

Part-time workers or part-time men? - Exploring the interstices of masculinity, fragmented work and professional work status

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ABSTRACT

Part-time working is largely considered a feminised way of working which offers a solution to the problem of combining waged work and child care. Thus, little attention has been afforded to men's adoption of part-time work and any subsequent consequences for articulations of masculinity. Accordingly, this paper uses a qualitative research approach to explore how masculinity is constructed and articulated where men engage in part-time work and by doing so, challenge the male breadwinner model. The paper selects men in managerial and professional roles as the foci of study to enable a nuanced examination of the interstices between masculinity, fragmented work and professional employment status. Findings suggest that where men with high occupational status elect to work part-time, they face few barriers to access and their masculinity is hardly questioned, either by themselves or by others, and may even be reconfirmed and/or enhanced.

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INTRODUCTION

It is argued that the relationship between women and work-life balance issues is at the root of the gendering of part-time work and other forms of flexible working, (Kirton and Greene, 2004; Glover and Kirton, 2006). So, rather than a gender neutral policy, the implementation of non-standard working practices is assumed to accommodate the need for women to combine domestic and waged labour (Kirton and Greene, 2004). The extant literature confirms this argument (Kersley *at al*, 2006, ONS, 2008). It is simultaneously apparent however, that access to working patterns that deviate from the full-time norm does not singularly hinge on gender but is shaped by factors such as industry and sector, and the individual agency workers possess by virtue of their job role and occupational status (Healy, 2004).

Rather than re-visiting mainstream debates concerning women's involvement with various forms of flexible working (Glover and Kirton, 2006), this paper uses the concept of part-time working as a vehicle through which to explore the social construction of masculinities within contemporary organisations and to tease out intersectional relationships between masculinity and occupational status. It examines the enactment of different masculinities through the lens of part-time working and in particular, how men in managerial, technical and professional roles perceive, utilise and defend their engagement with part-time working practices in the workplace. Using part-time work in this manner facilitates an analysis of how masculinity is challenged, constructed and produced in the context of assumed feminised working practices and invites an exploration of what it means to men to see, think and behave like men whilst working in a way that is more readily associated with women. In so doing, the taken for granted natural dominance of masculinity (see Connell, 2005) is challenged and debates concerning gender power, gender relations and gendered identities are

reignited. The key research proposition explored within the paper is the notion that men have distinctive ways of accessing, articulating and negotiating part-time work that are tightly bound with socially embedded norms of gendered identity and masculine dominance. Related to this proposition, it is argued that men with higher occupational status can use their eminence effectively to transcend potential negative aspersions cast upon their masculinity as a consequence of choosing to work in ways conventionally connected to women. The gender hierarchy and associated power structure is therefore, little disturbed, and may even be reinforced, when men in prominent organisational positions engage in part-time work.

LITERATURE

The gendering of work organisation

Flexible working is a familiar and much researched topic (Davies and Freedland, 2007, Noon and Blyton, 2007); there is however, less recognition of tacit assumptions regarding the gendering of flexibility (Liff, 2003). Successive Labour governments have, since 1997, promoted flexible working under the auspices of ‘family-friendly’ working and latterly as ‘work-life balance’, making progress to ensure that both men and women have a right to request flexible working to accommodate caring responsibilities. The new Conservative – Liberal Democrat Coalition appears to be committed to promoting flexible working practices for all and is particularly concerned to encourage greater shared parenting, as evidenced by the recent launch of the Modern Workplaces consultation (www.bis.gov.uk). Yet, despite use of gender neutral language and persistent effort to rally inclusiveness and universalism of access there is still an underlying presumption that flexible working in general, and reduced hours working in particular, is primarily aimed at women so they might more easily accommodate waged work and caring/domestic labour (Houston and Waumsley, 2003). Contemporary data would suggest that this presumption is well founded. As a group, women are far more likely to apply for and utilise all types of flexible working practices (with the exception

of home-working) (ONS, 2008). Furthermore, generally speaking, a greater proportion of employees work part-time in organisations where women make up a greater proportion of the workforce (Kersley et al, 2006).

Whilst this is so, a one-dimensional analysis, focused solely on the gendering of work organisation, fails to encapsulate further contextual, organisational and work-related features which shape employees' access to non-standard working. Dex and Smith (2001) for example argue that the presence, or otherwise, of equal opportunities policies, the degree of competition in the firm's operating market, the size of the organisation, the sector it operates in (public / private), whether unions are recognised and the nature of the workforce are all significant factors influencing access to part-time work and other forms of flexible working for both sexes. Salient to this paper Dex and Smith (2001) determine that the ability to choose *where* and *when* to work is more common where there is a highly educated and 'high discretion' workforce who can be trusted to use autonomy yet remain dedicated to the work role (Wise and Bond, 2003). WERS 2004 (Kersley *et al*, 2006) concurs; the Survey of Employees shows that managers had greater confidence than non-managerial employees that they would be able to access flexi-time if needed and 43 percent of managers reported that they had considerable autonomy over when they started and finished their working day compared to only 24 percent of non- managerial employees. However, the dual axis of gender and occupational status raises an interesting paradox where management is concerned; whilst managerial status might offer increased control over work scheduling, flexible working involving reduced working hours is not universally available within management roles. The Cross-Section Survey of Managers (Kersley *et al*, 2006) indicates part-time hours were not commonly available to managers. This corroborates with findings from the WERS 2004 Employees' Survey that only 27 percent of managers thought that they would be able to reduce their hours compared to 33 percent of non-managerial employees. Similarly the incidence of part-time working in professionalised occupations falls short of universal. Notably, the EOC (2001) found that whilst 14 percent of employees worked

part-time in professional roles, access to part-time working varied considerably between professional occupations. For example, it was well established among teaching, health and social welfare professionals but rare in engineering and technology occupations. Such findings reflect variance in the gender composition of professions and the influence of sector and job related characteristics in expanding or restricting access to part-time work (Dex and Smith, 2001).

Paid work and masculinity

The domain of paid work has long been inextricably linked, not just to men per se but to the performance of masculinity (Cockburn 1983, Guerrier and Adib, 2004). As a rule, men are expected to adopt the breadwinner role, supported by women whose primary allegiance is to the home (Connell, 2009). For men, being in a position to do this is a signifier of manliness and masculinity and the loss of this role diminishes masculine identity and power (Besen, 2007). Work can thus be conceived as an important space in which men trial and demonstrate their masculinity (Gaylin, 1992) and so achieve credibility and legitimacy as a male. Men who work in gender atypical areas or in gender atypical ways are arguably placed in a dichotomous position as they pose a challenge to conventional attitudes and assumptions. Such men rock the gendered sub-structure of the organisation and in so doing, become highly visible. Simpson (2004), in her study of men's experiences in female dominated occupations, articulates the different ways in which men and women experience being in a 'token' or isolated position, away from others of their own gender. It is asserted that 'while token women can be severely disadvantaged by their minority status, positive career outcomes may well accrue for 'token' men' (2004:352) as they are assumed to be career oriented even if they are not and they are deemed to have special expertise. Simpson's work and other similar studies (Cross and Bagilhole, 2000, Lupton, 2000) show that men have a variety of ways of coping with feminised work, for example, sometimes they distance themselves from women in an attempt to mark themselves out as different, often they re-work the job title to suppress overtly

feminine aspects of the role and emphasise its male components. These strategies help men in minority positions to align their work more closely with hegemonic masculinity and thus deflect any derision they may face from other men.

Part-time work and masculinity

Just as men's digression into feminised occupations prompts questions about masculine identity, men who transgress gendered notions of work organisation risk putting their masculinity 'on the line' (Simpson, 2004). Full-time work is the normative model and taken for granted as an assumed gender neutral arrangement yet, it is saturated with male values (Sheridan, 2004). Hegemonic masculinity is not just associated with work but it is more acutely associated with work that entails long hours and behaviours to demonstrate prioritisation of the needs of the employer over and above personal and family time (Swan and Gatrell, 2008); necessarily therefore, full-time work. Evidence of the working hours and working patterns of managers and other senior ranking employees (Kersley *et al*, 2006) cited earlier would suggest that at this level the pull of the normative (male) working model is particularly acute. Part-time work in managerial roles is less well established among women, let alone among men (Warren, 2003) suggesting both female and male managers feel compelled to deny family time and comply with the attributes of hegemonic masculinity; a point reinforced in the literature by the use of the label 'honorary men' to describe women who tread this path (Wajcman, 1998). The challenge for men who engage in part-time work is how to manage the dissonance between the essentially feminine way in which they work and the demands of the dominant masculine gender regime (Simpson 2004); a challenge perhaps made more formidable for managers and senior staff where the normative (male) model of working is so entrenched.

Certainly, to use Puwar's (2004) expression, men who work non-standard hours could be described as 'space invaders'; entering an established feminised form of work organisation and in so doing, highlighting themselves as different. However, whereas women's minority status in masculinised

work is often characterised by negativity or a requirement to act ‘masculine’ (Lupton, 2000), men might be able to use their visibility to resist prevailing interpretations of masculinity and construct ‘trail-blazing identities that actively challenge current practices and champion different ways of doing’ (Lewis and Simpson, 2010:9). Visibility is not always detrimental, on the contrary, Simpson (2010) argues that men may revel in token status and use it to construct a special identity for themselves, apart from other men. Pini and McDonald recognise this phenomena in their study of male flexible workers in an Australian Local Government organisation; the men who adapted their working hours so that they could care for their children portrayed themselves and their choices as “slightly on the progressive side and early adopters and believing in equality” (2008:606). This example of men constructing masculinity through eschewing full time work might be construed as either men rejecting the constraints of hegemonic masculinity (Swan and Gatrell, 2008) to legitimise doing gender differently, or an attempt to re-define hegemonic masculinity by dissociating it from the breadwinner role, thereby preserving manliness (Brandth and Kvande, 1998). Further, Pini and MacDonald’s study (2008) failed to show that dominant gender discourses were disturbed by men engaging in reduced hours working. So for example, male employees described choosing work arrangements to complement part-time study and/or other ventures designed to enhance future career success and emphasised the temporary nature of their attachment to part-time work. Critically, their orientation to part-time work was articulated as considerably different to that of female co-workers, who were assumed to choose part-time work over full-time work for family reasons; a subordinate and unimportant reason, in their opinion. Older men, reducing their working hours as part of a pre-retirement strategy, felt vindicated as they had satisfied traditional notions of masculinity by past dedication to full-time work. These men were anxious to distance themselves from young male part-time workers and voiced the opinion that ‘all real *young* men work full-time’ (2008:606). In different ways both of these groups of men can be seen to articulate their masculinity, despite their involvement with part-time work. Other men might experience internal tussles with their own

'manliness' as a consequence of engaging in feminised forms of work organisation, 'perhaps toying between 'a perceived ontological notion of masculinity on the one hand and a more personalised definition on the other' (Reeser, 2010:44), ever conscious not to be bound to a marginalised or subordinated gender identity, or to arouse a 'suspicion of laziness or deviance by those looking in' (Marsh and Musson, 2008:46).

METHODOLOGY

In this particular study, our ambition is to understand how men in managerial, technical and professional occupations articulate and carry out gendered behaviour within the context of part-time work. Since gender is performative (Butler, 1994), that is to say a dynamic, ascribed social identity which is fluid and negotiated reflecting context, the manner in which gendered identities are constructed and reconstructed is not easily identified and so presents particular research challenges. In an attempt to confront these challenges, this paper adopts an interpretivist ontology and epistemology where the key objective is 'to try to see how the people involved understand what's going on, and what they see as the evidence involved' (Jankowicz, 2005:116). Such an approach accepts disorderliness of thoughts and actions and seeks to extract issues, in this sense it is more befitting than positivist approaches in exploring how gender (masculinity) is constructed and reconstructed through attitudes and actions displayed in, and around, the way in which work is organised.

Since interpretivist approaches give pre-eminence to qualitative research methodologies (Jankowicz, 2005:123), the research tools adopted here are designed to elicit rich information from men about their perceptions and experiences of part-time work and to a limited extent to understand how the men's wives, line managers and work colleagues react to their part-time employment status. The researcher is not interested in the frequency of what is said or noting thematic counts and there is no intention to generalise to a population. Accordingly, data is generalised to theory (Yin 2003), and

some emphasis is placed on ‘naturalistic generalisability’ (Stake, 2000), that is the ability to generate a sense of external validity by recognising similarities and common themes in the information ascertained.

The paper is based on an initial study comprising six individual semi-structured interviews with men working part-time in managerial, technical and professional occupations, as summarised in table one below:-

Table one: participant summary

Job role	Working hours
Business Analyst, private sector office supplies organisation	Part-time, 25 hours/week
IT Technician, UK University	Fractional contract, part-time and term-time
Lecturer, UK University	Fractional contract
Dentist, Private Practice	Part-time, three days a week
Primary School Teacher	Part-time, two days per week
Secondary School History Teacher	Part-time, three days a week

To elicit the reactions of the men’s employers, work colleagues and wives two case studies were developed; one based around the secondary school teacher and the other centred upon the Business Analyst. The case studies were purposively selected to offer potential insight into receptivity to male part-time working in a public sector and private sector work setting. In each case individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with the man’s wife, his line manager and a work colleague.

Given the purpose of the study, to contribute to theory, the small sample enables the researcher to drill for depth of meaning, interpretation and understanding which might exemplify or defy theoretical wisdom or (less likely) generate new theoretical insight. The narratives were extracted using a biographical conversational technique, allowing the participants to tell their story within a sequence of semi-structured questions designed to set the tone and direction of the conversation. Further probing questions were used to encourage participants to develop their responses. The

'guided' conversations were framed to reflect the research proposition and so, in the case of interviews with the part-time workers, sought to elicit the men's attitudes and perceptions of part-time working, their motives and triggers for engaging with part-time work and their social and work-related experiences of being male and a part-time employee. The interviews which took place with the men's line managers and colleagues in the context of the two cases studies were designed to reveal internal organisational perceptions of the participants' working arrangements, whilst the interviews which took place with the men's wives explored familial reactions and responses.

The interview transcripts were scrutinised manually through a process of reading and re-reading. The issues to emerge in the course of the field work were highlighted and a number of themes identified; firstly, men's motives for retreating from the breadwinner role to engage in part time work, secondly, the way in which men perform gender in part-time work and thirdly the extent to which notions of hegemonic masculinity are impacted as a consequence of men's decisions to utilise a form of work organisation more closely associated with women. These themes are now presented and discussed with reference to conversational fragments elicited from the interviews.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Men's motives for retreating from the breadwinner role to engage in part-time work

With the exception of the Business Analyst, who attributed his career success to serendipity, the men in the study describe making early educational and/or employment choices designed to maximise income and employment prospects. In choosing their work paths carefully and studying to enhance their career prospects, the men demonstrate initial conformity with gendered expectations, for to do well in employment and therefore be in a position to provide for others is a strong signifier of masculinity (Besen, 2007). In recoiling from the breadwinner role and engaging in part-time work however, the men risk emasculation (Simpson, 2004). As the fragments in figure 1 illustrate, participants were unperturbed and, in the presence of a female researcher at least, expressed the view

that the breadwinner role could be performed by either sex and so was not a strong signifier of masculinity.

Figure 1 - The breadwinner role
<i>'For me there was no issue about am I going to be emasculated when my wife is supporting me (through study), it didn't even enter my head.'</i> [University Lecturer]
<i>'For most of my career I've been the breadwinner in my family but now I'm not, years ago that Would be odd but it's not today, is it? some men might be hung up on that but honestly as long as the money's rolling in does it matter who earns more of it?'</i> [Primary School Teacher]
<i>'I'm happy being the primary earner, OK the pressure's on to maintain this kind of salary to keep us in the manner to which we're accustomed but I see no reason why it should be him (husband) earns the most and me automatically in a part-time job or a housewife because I'm a woman'</i> [Business Analyst's wife]

In a somewhat contradictory message, the men in the study acknowledge that part-time working is gendered (Fredman, 2004) and in particular, strongly associated with mothers, such that they can combine paid work with childcare (Glover and Kirton, 2006). The men however legitimise their own participation in part-time work in a number of different ways (see figure 2).

Figure 2 – Reasons for part-time work
<i>'It just came up, I had a dead end full time job at the time and thought even though it was part-time it could lead somewhere'.</i> [IT Technician]
<i>'I've been looking forward to the time when I could ease back on the hours, I'd say I'd earned it over the years, it's something you work towards in my profession'.</i> [Dentist]
<i>'I said I might register for supply on retirement cos I thought it might be nice to a bit now and again but George (Deputy Head) said if you're going to do that, then how about two or three regular day's cover a week here? So you could say they asked me really.'</i> [Primary School Teacher]
<i>'When we moved over here I registered for a PhD and the plan was for me to study, do a bit of part-time work maybe and do most of the childcare. To start with my wife had a part-time job too and we shared the care but then she got a full time job to support us'.</i> [University Lecturer]
<i>'Even before (son's name) was born, we figured out it made sense for me to go part-time and be</i>

a stay-at-home dad part of the week, that way (wife's name) could keep her career too'.

[Secondary School Teacher]

'We had been using childminders for school drop-off and pick-up but we were both worried that this was not working out, we decided that we could afford for me to do the part-time role whilst [wife's name] continued with her career'. [Business Analyst]

In common with some of the men working flexibly in Pini and MacDonald's study (2008), the IT Technician and the University Lecturer both emphasised the temporary nature of their attachment to part-time work; as time went on both hoped the trajectories they were following would lead to full time work. The Dentist on the other hand has systematically sought to gradually reduce his hours over time and spend more time with his family, something he has been able to do by virtue of his occupational status and earning power. Despite legislative provision to encourage greater shared parenting, it is unlikely that fathers from lower income families would be able to enjoy similar privileges (EOC, 2007). The participant perceives his transition to part-time hours as a marker of success. Similarly the Primary School Teacher describes his transition to this way of working as a lifestyle choice, much as the older male part-time workers do in Pini and MacDonald's study (2008). In contrast, the Business Analyst and the History Teacher both articulate childcare as the sole reason for engaging in part-time work. In parallel with the men in Pini and MacDonald's study (2008) the men present their transition to part-time work to take on childcare responsibilities as somewhat altruistic and the natural actions of a men with strong equal opportunities values. As Swan and Gatrell (2008) note the notion of female breadwinner is still perceived as contrary to deeply ingrained ideas about the role of women in society, nevertheless both wives embrace the breadwinner role and contest the view that the role should be preserved for men. For both couples working arrangements are organised around what makes rational economic sense for the family.

Performing gender in part-time work

It has been established that non-standard working patterns are more likely to be accessible to women than to men (Kersley et al, 2006) and are reportedly used by more women than men (ONS, 2008) so, by participating in part-time work men are likely to find themselves in the minority and highly visible. As Simpson (2010) argues visibility is not always problematic and men may use this opportunity to construct a special identity for themselves that is distant and distinct from others. Alternatively men find ways of coping which enable them to maintain an overtly masculine identity by for example, emphasising the masculine aspects of the role (Simpson, 2004). Strategies of ‘coping’ and of ‘distancing’ were revealed in the study as the following section demonstrates.

In the study, the IT Technician was the only participant who appeared embarrassed to be working part-time, actively concealing his recent work status from his girlfriend (see fig 3). Just as Musson and Marsh (2008) suggest men in tele-work are suspected of being lazy or in some way abnormal, the IT Technician describes being the subject of mild teasing from his mates as a consequence of working part-time. Interestingly the Technician is the least senior and least well educated participant in the sample; crudely using occupation as a proxy for class (Crompton, 2010) it might broadly be observed that his slight discomfort with part-time work and his friends’ jibes about him not working full-time as they do, stems from more traditional working class conceptions of gendered roles.

Figure 3 – Coping strategies
<i>‘When I first met my partner I had two part-time jobs, so she thought I was a workaholic. I didn’t tell her that prior to that I was doing one shift!’ [IT Technician]</i>
<i>‘Often they ring me and say ‘Hey (name), can you do an extra day for us this week?’ I try and avoid key stage one that’s all, even if I just say “be quiet” in my normal voice it sets one of them off crying, they think I’m a big gruff man (laughs), safer to stick with the older ones. And as you know I still run the after school clubs in cricket, tennis and all sorts, that’s all extra y’know, don’t get paid for that’. [Primary School Teacher]</i>
<i>‘It wouldn’t be a big job to fix but I’d need to get back to the pc to do it, I’ll deal with stuff as soon as I can, otherwise the down time is a problem’. [Business Analyst]</i>
<i>‘I spend hours preparing and marking, over and above the hours I was paid for.’ [University Lecturer]</i>

As is illustrated by the conversational fragments in figure 3, several of the employees were anxious to stress their level of work commitment despite their engagement with part-time work. The University Lecturer for example explains how part-time lecturing work could be demanding and entail lengthy preparatory time over and above his contract, often encroaching into weekend time he had planned to spend with his family. The Business Analyst emphasised how his specialist knowledge meant that he would often receive calls about problems with the network when he was off-duty but attend to them straight away. The Primary School Teacher similarly mentioned his continued role in extra-curricular sporting activities which take place out of school time. In showing a willingness to do more than their contracts require the men in the study might be viewed as attempting to assert their masculinity by edging closer to the male normative mode of working and associated level of commitment (Swan and Gatrell, 2008). In addition, the fact that the Primary School Teacher volunteers involvement with school sports could be perceived as a vehicle for confirming an overtly masculine identity, similar to the coping mechanisms men tend to employ when working in a feminised role (Cross and Bagilhole (2000), (Lupton (2000)).

There were numerous examples of the men using their visibility as an opportunity to craft special status for themselves distinct from other part-time workers (see Fig 4.).

Figure 4 – Distancing strategies
<i>'There's no other men doing what I do that I can think of', 'you're novel then?' (Researcher), 'yes, I like to think so'. [Business Analyst]</i>
<i>'They (part-time call centre operators) go off on the dot at 2.30pm in such a rush that they almost mow you down in the corridor, they abandon ship, (Business Analyst) is different, we can contact him whenever if we need to.' [colleague, Business Analyst]</i>
<i>'see this, I have to plan this and lead this topic and then mark all the work, supply teachers just hit and run and don't have the responsibilities I do.' [Primary School Teacher]</i>
<i>'(History Teacher), Oh we don't really think of him as part-time, he knows the ropes, its different when you get supply teachers in or people start on a fractional contract,' [colleague, Secondary</i>

School Teacher].
<i>'I'm fortunate to be in professional practice and be a partner, it's not run of the mill part-time work'</i> [Dentist]

The Business Analyst uses his uniqueness as the only male part-time worker operating at his grade, and one of only a handful of senior staff in the entire organisation to work part-time as a means of avoiding being categorised with the other (predominantly female) part-time employees working in the call centre. He appears to revel in his part-time status and to be acutely aware of his ability to escape the label 'jobs worth' even though he too regularly leaves at 2.30pm. Similarly the teachers are perceived by others and by themselves, as distinct from other part-time teachers, and supply teachers in particular and are accordingly treated differently.

Part-time work - a deviation from hegemonic masculinity?

Gaylin (1992) suggests that work is an important space in which men demonstrate their masculinity. In the absence of full-time paid work as a site for the construction of their masculinity the men in the study might be considered partially emasculated. The case studies are illuminating here, in particular the interview with the Business Analyst's line manager, a man who describes himself as "*a Yorkshire man through and through*". Whilst the manager accepts that the Business Analyst works part-time and from an operational standpoint the arrangement work perfectly well, he comments, "*call me old fashioned but I still can't really get used to the idea, it's not something I get if you see what I mean*". He goes on to talk about another new father in his department who goes home at lunchtime to be with his wife and feed their baby, "*what d'y call them, Noughties fathers or something?*" The Analyst's work arrangement and the behaviour of the other so called 'Noughties dad' in the department pose a challenge to dominant masculine discourse by veering from recognised notions of hegemonic masculinity in which work is at the forefront of men's identity (Guerrier and Adib, 2004). The Analyst might be seen as using his visibility as a part-time employee to construct a radically new and different masculine identity (Lewis and Simpson, 2010) in sharp contrast to the conventional

masculinity demonstrated by his manager. Similarly, the University Lecturer is proud of the fact that part-time work has enabled him to spend more time with his children and be a hands-on father. He is critical of other men who, he thinks, prevent themselves from playing a more active role in their children's lives because they are too conscious of impairing their masculinity if they relinquish the breadwinner role (Besen, 2007). In articulating this view, the Lecturer seemingly aligns himself as a 'new man' (Reeser, 2010) and shows that he is unafraid of deviating from hegemonic masculinity. He does not completely denounce masculinity however and is quick to establish "*Nobody has expressed disapproval to me or suggested in any way what I am doing is wrong or that I should be pursuing my career. Nothing of that raising kids is women's work or anything like that*". In accordance with Brandth and Kvande's (1998) observation, the Lecturer's stance appears to represent an attempt to re-draw the lines around hegemonic masculinity to embrace childcare thereby preserving his manliness.

CONCLUSION

The critical research proposition informing this paper centred upon the notion that men have distinctive ways of articulating and negotiating part-time work that are tightly bound with socially embedded notions of gendered identity and masculine dominance. Moreover, men with higher occupational status can use their eminence effectively to transcend potential negative aspersions cast upon their masculinity as a consequence of choosing to work in ways conventionally connected to women. The gender hierarchy and associated power structure is therefore, little disturbed, and may even be reinforced, when men in prominent organisational positions engage in part-time working. As explained earlier, the approach we have adopted in conducting this research does not facilitate generalising to sample; instead we seek to reflect empirical data back to theory. Accordingly, in unravelling each of the narratives the central finding is that despite the contradictory relationship between flexibility and masculinity, the men in the study were able to articulate their involvement in

part-time work in ways that safeguarded their masculinity and in some cases, elevated it. For the IT Technician and University Lecturer part-time work represented space in which to develop a foundation for future breadwinning work. The temporary nature of their engagement with part-time work (for career enhancing reasons) represents an underlying compliance with traditional gendered expectations and so enabled the men to preserve their masculine identities.

In many ways the experiences of the other men in the study are analogous. The men possess proven breadwinner credentials, special expertise and senior status in their respective fields and this affords them protected status in the workplace despite their foray into a feminised form of working. Consequently, the choices made by the dentist and by both of the teachers to reduce their working hours, is not detrimental to their perceived success as employees or as men. In both of the schools, the fact that part-time working amongst professionals is not uncommon may however be a contributory factor in preserving the men's secure identity as 'full-time men'.

In the Business Analyst's workplace the normative pattern of full-time work is firmly entrenched at managerial / senior level and part-time working is prevalent only in routine clerical occupations (largely performed by women). Given these conditions it might be supposed that the Analyst's visibility as a male part-time worker at a senior grade would denigrate his masculinity. Conversely the specialist, technical expertise the Business Analyst possesses enables him to successfully distance himself from other flexible and part-time workers in the organisation and so avoid being categorised as uncommitted, effeminate or subordinate to those men who conform to the normative pattern of full-time work. Further his enduring commitment to the role despite his part-time status resonates closely with the normative (male) mode of working, confirming his masculinity and importantly reinforcing his dissimilarity to other part-timers who are perceived by some colleagues as 'jobs worth'.

The study also provides evidence of men contravening the notion of hegemonic masculinity as they unashamedly embrace feminine roles of childcare and domestic work. The men and their partners

present their choice as enlightened and as an 'intelligent' form of masculinity, informed by equal opportunities values. In this sense the men articulate their version of masculinity as superior to 'macho' masculinity. Neither is concerned that their choices would be construed as feminine. It is argued here that this level of self-confidence develops from the notion of men as 'the one' and female as 'other' and is reinforced by virtue of the fact that these men have occupational cachet that they can coalesce with their masculinity to repel any negativity related to the choices they have made. Whilst the study has depicted the performance of different versions of masculinity, it is highly questionable whether the hierarchical dominance of masculinity is displaced when men, particularly those men with occupational standing, engage in flexible work.

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