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Work-life reconciliation: including children in the conversation

Abstract:

This paper seeks to further understanding about children's experiences and knowledges of home and employment reconciliation. The paper, which draws on empirical research with children living in socio-economically diverse areas of North West England, makes three contributions. Firstly, it argues that children must be included in studies of work-balance, as the strategies parents adopt affect the way children are socialised towards appropriate divisions of domestic, caring and labour force responsibilities. Secondly, it contributes to research that considers the temporal and spatial boundaries between home and paid work to add the verbal dimension; demonstrating that children have varying levels of conversational interaction with their parents about employment in the home sphere. Finally, the paper contends that these distinct approaches to the verbal and spatial boundaries of production and reproduction are influenced by class dispositions, localised parenting cultures and constructions of childhood. This results in some children being shielded from the realities of paid work, whilst others are socialised to cope with labour market instability.

Keywords: Employment, Children, Work-Life Balance, Class, Parenting, Socialization.

1 Introduction

Neoliberal policy is grounded in a discourse of individualist family life, placing emphasis on the adult individual to fulfil their obligation to engage in paid work and be self-reliant as a family unit (Haylett, 2001; Skevik, 2003). These policies depend upon a normative definition of the successful parent, as a responsible, active, (employed) citizen who will evaluate the opportunities available and seek to do the best for their children (Gillies 2005; Lister 2006; Reay 2008). This individualistic ideology which promotes paid work for all does little to recognise the economic and social significance of women's unpaid contribution within an entrenched household division of labour. Geographical research explores the ways in which women, and mothers in particular, negotiate their complex, multiple and fluid identities within the context of local models of appropriate parenting to reconcile paid work, caring and domestic responsibilities (Holloway, 1999; McDowell, 2008). Some paid workers have eroded traditionally demarcated boundaries between the times and spaces of home and employment in order to reconcile their multiple demands, blurring boundaries between home and employment, as one sphere intrudes on the other (Hardill et al, 1997; Kwan, 2000; Perrons, 2003; Brannen, 2005; Hyman et al, 2005; Jarvis and Pratt, 2006; Johnson et al, 2007; Laegran, 2008). However, the choices that individuals can make in this regard are both enabled and constrained by moral values and norms towards parenting and employment, socio-economic context and institutional structures (Holloway, 1998; Duncan and Smith, 2003; Jarvis, 2005). These choices generate inadvertent outcomes for household members, particularly children who remain an absent presence in work-life reconciliation studies.

Against this backdrop, this paper firstly highlights the imperative of involving children in research that looks at the reconciliation of home and employment. This is essential given the proliferation of research looking at the effect child-rearing has on the employment-related decisions of parents (McDowell, 2004; Dermott, 2006), and progresses knowledge of the field to include children as the subjects rather than objects of research. Secondly, in order to highlight children's knowledge of these issues, the paper suggests that in addition to the spaces and times of home and employment, the level of employment-related conversation children are privy to in the home is crucial in socialising them into particular patterns of work-life reconciliation. This verbal dimension is significant and needs to be further considered in geographical research. Finally, the paper highlights how different approaches to discussing employment at home are related to socio-economic context and local moralities of parenting (Holloway, 1998, 1999; Duncan, 2005). Parents of different socio-economic backgrounds negotiate constructions of children as innocent and in need of protection (Skevik, 2003) against practices of exposing children to the realities of local labour market conditions (Gillies, 2006), creating distinctions in the different ways children are socialised into employment.

In this paper, I begin by reviewing the literature on employment policy and changing family forms in the UK, before exploring the divisions between the home and labour market spheres.

2 Reconciling work and family life

2.1 Citizen-workers, parents and the boundary between home and paid work

In response to economic restructuring and social changes, including increasing numbers of women with dependent children in the paid workforce, British social welfare policies have shifted towards a new set of assumptions about the contributions men and women make to families (Lewis and Giullari, 2005). Under current workfarist policy, adults are regarded as ‘citizen-workers’, all capable of engaging in employment, regardless of marital status, gender or caring responsibilities (Smithson and Stokoe, 2005). A second element of welfare state restructuring, distinctly different to workfare initiatives which (in theory at least) transfer responsibility for economic survival from the state to the individual, are child and family policies. Policies such as The National Childcare Strategy, extensions to maternity and parental leave and the introduction of parental rights to request flexible working arrangements all represent increased state involvement in the organisation of social reproduction, facilitating parental involvement in the labour force (Perrons, 2000; Lister 2006). These policies seek to promote (or at minimum, balance) economic needs for a flexible labour force against the rights of parents to make choices that are appropriate for their families (Lewis and Campbell, 2007), though research suggests that individual work-family balance choices may not be straightforward in the face of shifting economic and social conditions and contextual constraints (McRae, 2003; Jarvis, 2005; Dean 2007).

Geographers have provided insights into the ways people resolve their caring, domestic and labour market responsibilities. One strand of geographical work is concerned with the ways in which people reconcile the simultaneous time and energy demands of family life and workplace, such as adopting a form of the ‘one-and-a-half-earner’ model (Lewis, 2002, accounting for the prevalence of part-time working

amongst mothers) or working non-standard shifts (outside the Fordist 9am-5pm model) (Tausig and Fenwick, 2001). New technologies enable the extensification of employment across discrete times and spaces, potentially blurring the boundaries between home and employment (Kwan, 2000; Perrons, 2003; Hyman et al, 2005; Jarvis and Pratt, 2006; Johnson et al, 2007). However, the possibilities offered by ICT in providing employment flexibility in time and space are not available to all workers. Those employed in circumscribed, routine process occupations may not be able to perform their duties at some distance, as they are obliged to abide by the shift patterns and demands of employers (cf. Warren, 2003; Backett-Milburn et al, 2008), strengthening assertions that those who inhabit distinct occupational positions may be compelled to reconcile home and employment in diverse ways (Duncan et al, 2003).

Another area of emerging research considers how work-life reconciliation decisions are made in the context of social difference and localised attitudes to parenting.

Policy assumes that parents will reconcile their caring and domestic obligations to engage in employment, with the government facilitating the choices they make with regards work-life reconciliation (Lewis and Campbell, 2007). According to preference theory (Hakim, 2000), women's employment patterns are predominantly shaped by their own 'genuine choices' for a career in the labour market or domestic sphere. This view has been widely critiqued by those who argue that women's choices are rarely straightforward and that structural inequalities shape women's employment patterns (McRae, 2003; Duncan, 2005; McDowell et al, 2005; MacLeavy, 2007). Others add to this by illuminating the ways in which distinctive moral beliefs become dominant within localities over time, created through everyday interactions and institutions (Holloway, 1998; Duncan and Smith, 2002). The

research presented in this paper draws on these complementary perspectives to recognise that mothers' decisions about work-life reconciliation are highly influenced by social class divisions, situated within a set of (localised) social assumptions and values about their role as a mother, within the context of the neoliberal state encouraging mothers into employment. This approach contributes to academic understanding of the ways different groups negotiate uneven opportunities and constraints inherent in the capitalist economy, rather than simply reinforcing the hegemonic nature of neoliberalism (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2012, cf. Larner 2003; Gibson-Graham 2008). As parents negotiate localised moralities of parenting alongside their own quest for work-life 'balance' (within the constraints of their capital resources and the economic system), what becomes evident is that children experience a diverse array of home/life configurations.

2.2 Including children in work-life reconciliation debates

Whilst considering the decisions which parents make with regards work-life reconciliation, a conspicuous lacuna emerges; most notably, the views of children. Work-life balance debates assign children a passive role; the objects of parental decision-making. Yet a vibrant area of geographical research, *Geographies of Children, Youth and Families*, conceptualises children as competent social actors, influencing and influenced by their social worlds (Holloway and Valentine, 2000). Researchers have drawn attention to the numerous spaces of children's lives, including the home (Hancock and Gillen, 2007), school (Pike, 2008) and spaces of play (Skelton, 2009). Within the field, research has explored the diverse nature of children's childhoods, focusing on issues concerned with gender (Costello and Duncan, 2006), social class (Sutton, 2009), dis/ability (Holt, 2010) and so on. Whilst

this work provides insights which enrich our understandings of children's lives, there is a growing recognition of the need to place children and young people's lives into broader familial contexts. Studies in the global South have drawn attention to the contribution children make to household economies in terms of employment and caring (Punch, 2001; Evans and Becker, 2009; Bromley and Mackie, 2009); yet there is a paucity of research which includes the views of children and young people in analyses of parental work-life reconciliation in the global North. Children themselves remain an absent presence within work-life reconciliation studies, where the focus tends to be on how parents reconcile labour market duties with caring responsibilities, rather than considering children's subjective experiences and understandings of parental employment.

The sub-discipline has shown that children have views and opinions about many aspects of their lives, but studies considering children and young peoples' experiences of parental employment are scarce. In the wider social sciences, Galinsky (1999) explored the opinions of 8-18 year olds relating to working parents. The qualitative side of Galinsky's study focuses on the perspectives of children in the USA with employed parents, but also seeks to corroborate children's viewpoints through interviews with their employed parent(s). This approach contradicts the purpose and intrinsic value of including children's voices, as valid in their own right, in research. Research conducted by Lewis et al (2008) with young people aged 14-15 investigates the domestic responsibilities and time management of young people with and without employed parents. Whilst insightful, the study fails to recognise the importance of class, neighbourhood and gender which geographical research has shown are significant in influencing the patterns of work-life reconciliation which young people

experience (MacLeavy, 2007; Smith et al, 2011). Engaging with children's knowledge of parental employment is vital for understanding broader social processes. It is well established within the literature that local class cultures reproduce norms and traditions that create gendered and class-based parenting practices in different places, resulting in diverse strategies for reconciling employment and home life (Duncan and Smith, 2002; Warren, 2003; Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2012). Consequently, children are deeply embedded in these local, class-based practices and interrelate with them in their daily lives. The family thus continues to play a key role in the reproduction of social class and class inequalities (Crompton 2006), with class differences in the way children are socialised (Lareau 2003). Social interaction, including language and conversation, is a significant part of children's lives through which they interact with the world around them (Wang, 2007). Research has shown that the occupational position of parents has an effect on the intergenerational transmission of occupational types and social mobility for adults (Crompton, 2000), yet to suggest that children are simply passive drones in the socialisation process is to deny them agency. Children are not 'incomplete' adults; they have thoughts, feelings and experiences worthy of academic attention in their own right. At the same time, they are deeply embedded in a diversity of family formations, cross-cut by social difference and operating within the context of the neoliberal state. Thus whilst mindful of Gibson-Graham's (2008) concern that studies of the power of neoliberalism can effectively reinforce its hegemony (as knowledge production has a constitutive role), the paper also engages with the contingent nature of neoliberalism as it emerges in practice (Peck et al, 2009) by tracing the localised implications of parental work-life balance decisions from the perspective of children within the context of a neoliberal state which encourages parents to engage in

employment. Consideration needs to be given to how children perceive and make sense of their everyday lifeworlds, acknowledging their active role in the creation of their own life paths, the role of socialisation in the family and the simultaneous influence of social conditions.

In this paper, I contribute to work-life reconciliation debates by elucidating children's class-based perspectives of the 'spaces' of employment and the implications this has for their experiences. By drawing on conversational interaction between parents and children, it becomes clear that children's knowledge of parental employment is contingent on class position (and to a lesser extent, gender). This dimension is presented as the 'verbal' dimension of home and employment; a concept developed to contribute to existing analyses of the segmentation, integration and blurring of times and spaces of work (Nippert-Eng, 1996; Perrons, 2003; Laegran, 2008). Through a consideration of children's knowledge and understanding of parental employment, the empirical data illustrates how the discussions of home and labour market can be silenced or exposed through adult/child interactions. This is not to deny that children do not *know* how they feel about parental employment, they certainly do; rather the focus of this paper is to show that children's depth of knowledge and understanding, generated through conversation, is different. The paper suggests that local, class-based moral geographies of parenting (which consider how local models of appropriate parenting circulate through neighbourhoods) (Holloway, 1998) act to bolster the knowledge of some children in relation to employment decisions, whilst limiting that of others. This draws on wider conceptualisations of childhood as a time of innocence and vulnerability, when children are framed as dependent upon parent(s) to provide for them financially whilst protecting them from 'adult'

considerations of work, its inherent stresses and financial (in)securities. The significance of conversational interaction between children and parents is drawn out through considerations of the language of employment, the work-centredness of daily life (Hochschild, 1997) and household financial insecurity.

3 Methodology

This research draws on a wider research project exploring children's experiences of, and attitudes to, parental employment around the deindustrialised west coast of Cumbria. "Cumbria is a county of contrasts. The popular national, and sometimes regional, perception of Cumbria as synonymous with the Lake District and idyllic rurality belies a much more complex mix of settlements, lifestyles and policy priorities" (Cumbria County Council, 2006: 3). This is because "a significant number of wards [are] characterised by severe social deprivation and high unemployment" (Ofsted, 2001: 2). The county shares characteristics with other parts of the UK which have experienced a similar decline in male full-time employment and an increase in female part-time employment after the demise of large-scale manufacturing industries.

Social class is significant for this study because it gives an indication of economic, social and cultural factors beyond occupation alone (Armstrong 2006; Vincent et al, 2008). In this paper, class is used as a way to describe the material and social status of families in the research. Free School Meal (FSM) eligibility is a key proxy of social class in the British context, with government making an explicit link between FSM eligibility and poverty (DCSF, 2008; see also Dunne and Gazeley, 2008). The Office for National Statistics defines a school as 'deprived' if over 30% of children

are eligible for FSM (ONS, 2004) and therefore three school ‘types’ were recruited (Lower, Middle and Higher Income¹ schools) from the towns and villages in the west of the county. FSM eligibility for the group of eight ‘Lower Income’ schools (LI) involved in the study was largely over 30% and these Lower Income schools were characterised by an intake drawing on large social housing neighbourhoods suffering urban deprivation and low economic activity due to industrial decline. The four Middle Income schools (MI) drew on catchments of new private housing on the suburbs of medium-sized towns with FSM levels consistent with the county average (14%). Higher Income schools (HI), of which there were three², drew on populations living on the edge of the Lake District, characterised by higher status employment and FSM levels around 3%. This form of categorisation enabled the research to encounter a diversity of socio-economic circumstances and (potentially) different work-life reconciliation strategies (Duncan, 2005; Ward et al, 2007). The occupation of parents (given by children) was, where possible, coded according to the nine major groups of SOC2010 and compared to ward-level data for men and women. Similar patterns of sectoral difference were observable from both the field data and ONS trends; with parental occupation according to children in the sample shown in Table 1.

¹ ‘Income’ is used as a way to express the socio-economic differences between the communities the schools served. By their very nature, typologies work at the level of ideal types (Edwards and Alldred, 2000) and the method of grouping schools does not deny that individual families may differ from the broader trends evident.

² Unequal numbers of schools were involved with the research in each study grouping. This was due to a mix of infant, junior and primary schools making up the sample.

Table 1 Parental occupation types

	HI	MI	LI
Professional and technical occupations	63.6 35.1	54.8 40.0	6.4 9.8
Secretarial and skilled trades occupations	18.2 5.4	9.7 20.0	35.6 19.6
Caring, sales and customer services	- 10.8	3.2 14.3	11.1 33.3
Process and elementary occupations	- -	25.8 2.9	33.3 9.8
Not seeking employment – caring for children at home	- 43.2	- 20.0	- 27.5
Unemployed – seeking paid work	3.0 -	- -	13.3 -
Unknown	15.2 5.4	6.5 2.9	- -

Key: father, ***mother***

Notes: parental occupations were classified according to the nine major groups of the SOC2010. These have been grouped for the sake of space whilst retaining overall trends.

This paper draws on the accounts of children in Year 1 (aged five to six years old) and Year 4 (aged eight to nine years old) with both employed and non-employed parent(s)³. In each of these sub-groupings, children were interviewed: 37 in HI schools, 36 in MI schools and 51 in LI schools. An active process of consent was followed, with children aware of their right to refuse participation at any stage. Children were interviewed by the author, alone or in groups, depending on the

³ 11.5% of the sample lived in a lone parent household and 10% in no-earner contexts. The paper therefore predominantly draws on the experiences of children living in two parent households with at least one wage earner.

preferences of the child(ren). In practice, 70 interviews were one-to-one, 21 involved pairs of children and four included a group of three children. In research with children, there is often a strong emphasis placed on producing ‘child-friendly’ research methods (e.g. Thomas and O’Kane, 1998; Barker and Weller, 2003). Although activity-based methods do, on the whole, add to children’s feelings of control, power and inclusion in the research process, eliminating discussion from research with children also reduces the autonomy of some groups of children who have a preference for expressing their views verbally. Therefore, this research drew on a toolkit of methodological tools which were available to children in the research encounter. During the outline stages of the research, children were shown the range of methods available to them. After initial conversation, participants were able to select method(s) which they felt suited the ideas they were expressing or in some cases, the researcher would suggest methods to gain insight into different aspects of parental (non)employment. These methods include ‘rainbows and clouds’, developed as a means to depict positive and negative feelings about parental (non)employment, and Lego, utilised to explore the times and spaces of parental employment and domestic responsibilities using a hands-on activity (for a full discussion of these methods, see Pimlott-Wilson, 2012). To ensure anonymity, interviewees were allocated pseudonyms for use in the storage, analysis and publication of transcript data.

Themes that were explored during interviews included home life; parental and wider familial employment (type, patterns, satisfaction, change over time); roles and responsibilities within households more generally; and future hopes and aspirations. Whilst interviewing children about these topics, reflecting on research encounters and

analysing their transcripts by discursive theme, it became clear that children's knowledge of parental employment differed. The following section of the paper develops this finding, firstly looking at the way home and employment are verbally separated for some children as a localised articulation of parenting practices and then goes on to consider how the verbal boundary between the domestic sphere and labour market is blurred for others.

4 The (dis)integration of Home and Employment

4.1 Verbal Separation

The way in which children in the HI and MI samples describe parental employment is distinct to that found in the LI subgroup. The majority of children were aware of parental job titles or the location of work, with job titles frequently recounted in Higher and Middle Income schools, including doctor, nurse, dentist, solicitor, childminder and teacher. This approach may be reflective of the common currency which children felt was inferred by the use of job 'titles'; labels which role theory would suggest gives rise to a predictable set of duties, expectations and behaviours (Goffman, 1959). In the Middle Income sample, children also drew on occupational titles, but additionally use labels which confer status, particularly in the case of fathers' employment: "he's [father] the manager" (Craig, MI, Year 4); "my dad, he's the manager of [a construction business]" (Sienna, MI, Year 4). Their descriptions suggest management responsibility, yet their knowledge of the day-to-day tasks involved in such jobs is minimal: "he's the boss of [a business park]... I can't remember what he does" (Rachel, MI, Year 4); "well I don't know exactly what it is now [that my father does] but it is a job and he earns a lot of money (...) I think he's just a permanent manager" (Ryan, MI, Year 4). Status labels are therefore important

when children describe their fathers' employment in the Middle and Higher Income schools, revealing the salience of male breadwinner ideology (Jarvis, 2002; Charles and James, 2005; Laegran, 2008). Moreover, children's lack of understanding about their fathers' labour market engagement points to the minimal conversation children had with either parent about employment. Children's superficial knowledge of parental employment did not apply to just their father. Only a minority of girls in the MI sample discussed the daily tasks of their mothers' job at length (this was often in the case of businesses which children had personally encountered, such as shops); much more typical was a restricted knowledge. Emily did not know when her mother would be at work as "she doesn't really tell me" what her shift arrangement will be (MI, Year 4). Lisa's mother "just tells me she's gonna have a new job", with little discussion or information (MI, Year 4). By looking at the ways some children recite the job titles of their parents without understanding of their tasks and their uncertainty over working hours, a localised experience of parenting emerges. Whilst hours of work may differ, a particular strategy towards balancing the realms of home and employment comes to light: the verbal dimension.

Recognising the lack of information their parents imparted about employment, some children in Higher and Middle Income schools acknowledged their parents' preference for suppressing the depth of children's knowledge about labour market events. When asked whether her parents talk to her about work, Christina stated that "my mam and dad doesn't like talking about things like that" (HI, Year 4). Similarly, Robert described how "if there was a problem like that [work] they [my parents] would talk [to each other] about it", removing themselves from the room he and his sibling occupied, although "I often pick up on their conversations" (HI, Year 4).

Children's accounts in the Higher and Middle Income schools thus suggest that the level of discussion about paid work between parents and children in the home was infrequent and incomplete in comparison to their counterparts attending Lower Income schools. Through a consideration of parents' jobs, children's discussions in the HI and MI samples reveal a distinct set of knowledges relating to work. Employment is a common feature of many households (see Table 1); the vast majority of children knew their parents' job title and had knowledge of the key features of these occupations; yet the extent of this knowledge was circumscribed by parents constructing conversational boundaries. However, the strategies which parents adopt with regards discussions of paid work did not go unnoticed and unchallenged by all children. Olivia believes that her parents try to conceal information from her in order to protect her feelings, but she overhears them discussing issues:

I normally just overhear them in the car or in the bath or something, I'm always listening to them...they try, when I'm asleep they normally talk about it [work]... but sometimes like when I'm not tired or something, I just lie awake in bed and I overhear them a lot (...) say if it was some bad news, they try to keep me away from it so I don't get worried or nothing (MI, Year 4).

Likewise, when discussing his mother's practices towards discussing workplace issues, Michael affirmed that "I always hear her talking to my dad (...) And I always interrupt saying 'why, what [are] you doing, what [are] you doing?'"(MI, Year 4). Poppy similarly wanted to know more about her parents' employment yet her parents do not openly discuss work with her, so she "always switch[es] the baby thing [monitor] on downstairs without them noticing, [then I] go upstairs and switch mine

on so I can hear” (MI, Year 4). Poppy’s parents do not talk about employment issues with her face to face “because they don’t want me to be upset”. Although individual parents’ motives cannot be interrogated, children’s accounts of the verbal boundaries between employment and home are insightful. Wider geographical literature has shown how working practices increasingly intrude on the times and spaces of home life and in some cases, this blurring of the boundary is a conscious approach to work-life reconciliation (Perrons, 2003; Hyman et al, 2005; Jarvis and Pratt, 2006; Ekinsmyth, 2011). These children’s accounts contribute further to this body of work by showing that conversation is another way in which home and paid work are demarcated, with open and elaborative conversations about the labour market fundamentally limited for some children. In turn, these experiences can be located within the context of existing literature which interrogates localised parenting practices from the adult perspective to provide insight into the ways children experience class-differentiated childhoods. Normative discourses place emphasis on childhood as a time of innocence; with parents responsible for protecting this virtue (Valentine, 1996). Parents resolve their responsibilities towards home and workplace within the context of constraints and opportunities offered by their local moral climate, material conditions and institutional regime, (re)creating particular moral geographies of mothering and fathering (Duncan and Smith, 2002; Jarvis, 2005). Whilst simultaneously negotiating local norms of ‘protecting’ children and their multiple identities (including parent, worker and partner), parents in the HI and MI study areas minimise discussion as a means to shield children from the realities of the workplace. The verbal boundary between home and labour market is reinforced for Higher and Middle Income children by the concealment of everyday employment contingencies, a manifestation of local parenting practices which establish the

passivity and objectified status of children in labour market-related decisions (Holloway, 1998). On another level, the empirical data highlight how some children are active in challenging their construction as vulnerable; either subversively acquiring knowledge of this ‘adult’ domain through ‘eavesdropping’, or openly challenging these localised parenting practices at the household level. This practice of verbally dividing home and employment can be further revealed through an exploration of accounts which deconstruct this verbal divide, as practices are (re)negotiated according to socio-economic class, a focus of the next section.

4.2 Verbal Integration

The verbal separation of home and employment typical in the Higher and Middle Income sample is paralleled by a verbal integration in the accounts of children attending Lower Income schools. In a similar way to the ‘blurring’ of the temporal and spatial boundaries of home and employment identified by Hardill et al (1997) (an argument subsequently nuanced to include considerations of how ethics of care and paid work are reconciled in shifting economic conditions (Perrons, 2000; McDowell, 2004; Ekinsmyth, 2011); in the LI sample, the boundary between domestic and employment domains evident in HI and MI accounts was deconstructed through parent-child verbal interactions.

In the LI sample, children’s narratives of their parents’ jobs were distinct to those in the HI and MI schools. Job titles were less frequently relayed; rather a more descriptive notion of task and location was given. Jonathan described how his father “goes to [a construction company] and does pallets, makes pallets with guns, with nail guns and if, if they’ve been called out to work on like, [housing] estates and things,

they go and build on the estates” (LI, Year 4). Sophie’s dad “works in a paper shop... [for a local newspaper]...He goes at the counter and prices stuff and when people want to buy stuff he lets them buy them and gives them the money. Sometimes he goes out and does [delivers] the papers” (LI, Year 4) and Jasper wanted to “tell you about my mam’s job... she works in town...And it’s [in a household goods shop] ...she works on any till...my mam isn’t the boss, she’s *just*, you know, does some work” (Jasper, LI, Year 1, *emphasis added*). This distinction in account could be taken to reflect particular attitudes towards employment held by both parents and children (as children come to know about their parents’ jobs through discussion, daily experience and observation, but also by drawing on their own values and opinions, formed within their wider social context); between those (in the HI and MI schools) who think of themselves/their parent as having a ‘career’ as opposed to a ‘job’ (in the LI schools) (Green, 1995; Backett-Milburn et al, 2008). Jasper’s suggestion that his mother ‘just’ works rather than taking a supervisory role is echoed by Marie, who talked about how her mother “*just* cleans banks” (LI, Year 4, *emphasis added*). Despite this distinction in their descriptions of parents’ jobs, further analysis of children’s discussions reveals a significant variation with regards the depth and detail of knowledge pertaining to the labour market tasks of their parents, pointing to different conceptualisations of childhood, languages of employment and approaches to work-life reconciliation.

The age of children in the Lower Income grouping had little bearing on their awareness of labour market contingencies. All children were asked about the hours which their parents worked, with Annabel able to outline her father’s shifts in much greater detail than many children in the Higher or Middle Income schools:

He's off four days and then he works in four days and sometimes he has to work some of his off days because if somebody's poorly, he's got to work them (LI, Year 1).

In discussions of maternal work history, a minority of older children in the HI and MI samples were able to recount the jobs their mothers had held, often in the context of becoming a full-time stay-at-home mother. In the LI sample, knowledge of employment history was common regardless of the child's age or mother's current employment arrangement. Emma was able to talk in detail about the jobs her mother had previously had and her motivations for change:

“[mother left The Big Supermarket] coz she didn't like that (...) coz at Making Pottery she got paid off (...) And before The Big Supermarket she was at [A Clothes Manufacturer] (...) And before [A Clothes Manufacturer], Discount Clothing... (HPW: Why does she change jobs so much?) Coz sometimes, coz she doesn't like them but I think she's gonna stay at Frozen Food now... she just gets on with it [her job], sometimes people [customers] bother her and ask her to do stuff when she's already done something...she wishes people would leave her alone and, she wishes she could just work on the tills and put stuff on food [pricing and stacking shelves] and all that” (LI, Year 1).

This reveals fluidity in her mother's job history and also illustrates a high level of verbal integration of paid work and home, as Emma is aware of what happens at work and her mother's feelings about it. Tara also knew her mother was dissatisfied with her job as she “just says like, it's boring and she wishes it was better” (LI, Year 4). Although Emma's account suggests some level of choice in her mother's employment

history, leaving jobs she was dissatisfied with; both Emma and Tara's descriptions are illustrative of the relationship which many children suggested their parents, mothers in particular, have with the labour market.

Those with mothers employed in manual and service occupations suggested a work history characterised by regular changes and a desire for something better. When taken alongside existing literature focusing on mothers' decision-making, children's accounts add weight to the assertion that the 'genuine choices' (Hakim, 2000) of mothers may be constrained by factors beyond their own control (McRae, 2003; Duncan, 2005; Jarvis, 2005; McDowell et al, 2005; James, 2009). Whilst there may be some choice in which jobs mothers take, children suggest that mothers in the LI sample are discontent with manual and service occupations, yet these remain crucial to the household economy: "she wouldn't stay off [work] (HPW: Would she not?) Coz she needs the money...for food and stuff... She wouldn't hide anything from me" (Violet, LI, Year 4). Considerations of the financial impacts of (non)employment are fundamental for children in the LI sample. Home and employment are integrated through dialogue, as children's accounts suggest a deep knowledge and understanding of parental deliberations:

We haven't got any money with my dad getting retired [fired], and they stopped our Family Credit and they're trying to get us back on (...) we've got the Family Credit back again now he's started to work (Abigail, LI, Year 1).

We did have £1000 every like, month but [the Prime Minister] right, he takes, he takes a quarter of his [step-father's] money away to spend on like hospitals

and everything (...) we get like about, we get (counting) seven, seven hundred and fifty pounds (Bethany, LI, Year 4).

The discussions of these children illustrate the realities of life within the employment system in which their parents are embedded and the significance of particular, localised parenting moralities which acculturate children to the context in which they live. The understanding of the tax and benefits systems which these children exhibit indicates a degree of knowledge gained through conversation with parents which was not found in the other two study groupings, along with an associated household reliance on in-work benefits for financial security (McDowell, 2005; McDowell et al, 2006a; Braun et al, 2008).

Whilst Philo's (2003: 15) assertion that "children [are] yet to learn the adult boundaries between work, coping and play" may be true for some children (as normative frameworks endorse protecting children from 'adult' concerns); this paper supports previous research which shows that local articulations of parenting and childhood differ (Valentine, 1996; Holloway, 1998, 1999). Verbally solidifying the boundaries between home and employment may be one element of the strategy aimed at achieving the 'right' balance between these spheres; whereas for others, deconstructing conversational boundaries between home and paid work may be another approach to reconciling these domains in an effort to cope with locally-specific socio-economic circumstances. As class-differentiated approaches towards balancing the spaces and times of home and paid work are demonstrated in existing research from the perspective of adults (Duncan, 2005; Fagan et al, 2008); children's accounts suggest that such discrete home-employment reconciliation moralities

operate at a conversational level too, intertwined with different constructions of childhood and ‘good’ parenting. In her work, Gillies (2006) finds that working class parents are emotionally and practically engaged in accustoming their children to negotiate disadvantage and challenges. Children’s accounts support this assertion, illustrating that working class parents adopt conversational styles which are distinct to middle class approaches. This transpires in a practice of exposing children to labour market realities in neighbourhoods of lower socio-economic status involved in the study to ensure children are able to cope with potential instability and hardship; a parenting practice which differs to ‘normative’ (that is middle class) ways, but nonetheless attends to localised understandings of children’s emotional well-being. Children are highly aware of the (not-so) pleasant elements of employment, the stresses of unemployment and the threat to the household economy this could generate, along with understandings of the welfare and taxation systems. In contrast, the stability of employment for parents in the HI and MI samples could be one reason for a distinction in parenting practice; not discussing issues which are deemed immaterial to everyday household relations and which infringe on localised understandings of childhood innocence.

Localised constructions of childhood are also interwoven with the verbal (dis)integration of home and employment, as children’s accounts from the HI and MI sample present parents ‘protecting’ childhood by omitting discussions of labour market events, stresses and instability from the home. Gemma knew that her mother was “coming home a bit upset sometimes” recognising that “they [parents] don’t wanna tell us in case we get upset” (LI, Year 4). Gemma’s assertion corresponds with those of Olivia and Poppy in the MI sample (Section 4.1) who suggest that their

parents' containment of upset is related to their duty to protect the innocence of children (Skevik, 2003), exhibiting a similarity of parenting cultures. Whilst both Gemma and Poppy's parents were reticent to impart information about the difficulties of the labour market, children's accounts in the Lower Income sample were characterised by a greater depth of knowledge, infused with considerations of the labour market in which parents worked and localised constructions of 'good' parenting. Although Michael suggests that he (unsuccessfully) challenges his parents to reveal information about paid work, Gemma went further to suggest that she plays an active role in challenging the moralities of her parents and the way they interact with her, as "it takes me about five or ten minutes to get it out of her (...) I prefer to know". This develops Holloway's (1998) concept of local moralities of parenting, where she contends that such cultures are constructed solely by adults, to argue that children also play an active role in shaping local attitudes to parenting. Whilst Lewis et al (2008) suggest that children have little power over parents' employment, accepting their circumstances as a form of coping strategy (Näsman, 2003); the accounts of children presented in this paper show that they do not always passively accept the verbal separation of home and labour market which parents enact; they contest this through listening in and explicit challenge.

What is clear is that the boundaries of home and employment are not just spatially and temporally separated, integrated or blurred, but approaches to discussing paid work in the domestic sphere are differentiated. The next section will explore this conceptualisation further, adding the voices of children to existing research on the spatial divisions between home and employment, asserting the significance of socio-economic class.

4.3 Spatial (and Temporal) Separation of home and employment

This section focuses on the degree to which employment breaches the spatial boundary of the home. By considering the level of encroachment of employment tasks on the home from the perspective of children, the significance of the verbal (dis)integration of these two domains can be further exposed. Dual-earning professional and managerial households dominated in the Higher Income grouping, and here, children indicated the perceived flexibility that mothers had in their job especially in negotiating reduced hours or days of employment (Felstead et al, 2002). Mothers thus retained primary responsibility for caring for children, as households adopted a one-and-a-half worker model with mothers working part-time and organising the timing of paid work around children within an entrenched division of household labour (Vincent et al, 2004; McDowell, 2005; MacLeavy, 2007). Children were unaware of any labour market tasks being completed in the home by their mother and by engaging in paid work on a limited number of days per week, a distinction between home-related and employment-related tasks was established for the maternal role. This results in a primary spatial separation of home and employment as work-related tasks rarely enter the home, alongside a separation enhanced by the physical distance between the workplace and neighbourhood. Together these divisions are self-reinforcing, and the verbal separation of these two spheres added to the solidification of these boundaries. This resulted in children repeatedly describing the alignment between mothers' working hours and school hours (MacLeavy, 2007). Samuel described the harried daily routine of his mother, a training manager, fitting paid work with his school hours: "mam always drops me off ...[then] my mam goes and gets petrol at nine o'clock and so she makes it to work at

half past nine, and then, she always finishes at three o'clock and then she has to rush rush and get me"(HI, Year 4) and Robert said his mother (a solicitor) is "always there when I get back off the [school] bus" (HI, Year 4). This spatial and temporal separation of home and labour market into distinct time frames buttressed the verbal divide, producing one particular articulation of work-life 'balance' in the context of local parenting cultures, based around intensive mothering (Southerton, 2003; Armstrong, 2006). Children's accounts suggest that these mothers are able to exert 'choice' (Hakim, 2000) over the hours they engage in paid work. This choice may be supported by the sector in which they or their partner work (Table 1), with greater financial resources to support reduced working hours. Yet, choices may also be constrained by the requirement for professional mothers to remain attached to the labour market, along with limitations exerted by gendered moralities of care, childcare availability and so on (Duncan and Edwards, 1999; McDowell, 2004; Jarvis, 2005; Armstrong, 2006; Hebson, 2009). The assertion that mothers (rather than fathers) tend to "adjust their work identities to accommodate their family identities, but not vice versa" (Bielby and Bielby, 1989: 784) resonates with children's discussions (see also Vincent and Ball, 2006; Laegran, 2008). Children in the Higher Income grouping discussed how many mothers (43.2%) had ceased labour market engagement, with particular gendered divisions of production and reproduction emerging: "your mum normally stays at home and does the housework and your dad normally works" (Lauren, HI, Year 4). This suggests that a form of intensive mothering is adopted and reinforced in the two parent households which were predominant in this sub-sample, perpetuating 'traditional' household divisions of labour and socialising children into particular gendered roles (Perrons, 2003; Wheelock et al, 2003; Vincent et al, 2004). Paternal employment is prioritised and

maternal responsibility for the domestic domain manifests, as the relative saliency of each identity (mother, wife, and worker) influences how much time is allocated to each role (Holloway, 1999). This results in the tasks of each domain being completed in distinct spaces. In contrast, different forms of parental responsibility were presented by children attending schools in the Lower Income sample, despite a physical separation of home and labour market.

In areas of lower socio-economic status, characterised by routine manual and service employment, children also discussed a spatial separation of home and labour market tasks, but the justifications and manifestations of this were different. The spatial separation of home and employment tasks was not simply a reflection of ‘genuine choices’ (Hakim, 2000); rather the occupational type of parents, characterised by lower levels of autonomy and flexibility, had an overriding influence on the choices parents made in balancing home and employment (Armstrong, 2006; Ward et al, 2007). Employment tasks had to be completed in a specific place, such as a factory, shop or nursing home, meaning they were undertaken in a space separate from the home. When describing their parents’ jobs, a sense of space and location was important for children’s understandings (such as in the cases of Jonathan, Sophie and Jasper above). Children described the businesses in which their parents were employed, which were often located in the immediate vicinity of the community (Canny, 2004). Josh explained the way to his mother’s work: “you know that station with all the vans in it, right next to the school when you come out of the room and then that way and you see it there” (LI, Year 4) and Scott described his mother’s workplace in relation to places he knew well: “you know where you get the electric, near the church, in [Town]? (HPW: Yes) She works in that centre, in that big centre,

the big blue one...She goes on the computer” (LI, Year 1). This points to the familiarity children have with parents’ workplaces, as the spaces of children’s lives are more localised and differently composed to adults (and each other) (Cope, 2008). A dualism thus emerges in the spatial element of children’s reports of lower status occupations: the location of the place of employment may be spatially embedded in children’s knowledges of the microgeographies of the neighbourhood, but employment tasks themselves rarely enter the home because of the contingencies of, for example, routine process occupations. This in turn augments the findings about the verbal integration of home and employment, as it suggests that few children in the Lower Income neighbourhoods which were part of this study have been to their parents’ workplace, yet at the same time, they had an extensive understanding of the processes, friendships and frustrations within that space, acquired through discussion. The way children gain knowledge about employment is thus differentiated by social class and employment type, affected by the dispositions of parents and social constructions of childhood. Some are inclined to discuss employment with their children, whilst internalised norms about demarcating the home and employment spheres may predispose others not to discuss employment at home. Despite the spatial separation between home and employment which children in the LI sample experienced, the verbal integration of home and employment meant that children in the study had a detailed knowledge of workplace activities which took place beyond the boundaries of the home and their own personal experiences. In contrast, the following section explores the ways in which the children from Middle Income schools discussed employment infringing on the home space in the context of limited conversational interaction.

4.4 Spatial Integration of Home and Employment

In many studies, it has been suggested that individuals in higher-level occupations appreciate porosity of the home/employment boundary in order to reconcile competing demands (Berker, 2003; Laegran, 2008). Here, I suggest that this blurring was negotiated solely by parents in the Middle Income sample but still has implications for children and their lives. I have shown that in the HI sample, children are not aware of such porosity during their waking hours and so for them, employment is spatially divided from the domestic sphere. In counterpoint, many of the children who attended MI schools suggested that despite coming home from the workplace, their mothers in particular were then engaged with employment tasks in the space of the home in order to reconcile domestic, caring and labour market responsibilities. This was in the context of (generally) full-time employment of fathers which took place beyond the sphere of the home. Children reported their mothers returning home in order to care for them, yet many continued working once at home to balance employment demands with ethics of care, reinforcing the norm of dual earner households (McDowell et al, 2006b) and the primacy of maternal care for children (McDowell, 2004; Armstrong, 2006; Ward et al, 2007). Paid employment appears not to be precluded from the maternal role, but diverse strategies are utilised to reconcile labour market and social reproduction; strategies which were typically aligned with the experiences of peers, underlining the significance of gendered moral cultures of parenting, habitus and social networks (Holloway, 1998, 1999; Duncan, 2005). Whilst holding a job in school administration, Craig's mum also takes on extra book-keeping work after collecting him from school: "at the moment as well, the hairdressers in town, I can't remember what it's called, Phillip's the manager, she does bills for them....She does it, all of the wages she does...after school" (MI, Year

4). Blurring the spatial boundaries between home, childcare and paid work thus provides some mothers with a strategy for reconciling these responsibilities as children profess that their mothers feel they must ‘be there’ for their children whilst also requiring the income associated with full-time employment. This recasts the vision of intensive mothering found in HI schools (and beyond), as localised articulations of ‘good’ mothering emerge (Vincent et al, 2004; McDowell et al, 2006b).

Whilst families have traditionally constructed clear spatial and temporal boundaries between home and employment, these are breaking down (Jarvis, 2005). Academic research has sought to identify the impacts which juggling these domains has for mothers, both in terms of role overload (e.g. stress and harriedness) and role enhancement (e.g. increased self esteem that comes with financial independence) (Southerton, 2003; Cunningham-Burley et al, 2006); overlooking the potential consequences of these decisions for children’s well-being. For some children in the Middle Income sample, the blurring of the margins between home and labour market manifests as paid work tasks being brought home in the early evenings. Although this porosity may provide mothers in particular with a form of work/life reconciliation (Laegran, 2008), for children in the MI school sample, it exacerbates their verbal exclusion from the employment sphere. This lack of discussion does not preclude children’s knowledge of parental employment; rather they experience the daily effects of paid work and childcare arrangements, ‘pick up’ on parental stress and overhear conversations about the workplace. Children suggested that employment commitments affect the home in the form of telephone calls, revision for examinations and paperwork. Tabitha dislikes it when “she [mother] had to fill in this

paperwork form, for the, like, for [her workplace] and she couldn't, and she didn't have time to play with me with my new, with the game that I just made, so it's quite hard (...) I think it's my fault for getting in the way" (MI, Year 4). Tabitha blames herself for the restrictions her mother encounters and her feelings of guilt are intensified by the verbal barrier which her mother maintains. Although liking her mother's job, Olivia also dislikes the paperwork that her mother brings home and the lack of attention she receives:

Olivia's Cloud

"All the paper work is all over the house and she doesn't speak to me. I don't get everything like go[ing] to the piers or go[ing] ice skating" (MI, Year 4).

Maternal employment thus has implications not only for the well-being of mothers but also for their children, as Olivia elaborated that "there's paperwork all over the house and I don't get to speak to her as much coz she's normally always on the phone or stuff like that, she's always getting her pencil down, getting all the books ready".

Olivia points to the technology which, in minimising the spatial-temporal tensions of juggling paid work, learning and caring responsibilities for her mother (Perrons, 2003; Jarvis and Pratt, 2006), facilitates the intrusion of employment into the home sphere which children experience, despite a verbal boundary.

5 Conclusion

This paper contributes to geographical research by incorporating children into considerations of work-life reconciliation which to date have focused on the decision-making of adults (McDowell et al, 2005; Ekinsmyth, 2011). Focusing on children as subjects in their own right, rather than simply as the objects of parental care, the paper has explored a diverse group of children's understandings and experiences of parental employment. This analysis furthers geographical debates about the boundaries between home and employment (Hyman et al, 2005; Jarvis and Pratt, 2006), demonstrating the importance of verbal integration and exclusion of paid work from the home. In this case, while some parents seek to shield their middle-class children from the realities of adult labour market concerns, other parents accustomise their less well of children to the everyday realities of the labour market, ensuring they have the emotional resources to cope with present-day instability and future labour market realities (Gillies, 2006). The paper contends that these distinct approaches to the verbal and spatial boundaries of production and reproduction are influenced by labour market opportunities, class dispositions, localised parenting cultures and constructions of childhood. Moreover, through a child's-eye focus on the ways in which employment tasks enter the home, and a consideration of the vocabulary of employment, the paper shows how some children are active in negotiating access to

further knowledge about employment, despite their parents' efforts to 'shield' them from this domain.

As government policy assigns employment a key role as part of active citizenship and as a route out of poverty, research which only considers the impacts which juggling paid work, home and childcare has for mothers (Southerton, 2003; Cunningham-Burley et al, 2006) overlooks the implications which diverse patterns of work-life reconciliation have for children, their everyday experiences and future lives.

Children in the LI sub-sample are knowledgeable of their parents' work, socialised towards the realities of the local labour market through conversational interaction that helps them to cope with the everyday reality of their lives. At the same time, children in the MI and HI sub-groups are comparatively shielded from the world of work by the creation of verbal boundaries, demarcating paid work from domestic life in conversation. The work-centredness of contemporary life associated with the new economy (Hochschild, 1997; Jarvis, 2005), different parents' position within this and local moral cultures of parenting combine to impact on children's well-being and knowledges of employment, as some are exposed to the stresses and difficulties associated with their parent's employment and others experience the infringement of employment tasks on the home without explanation or discussion. Additional research is needed to investigate the ways in which work-life reconciliation practices affect children's everyday experiences of parental (non)employment, furthering understanding of how stress and employment insecurity are experienced in the current economic climate.

The UK Government positions families as increasingly vital in preparing children for their role as future citizen-workers (Lister, 2006; Mayall, 2006); yet the family also plays a key role in the (re)production of social class and class inequalities (Bourdieu, 1986; Lareau 2003; Crompton 2006). Differential levels of conversational interaction stem from diverse conceptualisations of childhood, the place of employment within the household and the economic contexts in which different parents operate, giving rise to diverse practices of socialisation. The paper shows diversity in how children learn about employment and parenting in the family, with these decisions influenced by labour market opportunities, institutional structures and local parenting cultures which can endorse, (re)shape and normalise the ways families reconcile gender roles and employment (Felstead et al, 2002; Jarvis and Pratt, 2006; Hebson, 2009). The dominance of professional and managerial careers amongst some parents is countered by the norm of manual and service jobs found amongst others; with different working conditions, routines and requirements experienced by children in their everyday lives. Children therefore have different expectations and understandings of the world of work long before they participate in paid work themselves (Pimlott-Wilson, 2011). This is not to assign children a passive role in this process, rather this paper suggests that some children are active in challenging localised moralities of parenting by questioning parents' practices and developing their own understandings of employment based in parents' experiences (both positive and negative). Nevertheless, additional research into the issue of intergenerational social mobility is imperative to understand how parental employment influences the futures of young people.

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