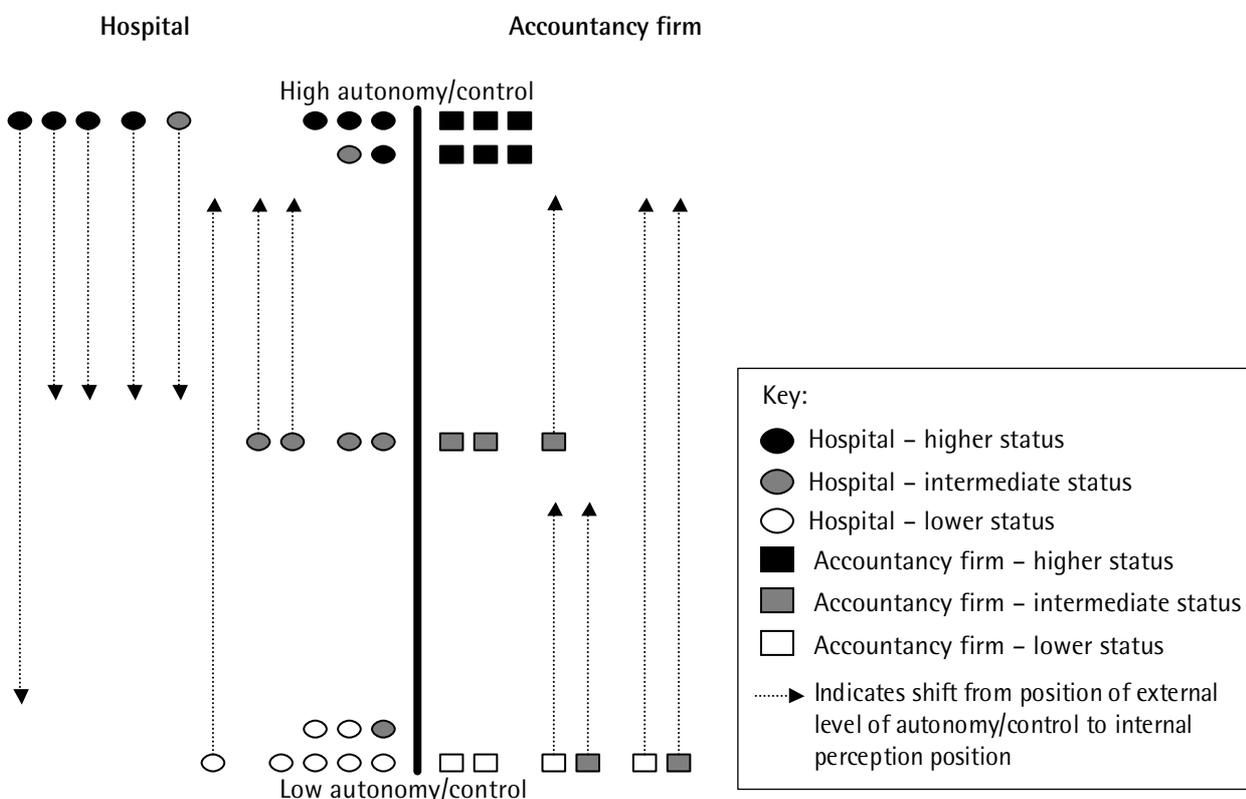
Table 3.1: 'External' and 'internal' assessments of amount of autonomy and control, by full-time and part-time employment status

	Full-time		Part-time	
	No	**%**	**No**	**%**
'External' and 'internal' match	12	57	9	56
'External' and 'internal' mismatch	9	43	7	44
Total	21	100	16	100

mothers to have within their workplace, given the status of their job, and how much autonomy and control they felt they actually had. As Table 3.1 shows, however, this was not clearly related to whether they worked full or part time. These mismatches raise issues for the validity of social class classifications that are linked to the ideas of autonomy and control, as well as for how we understand the impact of mothers' employment on family life.

The mismatch between the 'external' and 'internal' assessments of autonomy and control worked in both directions. In the hospital, the divergence tended to be among mothers in higher status jobs, who saw themselves as having lower autonomy and control than we would expect. In contrast, in the accountancy firm it was mothers in lower status jobs who saw themselves as having higher autonomy and control than we might assume. Catherine's experiences in the hospital and Natasha's in the accountancy firm illustrate these mismatches:

"I'm empowered within the remit of my own job but the system is somewhat bureaucratic and it just creates obstacles, and I don't like that. You become disempowered in that sense because the responsibility for managing services is dispersed. I have responsibility for managing the clinical team and clinical issues but you have managers that have responsibility for other service issues and support matters such as reviewing things around non-pay, overspend and the waiting lists. In theory you work as a team but sometimes it's frustrating because you can actually see the bigger picture and you can't understand why other people can't see things the same as you and you have no control because things are out of your hands." (Catherine, senior doctor, higher status, hospital)

"I meet and greet visitors and I direct them to the relevant person or office. I also have to sign visitors, people, and prepare an ID badge. I transfer calls from the main switchboard to the relevant departments. I have a lot of responsibility and there's lots to do because I'm at the reception desk on my own and it gets really busy and I have to think fast and make decisions quickly because there's no one there to check with.… The job allows me to use my own initiative, and I have lots of freedom when I'm out on the front desk on my own. Because I'm the receptionist I represent the organisation, I'm the first point of contact for [it] so I always try to make an effort with my appearance and first impressions count." (Natasha, receptionist, lower status, accountancy firm)

Catherine's experience probably is indicative of recent changes in the NHS, moving away from being dominated exclusively by the traditional ethos of care, towards an increasing emphasis on external and financial accountability and ideas around 'new' managerialism (Clarke et al, 2000). In contrast, the accountancy firm has a flatter, flexible organisational structure that has devolved responsibility down the organisation. Natasha's perception of her higher autonomy and control in her work, therefore, is partly an outcome of her company's organisational structure.

Nevertheless, there were some exceptions among the mothers working at the hospital, workers who saw themselves as having higher levels of autonomy and control than we might expect given the status of their jobs. For example, Denise worked as a clerk, yet viewed herself as having high levels of autonomy and control:

"I clock in for 8.00 am and go up to the wards to talk to people and from that I can work out how busy my day is going to be. I like the job because I'm in control. I'm happy being in control. I feel that I am doing what I want to do. I'm not bossed about by other people. I do take instructions and I do have a manager, but you know at the end of the day I can say to my boss 'that is the decision that I've made', and if he's not happy about it then we talk about it but I've reached a stage of my job where I know what I'm doing…. My manager knows I am good at my job and he trusts me to get on with things by myself, because I'm not someone who needs to have something looking over their shoulders all the time and my manager has every confidence in me." (Denise, clerk, lower status, hospital)

Denise's experience differed from the other mothers in lower status jobs in the hospital, in regarding herself as having greater autonomy and control than would be suggested by the nature of her job. A range of inter-connected factors can explain this. Denise was very committed to the hospital ethos of caring, connection, and community. She derived a great deal of satisfaction from this, and viewed her job, and hence herself, as being indispensable to the hospital in delivering its ethos. As a clerk she was involved in work that brought patients into the hospital from, and returned them to, the local community. Denise's work was not directly affected by the changing ethos of the NHS, unlike mothers such as Catherine, who worked in higher/intermediate status professional and non-professional posts. In addition, unlike many of her peers in lower status jobs, Denise (like Natasha, above) was engaged on a permanent contract.

Thus, structural factors, such as the mothers' employment conditions, as well as the overall organisational structure and workplace ethos, and the nature of their jobs, all played a part in these mothers' sense of autonomy and control and the meanings they attributed to paid employment.

Summary

This chapter has explored the mothers' views on what work was about for them and the extent to which they accorded with their respective work cultures. Key features are:

- The mothers working in the hospital had a strong commitment to caring for the local community, which accorded with their workplace ethos.
- The mothers working for the accountancy firm took a more individualistic view, often framed around monetary reward, in tune with their workplace ethos.
- The management, monitoring and demands of time at their workplace was an important aspect of how the mothers experienced issues of autonomy and control in their jobs.
- For the most part, the mothers' 'internal' assessments of their levels of autonomy and control accorded with the 'external' status of their job.
- Where there were mismatches in 'external' and 'internal' assessments, mothers in higher status jobs in the hospital saw themselves as having lower levels of autonomy and control, while mothers in lower status jobs in the accountancy firm felt that they had higher levels. These differences relate to the mothers' employment conditions, the organisational structure, and to their ability to deliver the 'caring and community' or 'client satisfaction and individual enterprise' workplace ethos to which they were committed.

Levels of autonomy and control in the workplace are important for understanding the mothers' perceptions of work, in our endeavour to 'unpack' the notion of employment. As we will show in the next chapters, it is the mothers' 'internal' perceptions of the amount of autonomy and control they had, rather than any 'external' assessment given the status of their jobs, that are significant in understanding the impact of work on their family relationships.

4

Mothers' perceptions of family needs, social relationships and identity

Introduction

This chapter examines how work may shape different identities for the mothers, around family and self. Are their identities more likely to focus on their work life, with the mothers having a sense of themselves as separate from their family relationships, as opposed to their caring role in the home and embeddedness in family life? We also consider the extent to which their work, and especially the amount of autonomy and control they had in their jobs, provides a context for their identity.

Before we explore the issues relating to the mothers' identity, however, we need to look at their understandings of the needs of other family members, and their own role in meeting these. In other words, we consider what the mothers were trying to achieve for themselves and others in their family relationships and how they felt work might impact on this.

Children and partners

This section explores the mothers' views about their family and in particular their children's needs, partner's needs and those of their wider family members. It highlights the way that the mothers regarded themselves as responsible for meeting these needs, and how their employment could support or make this more difficult.

Children's needs

The mothers talked about putting their children's needs first (as other research has found, for example, Ribbens McCarthy et al, 2000). They expressed an unquestioned, taken for granted, belief that 'good mothering' was about 'being there' for their children, caring for them, and making sacrifices for their children's sake. This applied to all the mothers, irrespective of whether they worked full or part time. Indeed, they all spoke about making time for their children shaped around their hours of work. In addition, 'being there' involved them in producing a sense of emotional security for their children that went beyond physical presence:

"By the time I get home I'm really tired from the journey but I always read bed-time stories to the children every night. It's our quiet time together and I can use this chance to find out what has happened in their day." (Jeanette, secretary, lower status, accountancy firm)

"I want my children to grow up feeling safe and secure. I want to raise them in an environment where they know that whatever has happened they can always come to me and talk about things and that I will always be there for them no matter what." (Simone, senior nurse, higher status, hospital)

One way the mothers attempted to build an emotional link between themselves and their children when they were not physically present was – where their children were able to – through

discussing their work with them. This was especially the case for those who connected their work and home lives (as we address further in the next chapter). The particular ethos of their workplace could come through in their accounts of building such emotional links, as in the quotes that follow:

"I've made an effort to explain what it is exactly I do at work. We spend quite a lot of time sitting down and talking together about our day. We've made a game of it. I ask them what they did today and then they say 'mummy how was your day today?', and I'll tell them the interesting bits in a language they can understand. So now they think I go off to a glamorous and exciting place each day." (Cynthia, director, higher status, accountancy firm)

"I think it is very important to talk to my children about my work. Of course they're only babies so I don't go into the upsetting details, but they know that it is my job to heal people and I tell them that I make sick people better. And so when I get home they say 'how many sick people did you make better today?' and I'll tell them 'three or four people' and they'll say 'oh, that's good mum, but mum, can you make seven or eight people better tomorrow?'." (Lauryn, nurse, intermediate status, hospital)

Some of the mothers working at the hospital occasionally took their children into work with them to concretely enhance this emotional link (see Edwards, 1993), further building on the communally connected ethos that they and the hospital espoused. Indeed, the hospital was considering the possibility of a 'bring your children to work day' policy.

The mothers could see their work enhancing their relationship with their children during the time that they were physically present with them. They spoke about being better equipped emotionally to meet their children's needs, often emphasising how time with their children was 'precious' or 'valuable':

"I make more effort with them. I have less time with them but I value that time with them. When you're at home with them all the time you take your time with them for granted. I have a much better relationship

with them by going to work." (Nancy, manager, intermediate status, accountancy firm)

The 'quality' of the time that parents and children spend together being emotionally and educationally purposeful, rather than 'taken for granted', has become a prevalent feature of contemporary understandings of 'good' parenting, particularly for mothers who are in employment (Furedi, 2001). It was in relation to the 'quality' of time they spent with their children that the mothers could feel that their employment, whether full-time or part-time, sometimes had a negative impact:

"Sometimes it's just impossible to do everything. It sometimes feels like a juggling act and you're trying to keep all the balls up in the air without dropping one. The stress, the hassle and the workload at work, and then you've got to come home and face similar hassle here. Every so often, it just builds up and you think 'Oh I'm just going to opt out and not work or do something more easy', because you get to that stage where you feel so tired and drained from trying to do everything and then no one is really benefiting from the situation." (Esther, senior nurse, intermediate status, hospital)

"When you're tired, you've had a tough day at work and you're absolutely shattered and [my son] is saying 'mummy, come and play with me' and you haven't got the energy to get up and play with him, then you do start to think is it all worth it?" (Beverley, senior manager, higher status, accountancy firm)

They could also feel that their children sometimes resented them working if it cut into times that the children themselves regarded as available, or wanted their mother to be there physically for them:

"… they don't mind about me going to work unless it's the weekend when they'd like to go somewhere and I say 'Oh, I've got to go to work today'. Then they really moan." (Denise, clerk, lower status, hospital)

"If they've not slept particularly well the night before or they've picked up a cold or minor illness they may say 'I don't want to

go to nursery today' or 'I don't want to go to school today', and they'll want me to stay at home with them. But I explain that I have to go to work and that I'll be with them later on and they seem to accept that." (Simone, senior nurse, higher status, hospital)

The negative aspects of their working for their children, however, was not the most prominent feature of the mothers' accounts. On the whole they regarded their employment as either having no, or positive effects.

One reason for mothers feeling that their employment had no impact on their children was that this study focuses on mothers with pre-school children, some of whom were under a year old, and because (with the exception of one mother working at the hospital) it was all their children had ever known:

"All [my son has] known is that I go missing for part of the day, and then I turn up to collect him. He doesn't understand where I go when I leave him and I'm not sure he even knows how long I've been gone for because when they're that young they can't understand time." (Louise, officer, intermediate status, accountancy firm)

For the most part, however, the mothers regarded their paid work as benefiting their children in emotional, developmental and material ways. They felt they were meeting their children's needs by developing useful skills and providing money to pay for activities and goods that they would otherwise have been unable to afford:

"They like that I work because I buy them nice things with my money. When I get home the first thing they do is go through my bags. They asking me 'mummy what have you brought me today?'… The job is good for my children because I can help them more. When I was at home my English wasn't so good but my reading and speaking is getting better since I work here. I'm happy and I like that because now I can help the youngest [children] with their homework and their reading. I can talk to the teachers now when I go to the school." (Kamaljit, assistant, lower status, hospital)

"I've learnt negotiation skills and I have taught my children negotiation skills and they use it effectively … they're very good negotiators.… I see them using it with us and their friends and at Brownies. A side benefit of work is that I've been able to put my skills to good use to help my children." (Cynthia, director, higher status, accountancy firm)

"I'm sure they like the extra privileges my working provides. They know with the extra income they can do extra things.… [My youngest daughter] is very aware that it was my salary that bought her a pony last year and pays the stabling costs." (Sarah, director, higher status, accountancy firm)

Many of the mothers also stressed the importance of being a good role model for their children, with work being a particular feature of this influence:

"I'm a good role model for the children because they see me getting up and going out to work, they see what I do, and it encourages them to think about doing well at school so that they can get a good job when they grow up because they've seen me working." (Denise, clerk, lower status, hospital)

"[My daughter] sees me working if I have to take work home. The other day I was finishing off something at home and she said 'mummy I want to be like you when I grow up, I want to go to work', I was really touched and I could see that my going to work is a positive influence for her." (Amanda, senior manager, higher status, accountancy firm)

Overall then, the mothers felt that their children had benefited in many ways, rather than suffered, through their employment.

Partner's needs

The mothers were also concerned with being a 'good' partner. Their perception of their partner's requirements, and the impact of paid work on their meeting these, differed.

Some of the mothers emphasised the importance of their partner's need for support in their employment through providing them with a comfortable home environment. In other words, they tried to ensure that their own employment had as little impact as possible on this aspect of their lives. Mothers in the lower or intermediate status jobs whose partner earned more than themselves, in particular subscribed to the idea of a male breadwinner within their family, and felt that their own work was of secondary importance. Marilyn's situation illustrates this well. She was a secretary at the hospital. Her husband earned much more than her as a surveyor, a higher status occupation than Marilyn's:

"I don't have to work but I enjoy it. My husband is the breadwinner, and because he works very hard for us I feel that it's my duty to support him. He works very long hours to provide for us and so it's my duty to take care of everything at home.… The house, the kids are my responsibility and it's his to provide for us. He shouldn't be pressured here. I make sure the home is always tidy and comfortable for him so that the home is a place for him to relax."
(Marilyn, secretary, lower status, hospital)

Other mothers regarded their paid work as a feature of a 'sharing" relationship with their partner. This could be in relation to financially providing for their family or enhancing the quality of their emotional relationship. Mothers who were employed in lower and intermediate status occupations, and whose partner was on a similar income to them, often highlighted how they supported their partner through their own paid work. They spoke about sharing the financial responsibility of raising a family so that their partner was not burdened by being the family's sole economic provider:

"I do the mortgage, Council Tax and telephone bill, and [my partner] does the other bills. So it's pretty much joint."
(Fiona, nurse, intermediate status, hospital)

Mothers who had a similar sort of workplace or occupation as their partner, especially in intermediate or higher status jobs, stressed the ways in which their own work enhanced the nature of their relationship by creating common interests and giving them something to talk about:

"We're supportive of each other's work and luckily we're in a similar line of work. That creates a bond between us because we have that understanding of what each other's work entails. I'll ask him how was his day and then he'll ask me about my day and we support each other. If there's a particular problem we can discuss it. If he's had a bad day I can always tell. I'm like 'right I'll just sort the kids out and put them to bed and we'll sit down and talk about it'." (Sarah, director, higher status, accountancy firm)

The mothers thus saw their paid work either as separate from, or as contributing towards, meeting their partner's needs. We will be pursuing further the range of ways that the mothers could seek to keep their paid work separate from, or connected with, their partner relationships and family lives more generally in the next chapter. The fathers' own perspectives are addressed in Chapters 6 and 7.

Extended family and social relationships

The mothers also saw themselves as holding primary responsibility for facilitating and maintaining contact with their extended family, be it on the mother's side of the family or her partner's:

"I usually go round to see his mum at the end of the week and sometimes I ask her to go shopping with me.… It was his mum's 50th birthday two months ago and I organised a surprise birthday for her and invited all her friends, the family and all her grandkids. And [my partner] can't be bothered to get involved and so I had to organise it on my own." (Jeanette, secretary, lower status, accountancy firm)

"I come from a small family but [my husband] has a large family. Both of our families live in Wales and so they don't get to spend much time with our lot [children]. Usually on a Sunday we phone both our parents, to see how they are doing and give them updates on the children. Well, I say 'we' but it usually falls on me." (Sarah, director, higher status, accountancy firm)

The mothers' work, and their partners', limited the amount of time available for nurturing these relationships. However, as the quotes above indicate, the mothers in lower status occupations tended to live close to their extended family, saw them on a regular basis, and viewed them as a source of support. In contrast, the mothers in the higher/intermediate status occupations were more likely to live further away from their extended family. Consequently, the time they spent with their extended family was often restricted to specific periods of time, such as festive and religious holidays. This contact demanded more forward planning and organisation on their part.

There are arguments that employment-based friendships are becoming more important for women, with kin and neighbourhood ties concomitantly loosening (see Jamieson, 1998). Certainly, 'the social side' could be one of the reasons some mothers gave for going out to work, and work-based friendships could be important for the mothers:

> "I've worked in the NHS for over 20 years and at this hospital for nearly 10 years, and so all my friends I've met through work." (Sherry, manager, intermediate status, hospital)

However, we have also seen that, for the mothers working at the hospital, work could be closely linked into the local community rather than marginal to it (see Chapter 2).

The mothers also talked about social relationships they developed through: their children (meeting other mothers in the neighbourhood and through playgroups); friends and business acquaintances of their partner's; activity-based groups they attended (for example, aerobics classes); and, for the mothers in intermediate and higher status jobs, from training or studying at university. These friendships could act as sources of practical and/or emotional support, and could be maintained face-to-face, or through telephone or email contact. There was a distinction, however, between mothers who viewed their social relationships as:

- existing on the periphery of family life:

> "Friends are just not a priority in my life at the moment. I try to see them as and when I can, but that's not often. With work and everything I'm too tired to get the energy up to see them. Anyway, spending time with my family comes first and my friends understand this." (Simone, senior nurse, higher status, hospital)

- maintained as part of family life:

> "We've [partner and self] got the same friends from university that I would say are our best friends. We sometimes go on holiday together and invite each other up to spend Christmas and Easter. It's nice because we're all at a similar life stage, we've all got young children." (Cynthia, director, higher status, accountancy firm)

- or separate from family life:

> "You get so caught up with life, going to work, being the mother, the wife, blah blah blah, that it's easy to lose sight of who you are. My best friends knew me before [my husband] and the children came along. That's why they're important, because when I'm with them they remind me I have an identity outside of my family." (Barbara, auditor, intermediate status, accountancy firm)

These various conceptions of how friendships fitted into their life point towards differences in the mothers' sense of identity, to which we now turn.

The mothers' identities: embeddedness and individualisation

Our discussion so far in this chapter has looked at how the mothers viewed their children's and partner's needs, and their relationships with wider family members and friends. This raises issues around what this means for their identity. To what extent did they see themselves as embedded in their family life (whether nuclear or extended), or as individualised people who needed time and space for themselves outside of family and work commitments?

The occupational ethos of the workplace might be seen as important in mothers' embeddedness or individualisation. As Figure 4.1 shows, however, working in the individualised endeavour

of the accountancy firm did not mean that these mothers necessarily saw themselves in individualistic terms, separate from their family life, and working for the caring, communally connected hospital did not mean that they identified themselves as embedded in family relationships.

Figure 4.1 does show that the level of autonomy and control the mothers experienced in their jobs is a feature of embedded or individualised identity. There is a tendency for mothers in intermediate and higher status jobs, involving greater autonomy and control, to view themselves as an individual needing time separate from their family. Mirroring this, those in lower status jobs, with low autonomy and control, tended to identify themselves as embedded in family life and relationships. This was irrespective of their 'internal', perceived, levels of autonomy and control as against our 'external' assessments (see Chapter 3). These tendencies, however, are by no means clear-cut.

Nevertheless, Figure 4.1 does draw attention to the interesting issue that some mothers who

regarded themselves as firmly embedded in extended family relationships (mainly in lower status jobs) could also talk about having time and space for themselves. Their very embeddedness acted as a valuable resource for facilitating an individualised sense of self alongside this, in a way that embeddedness in a nuclear family did not.

We will now examine this complex picture in greater depth, drawing on the mothers' views on how important it was for them to have time for themselves outside of their work and family commitments.

Mothers whose identity was embedded in their family

Most of the mothers who defined their identity as strongly embedded in family life, whether a nuclear or extended family, did not believe it was important for them to have time for themselves. These mothers saw their family relationships and their identity as one and the same thing. Their 'self' was a mother and partner, who valued

Figure 4.1: Family embeddedness and individualisation

Key:
- ● Hospital – higher status
- ● Hospital – intermediate status
- ○ Hospital – lower status
- ■ Accountancy firm – higher status
- ■ Accountancy firm – intermediate status
- □ Accountancy firm – lower status
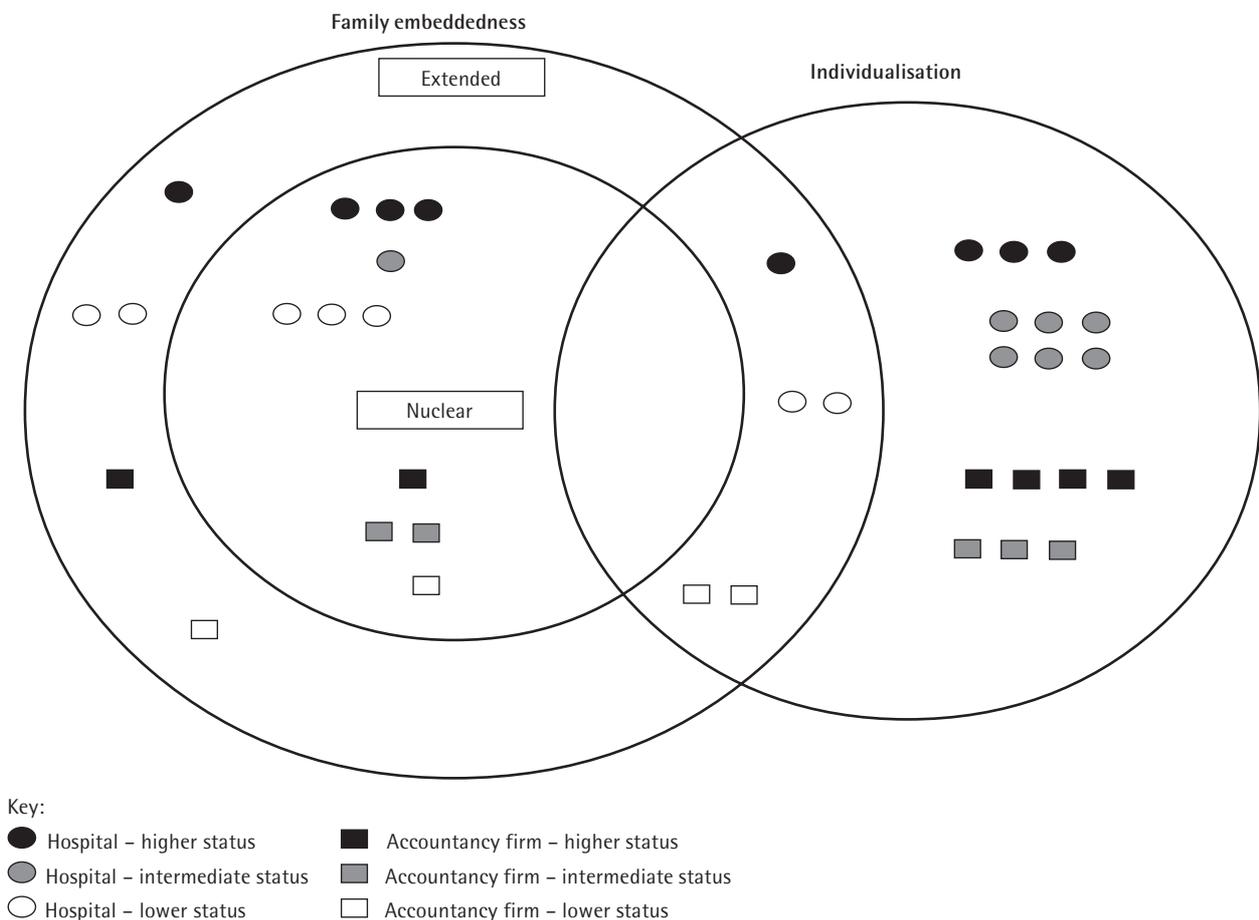
being part of a family – and being part of a family meant spending time, and doing things, together (see Edwards, 1993; Ribbens McCarthy et al, 2002). Thus they did not look for the opportunity or subscribe to the idea of spending time on their own without their family.

As we have said, overall there was a strong tendency for mothers in lower status jobs, both in the hospital and the accountancy firm, to see their identity as being located within their family:

> "I don't like going out knowing that my kids are not with me…. We may go up to any of my family's if they invite us up … or I don't bother to go out." (Denise, clerk, lower status, hospital)

To some extent this was associated with the nature of their work, the investments they made in their jobs, and what their jobs offered them and meant to them. Nevertheless, this is not a determining feature. For example, Denise (quoted above) had a lower status job, but saw herself as having a high level of autonomy and control (see Chapter 3). Moreover, as we can see from the quotes below, it was possible for those in higher status jobs with high levels of autonomy and control to also regard their identities as rooted within their family relationships – whether nuclear or extended – rather than having a separate sense of self:

> "I never take time for myself, I don't want to and I've never seen the need to do that. We do everything together as a family, even if it's just the five of us having a barbeque in the back garden. I couldn't imagine going off on my own and doing things by myself, I'd miss [my husband] and the kids too much." (Simone, senior nurse, hospital)

> "There's been times when [my husband] has asked me if I wanted him to take [our daughter] for the day so I can have time to myself but I always say no. We're a family and I like to spend all my time with them when I'm not working." (Riswana, senior manager, accountancy firm)

Most of these embedded mothers saw themselves as positively choosing to see their identity in this way. However, one mother's identity was somewhat reluctantly embedded in her family. This was because she was unable to create any

space or time for herself, given the daily demands of work and family commitments, which created practical difficulties and barriers to taking time on her own outside of her family:

> "Both our parents live in Scotland, and my brother lives in Australia, so I don't have family here as such to help me out. It would be nice to do that [have time for self] and I'm jealous of those women who can do it. I say good luck to them because if I had the choice I would do that…. I don't have the choice because I have to be with my family, because to get a babysitter costs money and I have to use that money to sort out the childminders for the time when I'm working." (Alison, clerk, lower status, hospital)

Alison's lack of embeddedness in wider family was probably a key issue in her ability to develop an individualised identity in relation to her family, as is evident if we turn to those who managed to do so.

Mothers whose identity was individualised

Mothers who saw themselves as having a more individual identity generally supported the view that they should have time for themselves outside of work and family life. It is unclear what precipitated these mothers' more individualised approach to their understandings of family relationships, and this is an area where more research is needed. As we noted earlier, this approach cut across the differences in working environments in both the hospital and accountancy firm. It also cut across hours of work.

It is also important to note that ideas that mothers who work part time are more 'home-centred' than those who work full time (Hakim, 1996, 2000) are not borne out here, as Table 4.1 shows.

Tendencies towards the mothers in higher status jobs, with more autonomy and control, having a more individualised identity were not clear cut either (see Figure 4.1). Nevertheless, it is clear that access to material and familial resources were important in supporting and sustaining such an identity.

Table 4.1: Mothers' embeddedness or individualisation, by full-time and part-time work

	Full-time employment		Part-time employment		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Embedded	13	62	8	50	21	57
Individualised	8	38	8	50	16	43
Total	21	100	16	100	37	100

The mothers subscribing to an individualistic approach had their identity sustained in a number of ways and this varied by social class. For instance, mothers in the higher status occupations, with partners similarly in higher status jobs, often bought in domestic help. This freed up time, which the mothers could devote to themselves:

"We're employing a whole workforce in our house. We've got a nanny, a cleaner, an ironing lady who comes every Tuesday and a gardener. That help I get is vital and I'm able to be somewhat flexible.… If I want to go off on my own to the theatre, or I sometimes come into London with my friends for lunch or dinner, I don't have to worry about the household falling to ruins because I've got that support there." (Sarah, director, accountancy firm)

Mothers in the intermediate occupations who aspired to an individualised approach were the most likely to experience difficulties in having their own personal time. In comparison with the mothers in the higher status posts, they could not necessarily afford to buy in childcare or domestic help to free up their time. In contrast to many of the mothers in lower status occupations (see below), they rarely had any family living close by who they could rely on for such support. However, these mothers did devise alternative strategies for facilitating and sustaining an individualised identity:

"I take the bus into work…. I don't mind the traffic, it suits me really because I get on at the first stop and I always get a seat. I'll just use that time to sit and collect my thoughts or I'll read, you know, one of those trashy novels like Jackie Collins or Jilly Cooper. [My husband] collects me from work so the bus ride in is the one moment in the day when I get to be by myself and I don't have to think about anyone else." (Sherry, manager, hospital)

"Ever since I was a teenager I've kept a diary and I've just started up with one again. It's about how I'm feeling and just express my own private thoughts. And if there's a particular thing that's bothering me it helps to get things into perspective. I would say I'm a caring person but I'm very selfish when it comes to my diary. It's the one thing I keep for myself." (Lauryn, nurse, hospital)

"Since I've been a full-time working mother I've always made an effort to have time to myself and I think I'd go stark raving mad if I didn't. It may be something as simple as having a bath. I use that as my own personal time. You know, I often do that. I lock the door, put my music on and light some candles. Everybody knows that that's my time and they have to leave me alone for an hour." (Barbara, auditor, accountancy firm)

In contrast, the mothers in lower status occupations often received help in the home from members of their extended family networks who lived nearby. They depended on these networks to provide time out for themselves. These mothers are particularly important in showing the complexities involved in the relationship between family and individual identity. It is too simplistic to suggest that mothers are either individualised or strongly embedded in a family identity. The mothers in lower status jobs were able to pursue time for themselves as a consequence of being strongly embedded in extended family relationships. Unlike the mothers in higher status jobs who purchased time for themselves, they could not afford to buy in domestic and childcare assistance. Instead, they drew on their extended family members to take time away from their family. Corrine is an example of the way in which an identity embedded in extended family can facilitate an individualised identity:

"I think it's important for mothers to have time to themselves and if you ask me then in my opinion it's not done enough by women. It's been easy for me because my mum lives across the road and my sister lives two roads away. [My partner's] parents I can get to in about five minutes away by car and so I'm spoilt for babysitters if I want to go out with my friends. I'll usually do that once a month, we'll go for a meal or the pictures. My mum also helps with the shopping. When she's doing hers she'll also pick up bits and pieces for me as well. It's been really good lately because I've joined this yoga class at the community centre. That's one thing I've been doing for myself where I don't have to worry about being a mum, girlfriend or employee of [the organisation]…. [My husband] doesn't have a problem with me having outside interests and friends because when he met me I was like that…. When it's my turn to go to my yoga class he comes home early from work so that I can get to my class for 6.30 pm." (Corrine, secretary, accountancy firm)

As Corrine's quote also shows, the mothers' partners were similarly important in their ability to pursue time for themselves and sustain an individualised identity, as well as in supporting or constraining other aspects of their home and work lives, as we will address in the following chapter.

It is important, however, to understand that, even if the mothers wanted and were able to free up time for themselves as an individual, rather than usurping obligations to family members, this was still firmly within the framework of their perceptions of themselves as responsible for meeting their children's and partner's needs. In this sense, family and family relationships were clearly central to how all the mothers viewed their lives.

Summary

This chapter has explored the mothers' understandings of their children's and partner's needs, their relationships with wider family members and friends, and what this means for their identity. It showed that:

- The mothers were committed to being there physically and emotionally for their children, whatever their hours of work. Although they acknowledged occasional difficulties in relation to the quality of time they spent with their children, for the most part the mothers regarded their employment as providing them with skills and resources that enabled them to better meet their children's emotional, developmental and material needs. They felt their children largely appreciated this.
- The mothers also felt responsible for meeting their partner's needs. Some saw their paid work as separate from this, and tried to ensure it had no effect on their ability to provide their partner with a comfortable home environment, especially where they earned less than their partner. Others regarded their employment as part of a form of sharing with their partner, as financial provider or as giving them interests in common to talk about.
- The mothers took responsibility for facilitating extended family contact, whether locally-based, as was mainly the case for mothers in lower status jobs, or more dispersed. Friendships could variously be viewed as peripheral to family life, part of family life and/or community links, or separate from family life.
- Within a framework of commitment to meeting their partner's and children's needs, mothers in higher and intermediate status jobs, with more autonomy and control, tended to see themselves as an individual who needed time and space separate from their family, regardless of their hours of employment. They bought in domestic support to help them achieve this. Mothers in lower status jobs, with low levels of autonomy and control, tended to identify themselves as embedded in family life and relationships, and devoted their time to this. Yet those who were embedded in extended family could also draw on this support to facilitate time and space for themselves individually.

The emerging picture of the mothers' variable understandings of the impact of their paid work on family relationships is further addressed in the next chapter, where we examine the dimensions along which the mothers could connect their work life into their family life and relationships, or attempt to keep work separate from home.

Mothers' perspectives on connection or separation of work and family life

Introduction

The focus of this study is on the impact of mothers' employment on their family life. It is, of course, important to recognise that this is a two-way process: family relationships and home life can also affect mothers' paid work. In the context of prevalent debates about mothers' labour market participation as individualising them, however, it is equally important to examine the effects of the mothers' paid work on their family. In this chapter, we do this by exploring the mothers' feelings about the extent to which they were connected to, or separated from, their work identity at home.

Work and home life can be perceived as two distinct entities, or as overlapping. Thus, for some mothers in our study, work and home were highly connected, while for others the two spheres were separate. We have classified mothers as 'connectors' when they considered that their work identity, work skills, their feelings about work, and their workplace ethos and practices affected their family relationships and home life. In contrast, we have classed mothers as 'separators' when they viewed work as having a limited influence on their home and family relationships. This chapter, therefore, explores the different dimensions of connection and separation in order to investigate the impact of the mothers' work on their family relationships, before going on to consider explanations for the mothers' different approaches.

Connecting and separating work and home

Mothers could either connect their family and work, or separate them. However, there were differences in the degree to which they were connected or separated. In other words, there was a continuum of connection and separation, and so we have identified both strong and weak 'connectors' or 'separators'. At one end of the continuum, mothers who were strong 'connectors' saw work as an integral part of their lives and of their self-identity, with work inextricably interwoven into their home lives. Weak 'connectors', while bringing aspects of their work life home with them, did not see their employment as a defining feature of their identity. At the other end of the continuum, mothers who were strong 'separators' regarded their work as detached from their home life and as peripheral to their identity. Weak 'separators' also regarded their employment as peripheral to their identity, but did feel that they brought aspects of their work into family life. As Table 5.1 illustrates, and in contradiction to claims that mothers who work full time prioritise their work identity (Hakim, 1996, 2000), part-time workers were more likely than full-timers to be strong 'connectors'.

We now turn to look in detail at the actual ways that the mothers connected or separated work and home life, and at the implications for family relationships from their perspectives.

Table 5.1: 'Connectors' and 'separators', by hours of work

| Work and home | Hours of work | | | | | |
| | Full–time | | Part–time | | Total | |
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
'Connectors':						
Strong	9	43	8	50	17	46
Weak	6	29	3	19	9	24
'Separators':						
Strong	2	9	1	6	3	8
Weak	4	19	4	25	8	22
Total	21	100	16	100	37	100

How mothers connected or separated work and family life

The mothers could bring work into, or keep it separate from, family life in a range of ways:

- items associated with work;
- transference of work ethos and skills;
- working at home;
- thoughts and feelings.

Strong 'connectors' integrated work into their home life to a much greater extent than did weak 'connectors' or 'separators'. So, a strong 'connector' might connect in all the dimensions listed here in addition to the defining aspect of self-identity that we discussed earlier.

As we will see in the following discussion, the impact of these aspects of how work could be connected or separated varied, with different implications for family relationships.

Items associated with work

Many of the mothers, both 'connectors' and 'separators', had items in their homes that were associated with their jobs and so were a constant reminder to themselves and others of their employment. For those in lower status jobs, these reminders tended to be restricted to specific items or events:

"The only thing that reminds me of work is my uniform that hangs on the back of my kitchen door. It reminds me that I have to wash and iron it so I'm ready for work." (Kamaljit, assistant, lower status, hospital – weak separator)

"Sometimes I forget that I'm home and when I answer the phone I automatically say 'good morning, [organisation], how may I help you?'" (Corrine, secretary, lower status, accountancy firm – strong separator)

For the mothers in higher and intermediate status jobs, however, the implications for home life could be more extensive in their impact on partners and children:

"I have an office but it's overflowing with paperwork. I'm slowly spreading out into the room upstairs that's supposed to be a room for the children to play in. I had to buy a new filing cabinet for extra storage space and I had to put it in this room so that means there's less space for them to play in. I do feel guilty about that, so we've been seriously thinking about moving to someplace bigger to accommodate our need for more space." (Catherine, senior doctor, higher status, hospital – strong connector)

Transference of work ethos and skills

As we saw in Chapter 4 in relation to their children, some mothers drew on their workplace ethos, and used skills they developed in the workplace and occupationally, at home. This was the case for both strong and weak 'connectors' and also for weak 'separators'. In contrast, strong 'separators' did not refer to transferring any work-based skills into their family life.

For those who did connect work to home in this way, the workplace ethos and concomitant skills often featured in their accounts. Importantly, such skill transfers were nearly always spoken about as having positive impacts on family life:

"The things I've learned at work take you through life and I can see it working at home. I'm super organised.… It's the only way I can juggle housework and time with [my son]. I write down everything that needs doing on my 'to do' list so that I can keep control of things. I tick things off as I do them. It's putting my time management skills to good use at home and I've found that it has really helped me to organise my life better." (Jessica, senior manager, accountancy firm – strong connector)

"I'm in the middle of renovating the house and certainly my job has worked for me because I drew up budgets, and I've kept an eye on the workmen to make sure that they're keeping to the budgets." (Barbara, auditor, intermediate status, accountancy firm – weak separator)

"What I do and where I work is basically about looking after people who are not well and who need help to get better. In nursing you can't just leave the work behind you when your shift is over, and you're always going to take that element of your work home.... If my husband is not feeling very well he's expecting me to become the nurse, but it's not only him because other family members also do the same thing. I'm seen as the 'rock' in the family, the one that has to hold everything together." (Simone, senior nurse, higher status, hospital – strong connector)

Simone's quote reveals that such connections of work into home life were not only made by the mothers themselves, but could be expected of them by family members. While the mothers largely saw transfers of skills from work to home as having positive implications for family relationships, however, such expectations might also place a heavy responsibility on them, as Simone implies. Moreover, if such mothers had separated their work skills from home life and 'failed' to meet these expectations, the ramifications for family relationships may well have been negative.

Working at home

Strong 'connectors' were particularly likely to take home pieces of work, and to work from home. This could be as part of managing their workload during the working week or outside of official work hours:

"It was becoming increasingly difficult to manage my time because I would spend most of my days at meetings and travelling to the different offices and yet I was expected to produce reports, usually on a short deadline.... I arranged it so that Friday would be my day to work at home so that I had that thinking time necessary to formulate policy responses for the

company." (Sarah, director, higher status, accountancy firm – strong connector)

"I usually take work home every week and I'll do some on Sunday night after I've put [my son] to bed. I'll have a glass of wine and I'll plan my diary for the week ahead, check timesheets, do my invoices and respond to my emails. You can't do everything at work and that's the way I can keep on top of things." (Jessica, senior manager, higher status, accountancy firm – strong connector)

Working at home tended to blur both the physical and mental boundaries between home and work. While not all the mothers who worked at home spoke of it having negative impacts, it is in relation to this aspect of connecting work and home that we begin to see some difficulties for relationships with partners and children:

"The agreement was that I would work 25 hours but it's just not humanly possible to do all that work and everything is sort of urgent. So I'm doing the extra hours by taking work home. Although I don't mind in theory, sometimes I feel it's impinging on home too much. I get lots of phone calls at home and that can sometimes be a problem, especially if it's term-time and you're trying to sort three children, it's chaotic, and I've got work on the phone. I can't concentrate on work and I don't feel I'm necessarily going to give the best advice and it's not fair on the children." (Esther, sister, intermediate status, hospital – strong connector)

"I will take work home with me when I have to. I might have a little moan about it but usually I'm happy to do that. That's where there's some conflict with my husband because he might come in and say 'work's over now, forget about it', but I go 'yes, but it has to be done'." (Diane, senior manager, higher status, hospital – strong connector)

Thus both the mothers themselves on occasion, and/or their partners, could resent time and attention spent working at home. We return to partners as a factor in mothers' decisions and ability to connect or separate work from home life later in this chapter.

By contrast, 'separators' often did not bring home any work, even in the face of the pressurised workload of higher, and some intermediate, status posts. Riswana provides a vivid example of this. In her attempt to achieve a work–life balance in the face of the accountancy firm ethos of prioritising client satisfaction, Riswana felt that she had to cut herself off from work, and so refused to bring it home:

> "I used to take work home but it was getting silly. So now I never take work home with me on principle. I give enough of my time to [the organisation], and during the working hours I make sure they and my clients get the best. My time at home is my own. I don't even take my briefcase home now because it reminds me of work and I want to keep the two very much apart. Yes, of course there are times when work gets stressful, and you can't help thinking about your day ahead, meetings I've got planned for the next day, but I'll try to do that at the end of the day. I make a list of activities, and that's a very effective way of me not thinking about work once I leave the office. I've spent lots of years training and I've worked ridiculous hours. Now it's my time, I want to get the balance between home and work, I want to enjoy my family without work becoming a factor." (Riswana, senior manager, higher status, accountancy firm – weak separator)

For women in lower, and some intermediate, status jobs, this aspect of a separation between home and work could be because the nature of their job did not require them to work at home:

> "No I don't take work home. I don't have anything to take home." (Marilyn, secretary, lower status, hospital – strong separator)

But mothers could also make a positive decision in this respect, not wanting work to impinge on family time at home.

> "I'm of the view that work shouldn't become something that takes over your whole life, and so to answer your question I'd say that no I don't take my work home with me. I don't think its necessary. If I have something to sort out for work I don't give it much thought at all when I'm [at home], I think 'oh, I'll worry about that

tomorrow' and push it to the back of my mind for the rest of the evening." (Barbara, auditor, intermediate status, accountancy firm – weak separator)

Barbara's remark about pushing work to the back of her mind at home also indicates the final way that work can be connected or separated from home life that we consider here – in the mothers' thoughts and feelings.

Thoughts and feelings

The mothers who were strong 'separators' of work and home often made a conscious effort not to think about work at home or to bring home any work feelings:

> "I don't have anything to do with work once I leave. When I leave work that's it, I don't think about it until I come in again the next day." (Gloria, assistant, lower status, hospital – strong separator)

Nevertheless, sometimes even strong 'separators', as well as weak 'separators' and 'connectors', and all of the strong 'connectors', could find it hard to turn off from work. They brought their feelings about work home with them, which affected their family relationships. This could be in a positive way, with a 'good day' at work meaning that the mothers felt happy and ready to engage with their children and partner. In the case of a 'bad day' at work, however, the mothers could bring home the work-generated stresses and strains. However much they might try to prevent it, their feelings could sometimes spill over and cause difficulties in their family relationships.

> "Work definitely affects my mood. If I've had a good day it puts you in a positive frame of mind, I'm more bubbly and will spend more time playing with the kids or I'll take them out for an extra treat, Macdonalds is a good one. But when I've had a bad day, I have less energy, I'm drained and tired, all I want to do is sleep, and so I'll want to spend less time with them. I'll give them a bath, read them a quick story and put them to bed. I'll be quiet for the evening and will not engage with anyone. I usually sit in front of the TV and tune out." (Lauryn, nurse, intermediate status, hospital – strong connector)

"If I've had a particularly bad day I go home and it's difficult to unwind, I do start to get annoyed with the kids sometimes. I don't want anyone to keep bothering me because I've had a bad day. But that's quite rare. I'll usually spend a few minutes on the phone to my mum about the day I've had, just to get everything off my chest and help to unwind." (Alison, clerk, lower status, hospital – weak separator)

"He can usually tell if I had a bad day at work. He'll go 'how was your day?' and I'll just grunt at him and not say much. If I had a completely awful day, then if I'm honest it does create a bad atmosphere at home because I'll be in this really black mood. Usually he goes 'I've had enough of this, I'm off to the pub', or he goes off to his mate's house and he doesn't get back home for hours, which then causes a big argument." (Pamela, secretary, lower status, accountancy firm – strong separator)

Explaining separation and connection

Our above discussion of the various aspects involved in how the mothers could connect or separate their work and home lives raises the question of why they took these different approaches. We have already demonstrated in Table 5.1 that this did not relate to whether they worked full or part time. At some points of our discussion we have indicated that the status of the mothers' jobs had some bearing, and have sometimes also referred to their workplace ethos. However, such factors did not operate in any deterministic fashion. Figure 5.1 illustrates the mothers' distribution along our continuum of separation and connection by job status and workplace.

The distribution of the mothers along the continuum shows that, generally, mothers in higher status jobs are more likely to be 'connectors', and in particular at the strong end, while those in lower status jobs are more likely to be 'separators'. There are, however, several exceptions. While, for the hospital, only mothers in lower status jobs are separators, some mothers in such jobs are strong connectors. For the accountancy firm, while all mothers in lower

status jobs are weak separators, so is one of the mothers in a higher status job. The mothers in intermediate status jobs have a more even distribution along the continuum where they worked at the accountancy firm, while those who worked at the hospital are all connectors. Behind this picture is a complex interaction of factors that have been running throughout previous chapters and this one:

- the mothers' identity;
- employment circumstances, including length of service, levels of pay, terms and conditions of employment including their job security, and education/training;
- workplace ethos and occupational skills;
- intensity of work/pressure of work; and
- job status and amount of autonomy and control.

Strong 'connectors' saw their work as an inextricable part of their self-identity, whether as a 'rational and logical' person in the accountancy firm or as a person with a 'caring nature' in the hospital (Chapters 3 and 4). 'Connectors' also tended to have spent more years in education and professional training, and without exception they had secure jobs, permanent contracts and worked regular, full-or part-time, hours (Chapters 2 and 3). Mothers in the hospital adhered strongly to the caring, community connective ethos of their workplace, as well as living in the community their hospital served, and had longer years of service (Chapter 3); and there were more 'connectors' among them (Chapter 3). Furthermore, as Figure 5.1 shows, across both workplaces, mothers in higher status jobs with high levels of autonomy and control in both workplaces were more likely to be 'connectors'.

In contrast, mothers who were strong 'separators' often saw work just as the means to an end – their wages, and work was not a central feature of their identity (Chapters 3 and 4). 'Separators' tended to have few qualifications, to be on short-term contracts, to have little access to extra workplace benefits, and to work anti-social hours (Chapters 2 and 3). Mothers in the accountancy firm adhered to the more individualised ethos of their workplace, lived further away from their work, and had shorter lengths of service (Chapter 3); and were just as likely to separate work from home as to connect work with home.

Figure 5.1: Separation and connection continuum
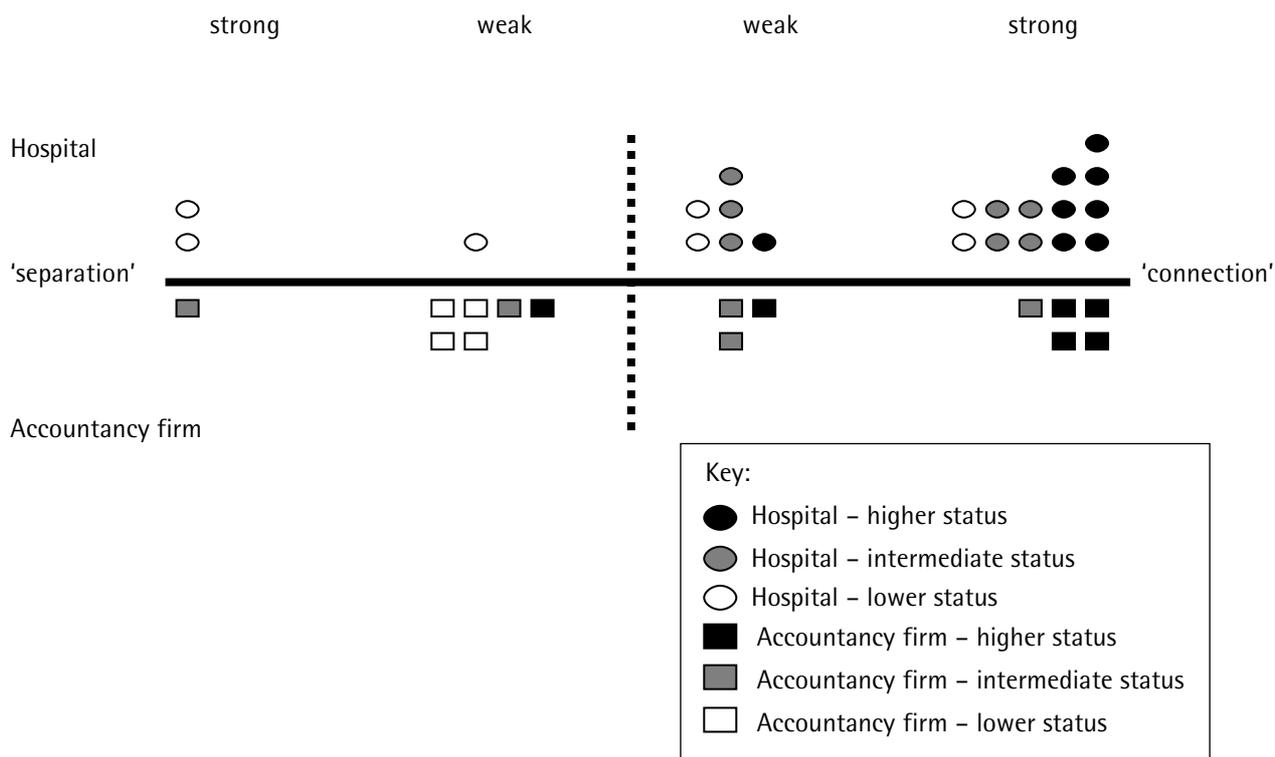
Most of the mothers did indeed demonstrate a combination of the factors we have identified as important in shaping their approaches as 'separators' or 'connectors'. In order to demonstrate the complex interaction of these factors, however, we now give brief case studies of several mothers who are located in places on our continuum that question some of the 'common-sense' aspects of individualisation and attitudinal choice ideas (discussed in Chapter 1).

Case study 1:
Denise, clerk, lower status, hospital – strong connector

As a mother in a lower status occupation who had not pursued education and training, and who was embedded in family life, we might expect Denise to separate her home and work life. However, she brought her work into her family life in many ways. Moreover, she brought her family life into work, sometimes taking her eldest daughter to work with her:

> "[My daughter] comes and sits with me, so much that she could run the [department] if she wanted to."

In part, Denise's strong ties to her work can be related her having a full-time permanent job. There are other factors contributing to her strong connection. Denise had worked at the hospital for seven years, and strongly adhered to its ethos of caring for the community:

> "I'm basically dealing with the public and I do have a good time at work because I feel I'm doing my bit to help them get better."

Moreover, as we saw in Chapter 4, although she had a lower status job, she felt that she had high levels of autonomy and control. She believed that her job encapsulated the hospital's ethos and that she was fundamental in enabling it to fulfil its mission:

> "I'm doing my bit for the hospital."

This belief was a key feature in her strong connection.

Case study 2:
Becky, secretary, lower status, hospital – strong connector

Becky, like Denise, was in a lower status occupation, so might be expected to be a 'separator'. She too had a full-time permanent job, had worked in the hospital for a similar amount of time (eight years), and had not invested in much education or training:

> "After I left school I did a secretarial course at college for a couple of years, then I got this job."

Unlike Denise, she saw herself as having low levels of autonomy and control in her job. In Becky's case, her strong connection of work and home life was related to the fact that the connection went both ways, but in a somewhat different way to Denise. Other members of her family were working at the hospital where she was employed. Indeed, there was a well-established tradition within her family of working in the caring professions, and adhering to the hospital's workplace ethos:

> "My mum is good friends with [a department manager] ... and she invited me to come in to have a look around the department and then I put in my application. I got the job.... Mum and dad have worked here for nearly 30 years.... My partner works at another hospital ... and that women I introduced you to was [his] mum. She works in the office next door and we're always in and out of each other's office. My other sister is training to be a nurse. In fact she's doing her nurse training here at the moment."

Becky's strong embeddedness in her extended family also enabled her to have a more individualised identity, with her workplace being a significant site of, and source for, her social life:

> "Work is also social for me."

Hence Becky saw her work as part of her identity and her family life because of these ties, and was a strong 'connector'.

Case study 3:
Barbara, auditor, intermediate status, accountancy firm – weak separator

Like Denise and Becky, Barbara worked full time. Unlike them, however, the factors associated with her employment might lead us to expect her to be a 'connector'. She had invested in training for her occupation, and had access to good terms and conditions of employment:

> "I made a lot of sacrifices during the time it took me to become qualified. I was really determined to achieve something in my life and I didn't want all those years I spent studying to go to waste."

Barbara's job was of intermediate status, and she saw herself as having a medium level of autonomy and control. She had worked for the accountancy firm for four years, and adhered to its client-centred ethos:

> "How I see [work] is I provide the best service to the best clients, so that has been my main focus."

Barbara, however, did not see work as part of her identity, taking on the workplace ethos only in respect of financial reward, as well as transferring her ability to draw up budgets to her home life. She was not totally embedded in family life, seeing herself as having an individual identity and needs. Nevertheless, as we saw earlier, she largely pushed work to the back of her mind when she was at home, and was a 'separator'.

Case study 4:
Riswana, senior manager, higher status, accountancy firm – weak separator

As a mother in a higher status position, Riswana might be expected to be a 'connector'. Although she now had a part-time job, Riswana had spent years in education and training for her occupation:

> "I worked very hard [at] university and then I did my exams … I happen to be good at what I do and so I have got quite far."

Her job was permanent, and she saw herself as having high levels of autonomy and control, with access to the accountancy firm's bonus scheme and other favourable employment terms and conditions. She had only worked at the firm for eight months, changing employer in order to work part time. Having worked for many years in accountancy firms, however, Riswana strongly adhered to the workplace ethos of individualised achievement and client satisfaction:

> "I like my job because I'm looked at as a valued employee. Working in the City, the best thing is that it pays, you know, the money is there, the wealth is there…. The thing that interests me the most, I suppose, is the changes in the market, industry changes and how these might affect the company and getting the best value for money for our clients."

Nevertheless, she was strongly embedded in her extended family, and as we saw earlier, cut herself off from work at home in order to achieve a work–home balance.

Case study 5:
Nancy, manager, intermediate status, accountancy firm – strong separator

Nancy was the only strong 'separator' in the accountancy firm, despite a number of factors that would lead us to expect her to be a 'connector'. She had a permanent intermediate status job with good terms and conditions, in which she had worked for 14 years. Furthermore, Nancy saw herself as having high levels of autonomy and control, rather than the medium level that would accord with the status of her job:

> "I like the job because I'm in control. I've been doing this for so long now that no one tells me how to do my job, I get on with it."

She worked part time, but had invested in education and training for her occupation. Moreover, she had an individualised identity, seeing herself as having a separate life and needs outside of her family (see Chapter 4). However, these factors did not lead Nancy to prioritise her work identity. Like Barbara, she adhered to the firm's profit-motivated ethos including through a focus on the financial reward that she gained from paid work. Moreover, Nancy's job involved dealing exclusively with temporary staff, rather than being involved in the mainstream of the firm, and this contributed to her strong separation of work from home.

These brief case studies have shown the complexity of the interaction of factors that we have identified as important in explaining the mothers' separation or connection of work from home life. There is, however, one more factor in the mothers' approaches.

Support from partners

The mothers talked about their partner as actively facilitating or constraining their approaches to connecting or separating work from home life and family relationships.

The majority of the mothers who were strong 'connectors' viewed their partner as supportive of their employment, and earlier in this chapter we saw that the mothers could feel that their partner (along with other family members) expected them to connect their workplace ethos and occupational skills with home life. The ways in which they regarded their partners as backing them, and thus the support for aspects of their connection, varied, however, depending on the women's social class and occupational status.

Mothers who were strong 'connectors' in the high and intermediate status jobs, emphasised the importance of talk, and the emotional support they derived from talking with their partners (see also Chapter 4). They particularly valued talking about their work and sharing work-related issues and ideas. Thus, in supporting these mothers' employment in this way, their partners also facilitated a particular aspect of connection:

"He's very supportive of the fact I do work and obviously he appreciates the added income ... I mean if anything, I think it actually gives us possibly sort of more to talk about because I've done my day at work and if I'd been at home all day with [my son] there would be less for us to talk about." (Elizabeth, senior officer, higher status, hospital – strong connector)

"He's fine about [my working].... He's very supportive, he encourages me, he gives me a lot of confidence. We'll talk about our work because he's in the same field so he understands the nature of my work. It's been nice to have that support." (Sarah,

director, higher status, accountancy firm – strong connector)

Nevertheless, the mothers felt that there could be limits to the extent of their ability to connect work into home life through talk. Their partner could show disinterest in the mothers' work as a topic of conversation:

"We have this arrangement where, after we've put the kids to bed and before we have our dinner, we each have 15 minutes to talk about our day. So he gives me 15 minutes before dinner to talk about my day and get everything off my chest. I know when to shut up because his eyes start glazing over." (Abigail, nurse, intermediate status, hospital – strong connector)

In some contrast, the mothers in the lower status occupations, whether as 'connectors' or 'separators', emphasised practical support from their partner. They too welcomed the chance and ability to talk to their partner about their work (see below). However, they valued their partners' help with the children and the housework more than talking.

"Since I started work, he helps me more because he sees that I'm tired after work. He does more shopping now, and sometimes he'll take the children out and does the buying of things for the children." (Kamaljit, assistant, lower status, hospital – weak separator)

"[My husband] changed his shift to the nightshift so he could help more with the children. He'll drop and collect our daughter from the nursery and when the other kids come home for school there's somebody waiting at home for them." (Denise, clerk, lower status, hospital – strong connector)

In part, this emphasis on practical support from partners was because these mothers could not afford to buy in this type of practical assistance, unlike the high earning mothers in higher status occupations. However, these class and occupational status differences in the valuing of talk in partner relationships among our sample also question aspects of notions of individualisation that stress empathetic communication as the predominant basis for

mutually satisfying relationships in contemporary society (for example, Giddens, 1991, 1992).

Although, as we saw earlier, some mothers themselves could actively choose to separate work from home life and family relationships, others felt that their partner constrained any connections and encouraged them to separate work from home. We have already seen how the mothers felt partners might resent them bringing work home. If they were generally unsupportive of the mothers' employment they could contribute to the mothers acting as strong 'separators'.

"He doesn't like me working, and he thinks I'm being selfish to want to work and asking my mum to look after [our son] when I'm working because he's only 15 months and it should be up to me to look after him. So I don't talk about work to him or my day at work, because that would just start an argument about me working." (Amy, secretary, lower status, hospital – strong separator)

"My husband wasn't too sure when I returned to work after maternity leave because he's very traditional and he thinks it's the man's role to provide for the family. He'd say 'what's the point of working when I earn enough for the family?'. He sees that I enjoy working and that I'd be bored at home all the time. He's okay about me working just so long as he doesn't have to hear about it and it doesn't affect the time I give the children." (Marilyn, secretary, lower status, hospital – strong separator)

In sum, where mothers were actual 'connectors', or wanted to connect aspects of their work with their home life, their partners could facilitate or constrain this. The only aspect where the mothers could feel that their partner might be unsupportive of, or unhappy about, them separating work and home, however, was in relation to expectations of particular skill transfer, as we saw earlier in the chapter. We examine their partners' own perspectives on the impact of the mothers working on family relationships in the next two chapters.

Summary

This chapter has continued our focus on the mothers' perspectives on the impact of their employment on family relationships, in particular how work and home can be viewed as distinct or overlapping spheres:

- Mothers could be strong or weak 'connectors' or 'separators' of work and home life. Along a continuum, strong 'connectors' saw their work as an integral part of their identity, and interwoven into their family life and relationships. Weak 'connectors' and weak 'separators', while bringing work home in various ways and to varying extents, did not see their employment as a defining feature of their identity. Strong 'separators' saw their work as distinctly detached from their home life and as peripheral to their identity.

- The mothers could bring work into, or keep it separate from, family life in a range of ways:
  - items associated with work;
  - transference of work ethos and skills. 'Connector' mothers largely viewed this as having a positive impact on family life, and felt that other family members could also expect them to transfer skills;
  - working at home. As well as enjoying working at home, 'connector' mothers themselves, as well as their partners, could sometimes resent time and attention spent on this. 'Separators' did not bring work home;
  - thoughts and feelings. 'Connectors' felt that this could affect children and partners in both positive and negative ways. 'Separators' made a conscious effort to forget about work at home.

- Generally mothers in higher and intermediate status jobs were more likely to be 'connectors', while those in lower status jobs were 'separators'. However, several of the mothers in lower status jobs in the hospital were 'connectors', while some mothers in higher and intermediate status jobs at the accountancy firm were 'separators'. Underlying this picture was a complex interaction of:

- the mothers' identity;
- their employment circumstances, including length of service, level of pay, terms and conditions of employment including job security, and education/training;
- intensity of work/pressure of work;
- workplace ethos and occupational skills; and
- job status and levels of autonomy and control.

- Partners were another factor in whether the mothers connected work into, or separated it from, family life. Where mothers were 'connectors', or wanted to connect aspects of their work with their home life, they saw their partner as facilitating or constraining this. Mothers in higher status jobs valued talk as support, while working class mothers in lower status jobs tended to prioritise practical help. Where mothers were 'separators', they saw their partner as supporting this. The only aspect of separation of work and home that they could feel their partner did not support was skill transference.

Having explored the mothers' perspectives on the impact of the impact of their employment on family relationships, we now turn to the partners' own views on this.

Fathers' perspectives on the impact of mothers' work: family needs, social relationships and connection or separation

Introduction

This chapter considers the views of the 30 fathers who agreed to be interviewed. We explore what they thought about the impact of their partner's work on family relationships, and in particular its effect on meeting their own needs, along with those of their children and wider family members. The chapter points up both similarities and differences in the mothers' and fathers' accounts, including where this relates to the mothers' separation or connection of work from home[1].

Fathers' views about family needs

This section draws on the fathers' views about the role of their partner within family life, addressing the father's own needs, their children's needs, and those of their wider family.

As other research has found (for example, Warin et al, 1999; Ribbens McCarthy et al, 2000), the fathers tended to have quite traditional views about the gendered division of labour within the

home. The data we present in this and the subsequent chapter show that they regarded the mothers as having primary responsibility for organising family time, domestic work within the home, and meeting the needs of family members, while they saw their own role largely as a breadwinner. The fathers held these views irrespective of whether they (18 fathers), or their partner (two fathers), was the main wage earner for their family, or they were on a similar income (10 fathers). Overall, the fathers felt strongly that the mothers' responsibilities at home should centre on responding to, and meeting, their own emotional and practical needs as well as their children's, and facilitating contact with wider family members.

Meeting the fathers' needs

The fathers, like the mothers, valued having a supportive partner:

"[My partner]'s very supportive of what I do. I can rely on [her], and I know that she's there for me, in my corner, one hundred percent. She's also a good person to be around, she's very good fun and she's always had the ability to make me laugh at myself. I find those qualities very attractive in her." (Justin, professional, partner of mother in higher status job, hospital)

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[1] This comparison is at the general level only. We have not linked the fathers' views individually with those of their partner. To do so would raise difficult issues of confidentiality.

"We've been together for 20 years now and she has always been my best friend and I trust her completely. If I want to know the truth, I know that she'll be absolutely honest with me. If I'm having a problem with a particular client, and talk it over with her to get her view, she may say 'darling have you thought about doing it this way?'. She's usually right more often than not. She'll tell me when I'm working too hard and if it's time to take a break, otherwise I would just keep on going. What I also like is that she's a good mother, I've seen different qualities to her since we had [our son] and I think she really comes into her own." (Christopher, professional, partner of mother in higher status job, accountancy firm)

Here we see some synergy between what the fathers wanted from their partner and what the mothers thought their partner wanted from them, which we discussed in Chapter 4. These quotes also echo some of the mothers' in relation to the sort of support they sought from their partner (Chapter 5). So fathers, like many of the mothers, could welcome opportunities to talk about their work and appreciated the way their partner was sympathetic towards their work. In the mothers' case, however, those in intermediate and lower status jobs had referred more to the importance of practical help from the fathers. The fathers, however, saw such domestic support as the mothers' responsibility rather than as 'help' for themselves, and so focused on the emotional side of their needs in their couple relationship (discussed further later).

Meeting the children's needs

The fathers' views about their partner's role in meeting their children's needs, firmly articulates traditional views about mothers' responsibilities. As for the mothers (see Chapter 4), the importance of the mother 'being there' for the children encapsulated the fathers' own beliefs about 'good mothering'. They similarly highlighted how their partner made time for their children, and met their children's material, practical and emotional needs, despite the demands of the mother's job. Indeed, they saw their partner as being responsible for meeting such needs, just as the mothers did (Chapter 4). They, like the mothers, also emphasised the issue of 'quality time'. Thus some of the fathers relied

on their partner to carry out the everyday parenting of their children:

"[My partner] has a very good relationship with the children and she's always there for them. Work does take up some of her time but for me this is not a problem because she'll spend lots of quality time with them on her days off or on the weekend, and she uses this time to focus on them to make sure that they have everything they need." (Michael, clerical, partner of mother in higher status job, hospital)

"I respect her as the mother of my children because I know how hard she works to make sure that they have all the opportunities we didn't have as children. She looks after me." (Frank, skilled, partner of mother in intermediate status job, hospital)

"... they're her priority in life. She's utterly selfless with the children. She always manages to make time for them.... After a long day at work she'll sit and talk with them about their day at school, give them their tea and spend time with them on their homework. And it will be her that reads the youngest a bed time story. She takes care of all these things and I'm lucky because it gets me off the hook. I'm lazy in that respect." (Brian, self-employed manual, partner of mother in intermediate status job, accountancy firm)

Meeting the wider family's needs

The fathers also saw the mothers as having a key role in maintaining and sustaining contact with their extended family and friends. They particularly highlighted friendships that were integrated into their family life:

"[My partner] is very big on family get-togethers. She's one for inviting everyone around or she'll arrange for us to go someplace. Last weekend about 15 of us drove up to the coast in a convoy of four cars. Luckily we all get on, and we do lots of family things together." (Terry, manager, partner of mother in lower status job, hospital)

"I've always said that a good quality of life is more important to me than a nice house or a nice car. I'd prefer to spend time with my family and friends instead of working overtime to get the extra money. It's good for the children too, that they can see there's a wide circle of people who care about them and they can go and stay the night at an auntie or uncle's house. We both have a lot of friends and we try and make the effort to visit them, or we will take it in turns to invite one of our own friends over to spend time with us." (Radcliffe, skilled, partner of mother in intermediate status job, hospital)

The impact of work on the meeting of family needs

The fathers' opinions about the extent to which their partner's work impacted on the family and the mother's capacity to meet the demands of family life varied. Their views were both positive and negative. However, there were no consistent differences between the fathers' views in terms of their social class, occupational status, or ethnic origin.

Many fathers thought that their partner's work was beneficial to the mothers meeting the needs of their families, and had a positive impact on family life. All of the fathers whose partner earned more than them had entirely positive views. In contrast, a couple of fathers felt that the mothers' work hindered their ability to meet their family's needs, and so had an overall negative impact on family life. In both cases, their partner was in part-time employment. Some fathers had more mixed opinions. This was fairly evenly distributed between fathers whose partner worked in the hospital and the accountancy firm (see Table 6.1), as well as across the mother's job status.

Table 6.1: Fathers' views of the impact of the mothers' work on meeting family needs

	Hospital	Accountancy firm
Largely positive view	10	9
Mixed views	4	5
Largely negative view	1	1
Total	15	15

We will now explore the fathers' views on the positive ramifications for family life of their partner's employment, and then examine their views of negative implications.

Meeting the fathers' needs – positive aspects of the mothers' work

The fathers identified a number of ways in which the mothers' work was beneficial and facilitated family and social life. A recurring theme was the way in which their partner's work enhanced the quality of their relationship together and, as a couple, with other people. For instance, they recognised the way in which work enabled their partner to develop and express aspects of her personality and self-identity that she was unable to do at home. Some felt that this also reflected positively back on themselves:

"She is very confident and I know that's to do with her working. If we're out with my friends or we have to attend one of my work functions I don't have to worry about [her]. I don't have to worry about staying by her side and holding her hand for the whole time because she can hold her own in all sorts of company. She always socialises well with my friends, friends of mine that I don't see often. They always ask her about the line of work she's in, or how's work going, so she'll sort of use her work to start up a conversation and fit in with people." (Alex, professional, partner of mother in higher status job, accountancy firm)

"When we go out then, yes, she'll often talk about work and the company. I feel it's her way of showing that she's not just Mrs Phillips but she's her own person in her own right. And I do get a sense of pride that's she not just Mrs Phillips and we're not joined at the hip.... I think it makes me look good to my friends that I'm with someone who's her own person and who has her own life." (George, self-employed professional, partner of mother in lower status job, accountancy firm)

The fathers also highlighted how, because their partner worked, they had shared and common interests which gave the two of them something to talk about. This was one of the benefits of working also identified by some of the mothers

themselves (see Chapter 4). Again, the fathers felt that their partner's work also generated interest among the couple's wider family members and friends:

"I couldn't imagine myself with a partner who chose to stay at home and who didn't have a life outside of our family. For starters what would we talk about? [She] is in a job that she enjoys and by talking to her you can see that she gets lots of satisfaction from it. It makes her attractive because she has something to say about herself, and she has a life of her own that is unrelated to her life at home." (Edward, professional, partner of mother in higher status job, accountancy firm)

"We're in a similar line of work and we can talk to each other about it. It makes the relationship interesting." (Kevin, manager, partner of mother in higher status job, hospital)

Finally, the fathers appreciated the income derived from their partner's work. Consequently, they were able to share the financial costs of raising a family, which meant that the burden of providing for their family did not rest solely with them. This was one of the advantages of working highlighted by some of the mothers themselves, in terms of 'sharing' (see Chapter 4). The fathers, however, posed this as 'help' that supplemented their own economic provision, rather than 'sharing', whatever their own level of income in relation to their partner's:

"Personally I'm happy that she's working and I can't understand it when men want their wives to stay at home…. Her salary helps us a lot, every penny counts and financially we need that money. I don't have that extra pressure of thinking that my wages are the only money coming into the house. I don't have to think how are we going to cope if the work coming in suddenly dried up, so [my partner] working means I don't have to worry about that thankfully." (Anthony, skilled, partner of mother in intermediate status job, hospital)

"[My partner] working is good for the family, because we can sit down together and plan financially for the future because we have two incomes to work with. The bulk of the bills come out of my salary but [her] money is used for extras, like our holiday, and goes towards buying things for the children." (Edward, professional, partner of mother in higher status job, accountancy firm)

Meeting the children's needs: positive aspects of the mothers' work

Fathers who regarded their partner's work as positively impacting on family life generally, also reported how it benefited their children and fulfilled their needs. They largely echoed the mothers' own views about the benefits of working discussed in Chapter 4. For instance, like the mothers, the fathers stressed the role of employment in the type and quality of relationship with their children:

"Because they know that mummy is not with them every hour of the day and cannot be there for them all the time, it stops them from taking her for granted and they really appreciate their time with her. And that time, I'm sure, is really special for them. Whereas I would imagine children who have their mums at home with them all the time take her for granted and they don't really appreciate her…. [The children] have the same relationship with her as they do with me, and that's something I never had with my mother. I took my mum for granted because she was always there for me. But the times I had with my father – and looking back as an adult I clearly remember those times together, because he wasn't there all the time for me and they were really special to me." (William, professional, partner of mother in intermediate status job, hospital)

The fathers also identified how their partner's work helped their children to develop useful skills, and furthered some of their developmental and social needs. In addition, they recognised the way in which their partner's work activities provided a positive role model for their children, and gave their children the opportunity to view another dimension of their mother's world, in a context unrelated to home and her mothering role. Once again, these positive aspects of work were similar to those cited by the mothers (see Chapter 4):

"[Our son] can learn from her going to work because she may do something at work that she can use with him at home. Just talking to [him] about her day at work really helps his language and communication and skills." (Christopher, professional, partner of mother in higher status job, accountancy firm)

"I think it makes her more interesting to the children to be around as well, and they can see that their mummy is not just a mummy and she has other different things that she does with her time." (Simon, professional, partner of mother in higher status job, accountancy firm)

"It's normal now for children to have your mother working, not like how it was for me when I was growing up. I'm sure when he's a little older and going to school, having a mum who's working and being the career woman will give him something to brag to his friends about." (Joe, manager, partner of mother in lower status job, accountancy firm)

The fathers also appreciated the way their partner's work helped to fulfil their children's material needs. The mothers' wages provided an additional source of income so that they could buy 'treats' and other nice things for the children. Again, this echoes the mothers' own views about the rewards of working (Chapter 4):

"I think the children sometimes think 'why can't mum be home more?' and I know that sometimes they are not particularly happy about her going to work. But I'm sure they understand that she has to work so that they can get extra pocket money and we can get them nice things for them at Christmas." (Martin, professional, partner of mother in higher status job, accountancy firm)

"As far as I'm aware [the children] are okay that [my partner] goes to work. They certainly like the extra treats her income brings." (Peter, skilled, partner of mother in intermediate status job, hospital)

Not all the fathers viewed their partner's work as a positive influence on family life, however. Some had primarily negative views about its effects. Even those fathers who, overall, positively valued their partner's work, identified a number of ways in which it posed difficulties for family relationships, in particular the mother's ability to meet their own and their children's needs, and relationships with wider family and social networks.

Meeting the fathers' needs: negative aspects of the mothers' work

One of the fathers' greatest concerns centred on the issue of time – again mirroring a general concern identified by the mothers themselves (see Chapter 4). However, the fathers' disquiet about their partner's lack of time was very different from the issues reported by the mothers. The fathers placed stress on the difficulties arising from the mothers' long working hours – even where they worked part time – in terms of meeting the competing needs of the fathers themselves in relation to those of their children, and domestic responsibilities:

"I don't discuss work with my partner, by the time I get home it's impossible. She's home from work before me, so by the time I get home she's so taken up with [our son], trying to spend what little time with him and get things ready for him for the next day, so I feel it's not fair to bother her. She doesn't have the time or energy to deal with anything I may want to say to her. Sometimes I do feel a bit neglected because she's constantly on the go when she comes home. She literally doesn't stop until bedtime and there's no time to sit down together as a couple like we used to do in our early days." (Kevin, manager, partner of mother in higher status job, hospital)

Kevin (above) felt a lack of time available from his partner, who worked part time, especially in relation to talking to her about his work. As we have seen above, this support was something that the fathers valued and expected from the mothers – it was part of being a 'good wife'. And although the mothers similarly valued talking to their partner about work, they also recognised that the extent to which they could do this was limited (Chapter 4).

The fathers could feel that the mothers' work, combined with other family commitments, meant that there were fewer opportunities for them to have time alone together. They were also

concerned about the emotional and physical costs to the mothers of trying to meet these competing demands, and the additional stress and pressures this placed on their relationship. Interestingly, this stress on the couple relationship was not mirrored in the mothers' accounts:

"Both people working and having small children means that you forget about your social life and spending time together as a couple." (Peter, skilled, partner of mother in intermediate status job, hospital)

"It can get quite tense between us because of work. It's difficult, I have to think more and be careful what I say, because we're both tired and it's easy to lose focus and a sense of perspective. We'll fight over petty and really silly things, like whose turn it is to do the washing up. And then it will escalate into something serious, and you know it's because we're stressed out about everything." (Robert, manual, partner of mother in lower status job, accountancy firm)

Meeting the children's needs: negative aspects of the mothers' work

Some fathers also were uneasy about the way in which the demands of their partner's work, and work-related stress, could result in their children's needs not being fully met. In particular, they emphasised how the mothers' long working hours (again, whether the mothers worked full or part time) could result in a lack of time to devote to the children. Again, the fathers' views provide some contrast with those of the mothers themselves. While the mothers stressed the importance of quality time with their children and observed that sometimes their children wanted to spend more time with them, the negative aspects of working were not the most prominent feature of their accounts of the impact of their employment on their children. Overall, they regarded their employment as either having little or a positive effect (see Chapter 4):

"She works long hours and I don't personally see the need for two parents to be working long hours. You know, you keep on hearing so much in the news about children going awry because there's no one there to

properly supervise them. It's something I'm worried about and [my partner's] long hours is something we're certainly going to have to address, because I feel that the children are not getting the proper attention and supervision they need." (Martin, professional, partner of mother in part-time higher status job, accountancy firm)

"She can get very irritable with the kids and seems to have less patience with them. I've noticed that when she's tired or she's running late in the morning because [our son] won't put his shoes on, or [our daughter] won't brush her teeth, she becomes very impatient and will be quick to snap at them. And I have to step in and take over. It's a case of her having to juggle too many balls in the air. I'd like to see her cut back on her hours because it's not doing the family or herself any good and the situation can't go on much longer." (Josh, professional, partner of mother in full-time intermediate status job, accountancy firm)

"[My partner] feels guilty when she tells them that she can't take them out today because she's got to go to work. The older ones feel it more. I'm not sure if the youngest understands that mum is not there. They're used to [her] saying 'no I can't take you swimming' or 'I can't take you to the park today because I have to go to work'. And they can't do the after-school activities because there's no one to take them. It's a shame they're missing out on the things their friends are doing." (Vince, manual, partner of mother in full-time lower status job, hospital)

As we will see in the next chapter, rarely did these fathers consider the impact of their work or their own long hours on their family, or how they could reduce the stress and pressure on their partner's time. They considered the problem to be primarily the mothers; thus, it was their partner who had to reduce her hours of work. However, the fathers could see themselves as supporting the mothers' employment in other ways (see Chapter 7).

Meeting the wider family's needs: negative aspects of the mothers' work

The fathers also raised similar concerns in relation to the mothers balancing the demands of work and nurturing and facilitating relationships with extended family and friends. This was an issue that the mothers themselves, especially those in higher/intermediate status jobs who did not have relatives living nearby, also recognised (see Chapter 4):

> "Having to juggle two careers means that it's really difficult to spend time with our family, and we rarely spend time with our friends. That aspect of life is sadly being neglected because there's so little time in the day to do everything with work, the children, and then finding the time to spend with your friends." (Kevin, manager, partner of mother in higher status job, hospital)

> "We never go anywhere and do anything now. Anytime I ask her its always 'no, I'm tired from work' or 'no, I've got to get up early tomorrow for work'. I've stopped asking." (Frank, skilled, partner of mother in intermediate status job, hospital)

The fathers' views about the positive or negative impact of their partner's work on their family life were, to an extent, related to the degree to which their partner connected or separated work from home. It is to these issues that we now turn.

Fathers' views of the impact of mothers' connection or separation of work and home on family relationships

As we saw in Chapter 5, we identified mothers as 'connectors' or 'separators', capturing the ways and extent to which they brought work into, or kept it out of, their family life. We pointed to a range of different ways in which they could do this, such as:

- the transference of work ethos and skills;
- working at home;
- thoughts and feelings.

We now consider the fathers' perspectives on these particular ways that their partner could connect work and home.

Transference of work ethos and skills

The fathers, like the mothers, could see the transfer of some the mothers' workplace ethos and occupational skills into the home as positive, and something they personally benefited from, including through learning from their partner's work experiences and knowledge. This transference, as we saw in Chapter 5, was viewed positively by the mothers, and they could also feel that family members expected this of them:

> "A lot of the issues [my partner] deals with have rubbed off on me. So when, at no notice, I was asked to be a personnel manager for six months, I stepped into the role quite easily because I had lived and breathed [her] work. And obviously [my work] has a huge diversity issue … and we spent a lot of time discussing the issues that arise from it. And I am able to bring ideas to my work and use certain skills that she has shown me." (Simon, professional, partner of mother in higher status job, accountancy firm)

> "I've got to learn the new computer system and she uses the same one at work, so she's helped me with that. We've gone through the manual together and because she's learned it at work, she's been able to help me learn it too." (Vince, manual, partner of mother in lower status job, hospital)

> "… she'll learn new things and try to implement them at home. After she went on an Excel course she said 'we're going to set up an income and expenditure sheet on the computer to find out where our money is going'. Once she tried to teach me to use the spreadsheet she set up for us, and I tried a couple of times to use it but I gave up." (Andy, professional, partner of mother in lower status job, accountancy firm)

> "… she's developed into a real people person and she can strike up conversations with anyone. I'm quite envious she has that skill to put people at ease when she meets them for the first time. She definitely gets

that from her job because [it] is a very people person occupation. It's clear she brings that behaviour with her from her work because when I first met her she was a very shy person." (Edward, professional, partner of mother in higher status job, accountancy firm)

While the mothers all viewed the transfer of workplace ethos and skills in a positive fashion, some fathers disliked the way their partner's occupational ethos entered their home life. The next two quotes from fathers whose partner worked at the hospital suggest that they felt that this aspect of their partner's connection to work was associated with the level of autonomy and control that she had in her workplace, and with her workplace ethos. It appears that their partner bringing home these aspects of her work could cause tensions:

"Even [my partner] would agree that she's bossy. It's because she's a manager, it's her job to boss people around. When she's at home it becomes second nature to her, she forgets she's no longer at work. I have to remind her that she can't get away with that behaviour with our friends. They won't put up with it and all it does is get their backs up." (Melvin, manual, partner of mother in intermediate status job, hospital)

"… she's used to working at a breakneck speed, so she gets impatient if things are not going fast enough, if the children are taking too long to eat for instance. I keep reminding her that she needs to slow down and remember that most people don't move at her pace that she's used to dealing with at work." (William, professional, partner of mother in intermediate status job, hospital)

Working at home

As we saw, mothers who were strong 'connectors' were often in higher status jobs, and were particularly likely to take work home and to work from home (Chapter 5). The fathers had rather mixed feelings about such activities. Some saw it as an intrusion into their family lives and resented it, while others quite liked it, or recognised that it was an inevitable part of their partner's job. Overall, in this respect, the fathers' views mirrored those of the mothers themselves:

"She spreads all of her papers on the living room floor and works here. They're overworked, she's on her feet all day and she doesn't get the time at work to do paperwork, and so she brings it all home. She makes a mess of the room and you can't find anything. I don't like that aspect of her work and I tell her that it's not fair that I have to put up with her working at home with all the papers." (Peter, skilled, partner of mother in intermediate status job, hospital)

"It's not so frequent that it makes you cross. But I think to myself that sometimes if you're tired and she needs help with a presentation, although it's not as though it's frequent where I get involved. If she has a presentation the following day, she'll do the draft, then use me as the audience, then redo it and then re-present it to me. While I'm happy to do that, it's sort of half past 11, and that can be a bit frustrating." (Simon, professional, partner of mother in higher status job, accountancy firm)

"I really don't have an issue with her working from home. Put it this way, I prefer her to be working here than at the office. It's nice to know that she's just upstairs working and the children know that she's around the house, even if they're not allowed to go and disturb her." (Edward, professional, partner of mother in higher status job, accountancy firm)

Thoughts and feelings

Mothers who were 'connectors' and those who were weak 'separators' sometimes found it difficult to switch off from work. They thought about their work once at home or brought their feelings about work home. This could generate good or bad moods depending on their day. The fathers felt the impact of these moods, and on occasions when their partner had a bad day, it could cause some tension in the household. Here, once again, the fathers' views on this aspect of connection mirror those of the mothers themselves (Chapter 5).

"I'll ask her 'what's wrong?' and she'll go 'oh nothing', but I can usually tell that something about her work is bothering her.

And if she's particularly close to a patient and she had bad news about that woman, she will not always speak up, but I know it's playing on her mind because she seems distracted and not focused on what's going on around her at home." (Solomon, skilled, partner of mother in intermediate status job, hospital)

"She won't have to say what happened at work because I can always tell if she's had a good day at work. For one, she's much more relaxed. Another thing is that she'll want to do more things with us. If it's a nice summer day like today, she'll take the kids to the park and we'll set up a barbeque in the garden." (Michael, clerical, partner of mother in higher status job, hospital)

"If it's a bad day, she's miserable and we have to tip-toe around her while she's slumped out on the settee in front of the TV. That can be quite annoying because we all have to suffer for her bad day at work." (Jonathan, professional, partner of mother in intermediate status job, accountancy firm)

Fathers' views on the mothers' connection and separation

In the same way that we identified mothers as 'connectors' or 'separators' in Chapter 5, we have identified the fathers as supportive or unsupportive of their partner's approach to connecting or separating work and home life (see Figure 6.1). The mothers in higher status jobs in both the hospital and the accountancy firm tended to be 'connectors', and as Figure 6.1 shows, most of the fathers supported this approach. Mothers in intermediate status jobs in the hospital also tended to be connectors, but in their case the fathers had mixed views of their approach or were unsupportive of their connection. Of the mothers in lower status jobs in the hospital, it was only the partners of 'connectors' who agreed to be interviewed, and these fathers were supportive of their partner's approach. Where mothers, in both the hospital and the accountancy firm, were 'separators', the fathers always supported this; no fathers were unsupportive of their partner's separation of work and home life.

Generally, the fathers whose partner connected work and home supported this connection. They recognised the importance of work for their partner and how it was a significant part of their partner's self-identity. They also acknowledged that their partner's work provided an additional, or in some cases the primary, source of family income:

"I really support [my partner] and I'm very supportive of her career because I can see that she loves it. She has also helped me. For instance her knowledge on policies have helped me." (Simon, professional, partner of mother in higher status job, accountancy firm)

Figure 6.1: Fathers' views of mothers' connection or separation of work and home
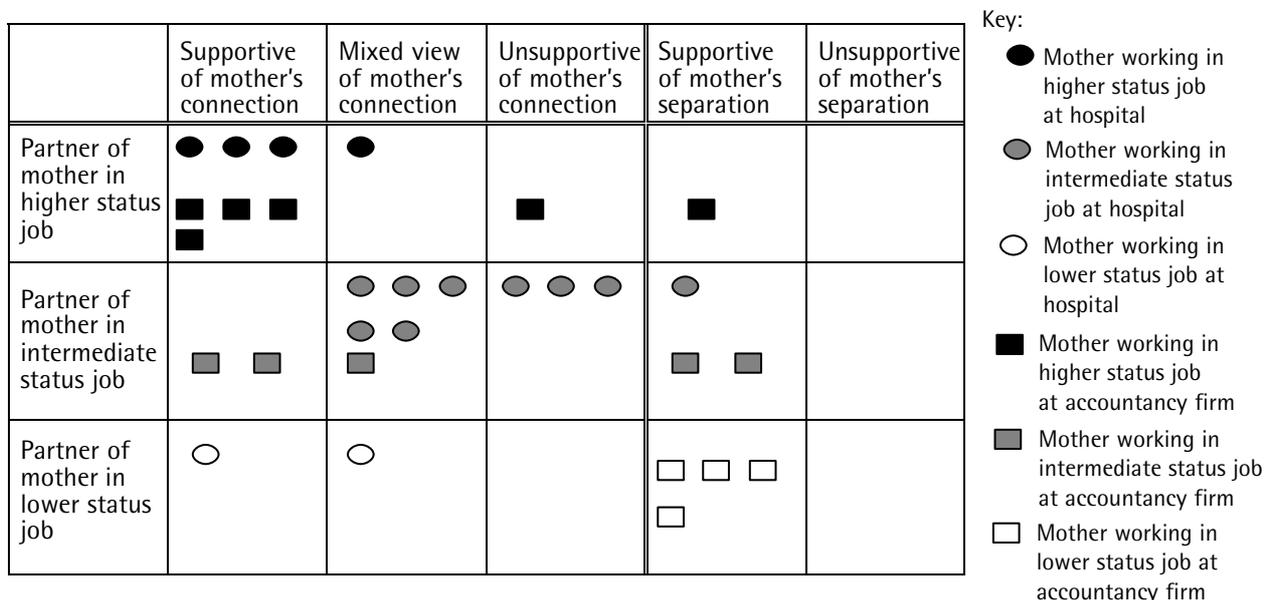
"I like her independence that her work brings. Obviously there's the financial reward. She enjoys what she does and so it makes for a happy home. I'm proud of her and I am happy to tell my colleagues what she does for a living." (Alex, professional, partner of mother in higher status job, accountancy firm)

However, as Figure 6.1 shows, a couple of fathers with a partner working in higher posts in both the hospital and accountancy firm, and all the fathers with a partner working in an intermediate status job in the hospital, either were ambivalent about or did not support their partner's connection to work. This was primarily because they felt that the mothers' work interfered too much with their domestic lives. They highlighted how their partner's job made it difficult for her to meet their family's needs. The mother's work, therefore, was viewed as having a negative impact on family relationships:

"I think that she works hard enough as it is, and her job can sometimes take over the family because she's too involved with it. I don't feel that she's thinking about us, as much as she could be. I would like her to be less involved with work." (Laurence, manager, partner of mother in higher status job, hospital)

"I'm not sure if she's always got her priorities right. There are times when I think she puts her work before family commitments and that's not right. Work is always there and nobody is indispensable, and it's difficult to get that message across to [her]. Surely attending your child's first sports day is more important than attending a meeting? We both have to work on getting the balance right…. Personally I would like it if she spent less time concentrating on work but she doesn't like to hear that." (Martin, professional, partner of mother in higher status job, accountancy firm)

For the mothers working in intermediate status jobs in the hospital in particular, there was evidence that the mothers' workplace culture and their occupation was an issue in the fathers' ambivalence or lack of support for their partner's connection to work. For example, fathers whose partner was a nurse tended to have mixed views about their partner's connection to work. On the

one hand, they supported and were proud of their partner's career. On the other hand, these fathers felt that the nature of their partner's job in a caring profession along with the workplace ethos of community service, meant that their partner invested too much emotionally in their job, which in turn could have a negative impact on family relationships:

"I'm really proud of what she does, I'll boast to my friends. Sometimes it can all get a bit much, because she hasn't got that type of work where you leave the office and switch off for the day. She has to deal with life and death situations every day and you can't just turn those emotions off. It's very emotional work and it drains her, I feel. She doesn't say much but you know when she's had a bad time of things because she'll be quiet for the night. That aspect I don't like, because it's not fair that we have to suffer." (Radcliffe, manual, partner of mother in intermediate status job, hospital)

"She's a wonderful and caring person and no doubt her job brings that out of her. She's good at it and I like that she's happy. But sometimes. It was last month I think, there was this patient that she got very attached too and she'd come home and talk about her. Then when we went away for the week, the patient suddenly died without warning. That was very hard for [my partner] and she'd come home and cry. That went on for about three days and I hated it. I hated to see her so upset and I couldn't do anything about it, and I hated her job for doing that." (Anthony, skilled, partner of mother in intermediate status job, hospital)

The fathers whose partner worked in the accountancy firm did not have to encounter these sorts of issues of community and connection. Therefore, they could be more supportive of their partner's connection to work as it did not enter into the home in this manner.

All the fathers whose partner separated work and home supported this approach – none were unsupportive. Some actively disapproved of mothers in general connecting any aspects of their work to their home life because they believed it would negatively affect family

relationships. Thus their support of their partner's separation, whether she worked at the hospital or the accountancy firm, reinforced traditional gender constructions about the role of women, and in particular notions of 'good mothering', where women are regarded as responsible for meeting family needs:

"I don't generally feel mothers should bring work home because, as it is, they don't have enough time. Luckily for me [my partner] feels the same way that I do. I think women have more chores to do than men do. I think we can get away without doing things. I think if they're bringing work home it would create a lot of friction around that and spending time, good quality time with their family, especially when you've got small children. So I'm very happy that [my partner] doesn't bring work home and she leaves all work matters at the office." (Safar, self-employed professional, partner of mother in higher status job, accountancy firm)

"[My partner] doesn't let anything interfere with her home life, so work is not something that concerns her at home. I agree with that." (Robert, manual, partner of mother in lower status job, accountancy firm)

As we saw in Chapter 5, where their partner held views such as these, the mothers could make efforts not to connect any aspects of their work to their home life. This might suit their own views, as 'separators' themselves, but in some cases it prevented them from making connections in some respects where they might have wished to, such as talking about their work. In such cases, this suggests a discontinuity and tension between the way the fathers saw their partner, and the way the mothers saw themselves. For instance, while the fathers may well have seen their partner's identity as embedded in family life, the mothers may have regarded themselves as having individualised aspects to their life. In turn, this has implications for the way that the fathers considered the mothers' work as impacting on family relationships. The considerations underlying their assessments of their own work on family life, however, are quite different. We turn to these issues in the next chapter.

The extent to which the fathers were supportive of their partner's connection or separation of work and home varied. Fathers whose partner connected work and home, where the mothers were in high status jobs, largely saw this as having a positive effect on family life and supported it. Fathers whose partner worked in an intermediate status job, in the hospital in particular, had mixed views of their partner's connection or were unsupportive, feeling that it had negative implications for the mother's ability to meet her family's needs. None of the fathers whose partner was a 'separator' of work and home thought that their partner's approach had a negative effect on family life.

Fathers who were not interviewed

As noted in Chapter 1, a third (seven) of the partners of mothers working in the hospital were not willing to be interviewed. Four were partners of mothers in higher status jobs who were all 'connectors' (three strong and one weak), while three were partners of mothers in lower status jobs who were all 'separators' (two weak and one strong). In the light of the fathers' perspectives presented in this section, it may well be that the partners of mothers who took a connective approach to work and family life felt that they did not wish any further aspects of their partner's work, in the form of this research, to enter their home life, given the connective community caring ethos of the hospital. The partners of the mothers who were 'separators' all supported this approach of separating work from family life, and in this case it appears to have meant excluding researchers too.

Summary

This chapter focused on the fathers' views, and explored what they thought about the impact of their partner's work on family relationships, in particular meeting the fathers' own needs, along with those of their children, and wider family members. It also examined the extent to which the fathers supported their partner's connection to, or separation from, work:

- Many fathers thought the mothers' work was beneficial and facilitated their meeting the family's needs. Some had more mixed opinions. A couple of fathers believed their partner's work posed difficulties and had a negative impact on family life.

- Most fathers felt that their partner's work had a positive effect on family relations because it:
  - enhanced the quality of their couple relationship by giving them shared and common interests to talk about with each other, and reflected well with other family members and friends;
  - relieved them of having the sole financial responsibility for their family;
  - met their children's needs by helping them developmentally and socially, and by providing additional income to buy 'extras' for the children.

  These were benefits that were also identified by the mothers themselves.

- The reasons some fathers thought that their partner's work could be detrimental to family relationships were because:
  - they felt that their partner worked long hours (whether this was full or part time) and thus did not have enough time to devote to the family and fulfil competing demands;
  - they felt that time alone with their wife was curtailed, while their children also missed out.

  Their views were in some contrast to the mothers, who largely evaluated their work as having positive implications for family life.

- Fathers usually agreed with 'connector' mothers' approach to work and family life, but partners of mothers in intermediate status jobs in the hospital had mixed views of, or did not agree with, their connective approach. No fathers disagreed with the mothers' separation of work and home.

- Traditional gender constructions about mothers' responsibility for family life and fathers' breadwinner role still underpin understandings of the impact of mothers' employment on family relationships.

Fathers' perspectives on the impact of their work on family relationships

Introduction

This report is concerned with the impact of mothers' work on family relationships. In Chapter 6 we focused on the fathers' views on this. In this chapter we continue with our focus on the fathers, but place their views in the context of their perspectives on their own work, and how they think it affects their family relationships. We continue to explore continuities and discontinuities between the fathers' and mothers' accounts of what family means to them, and their own role in meeting the needs of family members.

Fathers' perceptions of their responsibility for family needs

This section explores the fathers' views about family needs that they feel they are specifically responsible for meeting, and how their work either facilitates or hinders this.

Family purpose

All of the fathers stressed the significance of family in their lives. Their family gave them a strong sense of who they were, and provided them with a sense of purpose in life. As we have already seen in Chapter 6, underpinning their understandings of what family is about were traditional gender constructions of the male 'breadwinner' and the female domestic/family carer. In this way, their family – and specifically

having children – also motivated the fathers to work, and work harder. It encouraged them to achieve:

"Once you have a family, you get a sense of responsibility. When [my partner] told me she was expecting I thought 'crikey, I'd better get serious about the career'. You've got this huge sense of responsibility to look after your family and so it just encouraged me to work harder and take my career seriously because I wanted that promotion." (Peter, skilled, partner of mother in intermediate status job, hospital)

"Family life is what motivates me in what I'm doing. I'm building this business from scratch because of my love for my family and the desire to give them a good life." (Safar, self-employed professional, partner of mother in higher status job, accountancy firm)

"I do it for my family. They give me that sense of purpose to start my own business. I get up at 5.30 am every day to go to work and the reason I'm doing it is for them." (Melvin, self-employed manual, partner of mother in intermediate status job, hospital)

Children's needs

The fathers regarded the key ways that they could meet their children's needs were through providing for them financially, giving them emotional security, and finding time to be with

them. In many senses, their views were similar to those of the mothers, including the importance of 'being there' for their children (Chapter 4). We now look more closely at these aspects of children's needs, and how the fathers responded to them.

Financial provision

As we have seen earlier, the fathers felt that their family provided them with a reason for working, with financial provision to meet children's needs being a key aspect of this:

"I want to make sure that my children don't go without because I had a very tough childhood. All the long hours I work is for them, so they can have the nice things and they don't go without." (Solomon, skilled, partner of mother in intermediate status job, hospital)

"Children don't come cheap. You're committing yourself to a minimum of 18 years investment. That's a lot of money but you don't begrudge spending it, if you know it's going to make them happy or they're going to benefit from it." (Nathan, professional, partner of mother in intermediate status job, accountancy firm)

Emotional security

While some of the fathers had questioned the mothers' ability to 'be there' for their children as well as hold down a job, the fathers largely did not question their own hours of work in the same way. Rather, they believed that they were meeting their children's needs for emotional security alongside their role as financial provider:

"They need a good home environment where they feel comfortable. We will support them in everything they do. They should know I'm there for them, to come and talk to me about anything." (Michael, clerical, partner of mother in higher status job, hospital)

Safar (quoted next) did discuss hours of work and believed that because he worked from home, his long hours were offset by his physical presence:

"I see some men leave the house very early in the morning, and they don't come home until late. They're missing out on that emotional bond with [their children]. I'm there for [my daughter]. I get to spend time with her every day. I'm close to her because she sees me all the time, and so now we've formed a close bond." (Safar, self-employed professional, partner of mother in higher status job, accountancy firm)

Another interesting difference between the fathers and the mothers was that the fathers did not talk about involving their children in their work as a means of developing emotional links with them (for the mothers see Chapter 4).

Being and playing with children

The fathers, like the mothers, emphasised the importance of quality time. Unlike the mothers, however, they particularly stressed their desire to find the time to play with their children. Often, the fathers identified specific times during the day that were especially important for them to be with their children, such as breakfast time, bedtime and bath-time. In this sense, like the mothers, they 'fitted' their children's need for their physical presence to match their own availability:

"The best time of the day for me is when I play with them before they go to bed. I have made a conscious decision to always leave work at a certain time every day so that I'm home before their bedtime, I can have that time with them. It's important to make time for your children now because they grow up so fast." (Laurence, manager, partner of mother in higher status job, hospital)

"I don't see them as much as I like because they're in bed by the time I get home. So the weekend is generally my time with them. We'll spend our time playing games, or we go and fly the kite I made for them. If it's a really nice day, I may take them out on my own for the day to Hampton Court or the seaside." (Josh, manager, partner of mother in higher status job, accountancy firm)

Education and development needs

The fathers in higher occupational groups tended to stress the value of providing their children with a good education through their financial provision. In contrast to the mothers' accounts, they were much less likely to identify a role as meeting their children's educational or developmental needs, for instance by teaching them new skills, or supervising their homework or extra-curricular activities:

"You want them to have a good life.... I work to provide them with a nice home, nice clothes and a decent education." (Edward, professional, partner of mother in higher status job, accountancy firm)

"A good education costs money. If I want to work a 9 to 5 job then I get a 9 to 5 salary. They deserve a decent start in life. It's my job to ensure they get it, and I can't afford to give them a good start on a poor salary. I know that may be wrong, and not everyone agrees with me, but that is very much the culture we live in." (Martin, professional, partner of mother in higher status job, accountancy firm)

Overall, the fathers' accounts, unlike the mothers, did not include any discussion of their children's views about them working. Only one father considered what his work meant to his children but this was in the context of understanding how both he and his partner working may affect his children:

"Sometimes [the children] say they don't want you to go to work, irrespective of the job, it's just that any job takes you away from them. I do occasionally get feelings of guilt around both of us working." (Simon, professional, partner of mother in higher status job, accountancy firm)

In other words, within the fathers' accounts there were unquestioned assumptions about fathers working, and the notion of a male breadwinner.

Mothers' needs

All of the fathers felt that they supported their partner in the home, helping them to meet domestic needs and care for their children. They highlighted the practical and emotional support they provided. In fact, they could feel that they gave more support to their partner than they were given credit for:

"I'm always doing housework but [my partner] never notices what I do around here. I wash the dishes and wipe down all the surfaces in [the kitchen]. I don't like to hoover and I hate ironing, so I don't do that but I polish." (Safar, self-employed professional, partner of mother in higher status job, accountancy firm)

This discrepancy is, in part, related to the fathers' and mothers' slightly different understandings of what constituted support, as we discuss below.

Practical support

As we saw in Chapter 4, the mothers in intermediate and lower status jobs valued the fathers' support with the practical tasks of everyday family life, and it was obvious that some fathers also felt that this was a key contribution that they made:

"My daughter is used to me being with her more because it's me who takes her to nursery and then collects her. I'll stay with her until her mother gets home. I'm at home during the day and so I mostly cook the dinner and make sure the house is cleaned and kept tidy. I do the washing and the hoovering." (Vince, manual, partner of mother in lower status job, hospital)

In comparison with the mothers' accounts, however, most of the fathers had a much broader understanding of what constituted practical support. For them, practical support could similarly involve help with childcare and housework, but it also included taking responsibility for other chores such as gardening, DIY, and maintaining their partner's car. It was these latter tasks that were absent from the mothers' accounts of the type of help they valued from their partner in the home (Chapter 5). This is probably because, although such contributions were important, the tasks involved were not part of the everyday running of a household, or the daily routine of family life:

"I'll occasionally cook, but if [my partner] cooks, then I'll usually do the washing up after dinner, if she hasn't got around to doing it. I'm always tidying up and packing away the children's toys into this box we keep behind the sofa. What else do I do? I think that's it, other than I'm responsible for the garden. She doesn't know how to use the mower, so it's me who usually does the lawn. If I'm not watching the rugby, I might go shopping with them." (Peter, skilled, partner of mother in intermediate status job, hospital)

"I'm interested in DIY and do enjoy doing DIY things at home. I help with childcare, and on my day off or if I'm on a late shift I take [my son] to nursery." (Alex, professional, partner of mother in higher status job, accountancy firm)

Emotional support

The fathers' understanding of the emotional support they provided was similar to the mothers' (Chapter 5), and what they wanted for themselves (Chapter 6), involving talking with their partner and having shared and common interests. They did not refer to the limits to this communication that the mothers themselves perceived. However, the fathers, particularly in skilled and manual occupations, also mentioned other, less noticeable aspects of how they provided emotional support, such as watching television together, and making cups of tea for their partner when she was tired or upset:

"We're very supportive of each other. I'm very supportive of what she does at home with the children and in her career. I provide a shoulder for her to cry on." (Edward, professional, partner of mother in higher status job, accountancy firm)

"If she's had a bad time of it at work, and she gets home and [the children] are acting up and being difficult, I say 'right, go and sit down and let me take over here'. I'll spoil her and make a fuss of her by taking her up lots of cups of tea and chocolate biscuits." (Anthony, skilled, partner of mother in intermediate status job, hospital)

"I'm there with her most evenings and I like to keep her company. Most times we just watch TV, or we rent a DVD and we'll watch that together." (Brian, self-employed manual, partner of mother in intermediate status job, accountancy firm)

Fathers' work and its impact on family relationships

In this section we consider the fathers' views on their work and its impact on family life, and continue to compare the fathers' experiences with those of the mothers discussed in previous chapters.

The role of work for fathers

Most of the fathers enjoyed their work and found it satisfying. As for the mothers (Chapter 3), work was also important for the fathers in terms of socialising, and in giving them a sense of identity and status especially for the fathers employed in professional and managerial occupations:

"I define my identity around my work and being a husband and a father." (Justin, professional, partner of mother in higher status job, hospital)

"My job tells people something about the type of person I am. I'm very competitive, I like a challenge, and I enjoy being my own boss and I have worked very hard to get where I am today." (Edward, professional, partner of mother in higher status job, accountancy firm)

However, some fathers, particularly in skilled or manual occupations but also some professionals, viewed their work solely as a means to an end – a way of financially providing for their family:

"I don't find it challenging and I find the travelling hard going but it pays well and it allows us to have a reasonable comfortable lifestyle, so really I'm stuck." (Josh, manager, partner of mother in intermediate status job, hospital)

"I ended up [in my job] by default. I really wanted to be a teacher but the money wasn't good as a trainee teacher. We had just started a family and so we needed more money coming in." (Anthony, skilled, partner of mother in intermediate status job, hospital)

Whether the fathers saw their work as personally fulfilling or as a means to an end, the role of paid employment in their life was inextricably linked with financially providing for their family, and their children especially.

The impact of fathers' employment on family relationships

Although most of the fathers valued their employment, especially as a means of meeting the needs of their children, they recognised how it could also cause difficulties in meeting other of their family's needs. In particular, they highlighted how their work impacted on family relationships because it limited the amount of time they could spend with their family, especially their children. In other words, their work meant they could not always be the 'new' involved, child-centred father (for example, Burgess, 1998). Some resented this, and really wanted to be with their children more, and begrudged the fact that they could not. Other fathers argued that their partner was in a better position to negotiate their time and balance work and family life because, generally, mothers were not bound by societal expectations to act as the 'breadwinner'. As a result, they felt that their partner had greater flexibility and choice in deciding their working hours:

"I would love to spend my time with [my son] and I'm envious that [my partner] works part time so she has that extra time with him. I only get the weekends with him because by the time I get home from work he's in bed and I see him briefly for breakfast. Unfortunately, I don't have that luxury in my work that I can decide to work four days a week. [My partner] had the safety net in me, so that she had that option to reduce her hours if she wanted to. But we depend on my salary to pay the mortgage and it's not an option for me, I have to put the hours in so we can have a decent standard of living." (Kevin, manager, partner of mother in higher status job, hospital)

"I still think women get a fairer deal by employers when its comes to family because they recognise that it's difficult for working mothers to balance the two and they would want more time to be with their family. Employers give them more leeway, and they can be more flexible in how they work. There are lots of times when I really want to be at home and be around more for [our children] but I can't without losing money. Employers don't recognise that working fathers have the same need as working mothers. The system is very unfair for fathers." (Peter, skilled, partner of mother in intermediate status job, hospital)

Generally, it was the men in professional and managerial occupations with partners in similar higher and intermediate status jobs who expressed such views. In other words, the problems around time were most acute among dual career couples. These fathers worked long hours and tended to travel long distances to work:

"I leave home at 5 am so I can get the 5.27 train to London. Most days I try to get home for 8 but that's not always possible if I have a late meeting. I work incredibly long hours but that's part and parcel of the job. I think success in your career is dependent on what you actually deliver and what you put in and it's not just a 9 to 5 job. Of course, the downside is I rarely get to see my kids and the wife other than the weekends but if we want to have a good future then that's the sacrifice I've got to make." (Martin, professional, partner of mother in higher status job, accountancy firm)

By contrast, fathers in skilled and unskilled manual occupations rarely experienced the same sorts of time difficulties as those in managerial and professional occupations. They tended to work shorter hours, closer to their home, and had more flexibility in fitting their working patterns around their partner's working hours. This meant they could spend more time with their children:

"Night work suits me and I'm able to spend time with my daughter and watch her grow up. I can also help [my partner] with her

other kids because I'm at home when they come in from school, and I can help with them until [she] gets home." (Vince, manual, partner of mother in lower status job, hospital)

"The winter time is our quiet time of the year at work. Some days I won't have a lot to do, I'll finish by 3 or 4 in the afternoon. I finish in time to be there at the school gates when [my daughter] finishes school, then I'll go and collect the youngest from the childminder." (Brian, self-employed manual, partner of mother in intermediate status job, accountancy firm)

The fathers' own workplace ethos and occupational culture could also prevent some of them spending more time at home with their family. Many of the fathers worked in male-dominated organisations, or occupations that were blind to the fact that these men were also fathers with family responsibilities:

"I work in a very male-dominated field that doesn't encourage men to work less hours so that they can have more time with their children. It's still a very traditional industry in lots of ways, and you'd be frowned on if you said you wanted to work less hours or work in a certain way that allowed you to be around more at home so that you could spend more time with your family." (Peter, skilled, partner of mother in intermediate status job, hospital)

Some fathers, however, worked in a female-dominated industry or sector, which might provide them with more opportunities for engaging in family-friendly or flexible working practices, such as a hospital. Nevertheless, even here, they could work in male-dominated departments such as IT, finance, and building/service maintenance, which often scorned such practices. Terry worked in a hospital that had a range of formal family-friendly and flexible policies in place. However, the work culture in Terry's department made it difficult for men to take up these policies, even when the policies were statutory such as paternity leave. His experiences are indicative of how 'masculinised' workplace cultures impact on fathers' relationships with their family. They also highlight the discrepancies between formal policies and actual working practices:

"I've heard [paternity leave is] here, but I personally wouldn't ask for it unless [my partner] had a baby and it was the first week where she needed me to be around to help her.... I wouldn't ask for it. I'd be laughed at in the team for being a bit soft." (Terry, manager, partner of mother in lower status job, hospital)

Time for self

As we saw in Chapter 4, it was very important for some mothers to have time for themselves outside of their work and family commitments. This was particularly significant for those mothers who saw themselves as having a more individual identity as well as family responsibilities (Chapter 4). As we will see, the fathers also valued time for themselves. Unlike the mothers, however, this desire was not so intertwined with the extent to which their identity was embedded in their family or individualised through embeddedness. Rather, time for self was a far more taken-for-granted issue than was the case for the mothers.

The fathers acknowledged that the demands of negotiating work and family life, and meeting their children's needs meant they had less time for themselves. Despite this, nearly all the fathers were able to carve out time and engage in activities that did not involve their partner and/or children. Particularly popular were sports or social activities:

"Sports is very much a passion of mine but I've cut back since the children. I go to the gym after work or during my lunch hour twice a week, I play football twice a week, and I try to get in the odd game of badminton every two weeks with my best friend." (Laurence, manager, partner of mother in higher status job, hospital)

"I play squash every Tuesday and I go to a rugby match on Saturday, and that's the only time I get to be on my own." (Peter, skilled, partner of mother in intermediate status job, accountancy firm)

Generally, the fathers seemed to have greater networks of friends or associates who they would socialise with outside of work hours and family

life, compared with the mothers. They did not talk about snatching moments of time for themselves on their own, such as on the bus to work or in the bath, in the way that the mothers did (see Chapter 4).

> "I go to the pub on my own or the snooker hall with my friends every Friday night." (Radcliffe, manual, partner of mother in intermediate status job, hospital)

> "After work I'll go with my work friends to the pub a couple of evenings. And I try to meet up with my friends at some stage during the weekend so I get that time to relax by myself." (Jonathan, professional, partner of mother in intermediate status job, accountancy firm)

> "I made a lot of friends at university, and fortunately I've been able to keep up that friendship with them, so I've known them for a long time. We'll all meet up with our families or sometimes we'll go out for a lads night out on our own. I don't think [my partner] kept up contact so much because it's harder for women once they have children to keep that contact up, isn't it? My friends have become friends of the family now, so in a sense they're both our friends now." (Justin, professional, partner of mother in higher status job, hospital)

The fathers seemed to find it easier than the mothers to take time for themselves, away from work and family commitments. They did not appear to feel the same sense of guilt, or to be torn in the same way that the mothers could. Even if they felt they had to cut back on time for themselves because of their family responsibilities, they still seemed to be able to pursue this to a greater extent than the mothers. This suggests a number of things. First, it could be argued that, despite their commitment to family life, the fathers had much more of an individualised approach to family relationships, with a self-identity that was not only or primarily embedded in a family identity. Second, the fathers appeared better at juggling their time and work/family commitments, and at carving out time for themselves. However, their approach and ability were predicated on their partner assuming the primary responsibility for childcare and family responsibilities, and as we saw in

Chapter 4 in particular, the mothers did assume such responsibilities.

Many fathers who saw having time themselves as important, also were supportive of their partner having time to herself:

> "I play football twice a week, so why shouldn't she do something too. It's only fair, to me, that she gets her turn. So I babysit while she's at her yoga group. Sometimes she goes out with the girls, but not often enough, as I tell her that she should get out more." (Joe, manager, partner of mother in lower status job, accountancy firm)

However, there were a couple of men who were less supportive about their partner having time for herself:

> "I've always been very active and play a lot of sports but I've had to cut down to playing squash once a week, and golf on the weekends. It's the only time I have to relax. The demands of work are very high, and it's a very pressurised and competitive environment and so my squash games are vital. [My partner] doesn't have the same demands as I do.… Her hours are much shorter because she made the decision to go part time and concentrate on the children while they are young. I think that's where her priority is now, with the children. When she's not at work that should be her focus because that is her choice." (Martin, professional, partner of mother in higher status job, accountancy firm)

Connecting and separating work and home

As we saw in Chapter 5, the mothers could either connect their family and work, or separate them. The fathers too were either connecting or separating their own work with their home life. This section briefly examines this issue in order to understand how the fathers' work impacted on family relationships.

The fathers frequently highlighted the importance of separating work and home:

> "I believe that once you leave the office that's it. Work should stay at work. There's no need to bring it home. If you can't manage to do everything in the completed time that's a time management issue." (Kevin, manager, partner of mother in higher status job, hospital)

Despite such views, many of the fathers' accounts indicate that they were 'connectors' rather than 'separators'. Thus they adhered to the rhetoric of separation, while in practice they strongly connected to work:

> "No, I don't take work home, well aside from checking my emails. If I'm on call, I'll also have a pager and keep the mobile phone on in case they need to call me out." (Simon, professional, partner of mother in higher status job, accountancy firm)

The ways in which the fathers' work entered their home life were similar to the ways the mothers' work did (Chapter 5), namely:

- transfer of work ethos and skills;
- working at home;
- thoughts and feelings.

There were, however, social class and occupational variations in how the fathers connected or separated their work.

Transfer of work ethos and skills

The workplace ethos and particular occupational skills involved in the fathers' work infused their accounts in the same way that it did for the mothers:

> "We're in the process of moving house and my training means that I've got excellent understanding of all the technical jargon when it comes to sorting out the surveys and mortgage." (Jonathan, professional, partner of mother in intermediate status job, accountancy firm)

In contrast to the mothers, who saw such transfers as positive, the fathers' accounts illustrate that they did not always see the transference of their work ethos and occupational skills as positive. This mirrors the way that they also felt that the mothers' transfers were not always of benefit to family life (Chapter 6):

> "[My work] is a very competitive environment, you have to keep a competitive edge and be aggressive. It's hard to switch that off at home, and I try very hard to tone that side of my personality down but sometimes it comes through." (Nathan, manager, partner of mother in intermediate status job, accountancy firm)

> "In this job you get to see the worst side of human nature and you understand that people can do the most horrific things to each other. It does affect your life outside of the job. You're automatically suspicious of people and you expect the worst to happen, so your guard is always up." (Simon, professional, partner of mother in higher status job, accountancy firm)

Working at home/taking work home

Fathers who worked in senior posts or higher status occupations took work home with them and worked from home in the same way as the mothers in similar status occupations. Their accounts of working at home, however, were usually devoid of reflections about its impact on family life. This was in contrast both to the mothers' own accounts (Chapter 5) and to the fathers' evaluations of the impact of the mothers' work on family life (Chapter 6). This suggests that the fathers, especially those in higher status jobs, did not construct this aspect of their connection as problematic for family relationships; working at home was a taken for granted aspect of their employment. These fathers' lack of consideration of the ways that their own working at home impacted on family relationships also has to be understood in the context of their rhetoric of separating work and home life (see previous section):

> "I always check my emails every night to see if there's anything urgent that needs my attention for the next day, and I'll work most Sunday mornings." (Laurence, manager, partner of mother in higher status job, hospital)

"I still make the effort to get up early on the weekends, and I work in my office from home for a couple of hours on Saturday and Sunday mornings. If I have to make an overseas call, because of the time difference, it's usually easier to do it from home late at night." (Christopher, professional, partner of mother in higher status job, accountancy firm)

The fathers in skilled or manual occupations could be a little more reflexive in this respect:

"I've got to learn the new computer system. As there's not enough time at work to do it, I have to take things home and read up on it, but I'm not happy about doing it." (Vince, manual, partner of mother in lower status job, hospital)

Thoughts and feelings

The fathers were less likely to say that they brought home their feelings about work than were the mothers. They did refer to the potential impact of having a 'good' or 'bad' day at work, but did not really regard it as having the strong consequences for family relationships in the way that the mothers did (see Chapter 5). This may have been because they had a firmer grip on controlling their emotions about work, with a few of the fathers referring to retiring to bed rather than letting their emotions out on their partner and children. Their perspectives on leaving work feelings behind them when they came home, again have to be understood in the context of their separative rhetoric, as illustrated in some of the quotes below:

"On a bad day, I just want to sit quietly and not talk to anybody. Otherwise I'll just sleep, I'll sleep a lot if I've had a bad time at work.... [On a good day], maybe I'm more lively and I'll sleep less. I might do more around the house and make more of an effort with the kids. I'll give them money to rent a video and go to the sweet shop or so on." (Vince, manual, partner of mother in lower status job, hospital)

"I have a really stressful job, it's the nature of the work. Sometimes I get a bit uptight with [the children] but I try to get rid of those feelings before I get home by saying

'well actually it's not that important'. But I'm only human and so inevitably it does have an impact. I wouldn't really say anything about it but it does have an impact. I may think 'I'm really tired, I'm going to bed'. If I've had a good day then I'll come home smiling and I'll say to [my partner] 'I've had a great day' or 'guess what happened to me today'." (Edward, professional, partner of mother in higher status job, accountancy firm)

"I try to leave work frustrations at work, but if I've had a particularly arduous day then obviously I might be a bit short tempered in the evening. But usually once I've had something to eat or I've worked out my frustrations at the gym then I'm fine again." (Kevin, manager, partner of mother in higher status job, hospital)

Summary

This chapter focused on the fathers' perspectives on their own work, what it meant to them, how it influenced their understanding of their family's needs, and how they thought it affected their family relationships:

- The fathers stressed the significance of family in their lives. Traditional gender constructions of 'good fathering' (breadwinner) and 'good mothering' (domestic carer) influenced their understanding of family life.
- Most of the fathers positively valued their work, their role as financial provider and the way in which work shaped their personal identity. However, they could emphasise the tension between their 'breadwinner' role and meeting the other needs of family life, especially in relation to spending time with their children. The nature of the fathers' workplace ethos and occupational status affected the amount of time they could devote to family and home life. They felt that, in contrast, mothers did not face the same constraints in deciding how much time to spend at home and at work.
- Nonetheless, despite the competing demands of work and home and the constraints on their time, most fathers were still able to make time for themselves to pursue their own social

interests and activities, unlike most of the mothers.

- Similar to the mothers, the fathers connected or separated work and home. However, there was a strong tendency for them to embrace the rhetoric of separation, and to argue that their work did not impact on family relationships, while in practice they were often connected to work.

Conclusions

8

In this concluding chapter we will draw on the findings of our study to re-visit some of the key debates about the implications of mothers' employment for family relationships and to assess policies aimed at helping parents balance work and family life.

Caring and counting

The title of this report stems in part from the contrasting settings in which our study was conducted – the 'caring' hospital and the 'counting' accountancy firm. But our findings reveal another dimension of 'caring and counting' that has implications for employment policy and practice. Our study suggests that it may be just as important to care about *what happens* inside the workplace and how the dynamics of work interact with home life, as it is to be concerned with the *amount of time* that mothers spend at work.

These dynamics are often ignored in other studies. General debates about mothers' increasing labour participation and family life tend to use the terms 'employment' or 'work' as if they have only one dimension. Mothers work in particular jobs in particular organisations and it is the way in which the demands of work interact with the gendered division of labour in their homes that makes the debate a complex one. Previous studies and current employment practice give little consideration to which specific aspects of paid 'work' or 'employment' might affect family relationships. Our study provides some insights into these aspects – although, given the nature of our sample, care must be taken in generalising these to the total population of working mothers and their partners.

Family-friendly policies and flexible working practices are mainly focused on the management of mothers' work time and the amount of time they spend at work (counting) but our study suggests employers may need also to care about other key issues that impact on family life, such as:

- workplace ethos and working practices;
- the extent of autonomy and control that mothers experience;
- whether mothers choose work and family life to be connected or separated.

Workplace ethos and the meaning of work

Our study was conducted in two work settings. In one, the hospital, the prevailing ethos was 'caring' and service to the community. In the other, the accountancy firm, the prevailing culture was 'counting' – in other words, it was dominated by profit making, external accountability and driven by a mission 'dedicated to client satisfaction'.

Our study showed that the workplace ethos, encapsulated in the mission statements of the two workplaces, interacted with the mothers' understandings about the meaning of work. The mothers working in the hospital had a strong investment in, and commitment to, caring for the local community. They talked about their work as "making a difference" and "playing a part".

In contrast, the mothers working in the accountancy firm had a far more individualistic relationship to work. It was framed around the personal benefits they received from their employment, especially the monetary rewards, such as cash incentives and bonuses, and individual endeavour, rather than its social value.

In terms of understanding the relationship between these mothers' employment and their family relationships, these different orientations to paid work are important.

Many mothers saw their work identity, work skills and their workplace ethos and practices as affecting their family relationships and home life. The particular ethos of the mothers' workplaces was evident in their accounts of how they talked to their children about what they did at work and what they valued about it.

All the mothers we interviewed thought that work had had some beneficial effects on their family relationships. The ways in which these mothers' work had entered their homes, especially the transference of their workplace ethos and work skills, in their view, had proved positive for, and sometimes was expected by, their children and partner, and also their wider family (Chapter 5). Many fathers in our study welcomed the positive effects of their partner's transference of work ethos and skills into the home (Chapter 6).

There could also be a downside to this picture. Some fathers identified their partner's transference of work ethos and skills into the home as causing potential problems because they saw these as unwelcome intrusions into their family life.

Both men and women shared assumptions about mothers taking the primary responsibility for the family. Given these gendered assumptions about the division of labour at home, employers may need to give more thought to how their organisational culture affects employees who are mothers. If client satisfaction is the main mission, does this mean that mothers are expected to work extra hours, including at home, to ensure a contract is fulfilled to the client's satisfaction? What are the implications of such expectations for the mothers' home life, and how can the employers help in this? If caring is the main mission, how does the employer respond to a mother who has had a stressful time doing this at work and then returns home to continue caring? How can employers alleviate the effects of workplace pressure?

What happens at work: autonomy and control

Autonomy is understood to mean the amount of self-determination and flexibility an employee has in deciding how to spend their time, on what, with whom, and where. Control is about the extent to which an employee manages resources and staff and has leadership or strategic roles within the organisation. We assumed that mothers in higher status jobs would have high levels of autonomy and control and those in lower status jobs would experience low levels, with those in the intermediate position occupying a middle position. While this was true for most mothers, there were some important exceptions that illustrated the effects of different organisational structures. In the hospital some mothers in high status jobs were frustrated by their lack of autonomy and control, whereas, in the accountancy firm, it was mothers in lower status jobs who felt they had higher levels. It is these 'internal' perceptions that count in understanding the impact of work on family relationships.

The amount of autonomy and control the mothers had in their jobs could affect how they felt about their time at work and how their work entered the home. Tensions in family relationships arose from what happened inside the workplace and the quality of time spent there.

Both mothers working full and part time had these experiences. Reductions, or further reductions, in these mothers' working hours, or more flexible working patterns, would not necessarily have resolved these issues, or the pressures they faced, because such policies do not focus on *how time is used* or time sovereignty. This suggests that those family-friendly and flexible working policies and practices that focus exclusively on the *amount of time* spent at work are far too narrow, as are the assumptions underpinning them. Policies and practices may need to focus more clearly on such aspects of the workplace as managing the intensity of work; how the organisation manages the level of workload; the extent to which employees can feel autonomous and in control; and the extent to which they feel able to achieve their goals in the context of the time available.

Connecting or separating work and family life

The extent to which mothers connected or separated work from home helps to explain their variable understandings of the effect of their employment on family relationships. Generally, mothers in higher and intermediate status jobs were more likely to be 'connectors' of work and home life. Those in lower status jobs were

generally 'separators'. There were exceptions to this, however: several mothers in lower status jobs in the hospital were 'connectors' while some mothers in higher and intermediate status jobs in the accountancy firm were 'separators'.

Being a strong 'connector' was sometimes viewed positively (as we have already noted); 'connector' mothers largely viewed the transference of work ethos and skills in a positive light. On the negative side, both fathers and mothers said they sometimes resented the effects of mothers working at home and bringing home work, along with bringing home 'bad' feelings from work.

Interestingly, when the fathers, mainly those in higher status jobs, brought work home themselves, they did not see it as impacting on their family relationships (Chapter 7). Among these fathers, working at home appeared to be a taken-for-granted aspect of their employment. Most fathers were less likely than the mothers to report that work 'thoughts and feelings' affected their family. This may well have been because these fathers frequently believed they kept work and home separate, although their accounts showed that, in reality, they did not. It could have been this belief that made them identify more points of stress than did the mothers, when the mothers connected work and home. In other words, because the fathers we interviewed *thought* that they separated work from home, they may have thought their partner should have separated work from home too.

Partners had an important role to play in whether, and how, mothers connected, or separated work and family life. Middle-class mothers in higher status jobs valued talk as support, while working-class mothers in lower status jobs tended to give priority to fathers' practical help with the children or household chores.

Although separation of work and home did not necessarily imply a lesser commitment to the job, it is interesting to note that those in lower status jobs tended to have a more instrumental view of work. These mothers usually had no access to flexible and family-friendly policies and practices. In the hospital, mothers on temporary contracts in lower status jobs were not eligible for these policies, while in the accountancy firm only employees above a certain grade had access to them. This restricted eligibility is evidenced in other studies too (Forth et al, 1997; Hogarth et al,

2001; Dex and Smith, 2002). Underpinning such limited access is an assumption that certain types of workers – those in higher occupational groups or in core jobs – are more valuable and worthy of investment than other workers. Our study suggests, however, that by marginalising lower status workers, employers run the risk that employees will feel less commitment to the ethos and mission of the organisation as a whole. By ignoring such structural inequalities, policies directed at helping mothers to combine home with paid work tend to reinforce the individuation of problems that mothers face.

The impact of mothers' employment on family relationships

The mothers regarded themselves as responsible for meeting their families' needs. They largely saw their employment as supporting this. For example, mothers felt their relationships with their children had been enhanced emotionally, developmentally and materially, and they had acted as an important role model for their children (Chapters 4 and 5). Most also reported that their relationship with their partner similarly had been enhanced through their paid employment. For these mothers, employment meant that they shared with their partner the financial burden of providing for their family, and their jobs provided them and their partner with shared interests (Chapter 4).

The majority of fathers in our study agreed and acknowledged the benefits the mothers reported they had reaped from their employment. These fathers felt their partner's work had improved their relationship together because their partner felt fulfilled, contributed to the family financially and they had shared interests. They also saw the way their partner's work enriched her relationship with their children by focusing on the quality, rather than the quantity, of time spent together. These fathers also recognised the importance of their partner as a role model for the children, and in helping to meet their children's material needs (Chapter 6).

Differences in perceptions emerged in the accounts of mothers' and fathers' understandings of the sources of stress in the home. Mothers' experiences highlight how stresses in family relationships could arise as much, or even more,

from the quality of time they spent at work (such as the extent to which they feel autonomy and control and the impact of the workplace ethos, as discussed earlier) rather than the amount of time spent at work. In other words, these mothers' accounts were complex in their understanding of the different aspects of work that had an impact on their family relationships. None of the mothers cited lack of time in itself as the main problem.

Some fathers in our study believed that stresses in their family relationships arose from their partner's lack of time. They expressed this as lack of time for mothers to support them, time to be a couple, and time to be with their children; all of which they attributed to the mother's long working hours (Chapter 6).

Debates about the impact of mothers' employment

The individualisation thesis: caring and 'commodification'

As we saw in Chapter 1, mothers' increasing labour market participation has been seen as having brought about major changes in personal relationships within families – for good or ill. In particular, individualisation theories suggest that mothers' identities are increasingly rooted in their work life rather than being embedded in their family.

The findings from our study do not wholly support either the negative or positive versions of individualisation theories, and suggest that the theories tend to over-simplify working mothers' lives. Contrary to the negative versions that suggest mothers put themselves and their work first at the expense of their family, all the mothers in our study had strong and traditional views about what being a 'good mother' and 'good partner' was about. All were very committed to 'being there' emotionally and physically for their children, irrespective of their hours of work (Chapter 4).

Contrary to the positive proponents of the individualisation thesis, employment among the mothers in our study did not necessarily lead to more egalitarian relationships with their partners. In fact, most mothers and fathers we interviewed

subscribed to highly traditional, and stereotypical, views about the gendered division of labour within the home with mothers having primary responsibility for the home and the conduct of family life (Chapter 6).

The ways in which the mothers in our study constructed their identity points to the oversimplification of the individualisation thesis. The question, 'what is self?' requires a complex response. Family relationships were central to how all the mothers viewed their lives and their identity. For those mothers who defined their identity as strongly embedded in family life, a separate identity and 'time for self' were not always something they sought or wanted – they constructed their identity around the family and wanted to spend time with the family. These mothers tended to be those in the lower status jobs. Their access to the support of an extended family, however, also meant that they could, if they chose, use this support to have time and space for themselves. Those in higher status jobs tended to 'buy in' the help they needed to free up time. Mothers' identities could be deeply embedded in their family, yet strongly connected to their work. Even for those who tended to see themselves as an individual with separate needs from their family, this was still within a framework of commitment to meeting their partner's and children's needs.

Choice versus structural inequality

Concerns that mothers' increasing labour market participation means that they are becoming 'work-centred', and putting themselves first at the expense of their responsibility for family life, are not borne out in this study.

The findings from our study challenge some of the central tenets of preference theory, which is a modified version of individualisation theory. As discussed in Chapter 1, Hakim (2000) suggests that women's employment patterns are not a consequence of institutional and/or structural factors, but reflect their attitudes, work–lifestyle choices, preferences, aspirations and motivations, and together these explain women's polarisation in the labour market. Hakim distinguishes between 'work-centred' mothers who choose full-time employment, those who adapt their working lives to their families and choose part-time work, and 'home-centred' mothers who prioritise family

life and children over employment and prefer not to work.

The construction of our sample of mothers automatically excluded 'home-centred' mothers, because all the mothers included were in paid employment. However, interestingly, none of the mothers we interviewed appeared to fit Hakim's category of 'work-centred' mothers either. This could have been because of our methods of sampling. In essence, we had a self-selected sample and 'work-centred' mothers may have decided not to participate in our study. Alternatively, the absence of 'work-centred' mothers may have been because Hakim's typology is overly simplistic. Certainly, as discussed already, the way the mothers in our study constructed their identities calls into question some of the ideas underpinning Hakim's typology of working mothers.

Hakim associates full-time employment with 'work-centred' mothers and part-time jobs with 'adaptive' mothers. However, we found no evidence of this distinction in our study. According to Hakim's typology, the mothers we interviewed would have been classified as 'adaptive'. Yet these mothers – so-called 'adaptives' – worked both full and part time, contrary to Hakim's typology.

Indeed, our study's findings contradict Hakim's thesis. For instance, those mothers working part time, in fact, were more likely than those working full time to have an individualised work-centred identity rather than one embedded in the family (Chapter 4, Table 4.1). Similarly, the mothers in our study working part time were more likely than those working full time to be strong 'connectors' to work (Chapter 5, Table 5.1). And, contrary to Hakim's thesis, mothers who worked full time were just as concerned as those working part time to 'be there' for their children and meet their children's and family's needs. None of the mothers, whether working full or part time, saw their mothering as a 'weekend hobby' (Hakim, 2000, p 164), however individualised or embedded their identity.

Evidence from our study suggests that the mothers' position in the labour market was not purely a function of their choices, as Hakim proposes, but was affected by wider structural inequalities within the labour market. For instance, the mothers' terms and conditions of employment were a reflection on their position in the labour market. Those mothers in low paid temporary jobs, unlike those higher up the occupational hierarchy, were denied access to a range of employment benefits within their workplace, which affected their employment patterns and orientations to their workplace ethos.

Family–friendly and flexible working policies and practices

The main policies promoted by government and others aimed at helping parents combine paid work and their domestic responsibilities have been family-friendly policies and flexible working practices. Latterly, these have been relabelled 'work–life balance' policies and practices, and are meant to have a wider focus on all employees and their personal lives outside of employment. Williams (2001) argues that work–life balance policies have no impact on gender imbalances in caring responsibilities because they are predicated on a valuing of paid work at the expense of a value on unpaid care work. Yet, as we have seen, among the mothers we interviewed, care work in the home was valued just as much as paid work. This preoccupation with paid work in public policy helps legitimate paid work and devalues unpaid caring work in the home and the community – it perpetuates the divide between caring and counting.

A key issue in the context of our study is the extent to which these policies can ameliorate some of the pressures faced by the working mothers and fathers we interviewed. In other words, how effective were family-friendly policies for the parents in our study, what were their limitations, and what were the assumptions underpinning these policies? This is the focus of the final section of our report.

Mothers' and fathers' experiences of family-friendly and flexible working practices

In Chapter 2, we saw how, for the mothers working in the hospital, the ethos of care encompassed caring for the staff. The hospital had a family-friendly advisor whose role was to develop policies and working practices aimed at encouraging mothers to work at the hospital, and

to help them combine paid work with their domestic responsibilities. Thus, the hospital had developed a range of 'family-friendly' policies and practices such as flexible working, flexi-time, career breaks, special leave, job sharing and paternity leave. It also had an on-site work crèche for staff.

Similarly, the accountancy firm supported the needs of working mothers (Chapter 2). It employed a diversity manager for the UK, who was responsible for a range of equal opportunity issues, including the needs of working mothers. It had put in place a range of policies and practices such as equal opportunities, a working time policy, flexible working, and a dignity at work policy.

The mothers in our study showed how family-friendly policies allowed them to modify their time schedules, helped some of them to manage the demands of their work and their family, and thus reduced the strain of their multiple roles. However, the type of policies in place in these mothers' workplaces left untouched more fundamental problems about time, its sovereignty and use, as we discussed earlier.

Moreover, these policies have a tendency to reinforce the individuation of the problems these mothers faced in combining home with paid work. This was because they ignored structural inequalities and were not universally available to all the mothers we interviewed. This focus means that the solutions are similarly individualised. So, despite the existence of formal family-friendly policies, in practice, individual mothers in our study negotiated with their individual managers on an individualised basis about changing their individual working arrangements, which may have helped their individual family circumstances.

Gender divisions in families and take-up of policies

The mothers and fathers in our study held very traditional views about gendered divisions within their family; their roles in the family and paid work; and divisions between the private and public domains. In other words, mothers regarded themselves as holding primary responsibility for the family and fathers saw themselves as breadwinners, even when the woman contributed equally to the family income.

The division of labour in the home was not equally distributed – mothers and fathers saw women as carrying the larger load, emotionally and practically.

The nature of the policies on offer in these mothers' workplaces does not affect the gendered division of labour within their homes, or gendered assumptions about the separation of work and home. They are essentially a managerial solution to unequal divisions of labour within the home, and traditional gender roles. This is part of a wider public policy debate that relates to issues about legislating for what happens inside families, and a resistance within government to interfering in the private domain of the family. This approach to the family–work conflict means there is little engagement in a wider arena with the 'zero-sum' politics of the distribution of time and power between men and women in both public and private spheres (Lister, 2001, p 435).

Many fathers and mothers in our study regarded family-friendly and flexible working policies and practices as policies aimed at women. For example, some fathers felt that their partner could take advantage of these working practices but that they could not, and that the policies were irrelevant to them and to their needs. This may have been because many fathers in our study did not acknowledge the impact of their paid work on family relationships. However, they often believed that their partner's work caused stress in their family relationships and so such policies were more appropriate for their partner than for them. Thus, our study suggests that gendered assumptions informed the take-up of family-friendly and flexible working policies and practices, and this finding is borne out by more extensive research on the take-up of such benefits (Dex and Smith, 2002). Ultimately, these policies may reinforce family obligations as being the mothers' responsibility, because they were aimed at mothers and their 'needs'. For instance, in our study, the fathers' lack of flexibility in their work was predicated on the assumption that their wife/partner would take responsibility for their children and home life.

All the fathers in our study valued their family roles and expressed a desire to be actively involved in parenting. However, their contribution to family caring work was often limited and contained, and few were willing to

modify their work for their family because they focused on their breadwinner role. Thus, among these fathers there was a limited take-up of such policies (where available) aimed at helping parents combine work and family commitments. A particularly clear example of this was the experience of one father in our study who worked in a hospital that had a range of formal family-friendly and flexible policies (Chapter 7). The 'macho' work culture in this father's department made it difficult for men to use such policies. This father did not feel he could take advantage of the hospital's parental leave provision because his workmates would have ridiculed him. His experiences also highlight the discrepancies between formal policies and actual working practices. Again, this echoes findings in other research concerning the widespread low take-up of family-friendly provisions among men.

In summary

Debates about the impact of mothers' work on family relationships have become polarised but, by listening to the perspectives of the people directly affected, a more complex picture of the effects of mothers' employment has emerged. Understanding how the differences in work settings may interact with different mothers' home lives brings into question the premises on which family-friendly policies are formed. If what happens inside the workplace is just as significant as the amount of time that mothers spend at work, then family-friendly policies and practices may be falling short of their avowed aims to enable women – and men – to combine work and home responsibilities.

While there were points of stress, most mothers and fathers felt that the mother's employment has benefited family relationships, as partners and as parents, in many ways. Support from employers would enable families to build on and strengthen these benefits.

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