

Divergent Female Part-Time Employment in Britain and Denmark and the Implications for Gender Equity

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Abstract

This paper examines women's employment in Britain and Denmark, societies characterised similarly by high proportions of female employees working part-time but by rather different gender arrangements. Part-time working is associated with female-carer workers; women who have reduced their hours in the labour market to bring up children and are able to do this because of the presence of an alternative source of income - usually a male breadwinner. Yet Denmark has been conceptualised as having more of 'dual-breadwinner' gender arrangement than Britain. It would seem then, that part-time working is distinctly different in these two societies. Examining this question, the paper concludes that extensive part-time working for women, and not men, does indeed tend to reinforce a traditional male-breadwinner model. However, the strength of this reinforcement varies, depending on the relative conditions of the part-time labour market. These conditions vary substantially cross-nationally and can also change rapidly within one society over time. As a result, the typical 'role' a part-time job plays for women can also vary cross-nationally and can change over time.

A persistent question in the study of cross-national gendered employment patterns concerns how societies can achieve equality in the gendered division of labour and in the ways in which family and working life are reconciled. The Nordic countries emerge repeatedly in the literature as some of the most successful nations in Europe on these measures. Denmark, for example, has been conceptualised as having a more progressive equality gender contract, characterised by a dual-breadwinner/dual-carer arrangement gender arrangement. Britain, on the other hand, has been portrayed less positively in terms of gender role equality as a society dominated by male-breadwinning/female-caring. A factor at the root of these contrasting formulations is that more and more Danish women are entering the labour market and doing so on a full-time basis, whilst part-time employment remains common for women in Britain. Only twenty years ago, however, Britain and Denmark were routinely grouped together as countries with similarly high proportions of female employees working in part-time jobs. This suggests an interesting paradox since part-time work in Britain has usually been associated with certain types of female worker; those who have reduced their hours in the labour market to bring up children, and are able to do this because of the presence of an alternative source of income - usually a male breadwinner.

It would seem then, given the persistently high levels of female part-time employment in Britain and the previously high but falling rates in Denmark, that either Britain and Denmark have divergent gendered societal arrangements or that part-time working is a distinctly different affair in the two societies. This paper aims to compare women's part-time employment in these two societies to throw light on these issues. It does so by considering women's part-time employment in Britain and Denmark at the time when the two societies were the most similar in Europe in the levels of women working part-time. It then examines the divergence in the levels of part-time employment, considering the influences on, and the potential implications of, this trend. Before this, however, the paper begins by discussing the expansion of women's part-time jobs. It identifies the British-Danish comparison as a key and under-used site for the analysis of part-time working given, first, the widespread nature of this type of employment but also the rather different levels of employment and social protection that workers in part-time jobs have been afforded in each country, and that have resulted in substantially different quality part-time job markets. The paper moves on to argue that such higher and lower quality jobs are of central interest in debates over which arrangement of women and men's breadwinning and caring leads to the greatest gender equity in a society. If

women are over-concentrated in low quality jobs, with very low pay for example, then that society is more likely to be characterised as having a gender-unequal stronger male-breadwinner regime.

The paper concludes that extensive female part-time employment does not reinforce the male-breadwinner model to the same degree in all societies, since the poorer the typical part-time job; with fewer hours, lower rates of pay and weak social and employment protection, the more dependent on another income source a worker who takes that job is likely to be. The second related conclusion is that although the decline in women's part-time working does provide evidence of more female breadwinning in Denmark (but amongst younger cohorts in Britain too), this development does not necessarily result in an equal gender arrangement. If women's breadwinning expands without substantial changes in men's gender roles too, this could lead to an arrangement where women and men participate in the labour market to the same extent but in which caring remains firmly female-dominated. This is far from the ideal account of gender equity for which feminists have striven.

The growth of part-time working in Britain and Denmark

The deregulation of social time in much of Europe has led to a move away from such notions as standard working days, standard working months or years, and working time models based on the 40 hour week consisting of five eight hour days have been dissolving, on the whole (Garhammer, 1999). Pivotal within these developments in (what used to be termed) non-standard employment has been the growth of part-time employment. Three broad models of part-time usage have been identified in Europe; widespread use of part-time working combined with little protection for the workers; widespread use but combined with higher levels of protection; and a model where part-time employment has remained little developed (Boulin, 1999). The two widespread part-time models are of interest here since Britain and Denmark are key examples of the unprotected and protected versions, respectively. How did these different models develop?

In Britain, the growth in part-time jobs was inextricably linked to economic crises in the 1970's. Up until then the majority of employers had been opposed to offering part-time jobs unless they had no other choice (see the survey of employers in Hunt, 1975 for example). The 1970's, however, saw moves to 'rationalise' the workplace, and part-time employment became central to this process of cost reduction (Beechey and Perkins, 1987: 30). Since the growth of part-time employment occurred mainly in the service sector that was not only female-dominated but, and related to this, had also been less unionised historically, the growth of the jobs was largely unregulated. As a result, this unregulated boom combining with the fact that the primary push from employers was to use part-timers to reduce costs, produced a distinctly low quality part-time labour market in Britain.

In Denmark, on the other hand, the major expansion in women's part-time employment was substantially more controlled. Lower hours thresholds determine access to numerous rights and benefits in Denmark, and so short hours workers potentially face exclusion from a number of forms of employment and social protection. For example, the threshold for access to ATP – the supplementary labour market pension – is ten hours per week. In addition, only those who are employed for more than fifteen hours per week in any one month are eligible for the union controlled unemployment benefit, and access to dismissal rights. During the major expansion of part-time employment, more inclusive Danish trade unions restricted part-time jobs whose hours fell below these social and employment protection thresholds.

The substantial expansion of part-time employment in Britain and Denmark has signified major changes in typical working arrangements in the two societies. These changes are a central concern to those researching the gender division of labour since part-time employment is dominated largely by women (Dex, 1999). Further, rather than signifying more gender equality as women enter the labour market, this type of employment could '... be regarded as a means of avoiding more basic changes in the relationship between women and men' (Scott, 1999: 72), since it enables women to enter the labour market but still maintain their primary responsibility for unpaid caring work. A key question that this paper is concerned with then is: does female part-time employment necessarily reinforce the male-breadwinner contract cross-nationally?

Different breadwinner models in Europe

There has been substantial interest in the expansion of part-time jobs for women in Europe; in the conditions of this expanding type of work, in why it is that so many women work part-time, (particularly in societies where part-time jobs are much more disadvantaged than full-time), and in the implications of female-dominated part-time jobs for gender disadvantage in the labour market and gender roles in the home. This paper is inspired by the conditions of women's part-time employment in two countries which occupy quite different positions in models and typologies that have been developed to portray and explain the cross-national patterning of gendered employment, but where part-time jobs have been extensive.

For Irwin (1999: 31) 'a key development in the family in contemporary society is the modification of male claims to a breadwinner wage and a growth in the prevalence and importance of the financial co-resourcing of households'. In cross-national research, a whole host of models have been conceptualised to facilitate the comparison of variation and similarity in such developments. The models typologise how breadwinning/caring is balanced in different societies and incorporate elements of more, or less, equality in the gendered division of labour. At one extreme in the typologies is a depiction of the most gender differentiated of possible arrangements in which the man is the sole worker and the woman the sole carer; a family wage ideal (Fraser, 1997), a housewife gender contract (Hirdmann, 1988), a strong male-breadwinner regime (Lewis, 1992), and a male breadwinner/female carer gender arrangement (Pfau-Effinger, 1998). Other more gender-fair alternatives have been advanced. Fraser has usefully categorised these and considered their potential for gender equity. In a universal-worker model, for example, the aim is to increase equality by boosting women's participation in the labour market. Women and men enter the labour market to the same extent, whilst caring work is provided by either the state or the market. Whilst this model appears to offer an improvement on the gender differentiation of male-breadwinning and female-caring, it holds a number of problems for gender equality. Most notably, the universal-worker model accepts and builds on a male norm in which labour market work is full-time in 'standard' employment, and caring work is provided by someone else.²

A second potential improvement on male breadwinning/female caring is the caregiver parity arrangement. Here, caring work remains in the home but it is valued and rewarded. Carers are provided with well remunerated parental leave, for example (Fraser, 1997). Although this option avoids the problem of over-prioritising labour market work that so limits the universal worker model, it is itself limited since caring still tends to be female-dominated. Gender differentiated work roles persist. What is necessary for gender equity then, is a third alternative that balances caring and working, without over-prioritising either, but is not based on starkly gender differentiated tasks. This gender equal model in which women and men engage equally in both paid and primary caring work is termed 'universal-caregiver' by Fraser. Importantly, only in this model would the radical changes that have characterised women's typical patterns of engagement with the labour market in the latter half of the twentieth century, be reflected in equally dramatic changes in men's patterns of engagement with the home since it necessitates a *reciprocity* in changes in gender roles (Kjelstad, 2001).

What is important for this paper is that Britain and Denmark are located within contrasting societal groupings in these different gender arrangements, reflecting different breadwinner/carer alternatives. Denmark has been conceptualised as having a much more progressive 'equality gender contract', a 'weak male-breadwinner regime' and a 'dual-breadwinner/dual-carer gender arrangement' whilst Britain has been characterised with a 'post house-wife gender contract', a 'strong male-breadwinner regime' and a 'male-breadwinner/female-carer gender arrangement'. Yet as shown earlier, on the one hand, both countries have been marked by a high incidence of part-time working for women which, on the other hand, has remained stable only in Britain. In the study of female part-time employment, then, the British-Danish comparison stands out as a valuable but under-utilised resource.³ Key research questions are whether high levels of female part-time employment do/do not support the male-breadwinner model to the same extent in both societies, and whether the gender arrangement of Denmark has moved even further towards a

more gender equal model than Britain, and in such a short period of time. The paper moves on to address these questions.

Gendered employment in Britain and Denmark

How close are women's employment patterns in Britain and Denmark to the typical male-breadwinner ideal type? Can part-time jobs be seen to provide breadwinner work, or are they taken predominantly by workers with caring responsibilities? Before moving on to attempt to answer these questions, it is important first to consider Britain and Denmark on key issues of family formation since diverse patterns in different societies can have important implications for the analysis of gendered employment patterns. Fortunately for the comparison, Britain and Denmark actually emerge as rather similar societies in terms of a number of these issues, and in particular in the most important factors shaping women's employment patterns.

In terms of family formation, Britain and Denmark stand out as very similar in the EU in the proportions of women living with partners, and in total divorce rates (Coleman and Chandola, 1999: 53). Danish women are more likely to cohabit and are slightly older on marriage than their British peers (29.7 as opposed to 26.3 on first marriage in 1996. Danish Statistics, 2000; ONS, 1999), but these slight differences are not such a concern since marital status now has limited impact on shaping women's entry to the labour market. This is particularly true when women's dependent children are taken into account. The age of women's youngest child, for example, has by far the stronger effect on mothers' employment rates, on whether they work part-time or full-time and on predicting women's levels of earnings (Dex, 1999: 34). Comparing the two countries on these factors, the average ages of British and Danish mothers on child-birth are very similar (26.8 for Britain and 27.7 for Denmark in 1996/97. Danish Statistics, 2000; McRae, 1999; ONS, 1999), as are the average number of children women have and the proportion of children living in lone parent families (Coleman and Chandola, 1999: 53). Therefore we can move on to examine women's labour force participation in the two societies more confidently, without fear that the comparison is being distorted by very dissimilar patterning of child-birth. To address the divergence in part-time employment in Britain and Denmark, the paper draws on two main data sources; the *British Household Panel Survey* and the *Danish Longitudinal Data Base* (BHPS and DLDB. See Appendix), alongside the consideration of results from other large scale data-sets.

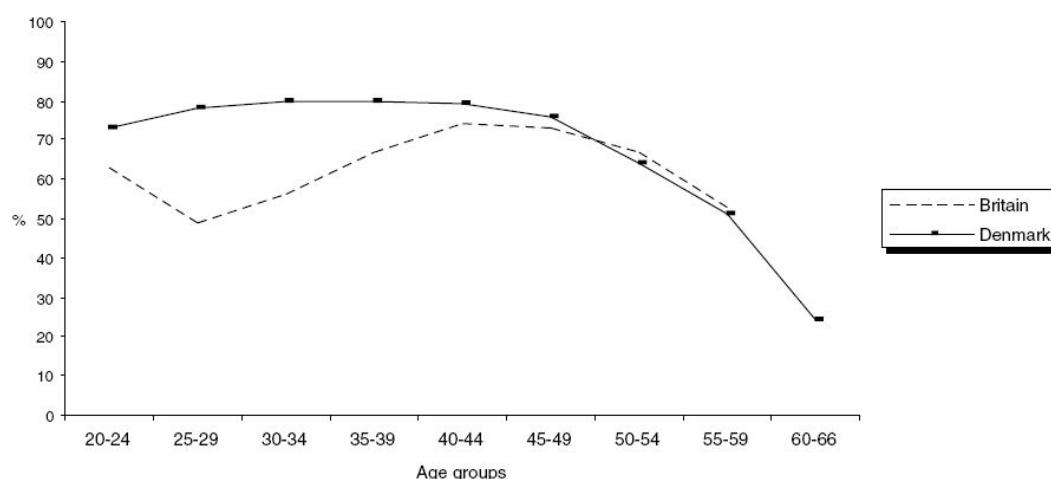
To examine the type of women in the part-time jobs in Britain and Denmark, workers were compared against two ideal-typical part-time profiles; a female-care ideal type (where a part-timer is a married woman who has reached the main child-rearing phase of her life, in her late twenties or older, with young children) and a male transitional worker ideal type (where a part-timer is a worker entering the labour market at the beginning of a career or exiting from it at the end). British women fit the female-carer profile quite distinctly in 1980. Women working part-time were very likely to be aged thirty or more, married with dependent children, and the more children and the younger their children, the more likely women employees were to work part-time (table 1). If their child was under 10 for example, 75% of employee mothers were working part-time. In Denmark at this time too, part-time working was most common for married women employees, especially if they had two or more dependent children (when around 50% were working part-time).

Similar part-time work?: Britain and Denmark in 1980

As the breadwinner/carer models reviewed earlier suggest, Denmark has been characterised by a substantially narrower gender gap in labour force participation rates than Britain. This was especially true for women's peak child-rearing years (around the ages of 25 to 40) when the dip in British women's participation in 1980 produced the familiar M-shaped profile in contrast to the male-like plateau of Danish women (see Chart 1). Despite these differences, at this time women's rates of part-time working in Britain and Denmark were very similar, and similarly high at 44% and 40% respectively. How similar were the women, and their jobs?

There were similar supplies of women to the part-time labour markets of Britain and Denmark, but a key topic for this paper is the quality of part-time jobs and the wages they provided to those family-carer women who took them.

Chart 1. Proportions of women in paid work in Britain and Denmark in 1980



Sources: Women and Employment Survey (Martin and Roberts, 1984). Danish Longitudinal Data-base

Table 1. Female part-timers in Britain and Denmark, 1980

	Britain	Denmark
% of female employees who are part-time:	45	40
By marital status:		
Married	55	46
Cohabiting	/ ¹	30
Separated/widowed/divorced	37	/ ²
Single	4	31
By number of dependent children:		
0	27	36
1	63	38
2	73	49
3+	73	47
By age of youngest dependent child:		
0-4/0-2	74	42
5-10/3-6	75	43
11-16/7-14	59	45
15-17		48

¹Category not included in the WES.

²Category not available in 1980.

Source: Women and Employment Survey (Martin and Roberts, 1984). Danish Longitudinal Data-base

Inequality in wages remains a crucial factor in research into gender divisions within the labour market and also in the home. The lower women's wages the more likely men are to be the dominant earner, and dominance in earnings can be used by men to justify their roles as main breadwinners and secondary carers (Artier, 1999). The question here is whether women's part-time working fortifies men's earnings dominance to the same degree in Britain and Denmark. If part-time jobs are very poor quality and very disadvantaged compared with full-time jobs, they will provide women with only a distinctly contingent working role, one which depends to a large degree on another income source.

Examining relative wages in Britain and Denmark in 1980, then, not surprisingly, part-time jobs emerged with low weekly wages in both societies. In Britain, however, these were substantially lower as a result of much lower hourly wages. Combining low wages with short working weeks (37% of female part-timers in the *Women and Employment Survey* were working fewer than 16 hours a week. Martin and Roberts, 1984: table 4.1), meant that part-timers were earning only 23% of the male weekly average compared with 59% for female full-timers (Martin and Roberts, 1984: table 5.1). In Denmark, the hours part-timers worked were rather short too but substantially higher relative hourly wages meant that women part-timers

were not so severely financially dependent on another source of income as their British counterparts. Wage dispersion in Denmark is checked by a combination of high, progressive taxation and collective agreements that enforce a minimum wage and curb extremes in working time (Madsen, 1999). Overall weekly wages of female part-timers stood at 44% of the male full-time median, double the relative wages of their British counterparts. Therefore, whilst very similar proportions and rather similar types of British and Danish women were employed part-time in 1980, a typical part-time job presented women with distinctly different (relative) weekly wages in the two societies. The developments after this 1980 picture are traced in the next section.

Divergence in part-time work?: Britain and Denmark after 1980

In the EU, overall levels of part-time working continued to grow throughout the 1980's and 1990's (Smith *et al.*, 1998). In keeping with this trend, aggregate rates remained high for British women, but there was a distinct decline in Denmark. Currently, Britain remains with Germany, Norway and Sweden in terms of having high proportions of female employees working part-time. Meanwhile Denmark has dropped out of this group, and is instead now clustered with France, Belgium and Austria as a moderate part-time using society (Fagan *et al.*, 2001). Given ongoing debates about the impact of female part-time employment on gender equality, this reduction in Denmark and the divergence between the two previously very similar levels has been a fascinating development. In both Britain and Denmark, part-timers in 1980 were likely to be female-carer workers, but we know that they were much better paid in relative terms in Denmark. Yet still it is in Denmark, and not in Britain, that the proportions of women entering part-time employment have fallen. Is this because part-time working became less popular for Danish women? Was there less demand for part-time employees? Have there been no changes in Britain at all?

(a) Female part-time employment in Britain 1980+

In Britain in the 1990's, rates of part-time employment for female employees remained at around 44%. These rates rose to much higher levels when women had pre-school or many (three or more) children (table 2a). The vast majority of British women in part-time jobs then, still fit the female-carer ideal type. The wages from their jobs continued to provide far from breadwinner levels. In 1995, part-timers were earning only 27% of the male full-time weekly (gross) wage (table 2c). Again, this is a result of low hourly wages (61 % of the male full-time average compared with 83% for female full-timers), and short working weeks (37% were working under 16 hours).

It is interesting that part-time jobs remain popular for British mothers despite their undoubtedly low quality. British women continue to say both that they work reduced hours because of domestic responsibilities, but also that they *prefer* not to work full-time (Hakim, 1991, 1997, 1998). Of course, it is now well accepted that it is important to locate the analysis of choices and preferences within the structures shaping women's working lives (Crompton and Harris, 1998; Proctor and Padfield, 1999; Warren, 2000a), and it is important to stress that the hours women actually express preferences for are longer not shorter part-time, but it is in the latter that women have traditionally been concentrated in Britain (Fagan *et al.*, 2001). All this casts doubt on the satisfaction of female part-timers with the jobs that they tend to occupy in Britain.

Whilst there has been little change in the proportions of female employees working part-time in Britain, a key development is that women are maintaining a firmer attachment to the labour market over the life course, so much so that their average participation profile of Chart 2 now resembles the inverted U-shape that applies for men (and for women in Denmark. Chart 1). Similarly, although part-time jobs do remain common, full-time employment has been increasing for younger cohorts of women. Perhaps the key time for examining developments over time in women's economic positions is the peak period of family building (Irwin, 1999: 41). In the data, we can see the growing tendency for younger women to remain working and to work full-time as they reach this family building period: younger cohorts of female employees are less likely to work part-time than older cohorts in their late twenties and early thirties (table 3). Importantly, the decline in part-time working for the younger women does not appear to be due to a drop in the availability of part-time opportunities because, overall, women's part-time rates have been

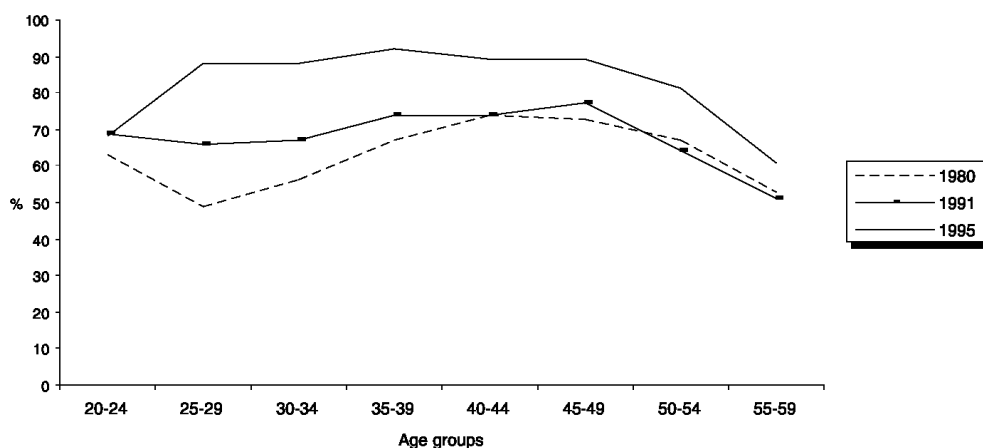
stable and men's have grown. Instead, it appears more indicative of new trends in younger women's labour behaviour as they reach these peak child-rearing years. Women's attachment to paid working is strong and certain groups, especially those women in high status occupations with high levels of education, are delaying child-birth and are returning more often to full-time rather than part-time jobs after taking maternity leave (Dex *et al.*, 1998; Macran *et al.*, 1996; Walby, 1997). If this pattern continues, and younger cohorts of women increasingly adopt more of a breadwinner labour market attachment in their key child-rearing ages, Britain may continue to move further away from its previously very strong male-breadwinner model.

Table 2 Female part-time employment in Britain, 1995

a) Proportions of female employees working part-time by:		
Marital status:		
Married	54	
Cohabiting	22	
Separated/widowed/divorced	41	
Single	19	
Number of dependent children:		
0	30	
1	55	
2	69	
3+	79	
A youngest child aged:		
0-4 years	69	
5-10 years	69	
11-16 years	52	
b) Female part-timers' relative wages		
	Weekly	Hourly
As % of male full-time gross median	27	61
As % of female full-time gross median	37	73

Source: British Household Panel Survey

Chart 2. Proportions of women in paid work in Britain, 1980, 1991, 1995



Sources: Women and Employment Survey (Martin and Roberts 1984). British Household Panel Survey, 1991, 1995

(b) Female part-time employment in Denmark 1980+

Since the 1979/1980 peak of around 40%, part-time rates for Danish women dropped. They fell to 32% as early as 1990 and have remained stable at this 1990 level since, with only some slight movements up and down. In 1999, for example, they still stood at 32%, falling slightly after 1997 (European Labour Force Survey. Warren, 2000b). Given the stability that characterised the 1990's, then, the 1980's stand out as the crucial decade of change in women's part-time working in Denmark. An important change was in the type of women working part-time, away from the female-carer model that characterised the late 1970's/early 1980's.

After 1980, the prevalence of part-time jobs amongst married women workers with children fell. By 1990, for example, it was only mothers who had many (three or more) dependent children who were significantly more likely to work part- rather than full-time (table 4). In addition, if we examine part-time rates over the prime family building period of the early thirties, substantially fewer of the younger cohorts of women were working part-time. Less than 30% of women employees born between 1956 and 1960 were part-timers at this age, compared with 42% of the women born ten years earlier (table 5). With this decline in the proportion of mothers working part-time, the age profile for female part-timers in Denmark has moved correspondingly closer to that of men,⁴ where part-time employment is most common for workers aged under 25 or approaching retirement.

Table 3. Proportions of women workers in part-time employment by age, Britain

Year born	Age								
	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59
1971-74	26	22							
1965-70		14	30						
1961-64	2		29	44					
1956-60		13		47	52				
1951-55			36		56	48			
1946-50				59		52	48		
1941-45					55		49	49	
1936-40						55		54	61
1931-35							52		57

Sources: Women and Employment Survey (WES) 1980, British Household Panel Survey, 1991 and 1995.

Table 4 Female part-time employment in Denmark in 1990

a) Proportions of female employees working part-time by:		
Marital status:		
married		35
cohabiting		31
separated/widowed/divorced		21
single		26
Number of dependent children:		
0		32
1		29
2		32
3+		42
A youngest child aged:		
0-2 years		37
3-6 years		26
7-14 years		32
15-17 years		30
b) Female part-timers' relative wages		
As % of male full-time gross median	Weekly	89
As % of female full-time gross median	Hourly	104

Source: Danish Longitudinal Data-base

The distinct drop in part-time working amongst women in Denmark could be the result of a number of factors. Women might want part-time jobs but these may no longer be available, for example. In this way, Danish women would be becoming reluctant or involuntary full-timers. Conversely, the decline might be a result of voluntary positive moves towards a more gender equal arrangement, with women preferring full- rather than part-time jobs. It would appear that the popularity of part-time working amongst Danish women has indeed fallen. In the part-time boom of the 1970's, the supply of women willing to fuel this early expansion was apparent. In a 1974 survey, for example, when 23% of married/cohabiting women were working part-time, fully 56% said that if they could choose freely whether to have a job or not and what type of job, they would prefer part-time employment

(Transgaard, 1981). Since then fewer women express preferences for part-time jobs (Boje, 1996), and this fall in their popularity is linked to a number of different developments.

Table 5. Proportions of female employees working part-time by age in Denmark

Age	Year born									
	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-66
1961-64	66	34	33							
1956-60		14	25	27						
1951-55			34	30	30					
1946-50				42	35	31				
1941-45					44	36	33			
1936-40						47	40	38		
1931-35							46	43	39	
1926-30								47	41	54

Sources: Danish Longitudinal Data-base (DLDB), 1980, 1985, 1990

First, and most positively, part-time jobs are less popular because there has been a substantial increase in women's educational qualifications in Denmark and part-time jobs are typically less attractive to better-educated women. More negatively, their declining popularity is linked closely to a fall in the income that can be obtained from working part-time. In the 1990 data, female part-timers were earning, on average, 50% of the male full-time weekly wage. This was actually a slight improvement on the relative wage position of female part-timers in 1980 and is linked to the fact that part-timers began to work longer hours over the decade. By 1990, the majority (72%) were working fifteen hours or more. What had diminished in the 1980's, and was to continue diminishing in the 1990's, was the extra income, aside from their wages, that part-time workers could be entitled to. Up to the 1980's, an income boost via unemployment benefits was available to those workers in part-time jobs who were registered as full-time members of union unemployment schemes. This benefit began to be restricted in new policies devised to address rising levels of unemployment in Denmark (see Lind, 1999: 196). As a result, the total income available from working part-time fell, and its attractiveness correspondingly decreased. At the same time there was a growing conviction that a dual full-time waged household was increasingly necessary for families to get by in the Danish economy. A final assault on the appeal of working part-time came with the movement towards privatisation in the 1980's. This saw jobs in the public sector, where the best part-time opportunities had been located, cut at central, regional and local levels (Danish Statistics, 2000). Overall, then, the 'solution' part-time jobs had presented to Danish women very rapidly began to be seen as more of a trap, and many women felt that working part-time placed them in too precarious a labour market position (Tomes, 1993).

Despite the fall in the appeal of part-time jobs, it would appear that reduced working hours remain attractive to Danish women. Their average working hours were 34 in 1998,⁵ but their average preferred hours were somewhat lower at 29. Furthermore, a substantial minority (38%) of female full-timers reported that they would actually prefer to be working part-time (Fagan *et al.*, 2001). These figures are rather similar to those for British women, for whom 27 hours a week were preferred, and 33% of full-timers said that they would prefer a part-time job. This similarity in British and Danish women's preferences, alongside the differences in actual working weeks, raises questions over whether Denmark has achieved a more positive arrangement of its breadwinning and caring.

Discussion and conclusions: moves towards more gender equity

This paper has been stimulated by a fundamental issue in the study of women's employment: the question of gender differences in the distribution of paid work. The Nordic countries are commonly highlighted as some of most gender (and generally) equal societies in their divisions of labour. Britain falls short in that a stronger distinction remains between men as breadwinners and women as secondary earners/carers. Therefore, this paper examined why two countries with such

differing gender regimes as Britain and Denmark should have been characterised by such similar (albeit diverging) proportions of women in part-time jobs, when extensive part-time employment has not traditionally been associated with women taking a breadwinner role. It asked whether female part-time employment necessarily reinforces a male-breadwinner model and whether the two societies were witnessing diverging gender regimes.

First then, the comparison of Britain and Denmark showed that extensive female part-time employment did not reinforce the male-breadwinner model to the same degree in both countries. The relative conditions of the part-time labour market can vary dramatically cross-nationally, since better quality part-time jobs with longer hours and better wages (and income transfers) mean that men's earnings dominance is not so severe. Furthermore, part-time labour market conditions, and the income part-time jobs provide, can change rapidly within one society over time. In Denmark, the impact of the reduction in better quality public sector jobs and the withdrawal of unemployment benefits to part-timers made working part-time less feasible for many women. Women working part-time have seen their hours increase, perhaps to make up for this shortfall. Importantly, recent developments towards flexibility within Denmark have included trying to boost part-time jobs via providing more and freer access to part-time working. In the round of collective agreements in 2000, the proportions of employees with free access to part-time working was raised from 43% to 51 % (Danish Ministries of Labour and Economic Affairs, 2000: table 11). It will be interesting to see what impact this has on the numbers of part-time workers, and who might take up the new opportunities.

In Britain, there have been recent moves to improve the conditions of the part-time labour market. For example, the European Court of Justice ruled in 1994 that employers cannot exclude workers from occupational pension schemes based on their hours of work (European Court of Justice, 2000). Importantly, in 1999, the introduction of the minimum wage (£3.60 an hour for most workers, going up to £4.10 in October, 2001) led to wage increases for the very poorly paid, particularly women in part-time jobs (Low Pay Commission, 2000). Future research on post 1999 data will be able to explore the impact these changes have on women's typical earnings from a part-time job.

In addition to the quality of part-time jobs and the wages they provide women, a second related concern of the paper was whether the divergence in rates of part-time employment for women was signifying more gender equality in the ways that breadwinner working, and, by extension, caring work are distributed in Denmark. Using Fraser's models of gender equity, the most preferable caring-breadwinning outcome was identified as a universal care-giver model; one that is based both on women entering the labour market to the same extent as men, and on men taking an equal share in unpaid caring work. This paper has shown that women have continued to increase their working levels closer to the male level in Denmark. The next research question is whether there has been the reciprocity in changes taking place in women and men's caring roles necessary to achieve universal care giving. Unfortunately, it would seem instead that Denmark has moved closer to a universal worker model, with elements of the caregiver parity model and, unfortunately, both are problematic.

The universal-worker element of the Danish model is problematic as it prioritises the traditional male style of working; full-time, continuous employment, but this is not necessarily what women and men, especially those with children or other dependents, want. Whilst there is support for dual full-time working in Denmark (Ellingswter 1998), combining full-time employment for women and men with extensive publicly provided child-care has been criticised. Even as early as the 1980's, Jensen (1994: 114) was finding (in a 1989 survey into parents' day-care wishes) 'full-time jobs and full-time child-care are the wish of very few, even though this is what many in practice do today'. The caregiver parity element of the Danish model is problematic too since care-work remains so firmly female-dominated. Danish women, even though they are increasingly entering the labour force and working similar hours to men, retain ultimate responsibility for children and for house-work (Bonke, 1994; Hojgaard 1994; K6rmendi 1990). It is striking how many fathers still remain unwilling and/or feel unable to take advantage of the extensive parental leave schemes available in Denmark, even though these are well remunerated in international terms. Women still account for 92% of up-take (Danish Statistics,

2000: table 152. Although fathers' use of paternity leave hit 67% in 1999. Danish Ministries of Labour and Economic Affairs, 2000). These problems with the Danish model, and the necessity for reciprocity in changes in gender roles, was expressed neatly by the Nordic Council of Ministers who stated about Denmark (NORD, 1997: 1),

Here I think we have failed in a way. We have tried to press women into the male position in their working life ... That is one of the reasons why we have tried to address the problem of the role of men and to discuss what sort of changes we need in their role so that they are also able to take more care of their family.

Changes in women's employment have been dramatic in Denmark but there is evidence that higher proportions of younger cohorts of British women are also remaining working in the labour market after child-birth, and working full-time. Yet research shows repeatedly that women still retain responsibility for the bulk of unpaid domestic work (Dex, 1999; McKie, Bowlby and Gregory, 2001; Speakman and Marchington, 1999). Overall, British women spend more hours on housework than men and although there is evidence of increased equity amongst the younger couples, there is still a marked discrepancy in their domestic work loads. Even in what are arguably the most egalitarian households, dual-earners, parity in care work, decision-making and in career development is still not the norm (Hardill *et al.*, 1999: 204).

In both Britain and Denmark, then, women have undergone radical changes in their working lives in the past decades. The changes might have been more rapid in Denmark, but they are significant in Britain too, not least in the fading of the M-shaped participation profile. An important area for future research, therefore, lies in more in-depth studies of the developments within the household that both reflect and impact on these trends. As Morgan (1999: 35) has suggested, there are wide and complex strategies being used within the household by different groups of women, alongside substantial variation in men's stability or resistance to change. Central research topics include, then, assessing the levels of caring that are still carried out within the home in those societies that, like Denmark, are approaching dual-breadwinner working, and how this caring work is organised and negotiated within the household. A second interesting question is how the breadwinning-caring balance, and negotiations around this, compare in dual-breadwinner homes in less gender equal regimes like Britain? This is because unless we begin to see men's working roles change, and the important point is that they must change as dramatically as have women's in the past forty years, then a new gender arrangement may be established in which women's dual workload is not just left unquestioned, it is intensified.

Data appendix

The main data sources are two large, national data-sets: the *British Household Panel Survey (BHPS)* and the *Danish Longitudinal Data Base (DLDB)*. The *BHPS* is a survey of each adult in a nationally representative sample of over 5,000 households. Data is available from 1991 onwards and approximately 10,000 individuals are interviewed (see Taylor *et al.*, 1995: A4-1). The Danish data-set is derived from the *Danish Longitudinal Data-base* which is one of the largest and richest national data-sets available for labour market research in Denmark (Hvidkaer, 1984; and see Westergdrd-Nielsen, 1984 for a detailed discussion). This is a 5% random sample of the Danish population, with data obtained from administrative records such as unemployment registers, taxation records and pension payment registers. A more manageable 1 % sample of the Danish population which is produced by the Centre for Labour Market and Social Research (CLS) in Arhus is used here.

Acknowledgements

The paper was developed from research funded originally by ESRC grant number R00429334371. The data (and tabulations) based on the *BHPS* were made available through the UK Data Archive. The data were originally collected by the ESRC Research Centre on Micro-social Change at the University of Essex, now incorporated within the Institute for Social and Economic Research. Neither the original collectors of the data nor the Archive bear any responsibility for the analyses or interpretations presented here. For the Danish analysis, the data used were made available through the

Centre for Labour Market and Social Research (CLS), University of Aarhus and Aarhus School of Business, under the agreement between Danish Statistics and the CLS. Neither Danish Statistics nor the CLS bear any responsibility for the analyses or interpretations.

Notes

- 1 Pfau-Effinger (1998) termed the Finnish version of this a dual-breadwinner/state-carer gender arrangement.
- 2 This model also holds negative connotations for couples' shared family and leisure time (Fraser, 1997).
- 3 Sociological comparisons of women's work in Britain and Denmark have been rare. Dex and Smith (1990) provided an economic analysis and Ellingswter (1992) offered a short comparison of Britain, Denmark, Germany and Norway.
- 4 This change in the relationship between Danish women's age and their part-time or full-time employment was supported by two logistic regression of women's part-time employment using 1980 and 1990 data. By 1990, part-time employees were more likely to be aged 16 to 25 or aged 55 or more.
- 5 The collectively agreed full-time week is 37.

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