Class and Work in post-crisis Britain

The Rosemary Crompton Memorial Lecture 2017

Tracey Warren, Professor of Sociology, University of Nottingham.
Lecture outline:

• Crompton, class, gender and work

• The ‘Great recession’ and a decade of economic uncertainty

1. Work-life debates
2. Part-time employment
Gender, class and work

In my BA Sociology onwards

‘You always choose the most boring essay question’
Class matters. Women’s decisions to go back to work may be different for different classes, with working class women more likely to work because they need the money. Patterns of childcare choices are also class related, with lower social groups more likely to rely on relatives, while professional and managerial parents ‘choose’ the more expensive market-based care.

Even the ability to achieve a work and life ‘balance’ has a significant social class, as well as gender dimension. Women from higher social classes have many more opportunities and fewer constraints than do lower class women to achieve their preferred balance of employment and family care.

Less privileged women often do not have the luxury of putting their preferences concerning the ideal family employment mix into practice. One reason is that they lack the resources that benefit the middle class – both in terms of financial resources and in terms of knowledge of how to “play the system”. On the other hand professional and managerial women who work full-time have markedly higher levels of work-life conflict than other groups.
1. Work-life reconciliation and material dis/advantage

*Mothers’ employment, work-life conflict, careers and class*

‘New problems of work-life conflict, and increasing material inequalities between households, have emerged, and it is likely that these issues will become even more pressing in the future’.

(Crompton and Lyonette 2008: 230-1)
‘the expansion of opportunities for women may have the effect of widening the gulf between the most materially advantaged and disadvantaged households in Britain’

(Crompton and Sanderson 1990: 166)
• Significant class differences in work-life conflict

• WL conflict lower in ‘man full-time/woman part-time’ households. 1.5 earner

• ‘One way in which women can reduce their levels of work-life conflict, therefore is to opt for part-time work’.

(Crompton and Lyonette 2008: 220)
2. Part-time jobs

often ‘a particularly exploitative form of women’s employment’

Crompton and Sanderson (1990: 60)
‘with the advent of the recession in the 1970’s part-time jobs in manufacturing declined rapidly, but part-time working as a whole continued to rise as jobs were created in the service sector....

It is not, however, the precise level of part-time working that concerns us here, but rather, its implications’ (167-8)
1. Work-life reconciliation, class and gender

Material dis/advantage

‘New problems of work-life conflict, and increasing material inequalities between households, have emerged, and it is likely that these issues will become even more pressing in the future’.

(Crompton and Lyonette 2008: 230-1)
The great recession: a middle-class man-cession?

Middle class finances hardest hit by recession
Middle class finances were hit hardest by the recession, new figures indicate, where value of savings and investments was eroded.

It's Not Just a Recession. It's a Mancession!
Derek Thompson, Jul 9, 2009

The squeezed middle deserves far better
David Cameron has to come up with an agenda that will see those suffering from that "protracted austerity" benefit from the recovery.

95 Percent Of The Jobs Lost During The Recession Were Middle Class Jobs
By Michael Snyder, on May 1st, 2012

Who is the biggest loser in the ongoing decline of the U.S. economy? Is it the wealthy? No, the stock market has been soaring lately and their incomes are actually going up. Is it the poor? Well, the poor are definitely hurting very badly, but when you don’t have much to begin with you don’t have much to lose. Unfortunately, it is the middle class that has lost the most during this economic downturn.
Material disadvantage in Britain

Who are the JAMS?
Which of the following best reflects your financial position?

- I am very comfortable financially: 4%
- I am relatively comfortable financially: 37%
- I am just about managing financially: 37%
- I am not really managing financially and often struggle to make ends meet: 12%
- I am not managing financially and often have to go without essentials or am falling deeper into debt: 4%
- Not sure: 6%

YouGov | yougov.com
November 24-25, 2016

School holidays leave 3 million children at risk of hunger, report says

Child poverty facts and figures

Poverty affects one in four children in the UK today. When kids grow up poor they can miss out – and so do the rest of us. They miss out on the things most children take for granted: warm clothes, school trips, having friends over for tea. They do less well at school and earn less as adults.

Any family can fall on hard times and find it difficult to make ends meet. But poverty isn’t inevitable. With the right policies every child can have the opportunity to do well in life, and we all share the rewards of having a stronger economy and a healthier, fairer society.

Poorest UK families struggle to put food on the table, survey finds

One in four low-income households does not eat regularly or healthily because of a lack of money. Food Standards Agency says

Thousands on 50p-a-week housing benefit, Panorama finds

MID YEAR STATS

More than 500,000 three day emergency food parcels in the first half of 2016/17 – over 188,500 to children.

Between April and September 2016, Trussell Trust foodbanks across the UK distributed 519,342 three day emergency food supplies to people in crisis compared to 590,369 during the same period last year. 188,548 of these went to children.

Trussell Trust CEO, David McKelvey says: “As the number of emergency food parcels provided to people by foodbanks rises once again, it’s clear that more can be done to get people back on their feet faster.”

Read the official press release here

...a quarter of young mums currently used food banks or had used them in the past.
Material disadvantage in Britain

School holidays leave 3 million at risk of hunger, report says

Cross-party group of MPs and peers cites evidence of children in need of help when school canteens are shut

Child poverty facts and figures

Poverty affects one in four children in the UK today. When kids grow up poor they miss out – and so do the rest of us. They miss out on the things most children take for granted, having friends over for tea. They do less well in school. They find it difficult to make ends meet. But poverty is not inevitable. Every child can have the opportunity to do well of having a stronger economy and a healthier,

UK families struggle to put food on the table, survey finds

The households does not eat regularly or healthily because of income, says a survey, and in many cases the children suffers.

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Read the official press release here.
Work-life: time and time wealth

• overstretched time-pressurised lives
• having enough quality time

  e.g.

  ‘How satisfied are you with the balance between the time you spend on your paid work and the time you spend on other aspects of your life?’
  ‘I never seem to have enough time to get everything done in my job’
  ‘Your job prevents you from giving the time you want to your partner or family’
  ‘I often find it difficult to fulfil my commitments outside of work because of the amount of time I spend on my job’

• Does material dis/advantage shape work-lives?
Work-life conflict and class

Professional and managerial women workers. Crompton.

- better work-life entitlements from employers (Crompton et al. 2003)
  - though many do not feel able to use them (especially if want promotion)
- work long hours in jobs, still responsible for childcare and domestic work
- WL conflict** is higher than for other female workers

**

- I have come home from work too tired to do the chores which need to be done
- It has been difficult for me to fulfill my family responsibilities because of the amount of time I spent on my job
- I have arrived at work too tired to function well because of the household work I had done
- I have found it difficult to concentrate at work because of my family responsibilities.
(Crompton and Lyonette 2008)
‘New problems of work-life conflict, and increasing material inequalities between households, have emerged, and it is likely that these issues will become even more pressing in the future’ (2008).

2012 Tracy Shildrick et al.

the normalisation of everyday hardship for working class in austerity Britain. Day-to-day life as a financial juggling act.

2012 Skeggs and Loveday (482).

‘Yeah, not worrying if there’ll be enough food on the table, it controlled my life and me mams before me, like avoiding the rent man. It may not sound like much now, but my God it intervened in every minute of your life. We struggled to just get by. I don’t think other people understand that’.

‘I personally cannot imagine what it must feel like to live without worrying all the time, to afford everything, not thinking if the car breaks down I’m really buggered. In my life if one thing went wrong it could set off a chain reaction and many other things would follow. It’s like living on a knife-edge, just hoping things aren’t going to go wrong’.
Figure 1a. Material disadvantage in Britain

Figure 5. Employees (aged 18-64) reporting ‘financial difficulties/just about getting by’*, by occupation. Sorted most difficulties to least in 2010-11.

Source: 2005-6 (BHPS Wave 0) and 2010-11 (US Wave B)
* How well would you say you yourself are managing financially these days?

Figure 1b. Material disadvantage in Britain

Proportion of employees (aged 18-64) who would like but can't afford to pay for an annual holiday (2005-2011).

a. Women

b. Men

Source: 2005-9 (BHPS), 2009-11 (US)

For 90% of this population it [work-time] is a financial decision, most people have got bills to pay and if they’re struggling they’ve got to do the work (Luke, manual worker, manufacturing).

Errm, I would, [like to work fewer hours] but obviously I wouldn’t be able to make the money that I need. So unless obviously my hourly rate was more to make up for the loss, but I mean otherwise not really no, because it wouldn’t really work (Adam, welder, construction industry).

If he [partner] could only work a certain amount of hours we’d struggle, we’d really struggle (Hayley, beauty therapist, part-time).

(Pre-recession interviews. Warren, Pascall and Fox 2009).
The material basis of work-life

Financial hardship, uncertainty, ‘just about’ getting by/managing, financial shocks.
• Experience of
• Worry-fear-dread of

Economic shocks:
• employment
• family
• wealth

Experience of financial hardship
Capacity to buffer against economic risk
• Classed buffering
• Classed financial safety nets.
• Classed networks of financial responsibilities

(e.g. Hacker et al. 2013; Hills et al. 2013, 2015).
2. Part-time jobs

‘One way in which women can reduce their levels of work-life conflict, therefore is to opt for part-time work’.

1990

‘A particularly exploitative form of women’s employment’

‘It is not, however, the precise level of part-time working that concerns us here, but rather, its implications’
### Table 1. Objective dimensions of the financial domain: female employees* by employment type, Britain

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<th></th>
<th>Women All</th>
<th>Women PT</th>
<th>Women FT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median hourly wage in £s.</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>6.8</td>
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<td></td>
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<td><strong>4.2</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>% saving from current income</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>52</td>
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<td><strong>35</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Employer pension scheme?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Scheme available, and member</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>59</td>
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* Aged 18-59. Excluding full-time students.
** Professional/managerial/associate professional

*Source: BHPS, 1999.*
Figure 3. Part-time workers in the UK (thousands).

Figure 4. Women's occupation, by work-time and occupation (women aged 20-60).

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<th>1986</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>21%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>47%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>44%</td>
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<td>Part-time</td>
<td>All</td>
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<tr>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>42%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>16%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>All</td>
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<tr>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>32%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>36%</td>
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| N     | 886           | 632   | 1,518 |
|       | 1,853         | 1,120 | 2,973 |
|       | 819           | 548   | 1,367 |

Higher: Managerial/Prof/Assoc prof. Middle: Administrative, Trades and Personal. Lower: Sales, Operatives and Elementary.
Figure 5. Women's mean wages (gross hourly) as % male full-time mean, by work-time and occupation (women aged 20-60).

Higher: Managerial/Prof/Assoc prof. Middle: Administrative, Trades and Personal. Lower: Sales, Operatives and Elementary.
Figure 6. % of female employees reporting ‘being in financial difficulties/just about getting by’, by work-time and occupation (aged 18-64).

Higher: Managerial/Prof/Assoc prof. Middle: Administrative, Trades and Personal. Lower: Sales, Operatives and Elementary.
Conclusion

Class and work: work-life and part-time jobs

‘..work-life articulation in Britain is achieved alongside continuing gender inequality in the sphere of employment, and widening class inequalities...
the ‘one and a half breadwinner’ work-family articulation model is by no means satisfactory’ (Crompton 2006: 90)

Material inequalities: must be as central to work-life framework as time inequalities.


