

Gender and work orientations in conditions of job insecurity

ABSTRACT

This paper explores women's and men's work orientations in conditions of job insecurity, arguing that it is time to move beyond essentialist conceptions of work orientations and central life interests in order to understand the significance of paid work in people's lives. Data from a qualitative study are presented which show that the significance of paid work and the priority given to home and work are affected by experiences of job insecurity, changing domestic circumstances and stage in the life cycle and that this is the case for both women and men. Conversely, the significance of paid work can affect how job insecurity is experienced and its impact on individuals and their families. The assumption that men's work orientations are homogeneous and that work is their central life interest is not supported by the findings presented here and it is argued that the significance of work in men's and women's lives is more variable than has hitherto been recognized. To capture this variability it is time to move away from the acrimony of the debate over women's work orientations and notions of a central life interest which underpin it.

KEYWORDS: Job insecurity; gender; work orientation; paid work; family; identity

In recent years there has been considerable debate, if not controversy, about women's orientations to paid work. Catherine Hakim, for instance, argues that it is only a small minority of women (20 per cent) who are 'work centred' in the way that men are while the bulk of women are either 'home centred', prioritizing home over paid work, or 'adaptive', attempting to combine home and children with paid work (Hakim 1998, 2000). Thus women are heterogeneous in their work orientations while men are much more homogeneously work centred. According to her it is only women working full time (and not even all of these) who have a similar work orientation to men; they have a work ethic consisting of a 'normative commitment to work as a central life interest, with employment seen as a long-term career rather than as a short-term job' (Hakim 1996: 107). She

takes issue with those, particularly feminists, who argue that there are no essential differences between women's and men's commitment to paid work and that it is different constraints and expectations that lead to different orientations, claiming that they are misguided at best and deliberately misrepresenting research findings at worst (Hakim 1995). Unsurprisingly such provocative accusations produced an immediate and equally vehement response exposing Hakim's 'straw feminists' and disputing her claims (see e.g. Ginn et al. 1996; Bruegel 1996; Crompton and Harris 1998a).

Elsewhere, however, Hakim herself provides evidence that there is little gender divergence in terms of commitment to paid work between women and men who are in paid employment and that there is little evidence of sex differences in work orientation amongst those who are highly educated and in higher grade jobs (Hakim 1996: 102, 103). Indeed, 'working women's work orientations and behaviour have grown closer to men's' (Hakim 1996: 109). But because at any one time a significant number of women are not in the workforce and most studies of work orientations exclude them, she argues that the similarities between women and men have been overstated.

Her arguments are based on evidence from survey research which fails to show the '*qualitative* differences between men and women, and between different groups of women, in the meaning and value of work' (Hakim 1996: 100). Moreover what is missing is 'research on attitudes, motivations, preferences and plans' in order to understand not only '*what* people are doing, but also *why*' (Hakim 1996: 119). Some attempts have been made to provide this sort of evidence for women (see e.g. Crompton and Harris 1998a, b; Glucksmann 2000; Bradley 1999; Procter and Padfield 1999) but there is a dearth of comparable research into men's work orientations, how they are shaped by work and non-work influences, and how they change during the life course. In the absence of such evidence and using the typology she developed for women, Hakim suggests that 60 per cent of men are work centred, 30 per cent adaptive and 10 per cent home centred (Hakim 2000: 255).

Earlier studies of men's work orientations distinguished between instrumental and expressive orientations to work. This distinction suggests that not all men are work centred in the way Hakim claims: those with instrumental orientations and a weak work ethic have a 'low commitment to work in the absence of financial need' which means that work cannot be a central life interest for them. This orientation is typical of women and men, full-time and part-time workers, employed in low skilled jobs (Rose 1994) and was identified by Goldthorpe et al. amongst their affluent workers. Jobs which had no intrinsic reward could be tolerated and even sought after if the pay was high enough (Goldthorpe et al. 1969). Such approaches are, however, problematic because they focus entirely on the person *qua* worker, pay little attention to gender and none to stage in the life course and domestic circumstances. As a result it is possible to work

with a concept of the 'central life interest' which rests on a simple dichotomy: is the worker more involved with what goes on in work or with what goes on outside it? This notion of central life interest also underpins Hakim's typology with her work- and home-centred categories being characterized by the presence of a central life interest and her adaptive category by its absence. This suggests that defining the 'adaptive' category as representing a work orientation is problematic and that it is not equivalent to her other two categories of work-centred and home-centred. Moreover it is a category which can mop up all those who do not demonstrate a central life interest and associated orientation to work. A similar criticism has been made of her earlier 'drifter' category which is a 'residual' category dominating her theory thereby rendering it problematic (Procter and Padfield 1999: 156).

There are clearly problems with the notions of work orientation and central life interest which become apparent when women's work is the focus of attention and when the relation between work and home is considered. In this paper we attempt to contribute to the debate about women's and men's work orientations by looking at the changing importance and meaning of work (paid and unpaid) in conditions of job insecurity. In so doing we suggest that it is time to move beyond essentialist conceptions of work orientations and central life interests in order to understand the place occupied by paid work in people's lives.

THE STUDY

Our research explored the gender dimensions of job insecurity and the consequences of job insecurity for women's and men's commitment to paid employment and their work orientations. We interviewed 55 women and 56 men in three organizations in a specific travel-to-work area in South Wales. We selected organizations in different sectors of employment – manufacturing, the public sector and the retail sector – so that we would have a contrast between different forms of employment and between male- and female-dominated industries. The manufacturing organization, Make-a-Lot, was characterized by full-time, permanent employment and 86 per cent of the workforce was male. The retail organization, BigShop, and the public sector organization, BureauGen, were characterized by various forms of non-standard employment, such as part-time, casual and temporary employment, and their workforces were predominantly female (74 per cent and 58.5 per cent respectively).

We conducted in-depth interviews with respondents at their places of work. They took place between July 1999 and September 2000, lasted between 1 and 3 hours and were tape recorded and transcribed. Interviews were arranged in consultation with the personnel departments and all respondents volunteered to take part. An almost equal number of women and men were interviewed in each organization from a range of jobs,

TABLE I: *Distribution of sample by gender and age*

Age	BureauGen		BigShop		Make-a-Lot		All
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
16-19	0	1	3	0	0	0	4
20-9	3	4	6	2	1	1	17
30-9	5	5	6	4	8	5	33
40-9	5	4	1	7	7	9	33
50-9	5	5	1	4	4	2	21
60-9	1	1	0	1	0	0	3
Subtotal	19	20	17	18	20	17	-
Total:	39		35		37		111

occupations and positions in the organization's hierarchy. Relatively few of our respondents were in managerial or professional occupations, the majority were working in routine non-manual occupations or skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled manual occupations and many were in supervisory positions.

Our sample included a fairly even spread across the age range with fewer respondents under 20 and over 60; this is shown in Table I. It also included women and men working part time and full time and on permanent and temporary contracts. This can be seen in Table II. All those on temporary contracts and almost all the part-timers were either in routine non-manual or semi- and unskilled manual occupations.

We explored work orientation by asking respondents how important their job and paid work in general were to them and discussing the significance of paid work in relation to other types of work, such as domestic work, and their homes and families. We also asked them to discuss the relative importance of their own and their partner's jobs (where appropriate) and whether the significance of paid work had changed for them over their life course and/or in response to changing domestic circumstances and experiences of job insecurity. In what follows we discuss the impact of job insecurity on work orientations before moving to a broader discussion of the significance of paid work in conditions of job insecurity.

TABLE II: *Distribution of sample by hours of work and type of contract*

	Female				Male				Total
	Full-time		Part-time		Full-time		Part-time		
	Perm	Temp	Perm	Temp	Perm	Temp	Perm	Temp	
BureauGen	13	3	4	0	12	4	3	0	39
BigShop	8	0	10	0	9	0	8	0	35
Make-a-Lot	17	0	0	0	18	2	0	0	37
Total	38	3	14	0	39	6	11	0	111

JOB INSECURITY AND WORK ORIENTATION

There is relatively little research that has explored the impact of job insecurity on work orientations but rather more that has investigated how unemployment affects attitudes to work (see e.g. Gallie and Vogler 1993). What emerges from these largely quantitative studies is that job insecurity reduces job satisfaction, commitment and involvement (Hartley et al. 1991: 199) and is demotivating (Burchell et al. 1999). It can also increase the effort made at work, especially if it is thought that doing so is likely to decrease the chances of being made redundant (Hartley et al. 1991: 84). The experience of unemployment, in contrast, increases both commitment to work and the importance attached to intrinsic rewards (Gallie et al. 1998: 195). There is no evidence that those on temporary contracts are less concerned with the intrinsic rewards of paid work than other employees but instrumental orientations to work are more common at lower skill and educational levels (Gallie et al. 1998: 201). These findings are replicated in our study but, in addition, we found that being close to others who experienced insecurity also had an impact on work orientation.

Current Insecurity

In all our organizations there were people who perceived their jobs to be insecure. However many claimed that commitment was affected neither by insecurity nor security.

At the moment it's quite secure for me. I'm permanent now, I was contract before . . . I am committed to it, but I was committed when I was temporary. Because it was, I'm temporary, I've got to prove myself. So I was committed then. (028C,F,26yrs)

For those who were in posts that depended on good performance for their continuation, insecurity often acted as a motivating factor. If they did well they would have a chance of further promotion or being retained in that job (cf. Gallie et al. 1998). This was not always the case though. Some found temporary contracts demotivating even though there might be a chance of their being made permanent. These divergent reactions support the views of several of our respondents who thought the effect of insecurity would depend on personality (cf. Hartley et al. 1991). 'I think it depends on the person, you'll get one who'll work harder if the decision was made he wouldn't be the one to go and you'll get one who thinks, well I'm going so why should I care, type of thing' (030C,M,34yrs).

Insecurity also arose from the possibility of redundancies or store closure or from perceptions of the difficulty of finding alternative employment. Many of our respondents thought it would be difficult to find a comparable job if they lost their current one and would have to take a drop in pay or risk an insecure job. This was particularly apparent amongst those older workers who felt that their skills were no longer marketable or that their

age would count against them. Those under 30 were more confident of being able to find alternative employment. Others told us that although they would like to have a different more challenging job they were not prepared to take the risk of trying to find alternative employment.

I felt as if [looking for another job] was too risky. I mean, you know, if you had to think about keeping the family . . . So I felt as if I couldn't just risk doing anything else really . . . But whether that made me feel better I don't know, or made me feel I was more trapped. . . . It provided what I needed at the time. And it did provide some job security.
(035A,M,40yrs)

This suggests that experiencing one or more forms of job insecurity can, at one and the same time, tie employees more firmly into their current job but also have a demotivating effect resulting in a more instrumental attitude towards it. The only exceptions to this are found amongst those who believe that they have some control over the situation and that their performance is likely to be critical in whether or not they retain their jobs.

Past Insecurity

Past experiences of insecurity most commonly took the form of redundancy and/or unemployment, either with the current employer or, more frequently, with another employer. This sort of experience affected several of the young men, one of whom told us

I've changed my attitude towards work. . . . Losing the job . . . was a shock. It was a good shock, but not being able to find a job and realizing how hard it was, trying to find a job, struggling to maintain a life basically. It taught me a lesson and it's one I don't want to repeat again.
(034A,M,26yrs)

It made them less blasé about work and more willing to stick with the job they had, even though the only motivation for doing it might be a wage and, in some cases, security. Fewer of the young women had experienced unemployment and for those who had it had coincided with motherhood and financial support from a partner. They differed from the young men in so far as they were all very committed to their jobs and, importantly, to careers and none had a purely instrumental view of paid work. Some of the young men shared the young women's commitment but others had a more instrumental work orientation. These differences may be part of a generational shift in gendered expectations of paid work but the nature of our sample neither allows us to draw firm conclusions nor to disentangle cohort from life-cycle effects.

Past experience of insecurity leaves some feeling that loyalty and commitment are not necessarily rewarded and job loss can hit you without warning. This may also contribute towards the more instrumental work orientation of many with what can be termed working-class jobs. It also made some

reassess the place of work in their lives and make plans for early retirement or even led to a complete change of jobs and a reassessment of the relative importance of work and home. Thus one man who had been made redundant had reassessed his whole view of men as breadwinners and had been thinking of becoming a house-husband.

Absolutely my priorities have changed. . . . I used to have this thing in my system that the man had to be the breadwinner. . . . I had to have the insurance of the car in my name . . . I mean at the end of the day does it really matter who's got the insurance for the car? (014A,M,35yrs)

In contrast, another man, who had been made redundant very suddenly from a relatively senior position still regarded himself as the breadwinner and saw his new job as more important than his wife's.

I still class myself as the breadwinner of the family. And therefore I need a job to earn an income . . . I may be old fashioned in my way but that's my way of thinking about it. (013A,M,55yrs)

He took this view even though he was now earning much less than previously, his wife earned more than he did and she was in a professional job which she had held throughout her working life.

Others' Insecurity

Being close to others, particularly partners, who have experienced job insecurity can also have an effect on work orientations. In order to explore this we focus on 8 women who reported that they were the main breadwinners and 3 men who said that their wives were the main breadwinners. It is particularly interesting to consider their responses as it has been claimed that home centredness amongst women is associated with part-time working and a male breadwinner ideology while work centredness is associated with full-time employment and an egalitarian gender ideology.

Two of the women defining themselves as main breadwinners could be unequivocally described as work centred (although one of these had had her ambitions thwarted) in the sense that they had prioritized their jobs/careers and had taken a positive decision not to have children. A third was also work centred. She had weighed up the pros and cons of part-time working when her children were small and had decided against it because of the effect it might have had on her promotion prospects; she had worked full time since leaving school. The other five had returned to full-time employment because of their husband's job insecurity and/or redundancy. All of them had either worked part time or taken time out of the workforce when their children were small and some had done both. They combined work and family but were diverse in their orientations to work. Two were now ambitious, very committed to their jobs and talked about their domestic circumstances in terms of 'role reversal'. In contrast the other three would have preferred not to have had to be the breadwinners; they

had an instrumental attitude to work and were only doing it because of financial necessity.

The time I was brought up you married a man, and I never expected to work all my life. I thought I'd have babies and be a housewife like my mother was and that he would work and bring in all the money. But it just doesn't work out that way . . . [as a result] I feel that life has given me a hard deal mind. I didn't want to be the breadwinner of my family, but I think it's all been one hard slog, it really has been . . . I've got to work and I begrudge it that I still have to do this. At my age I don't want to do it. (024C,F,50yrs)

All 8 of these women had partners who were in insecure employment or out of work for various reasons.

This evidence suggests that work orientation is not something that is static but can change in response to changing circumstances; it also does not necessarily coincide with full- or part-time employment. Thus three of the women had always worked full time and were in an organization which had a clear career structure; they were work centred in the sense that their 'main priority in life' was something 'other than motherhood and family life' (Hakim 2000: 164). Two of the women had been working part time before becoming the main breadwinners for their families and now demonstrated a strong work ethic and commitment to their jobs. The remaining three would have preferred not to be breadwinners, their orientation to work remained instrumental and although paid work was important to them they could be said to be home centred. Thus although their partners' job insecurity has clearly had an impact on these women's employment behaviour, it is only for some that it has affected their work orientation and made them more committed to paid work.

The comments of the three 'reluctant breadwinners' are very similar to those of many men about their own breadwinning role.

Once I got married and started having children, well it curtails then. So I couldn't very well shop around for jobs . . . in the early part of the marriage I had thought at some time of going back to college, studying. But I could see she wasn't keen on it, so I just left it there . . . Obviously when . . . I found myself that I had commitments, I had to, therefore, look for the most secure, most well paid job and take the opportunity . . . I haven't been able to find a job that I wanted to do, that I loved doing, that I was pleased to be going and do. (017C,M,51yrs)

Seemingly some women are now experiencing what many men have always experienced, being tied into a provider role because their wage is the only one that can be relied upon.

Of the men who said that their wives were the main breadwinners, two had been in 'men's' jobs from which they had been made redundant. Neither of them was able to identify with their current job, one because he felt it was a job that women could do and men could not and the other

because there were no goals for him to aim for, and both were earning much less than they had been previously. The third had experienced insecurity in his current job and had what is often seen as a feminine orientation to work, valuing the social dimension of it rather than the work itself.

I enjoy being in work to a certain extent. I don't enjoy the work. But I actually enjoy being here. There is a lot of friends in work. . . . It's merely a means to an end to get the money at the end of the month and that's all it is.

The job was something he did not identify with and he did not demonstrate a strong work ethic. Nevertheless he said: 'I can't imagine myself not working . . . it's definitely part of me.' However he prioritized his home life over his working life,

My home life is far more important than my work life. I know I have to have the job. I have to do the work. But I value the home life far more than I do the work life. (021A,M,36yrs).

This home centredness was shared by the other two men and one of them had considered becoming a 'house-husband' before he got his current job. He had left his previous 'macho' job in order to spend more time with his children and to be a 'full-time' father (014A,M,35yrs). This orientation to work and the relative importance placed on home and work is usually assumed to be associated with women rather than men.

These findings suggest that actual involvement in paid work does not necessarily reflect an underlying work orientation and a persistent central life interest. Thus full-time working may not be an indication that someone has paid work as their central life interest while part-time working, as we shall see, may not necessarily reflect home as a central life interest. Clearly involvement in and commitment to paid work change with changing circumstances. Similarly work orientations and the relative importance attached to home and work can also change. Attempting to read off work orientation and/or central life interest from actual involvement in paid work is therefore far from straightforward.

The discussion thus far suggests that while some women and men are work centred, others are not. For them paid employment is something that fits in with family life and which makes family life possible. Furthermore, people can become work centred having previously been home centred and vice versa (this is explored more fully below). Thus the experience of job insecurity can change involvement in work, the relative importance of home and work and the significance of work to an individual's sense of self. This suggests that rather than talking about work orientations, with the implication of something that is unchanging and based on a similarly unchanging life interest, it may be more useful to talk about the significance of work and to explore how this relates to job insecurity, stage in the life course, changing domestic circumstances and labour market experience. In the next section we therefore turn our attention to the significance of

paid work, distinguishing between people's actual involvement in paid work and the relative importance they attach to work and home. We also draw attention to the importance of paid work as a source of identity for both women and men.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WORK AND THE EXPERIENCE OF JOB INSECURITY

It is often assumed that job insecurity is not as serious for women as it is for men. Underlying this assumption is the view that men are the main providers for their families and that men's jobs are therefore more important to the family-households to which they belong. Conversely women's home centredness means that, even were they to lose their jobs, they would have a culturally defined role in the home which they could fall back on. Many of our respondents agreed with these sentiments but others thought there was no gender difference in the seriousness of job insecurity and that it affects women and men equally. Here we explore the relative importance attached to home and work in a context of job insecurity and the ways in which this affects people's responses to job insecurity.

The most widespread orientation to work in our sample could be said to correspond to Hakim's 'adaptive' category (cf. Procter and Padfield 1999), those who combine home and work, although the way home and work are combined is often gendered. If work centred is defined as having work as a central life interest then most women and men did not fall into this category. Most saw paid work as essential in order to provide for a family and/or to have the desired lifestyle. And its importance and the time devoted to it varied, for both women and men, during the life course. Within this 'adaptive' group there was a distinction between those who saw paid work as a means to an end and those for whom it was an end in itself. Indeed many of the latter spontaneously said that they would want to continue working even if they won the lottery. Others said that if they could afford to they would give up work. But even for those who saw paid work in instrumental terms, it was also important to them in other ways. For instance, many of the production workers at Make-a-Lot seemed to demonstrate an instrumental work orientation but on further probing their jobs and paid work in general appeared to be much more important to them than simply a means to an end. One of the men said that his job was important because of 'money, mortgage, children' but that it also gave him 'a bit of self respect'. Another commented

I like working. It gets you out of the house. You socialize, you've got friends. . . . I'd hate to be unemployed. I like to be active. I just love, well I don't love work, nobody loves work, that's a stupid thing to say. But it's what makes the world go round at the end of the day. (037C,M,39yrs)

And another said that it 'gives you respect, dignity . . . you just feel more important' (030C,M,49yrs).

Many of our respondents felt that home and work were equally important but most felt that their homes and families took priority. This suggests that to claim that men are 'work centred' simply because they work full time may be inaccurate. It may be that they, as well as women, are home centred (or 'adaptive') but that their 'home centredness' takes the form of providing for their families by engaging in full-time work. This is the case for some women too, especially for those who had taken on the bread-winning role instead of their partners. One man said that work and family,

go hand in hand to a certain extent. You need the money to bring up the family, so you've got to have a job to give them what they want and keep yourself to a standard. (013A,M,55yrs)

Several men commented on their own family centredness.

I think a lot about the family when I'm in work, you're always thinking about your family, yes. I think I'm family orientated . . . I'll get my machine running, do it right. But once you've got your own time then, your thoughts will drift to home. (021C,M,49yrs)

And a lot of men reported that they worked for their families and that their families took precedence over their jobs.

I think home life is more important. That's not to say that work life isn't important . . . Of the two my family comes first obviously . . . When you've got the kids you've got to work, to care for them. You work for the family to be honest. Whatever else you get out of it. (035A,M,40yrs)

This suggests that many men see paid work as something they do for their families and it is this that gives many of them their prime motivation; this is particularly true for men who have a more instrumental orientation to their jobs.

Identity

For many of our respondents, women and men, paid work was important in the sense that it was part of their identity. Thus one of the women spoke of her job in the following way

I've never, ever not worked because I've never taken any time off for maternity or anything like that. So I've always worked and it is important to me. . . . Work, the job I'm actually doing now is a big part of my life, because I don't probably, I take a lot of it home even if it's not carry it home, it's in my mind. I don't switch off. (034C,F,41yrs)

One of the men voiced similar sentiments. 'I think . . . a lot of people, myself included, define themselves by what they do and where they work' (027C,M,37yrs).

Paid work also related to being a parent although this differed for women and men. For men there was no contradiction between paid work and their

identity as fathers. Indeed, until very recently, home centredness in men has meant bringing home a full-time wage. Thus one young man, on a very low wage and working part time, said: 'It's my duty isn't it as, like, a father to actually go to work and provide for my kids' (024B,M,28yrs). In contrast, when women's paid work was part of their identity it was defined as separate from (and potentially in conflict with) their identity as wife or mother. Paid work was an assertion of themselves as individuals as opposed to being a mother, wife or housewife. In the words of one of the women, 'I need to do something other than just be a housewife and mother.' Her job gives her, 'individuality. I'm not just the mum and wife and housewife' (032A,F,44yrs). Women talked about their jobs being important for them as individuals, as being time for them and important for their independence and their own identity and self-realization rather than being simply a wife and mother.

It was also the case, however, that women were seen as much more flexible than men in the jobs they were prepared to take. Most men expected to have a job which reflected their skills and their identity which, as we have seen, often involved being the provider. In this sense it could be suggested that men invested more of themselves in a job than women did and so job insecurity became more of a problem. Flexibility and a willingness to take any work, a sentiment expressed by many of the women, can be an advantage in a situation of job insecurity. Part of this flexibility arises from seeing a job as something that you do rather than a reflection of who you are. One of the women, for instance, said

I wouldn't have difficulty getting a job. I know I would get a job. It wouldn't be the job I'm doing now . . . Stacking shelves at Tesco's, I could do it. (009C,F,46yrs)

Such views were most common amongst the least skilled women. Those who were further up the hierarchy felt that 'stacking shelves in Tesco's . . . wouldn't be enough for me' (027A,F,40yrs) and another, who had worked in BigShop, told us that she had felt it was beneath her and that her new job in BureauGen was of a far more appropriate status for her. Flexibility was therefore associated with low skill levels, a lack of identification with a particular job (as opposed to paid work) and seeing paid employment in instrumental terms (cf. Rose 1994). It could also be taken as evidence of home centredness and a stronger identification with being a wife and mother than with their paid work which was, undoubtedly, the case for some. Others, however, expressed negative views about housework and being confined to the home and were very positive about their paid work. A woman working part time in BigShop said

I don't enjoy being home. I get the buzz. I enjoy working with people. I enjoy the customers. And now I enjoy the authority . . . sad but there I am. But I do enjoy the job. (016B,F,40yrs)

Another who was in a relatively high status job, had children and was working full time in Make-a-Lot said

I'm happy working, it does quite a lot for my, sort of self confidence I think. It's probably very important, you know. . . . I can't see me being the type of person who would be just happy being at home . . . I don't think I'm that type of person. (035C,F,34yrs)

Most men also felt that they were not 'that type of person' and that staying at home was simply not an option for them.

If I didn't work, I'd probably end up going sort of stupid . . . I think working is one of the most important things in the world, if you want to survive and better yourself you've got to have money. And it means working. (033A,M,26yrs)

The cultural association of women with the home might appear to make it easier for women to cope with job insecurity but this was certainly not the case for most of the women we interviewed who, by definition, had 'chosen' paid work over domestic work. This association seemed to be less strong amongst our younger, female respondents although some anticipated taking a short time off work once they had children. This anticipation was often not borne out in practice.

I enjoy being with people you know, I do enjoy working with people like. I don't think I would if I had to -- I don't think I would give up work . . . I used to think when I had my first daughter I'd love to give up but no. I don't think I could be in the house all day. (037A,F,36yrs)

And some had anticipated taking time out when they had babies but had spent their maternity leave at home and by the end of the leave period had decided that staying at home was not for them.

Part-time Working

Earlier research shows an association between part-time working and an instrumental orientation to work. However there is evidence that it is the association of much female, part-time work with low levels of skill which gives rise to the link between part-time work and an instrumental orientation to paid work (Rose 1994). There is also evidence that part-timers have lower expectations of paid work in terms of both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards and that they place a high value on convenience (Gallie et al. 1998). In our sample most of the women working part time were either students, had young children at home or were older returners having taken time out of the workforce when their children were small. They were also in low skilled jobs. These are the women who most closely fit Hakim's model of home-centred women whose orientation to work differs from men's but, even amongst them, the significance of work varies (cf. Walsh 1999). One of the part-timers at BigShop said that paid work was 'very important really. It comes second to the family. But it is an important part. I don't feel guilty when I go out and spend some money on something because at least I feel

I'm contributing to the income' (006B,F,43yrs). This sort of orientation was found among those who were combining caring with paid work by working part time and does not imply that paid work is unimportant even though the family is given priority. Others, however, see part-time work as a temporary phenomenon dictated by family circumstances and, as soon as their children are old enough they intend to return to full-time employment. The men who were working part time were either students who were combining paid work with other, prior commitments, or were ancillary wage earners in the sense of still living in the parental home, having a partner who was the main income earner or having already retired and working to supplement a pension. Some of the younger men would have preferred to work full time. Many part-time workers demonstrate considerable commitment to their jobs whether or not they are ancillary wage earners. Indeed one of the more senior women was challenging the association made in her place of work between part-time work and low commitment to the job and had had to fight to be allowed to go part time and still retain her position. This suggests that work orientation cannot be neatly 'read off' from hours of work and that the relative importance attached to work and home changes depending on changing circumstances. This becomes even clearer when considering how work orientations change over time.

Life Course

Many respondents described how the importance of paid work and the significance of job insecurity change over the life course. This is most obvious in the case of those who are primary carers of young children, usually women, who change from full to part-time employment and then return (or not) to full-time employment when the children are older. It is also the case for men who have financial responsibilities for children and for whom financial need is one of the most important reasons for working. One of the men described changes in the importance of keeping his job.

When I was single, when I first started here and I was single, it didn't make a difference whether the place closed or not. Because I had no dependents. I didn't have to – there was just myself I was taking care of. And when you get married and you get a house and you have got a mortgage and a couple of kids come along then that – that's the difference. (036C,M,40yrs)

The importance of the extrinsic rewards associated with paid work, one of which is job security, changes over the life course assuming more importance with marriage and children, particularly for men. This view was echoed by women.

When I was younger I didn't care Once you get married and you have children, then you change. Because you have responsibilities, you have got to have money haven't you? (010C,F,45yrs)

Other women, in contrast, said that paid work had always been important to them and, as we have seen, commitment to paid work seemed to be higher amongst the younger women in the sample than the younger men. There were older men too who said that paid work and a work identity had always been important to them but, for many of our respondents, the significance of paid work changed as they grew older (see also Gallie et al. 1998). For some this was to do with its not having met their expectations but it was also related to financial responsibilities decreasing thereby making it possible to think of doing other things. Indeed the provider role (however it is shared) ties people into paid work when they might not want to be there at all.

Some of our older respondents were reassessing the importance of work regarding it as less important when financial demands changed. One of the older women said

It wouldn't break the bank if I finished tomorrow . . . As far as money is concerned, it's nice to have the extra money, the older I get now the more I feel that perhaps, you know, I'd like to finish. (031C,F,53yrs)

The importance attached to paid work may also decrease if promotion prospects dwindle and aspirations are frustrated or as retirement approaches. Indeed many of our respondents said that they were looking forward to early retirement so that they could enjoy other parts of their lives. This was true for both men and women and some of our younger respondents were already anticipating this happening as they grew older. In addition the relative importance attached to work and home changes. One of the more senior men said

I suspect home life is probably more important now than it was in the past. Again as I've got older, as I've come towards the end of my sort of working life . . . I don't want to still have the sort of idea that work is the most important thing and suddenly switch to something which I don't consider as important. So home life is perhaps more important than it used to be . . . I think perhaps my home life gives me more satisfaction than work. (036A,M,52yrs)

One of the senior women who was very committed to her job voiced similar sentiments

I think the older you get the more you think that there is a life outside of work. And the more the struggle it gets to come in in the morning . . . I probably see far more of my work colleagues than I do of my husband or the kids, so it is important. And I do, I do like my job. . . . [but] work is not as important as home. Home comes first every time. (027A,F,40yrs)

CONCLUSIONS

There is evidence in our research that the significance of paid work in people's lives is affected not only by the nature of the job that is being done but also by experiences of job insecurity, changing domestic circumstances and stage in the life cycle. Thus job insecurity, redundancy or unemployment, whether experienced by respondents or by those close to them, have an impact not only on involvement in paid work but also on the relative importance attached to home and work. It can also lead to changes in domestic divisions of labour. We have seen that role reversal is a strategy adopted in response to job insecurity by some of our respondents and that this may involve a change from being the ancillary to being the principal wage earner (or vice-versa). Such changes are not always associated with a change in the relative importance of work and home, however. Thus some women can become the main breadwinner while still subscribing to a male breadwinner ideology and prioritizing home over work while others can espouse a more egalitarian gender ideology and embrace their new work identity and career prospects. This is also true of the men who found themselves earning less than their wives, some felt they were no longer the breadwinner while others maintained this identity. Those who abandoned a breadwinner identity and ideology often began to reassess the place of paid work in their lives.

We found that the priority given to paid work relative to family life is subject to change and that women and men may both be home centred but this home centredness is expressed in gendered ways. Thus women's home centredness is often associated with temporary or permanent withdrawal from the workforce when there are young children to care for while men's is more likely to be associated with full-time employment in order to support a wife and family. In such cases work centredness cannot simply be read off from full-time employment nor home centredness from part-time employment. Several of our respondents had changed from part-time to full-time employment or from high-paying, high-risk to low paying, secure employment and this was often associated with a reassessment of priorities. For some moving from part-time to full-time employment could lead to a stronger commitment to paid work while for others it had no perceptible impact on the significance of work. This suggests that work orientations (however defined) do not fit neatly with the full-time/part-time distinction and that some who are working full time may be home centred while some working part time may be work centred and have a strong work ethic.

Our evidence shows that the significance of paid work changes over the life course and in response to changing domestic circumstances. Thus the need to earn money may gain more significance with responsibilities for children and may be particularly important for those who have a provider role; flexibility may be more important for those who have other calls on their time such as studying or caring responsibilities; security may be important if someone wants to be able to plan long term or provide for a family

while prospects and careers are important for those who want to 'get on'. Promotion, however, involves increasing responsibility and time commitment and the need to prioritize work over other aspects of life. A willingness to do this was only apparent amongst a few of our respondents – part-timers and full-timers – while most were content to forego promotion after a certain level because they were not prepared to prioritize paid work to such an extent.

Alongside this, most of our respondents, women and men, valued work for its own sake. They did not necessarily prioritize work over home but paid work was very important in their lives and was often just as important as home (although most of our respondents when pressed said that family was more important than work). Their families could therefore be defined as their central life interest although many told us that they would still work even if they won the lottery. This sort of attachment to paid work could be found in all three workplaces although it was less evident at lower levels where a more instrumental orientation predominated.

Our evidence suggests that the dichotomy between home centredness and work centredness may not reflect the significance of work in people's lives and that perhaps most men, as well as most women, are in the 'adaptive' category (although our findings can only be suggestive given the qualitative nature of our study). This questions both the usefulness of this category as an analytical tool and the categorization of all men as homogeneously and unproblematically work centred. It also questions the notion of central life interest which underpins both Hakim's typology and much of the work orientation literature. Most of the women and men we spoke to do not have one central life interest. It is more complicated than this with most respondents valuing work and home and wanting to maintain a balance between them. Indeed it could be argued that many men are as home centred as women allegedly are but that home centredness is expressed in gendered ways. There are signs in our research that this may now be changing and that gender boundaries may be shifting. This suggests that the notion that work orientation and central life interest are stable across the life course and are differentiated by gender is of limited use in understanding people's actual involvement in paid work, the relative importance attached to work and home and the way that these change with changing circumstances. We are not suggesting that these notions be abandoned, rather that they be incorporated into an exploration of the changing significance of work in women's and men's lives. In this way we can perhaps move beyond the acrimony of the debate on women's work orientations and begin to explore the ways in which work and home, the nature of the job being done, job insecurity, labour market experience and stage in the life course affect the significance of paid work for both women and men.

(Date accepted: February 2003)

Nickie Charles
Sociology and Anthropology
School of Social Sciences and International Development

and
Emma James
National Centre for Public Policy
University of Wales, Swansea

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The research on which this paper was based was funded by the ESRC as part of its *Future of Work* programme, award number L212252012, and was carried out by Nickie Charles, Emma James and Paul Ransome. We are grateful to Chris Harris for critical comments on earlier drafts of this paper and to all who participated in the project, especially those in the three organizations who invested considerable amounts of their own time ensuring our interviews ran smoothly.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bradley, H.** 1999 *Gender and Power in the Workplace*, London: Macmillan.
- Bruegel, I.** 1996 'Whose myths are they anyway? A comment', in *British Journal of Sociology* 47(1): 175–7.
- Burchell, B., Day, D., Hudson, M., Lapido, D., Mankelov, R., Nolan, J. P., Reed, H., Wiehert, I. C. and Wilkinson, F.** 1999 *Job Insecurity and Work Intensification: Flexibility and the Changing Boundaries of Work*, Work and Opportunity series no. 11, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Crompton, R. and Harris, F.** 1998a 'Explaining women's employment patterns: "orientations" to work revisited', *British Journal of Sociology* 49(1): 118–47.
- Crompton, R. and Harris, F.** 1998b 'Gender relations and employment: the impact of occupation', *Work, Employment and Society* 12(2): 297–315.
- Gallie, D., White, M., Yuan, C. and Tomlinson, M.** 1998 *Restructuring the Employment Relationship*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gallie, D. and Vogler, C.** 1993 'Unemployment and attitudes to work' in D. Gallie, C. Marsh and C. Vogler (eds) *Social Change and the Experience of Unemployment*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ginn, J., Arber, S., Brannen, J., Dale, A., Dex, S., Elias, P., Moss, P., Pahl, J., Roberts, C. and Rubery, J.** 1996 'Feminist fallacies: A reply to Hakim on women's employment', *British Journal of Sociology* 47(1): 167–74.
- Glucksmann, M.** 2000 *Cottons and Casuals*, Durham: Sociologypress.
- Goldthorpe, J., Lockwood, D., Bechhofer, F. and Platt, J.** 1969 *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hakim, C.** 1991 'Grateful slaves and self-made women: Fact and fantasy in women's work orientations', *European Sociological Review* 7(2): 101–21.
- 1995 'Five feminist myths about women's employment', *British Journal of Sociology* 46(3): 429–55.
- 1996 *Key Issues in Women's Work*, London: Athlone.
- 1998 'A sociological perspective on part-time work' in H-P. Blossfeld and C. Hakim (eds) *Between Equalization and Marginalization*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 2000 *Work-lifestyle Choices in the 21st Century: Preference Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hartley, J., Jacobson, D., Klandermans, B. and van Vuuren, T.** 1991 *Job Insecurity*, London: Sage.
- Procter, I. and Padfield, M.** 1999 'Work orientations and women's work: A critique of Hakim's theory of the heterogeneity of

women', *Gender, Work and Organization* 6 (3): 152–62.

Rose, M. 1994 'Skill and Samuel Smiles: changing the British work ethic' in R. Penn et al. (eds) *Skill and Occupational Change*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Walsh, J. 1999 'Myths and counter myths: An analysis of part-time women employees and their orientations to work and working hours', *Work, Employment and Society* 13(2): 179–203.