University of Birmingham

Providing, performing and protecting

Radcliffe, Laura; Cassell, Catherine; Malik, Fatima

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

Providing, Performing and Protecting: The Importance of Work Identities in Negotiating Conflicting Work–Family Ideals as a Single Mother

Laura Radcliffe (iD),[1] Catherine Cassell (iD)[2] and Fatima Malik (iD)[3]

[1]University of Liverpool Management School, University of Liverpool, Chatham Street, Liverpool, L69 7ZH, UK, [2]Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston Park Road, Birmingham, B15 2TT, UK, and [3]Leicester Castle Business School, The Gateway, Leicester, LE1 9BH, UK
Corresponding author email: l.radcliffe@liverpool.ac.uk

The aims of this paper are twofold. First, we aim to expand understanding of work–family experiences beyond the prevalent emphasis on traditional couple-headed families within organization and management literatures by focusing on the experiences of employed single mothers. Second, we aim to gain insight into how work and family meanings may be negotiated in the context of heightened conflicting ideals and demands. Drawing on rich qualitative data from in-depth interviews and diaries, our findings make three important contributions to the existing work–family literature. First, we show that conflicting work and family ideals are not only exacerbated for single mothers, but viable narrative strategies with which to negotiate this conflict are also restricted. Second, we highlight how narratives constructed around the meaning of work are key to single mothers' negotiation of conflicting work and family ideals and identify three work narratives drawn upon by single mothers focused on providing, performing and protecting. Finally, we demonstrate how shifts between single mothers' work narratives are particularly influenced by progression opportunities and a supportive work environment. We conclude by making suggestions for future work–family research.

Introduction

Within the extensive work–family literature presented in management journals to date, there has been a predominant focus on family as constituting the 'nuclear' model of a heterosexual married couple, living with biological children, in which division of domestic and economic labour is usually gendered (Gatrell *et al.*, 2014). Numerous reviews of work–life literature continue to draw attention to this overly simplistic notion of family and the subsequent lack of diversity (Gatrell *et al.*, 2013; Özbilgin *et al.*, 2011), whilst the experiences of diverse families remain relatively understudied in this field. Some scholars have begun to address

this issue by exploring, for example, work–family experiences of ethnic minority women (Kamenou, 2008) and same-sex couples (Sawyer, Thoroughgood and Ladge, 2017), noting the importance of acknowledging different experiences when engaging with work–life debates. The current study aims to continue in this regard by focusing our attention on the work–family experiences of single mothers.

Single-parent households are common across OECD countries (Eurostat, 2017), constituting one in four families in the UK and USA (ONS, 2017; US Census, 2016), of which the majority are headed by women (ONS, 2019; US Census, 2016). Literatures outside management fields, such as within social policy (e.g. Nieuwenhuis and

Laurie, 2018) and family studies (Moilanen *et al.*, 2019b), have explored single parents' experiences, recognizing that, due to lack of another adult within the household, single parents are likely to experience greater challenges in managing competing role requirements (e.g. Moilanen *et al.*, 2019a). However, management scholars predominantly focus on work–family experiences of couples (e.g. Greenhaus and Powell, 2017; Masterson and Hoobler, 2015; Radcliffe and Cassell, 2014). This is despite single mothers' experiences being particularly relevant to this literature given that, in the UK, the majority (69.9%) are in paid employment (ONS, 2019), with around half working full-time (ONS, 2019). Further, half of those who are unemployed cite challenges with childcare and limited workplace flexibility (DfE, 2018). Despite evidence highlighting particularly challenging circumstances for single mothers managing work and family, they have frequently been without a voice in management literatures (Bakker and Karsten, 2013).

Extensive management research examining work and family, although predominantly focused on couples, highlights how the meanings people attach to these roles influence how work and family are experienced and managed (e.g. Masterson and Hoobler, 2015; Powell and Greenhaus, 2006). It also demonstrates how conflicting ideals often emanate from these roles, making them difficult to reconcile (Dutton, Roberts and Bednar, 2010). Further research exploring how individuals negotiate and reconcile conflicting work and family ideals has been called for, particularly where significant pressures exist in both domains (Greenhaus and Powell, 2012), which is particularly likely to be the case for employed single mothers. The current research therefore seeks to investigate how single mothers experience and manage conflicting work–family ideals. In order to position our research, we first examine what is already known about conflicting work and family ideals and how they are navigated, whilst considering the implications for single mothers given their unique position as sole or main breadwinner and caregiver. We then consider the impact of holding a stigmatized family identity, another pressure experienced by those who diverge from traditional family ideals (Sawyer, Thoroughgood and Ladge, 2017). Subsequently, we bring these literatures together to frame our research questions.

Conflicting work and family ideals

Different roles are associated with certain behaviours, values and choices considered to be appropriate, and perceived positively, when enacting that role (Dutton, Roberts and Bednar, 2010). When divergent behavioural ideals emanate from different roles, this can lead to internal tension and conflict (Dutton, Roberts and Bednar, 2010). When considering different ideals associated with being a good employee and a good parent, in particular a good mother, conflict potential becomes apparent. Motherhood ideals are socially constructed and derived from culturally shared expectations about appropriate practices and behaviours of mothers (Hays, 1996). The notion of 'intensive mothering' is a dominant mothering ideology in western societies, dictating that a mother should be child-centred with a labour-intensive and emotionally absorbing parenting style where time, energy and resources are devoted to children's needs (Hays, 1996). It assumes that time mothers spend parenting is especially important for child well-being, more so than time spent with other caregivers (e.g. Liss and Erchull, 2013). While researchers have recently noted that intensive parenting practices are gradually becoming more relevant to fathers (e.g. Ladge *et al.*, 2015), there continues to be an expectation in the UK that mothers take primary responsibility for childcare (Park *et al.*, 2013) and intense pressure for mothers, more so than fathers, to prioritize family over work (e.g. Okimoto and Heilman, 2012).

This is evidently at odds with the image of 'ideal workers' (e.g. Reid, 2015); a good employee is one who is devoted to their job above all else (Blair-Loy, 2009). Research has demonstrated for some time that employers increasingly demand long, unpredictable hours (e.g. Sellers, 2018; Simpson, 1998). In 2017 alone, UK employees worked two billion unpaid overtime hours, with many employees working 48 hours a week or more (Sellers, 2018). Increased competition between workers and the 24/7 economy contribute to a culture of working all the time and everywhere (Williams, Blair-Loy and Berdahl, 2013), and working long hours is often perceived as essential for career progression (Castro, 2012; Francesconi, 2001). While acknowledging that underemployment and precarious work may be more problematic than long

working hours for some (Warren, 2015), research suggests that expectations of constant availability for work persist (Blair-Loy, 2009).

Taken together, this research highlights how motherhood ideals conflict with those associated with success in the workplace. Regardless of family type, women are therefore likely to experience challenges in reconciling contradictory spheres of work and mothering (e.g. Gatrell *et al*., 2014; Hays, 1996). Hays (1996) argued that mothers respond to such challenges by justifying ambitions in both domains directly concerning ideologies of intensive mothering. Here we seek to explore whether, 20 years on, this is still the case and, in particular, whether this is the case for single mothers who, as we will go on to argue, experience heightened challenges in meeting such expectations given their role as both main provider and caregiver.

Strategies for navigating conflicting work and family ideals

In order to examine how employed single mothers navigate internal tension or conflict created by conflicting ideals across work and family roles (Dutton, Roberts and Bednar, 2010; Hays, 1996), we turn to broader literature on identity conflict navigation. Following a narrative conceptualization of identity as an 'internalized and evolving life story that integrates the reconstructed past, perceived present, and anticipated future' (McAdams, 1996, p. 301), we conceive that an important element of narrating one's identity is to enable a sense of self-coherence (e.g. Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010) and avoid ongoing identity conflict, which has been shown to have negative consequences for well-being (Dutton, Roberts and Bednar, 2010). Indeed, in negotiating identity conflict, prior research suggests that individuals strive to reduce or ameliorate conflict (e.g. Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008) and that an integrated sense of self is desirable (Ramarajan, 2014).

Here we consider concepts of 'identity work' to be particularly useful, referred to by Snow and Anderson (1987, p. 1348) as 'a range of activities that individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept'. Particularly relevant here is their notion of 'identity talk', or 'verbal construction and assertion of personal identities' (p. 1348), which includes internal negotiation and reconstruction of meanings attached

to different identities (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). Watson (2009) suggests that there are several narratives with which individuals can engage to construct a positive sense of who they are across roles. However, options considered as 'viable' are dependent on, and constrained by, social acceptability, which differs across groups (Smyth and Craig, 2017). For example, it has previously been suggested that men can construct a congruent sense of self by enacting breadwinner family identities (e.g. Miller, 2010); conforming to ideal worker norms, while concurrently providing financially for their family, thereby fulfilling socially acceptable notions of fatherhood (Bagger, Li and Gutek, 2008). This implies a particular strategy viable for men and fathers, but for women this would lead to further conflict due to deviation from socially constructed feminine qualities of care and maternal ideals (Gatrell, 2004).

Existing research exploring how coupled mothers navigate conflicting work and family ideals suggests prioritization of their maternal role to a greater extent by, for example, staying at home or reducing their working hours (e.g. Johnston and Swanson, 2007). However, reduced engagement in work roles may be a more viable option for mothers in couples, where they can engage in household specialization with their partner, dividing parental responsibilities of caregiving and financial provision (Baxter and Alexander, 2008; Becker, 2009). Research exploring mothers with high-level careers suggests they shift meanings attached to their family role, narrating alternative ideals associated with being a good mother. For example, constructing narratives around being career role models for their children, while modelling couple-level gender egalitarianism alongside verbalized beliefs that parental expectations are best met by the combined efforts of both mother and father (e.g. Blair-Loy, 2009; Johnston and Swanson, 2007). However, for single mothers, such narratives may not be attainable.

Theorizing couple-level work–family negotiation, Masterson and Hoobler (2015) argue that family identities may be defined in a variety of ways, where individuals can perceive their family role as being physical caregiver, economic provider, or both; which they refer to as holding a 'dual-centric family identity'. However, given the necessity for single mothers to act as both primary caregiver and provider, conceiving family identities as focused on *either* physical caregiving *or*

economic provision seems problematic. Dual-centric family identities may therefore be particularly relevant. In this sense, previously highlighted strategies for navigating identity conflict, such as role distancing (Snow and Anderson, 1987), involving an attempt to give impressions of a lack of commitment or attachment to a particular role (see also disidentification; Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001) may be challenging for single mothers. Indeed, employed single mothers may experience reduced viable options for navigating conflicting work and family ideals compared to their married counterparts.

Intensification of conflicting work–family identities: parenting alone and stigma

Stigma is defined as a collective label imposed on individuals or groups that extensively discredits these individuals (Goffman, 1963). Therefore, a stigmatized individual is someone who conveys a social identity that is devalued in a particular social context (Crocker, Major and Steele, 1998). Recent work–family research focusing on the impact of stigma-based work–family conflict (WFC) faced by LGB families emphasized the need to consider the WFC experiences of people who possess other stigmatized family identities (Sawyer, Thoroughgood and Ladge, 2017).

Single-parent families are a stigmatized group, with research continuously highlighting negative attitudes towards them (e.g. Valiquette-Tessier, Vandette and Gosselin, 2016) and perceived alignment with a non-respectable working class (Skeggs, 1997; Tyler, 2008). This is particularly pertinent in the UK, where lone mothers have often been depicted as a social problem due to deviation from the male-breadwinner family model (Salter, 2018). Frequently implicated as being deficient in terms of employment, far from the 'ideal worker', they are portrayed as uncommitted employees (Eby *et al.*, 2004) or benefit recipients who are a financial drain on society (Valiquette-Tessier, Vandette and Gosselin, 2016). This is despite the number of lone parents in the UK labour market demonstrating a record high (ONS, 2019) and fails to acknowledge the additional challenges facing employed single parents (Moilanen *et al.*, 2019a; Nieuwenhuis and Laurie, 2018). While prior research has examined the impact of stigmatization,

a detailed consideration of how this influences single mothers' navigation of work and family is yet to be considered.

To begin to understand such experiences we turn to the literature exploring how people experience and navigate stigmatized identities by employing identity management strategies (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999; Ashforth *et al.*, 2007; Goffman, 1963). Snow and Anderson (1987) specifically referred to 'identity talk' as one way in which individuals work to verbally construct and represent themselves more positively to others in the face of stigma. Drawing on the notion of identity work, others have identified how people use narrative tactics to challenge, distance or dissociate from stigmatized identities (Ashforth *et al.*, 2007), while connecting strongly with other socially valued roles (e.g. Brewis and Godfrey, 2018; Toyoki and Brown, 2014).

Concerning how this may influence single mothers' work–family negotiation, it may be pertinent to consider that success in paid employment is highly valued in western societies (e.g. Collinson, 2003). It may therefore be conceivable that single mothers would strive to attain valued work identities as a route to escaping negative workless single-mother stereotypes. However, this may be particularly challenging without another person in the household to share parental responsibilities (Moilanen *et al.*, 2019a).

Alternatively, in light of these challenges, another option might be to connect strongly with maternal ideals, narrating the importance of intensive mothering (e.g. Hays, 1996; Johnston and Swanson, 2007). One recent study looking at single mothers in Finland suggested that narratives of intensive mothering remained important, influenced by efforts to resist cultural scripts suggestive of the superiority of the nuclear family (Moilanen *et al.*, 2019b). Though this might enable resistance to stereotypes of deficient single motherhood, socially approved versions of such maternal narratives may not be accessible. For instance, narratives of the 'devoted stay-at-home-mum' or the 'supplementary breadwinner' (Schmidt, 2018) are largely unavailable to single mothers who, by necessity, are the sole household provider. Further, reduced association with paid employment also risks moving closer to the stigmatized, workless, single-mother identity. Questions therefore remain

regarding how managing such a stigmatized family identity may influence the negotiation of conflicting work and family ideals. Hence our research questions are as follows:

1. What challenges do employed single mothers narrate in navigating work and family ideals?
2. How do these mothers construct work and family identities in light of conflicting work and family ideals and stigmatization?

Methods

To explore the above research questions, we recruited a sample of employed single mothers from the UK, who were solely or predominantly responsible for daily childcare. In terms of UK context, higher childcare costs and lack of flexibility contribute to heightened employment challenges (DfE, 2018; Rabindrakumar, 2015). Working hours are some of the longest in Europe, with individuals often working beyond contracted hours, highlighting strong ideal worker norms (Working Families, 2016). However, single mothers have fewer financial resources (Moilanen *et al.*, 2019a) and struggle to meet financial needs with anything less than full-time employment (Millar, 2008), therefore it is no surprise that single mothers tend to report higher levels of WFC than coupled mothers (Moilanen *et al.*, 2019a).

Here we define single-parent households broadly, as those in which only one parent resides within the same household as one or more of their children. All participants lived with children but without fathers, with non-resident fathers having limited day-to-day childcare involvement, ranging from being completely absent to seeing children at weekends. While children were of varying ages, all mothers within our sample had experience as single parents since children were of preschool age or younger. Employed single mothers are a difficult sample to access due to significant responsibilities and time constraints, hence our sample – although diverse in some ways – is similar in others. All participants were white British, aged between 21 and 55, with a mean age of 38, and worked a minimum of 18 hours per week in a variety of occupations, at varying skill levels (see Table 1 for further details). Class was somewhat difficult to define within our sample. While economic instability or lack of material security, and even alignment

with single motherhood itself, may be suggestive of working-class status (see Skeggs, 1997), in terms of educational qualifications our sample was diverse. For instance, seven participants had university-level education, with one participant engaged in university education at the time of the study.

In terms of the research team, although ethnically diverse, we are all female. Two of us have also had periods of our careers when we have been single mothers, as well as experiencing motherhood as part of a couple. Acknowledging our all-female research team and personal experiences as working mothers, we engaged in personal and collective reflexivity throughout the research process, ensuring our analysis was grounded in the data, rather than based on personal presuppositions. However, as interpretivist researchers, we also acknowledge that ours is one possible interpretation of the data and that other interpretations are possible.

Initially, an information sheet explaining the research purpose and requirements was disseminated via relevant social media groups, such as single-parent Facebook groups, with the full consent of the group's moderators. From initial contacts, while acknowledging potential limitations of this approach in terms of respondents identifying others most like themselves, snowball sampling was deemed the most effective way of accessing this difficult-to-reach group (Saunders, 2012). We therefore also drew on existing participants' networks, where they were happy to do so. Details of the participants, including pseudonyms, are presented in Table 1.

Data collection

As the focus was placed on participants' perceptions, an exploratory, interpretative approach was adopted drawing on lengthy (each around 2 hours), semi-structured interviews conducted alongside qualitative diaries kept over 4 weeks. We gained informed consent from all participants and conducted interviews in a place of their choosing to aid participant comfort, which was generally in their own homes to avoid childcare issues. Interviews initially ascertained background information on job roles, organizations and family arrangements. Questions then centred on exploring key transition points in participants' life histories – such as when they became a single-parent household – useful in gaining insight into how they made sense of decisions at times when work and

Table 1. Study participants

Pseudonym	Age	Children	Employment	Hours per week	Data collected	Predominate work identity narrative
Tania	21	1 aged 2	NHS receptionist	18	2 Interviews & Diary	Providing
Janet	48	1 aged 12	Administrator for telecom company	18	1 Interview	Providing
Christina	33	1 aged 3	Teaching assistant	18	1 Interview	Providing
Nancy	48	1 aged 15	Manager of a charity	30	1 Interview	Protecting
Belinda	44	2 aged 8 & 11	Finance assistant in the retail sector	32	2 Interviews & Diary	Protecting
Hilary	38	1 aged 9	Administrator	27	1 Interview	Protecting
Viv	37	2 aged 5 & 7	Social worker	Full-time	1 Interview	Protecting
Eva	39	2 aged 5 & 8	Primary school teacher	Full-time	2 Interviews & Diary	Protecting
Shelley	35	1 aged 10	University teacher	Full-time	1 Interview	Protecting
Katie	25	2 aged 4 & 6	Customer service assistant & university student	Zero-hours contract	2 Interviews & Diary	Performing
Amy	44	2 aged 5 & 8	Contract officer at a college	Full-time	1 Interview	Performing
Coleen	34	1 aged 2	Service manager for IT company	Full-time	1 Interview	Performing
Carol	33	2 aged 13 & 16	University researcher and teaching assistant	Full-time	2 Interviews & Diary	Performing
Karen	55	3 aged 13, 16 & 19	Academic	Full-time	1 Interview	Performing
Natalie	41	1 aged 12	ICT service desk manager	Full-time	1 Interview	Performing

Note: Full-time hours in the UK usually refers to those working 35 hours or more per week. All participants listed here as working full-time indicated contracts specifying 37.5 hours or more per week.

family roles were most salient. Questions were also asked around daily challenges, general strategies for managing work and family, and feelings associated with these experiences.

All participants were invited to keep a qualitative diary. Crozier and Cassell (2016) highlight how other studies utilizing qualitative diaries typically employ a small sample size (Holt and Dunn, 2004). In this case, five of our participants volunteered to keep a diary, permitting additional depth of discursive analysis. This enabled further insights in terms of participants' lived daily experiences, in particular how challenges and pressures were experienced and navigated daily (Radcliffe, 2013). Entries focused on how conflicts were managed, why they were managed in this way, and how they felt about resolutions or outcomes, recorded over 1 month and followed by further in-depth interviews. Those who took part in this stage were given pen-and-paper diaries, including a cover sheet providing an overview of the kinds of experiences, and level of detail, we were seeking. Follow-up interviews provided opportunities to further explore important points raised in the diary, permitting additional depth of understanding. Further, providing an opportunity for participants to discuss experiences of the research process in a safe and confidential environment is ethically important given the time-intensive and longitudinal nature of their engagement (Cassell, Radcliffe and Malik, 2019).

This resulted in 20 interviews and 48 diary entries, including rich, detailed accounts of the nuances of work–family meaning making. Hence the focus here is not on claiming generalizability. Rather, we would argue that our approach offers depth of understanding, providing insights which are, as Cohen and Duberley (2015, p. 192) assert, 'valuable both in their own right and in establishing an agenda for future research'.

Data analysis

Interviews and audio-recorded diaries were transcribed verbatim, and handwritten diaries were word-processed before initial thematic analysis as prescribed by King and Brooks (2016). Template analysis (King, 2004) is a flexible technique enabling integration of data from different methodological sources within a single analytic template. Hence this seemed appropriate for combining data from two different methodological sources. Inter-

view transcripts and diary data were first read broadly, enabling data familiarization and immersion, the creation of participant summaries and development of initial coding categories. This initial phase of coding was predominantly descriptive in terms of highlighting repeating ideas in the data capturing how participants defined themselves relative to work and family, as well as challenges, experiences and coping strategies.

The second stage of coding was more conceptually focused and involved moving back and forth between analysis and interpretation. This included focusing on insights ascertained from repeating ideas within our data, as well as existing literature. As a result, initial coding categories were modified, including moving themes into different thematic categories and condensing themes into more distinct categories as clear relationships emerged (King and Brooks, 2016). For instance, within broad thematic categories labelled 'work identity narratives' and 'family identity narratives', different patterns associated with how participants narrated who they were in these roles were organized under particular sub-theme headings. For example, work identity narratives focused on work as being important in terms of family financial provision or enabling them financial self-sufficiency were labelled 'provider identity narratives'. These were thematically separated from narratives focused on a strong desire for career progression and achievement in the work domain, which were labelled 'performer identity narratives', and those discussions that highlighted a caring role and enactment of maternal selves at work, labelled 'protector identity narratives'.

The third stage of analysis involved all members of the research team. Initially separately, each of the two additional members of the team worked through the findings looking for positive and potentially contradictory evidence. Together we then shared examples of where there may have been alternative views of the thematic coding. The conclusion was a considerable level of agreement about the coding of data into the different themes. Given the iterative process between the first author conducting the analysis and reflexive discussions with the research team, we were confident we had met the conditions for an internally reflexive audit trail (Johnson *et al.*, 2006).

The final stage involved searching for conceptual patterns highlighting how different themes linked together and related to one another. This

was achieved by regularly moving between thematic examples and individual participant summaries in order to retain the wholeness of each participant's story (King and Brook, 2016). For example, while both work and family identity narratives were important, diverse work identity narratives emerged as central to participants' navigation of conflicting work–family ideals and daily experiences. While some variation in family narratives did exist, all participants presented family narratives suggestive of dual-centric family identities (Masterson and Hoobler, 2015), and any shifts within this appeared to be informed by work identity narratives. Work identity narratives therefore became our focal point.

Findings

Challenges in navigating work and family

In answering our first research question, we focused on the challenges employed single mothers face in navigating work and family. Our findings revealed two additional pressures experienced by single mothers: first, the experience of concurrent sole breadwinner–caregiver pressures and second, pressures related to navigating the stigmatized single-mother identity. In relation to the pressures associated with being the sole breadwinner, Viv and Nancy expressed concerns about financial security:

> I pay the mortgage and if I don't pay the mortgage, if I lose my job, then I've not got no house, and it scares me, the idea of losing my house, and that's all down to me.

> Because you're the only breadwinner… you're less likely to take a risk because you've got a house to run and a child to look after.

Individuals in many couple-headed families face similar pressures associated with being the sole or main breadwinner (e.g. Haddock and Rattenborg, 2003; Schwartz, 1994), but for single mothers these pressures existed concurrently alongside those related to being solely or predominantly responsible for providing hands-on care. While our participants received varying levels of support from other family members, it was clear across accounts that they perceived caregiving as a personal responsibility, therefore the pressure of being the lone parent responsible for caregiving remained. For

instance, Hilary explained: 'It's not like there's another parent there looking after her so that burden of worry is taken away'. Similarly, Carol insisted 'they're my responsibility. They're nobody else's'. Pressures of parenting alone were clearly felt across our sample. As Eva outlined:

> You're recreating what they're missing from not having a family unit… you know with single mothers, so many of my friends have been in a similar position, like trying to be a perfect mum and make sure their lives are lovely kind of thing. You put yourself under a lot of pressure to do that kind of thing because you're making up for everything they're not having in their family life.

Alongside the concurrent sole breadwinner–caregiver pressures, a further pressure experienced was the desire, and associated work required, to dissociate themselves from stigmatized single-mother stereotypes. Representations of single mothers tend to have class-based connotations, linked to a perceived lack of respectability (Skeggs, 1997), and it was evident that these mothers were seeking to resist such social positioning throughout their accounts, emphasizing how they deviated from this in both their parenting and employment practices. For instance, Amy talked about the additional pressures of parenting alone, while also striving to distance herself from such negative stereotypes:

> I am on my own, I don't want to be… I don't mean this of all the other single parents that you see… but shoving a sausage roll in their mouth walking round or giving in for giving in's sake, because it's easier to.

Similarly, pressures placed on the work identity are heightened further due to the importance of work in avoiding stigmatization associated with unemployment. Indeed, identity work to dissociate themselves from stigmatized stereotypes (Ashforth *et al.*, 2007) appeared to exert a continuous additional pressure, simultaneously striving to associate themselves with socially valued roles (e.g. Toyoki and Brown, 2014), in this case paid employment. For instance, Belinda repeatedly insisted

> I'm not one to stay on benefits… I like to go to work and earn my money, not expect to be given handouts… I'm not a benefit person.

Meanwhile, Viv explained how 'The career gives me a bit of self-respect… it's nice to have that there as your little golden nugget'. The work role

was therefore important as a means of managing stigmatization.

This importance placed on paid work was also evident in family identity narratives espoused by our participants, making it clear that both paid work and hands-on care were integral. Therefore, in line with previous literature, all participants could be referred to as holding dual-centric family identities (Masterson and Hoobler, 2015). However, our data also highlighted great diversity within our sample, suggesting that experiences are far from uniform across individuals with similar family identity framings, as has previously been suggested (Masterson and Hoobler, 2015). In particular, how participants discussed their work role was revealed as diverse, and integral to negotiating conflicting ideals while navigating a stigmatized identity. Therefore, our findings now turn to focus on three key work identity narratives drawn on by participants.

Provider work identity narratives

All participants referred to their maternal role as incorporating a provider dimension, suggesting that for single mothers, economic provision is viewed as an integral part of being a good mother. However, while most single mothers in our sample derived additional meaning from work beyond financial provision alone, for some, providing financially for their family was their predominant focus when talking about work. For example, Christina discussed work as important because it enables her to feel 'more in control at home because I was bringing in an income' and Tania focused on work as a source of fulfilment 'when I get paid and I've earned it for us'. Tania went on to further emphasize work as important in enabling a better life and future for her son, explaining

> I don't know, people on benefits all the time, they're just stuck… I want to be able to buy my own house so [my son] has got a nice house.

Work is evidently important in enabling her to position herself as opposed to those who do not work, but portrayed predominantly as a way to support her family instead of taking on additional meaning. Therefore, career-related achievements were de-emphasized. Where provider narratives dominated there was a clear focus on separating work from family by making decisions to refuse additional work, once they felt they had achieved

an appropriate level of family provision. For instance, in Tania's diary, when offered additional work for more money, she turned this down because she 'would hardly get to spend time with him [her son] then', rejecting any impingement on family time. In this sense, presenting adherence to intensive mothering ideals appeared to be an important narrative strategy when provider narratives dominated work discussions, integrating the two by incorporating work as an element of what it means to be a good mother. Therefore, once adequate provision was met, physical and emotional care was prioritized.

When considering why participants drew on particular narratives, it should be noted that fewer opportunities were available to those who focused on provider narratives, particularly concerning career progression. For instance, Tania, only 21 at the time of the study, indicated that the way she conceptualized work may shift depending on future opportunities:

> I wanted to be a midwife but shift work doesn't fit in with a child… Maybe if I have another child in 5 years, I can start my training in ten years.

Conversely, for Janet, aged 48, it was evident that such shifts in work identity had already taken place when she concurrently became a mum and a single parent:

> Before I had Rachel, I had a team of 30 people, and I used to do a lot of overtime… but as soon as I had Rachel… I don't do overtime anymore.

While she frames this as her choice, subsequent discussions reveal a rather constrained 'choice' in terms of what the organization would permit, suggesting identity work performed to amend how work was conceptualized. She explained: 'if I wanted to progress, I would definitely have to up my hours and go back full-time'. Here, organizational expectations appeared to have an impact on how single mothers narrated their identities. Identities were fluid and dependent on the context in which they were constructed, and how 'choice' may be constrained.

Performer work identity narratives

Other narratives moved beyond talking about work only as a means of family provision, placing importance on career progression, performing at work and being highly valued in the workplace.

Where such narratives came to the fore, traditional notions of success in the work domain appeared important in enabling a positive sense of self. For instance, talking about her work role, Carol, a university researcher, explained:

> It's really important to me. My work role, to me, is who I am. This is who I am as a person... within months of starting it meant a lot to me and it just became essential to me... I could be someone, I could do something.

Such discussions emphasize the intense importance placed on work, far beyond a focus on financial provision alone. Immediately following this discussion, she highlighted the stigmatization she experienced as a pregnant teenager, where she felt she had no choices and 'was told by my Catholic School that I wasn't allowed to come back'. This juxtaposition suggests striving for success in the work domain, and connecting strongly with this role, was important to her as a means of dissociation from the stigmatized, single-parent identity.

However, seeking to perform at work inevitably involved engaging with ideal worker norms. While flexibility could sometimes be negotiated if organizations permitted, expectations of long working hours tended to persist. In this respect, all single mothers emphasizing performer narratives strived to adhere to elements of the ideal worker. Therefore, organizations permitting flexibility were especially important in enabling such narratives. Colleen talked about how her current organization's flexibility in terms of when, how and where she worked allowed her to manage her responsibilities in the home domain, while also achieving at work:

> Because that's the ethos, I don't worry if I was working flexibly that my bosses would be turning around asking, is she doing her job? In previous organizations there was a lot of pretence, like people sitting at their desk playing solitaire at 7–8 p.m. just to be the last person out of the office... I'm just not that kind of person.

While she suggests she is 'not that kind of person', she is in a privileged position, having a highly valued skill set and therefore in a better position to negotiate, enabling her to perform at work while managing work and family alone. Conversely, Amy experienced increasing expectations from her organization and therefore relied heavily on her mum for support. She explained: 'I don't know how I'd do my job if I didn't have my mum', highlighting how those who did not have such support would be unable to meet ideal worker norms, thereby removing performer narratives as a legitimate way to construct work identities for many single mothers.

While focusing on performing at work was a narrative strategy allowing single mothers to further distance themselves from stigmatized, unemployed or uncommitted single-mother stereotypes (Valiquette-Tessier, Vandette and Gosselin, 2016), it did not help to reconcile incongruent work and family ideals. Therefore, such narratives were accompanied by identity talk that moved away from intensive mothering ideals, instead focusing on career role modelling for their children, portraying workplace achievement as demonstrating parental success. For instance, Coleen discussed how '... in terms of being able to see what she can achieve, that's down to me' and Karen talked about how 'obviously how I bring them up... if I've got this work ethic then they're going to have it'.

However, holding themselves to such standards at work, while also being responsible for caregiving at home, evidently led to stress and exhaustion. For instance, Karen reported how she 'often feels overwhelmed' and as though she is 'drowning', due to incompatible mothering ideals and workplace pressures:

> I used to say this to people... I'd absorb, absorb, and absorb like a dry sponge but then what I felt was like I was leaking, I could take no more in, my sponge was too full and I was just collapsing... everything was oozing out because there was no more capacity.

Shifting narratives away from intensive mothering ideals, including reliance on support from those outside the nuclear family, came at a price, with evidence, particularly in diary entries, of persistent, daily guilt and work–family identity conflict. For example, in the diaries

> *Katie*: 'I'm conscious the kids are missing out more. I'm a bit more tired so maybe not as interactive as I should be. There's more of a guilt element... but at the same time, because I'm working the time that I do get with them I kind of enjoy it a bit more.'

> *Carol*: 'My mum reminded me how rubbish I can be when I'm busy... when she got in the car, she handed Megan [daughter] her prescription medication. Great big help but Megan didn't even tell me she needed them. She went straight to my mum. This

reminds me that I'm not there and the kids are aware of that.'

For those single mothers who have the resources and opportunities to enable performer narratives, they can dissociate even further from the stigmatized, workless single-mother image, and move towards the employed 'ideal', demonstrating achievement in a valued societal role. However, this involves a shift away from intensive mothering ideals, accompanied by regular experience of work–family identity conflict and the need to perform ongoing identity work or, as Carol explains: 'I have to go through this battle with myself now and again'.

Protector work identity narratives

The third work identity narrative focused on work as another domain in which to enact feminine, maternal identities, thereby enabling a sense of internal consistency across roles, while also maintaining positive associations with paid work. Eva, a primary school teacher, expressed the value of her work role in terms of a desire to protect the children in her care:

> You're next to mother and father, because you're with them for seven hours a day. So, you are seen as next to the parent and you know you've got to be that reliable and responsible role model.

Narrating her work role in this way enabled her to create self-coherence, reducing identity conflict by explicitly highlighting value in her work, while also conforming to feminine gender ideals by invoking her maternal identity in this domain. An explicit discussion of enacting maternal ideals at work was echoed by Nancy, the manager of a charity, who discussed 'trying to be mother and keeping the peace with everybody' and Shelley, a university teacher, who told her students 'I'm your mum at university'. Protector narratives therefore presented paid employment as another domain in which to enact stereotypically feminine identities, as protectors who help and support others.

Evidence of internal shifts between performer and protector narratives provided some insight into why participants might focus on particular work identity narratives. For instance, for Shelley, who had attempted to complete her PhD but struggled to do so, career progression appeared to be a prior consideration, abandoned due to an inability to conform to ideal worker norms. She explained:

> I do not have another adult to help so it's down to me. I don't have the weekends to work. I've now got to the point where I'm reassessing… a PhD isn't going to make me a better lecturer. I've always had good marks and students like the course… I'm quite a mentoring, motherly kind of person.

Here we can see the identity work engaged in to shift between performer and protector narratives, refocusing values towards a more maternal self in order to cope with feelings of failure due to being unable to meet organizational requirements, rationalizing this shift in line with a need to focus on her students. The ongoing, daily identity work involved in this process was also evident in Eva's diary entries:

> I felt incompetent when a younger teacher achieved deputy head role as he can be at work at 7 a.m. as he has no children… I sat with other colleagues and put it into perspective. I can treasure time with my children instead.

She went on to explain how 'I think the bare bones of me is I still like to teach… As a manager you have to leave your class with unqualified people'. Such identity talk, drawing on maternal selves at work, appeared to be a strategy employed by single mothers when confronted with unachievable ideals. Rather than abandoning or weakening attachment to their work role, which would be practically unfeasible, as well as leaving them open to stigmatization, they work to reconceptualize the meaning of the role. While this seemed to enable continued identification with work, and some degree of work–family congruence, it was not without problems.

Just as single mothers seeking to perform at work felt overwhelmed, those focused on protector narratives expressed similar feelings. However, for these mothers such feelings appeared to be exacerbated further still by internalized pressures to support everyone in both domains, in order to maintain this idealized image of themselves. For instance, Nancy discussed how she always attempts to 'please everyone, make everyone happy'. Hilary explained how this led to her 'being shattered', sometimes even leading to 'a nasty bout of depression'. Eva speculated:

I don't know if we just burn ourselves out as single parents, whether we will get to a certain age and that will be it or something goes, and we just can't continue.

Therefore, while protector narratives appeared to avoid previously discussed identity conflicts, it was evident that this also came at a price.

Discussion and conclusions

Our first contribution, in line with research question one, is demonstrating the challenges experienced by employed single mothers in navigating work–family ideals. Exacerbated pressures were experienced due to sole breadwinning responsibilities experienced *in conjunction with* parenting alone. Single mothers are therefore unable to engage in household specialization (e.g. Baxter and Alexander, 2008) or turn-taking to manage caregiving tasks; strategies often used by couples (Radcliffe and Cassell, 2014). In this sense, dual-centric family identities (Masterson and Hoobler, 2015) seemed almost a necessity for single mothers. These pressures were further intensified by the need to manage a stigmatized family identity, resulting in intensive and ongoing identity work to avoid association with the stigmatized stereotype of the single mother. The co-occurrence of these pressures not only exacerbated conflicting work–family ideals, but also reduced viable, or socially acceptable, narratives available to help them manage this conflict (Watson, 2009). While recent research has suggested that women in couples may conceptualize their work role in different ways, including viewing work as a leisure activity or presenting their role as 'supplementary breadwinner' (Nadim, 2016; Schmidt, 2018), such narratives were absent from our participants' accounts. Rather, narrative tactics were frequently used to avoid identities that did not place high value on paid employment, including derogating those who were not committed to employment and aligning themselves strongly with the socially valued work domain (Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001).

Our second contribution, and response to research question two, is in providing insight into how single mothers worked continuously to navigate intensified conflicting ideals. An important part of this was working to present themselves as independent, valuable employees, by transform-

ing work narratives. Previous research has demonstrated how mothers in couples navigate conflicting ideals by transforming family narratives to enable presentation of themselves as good mothers (e.g. Blair-Loy, 2009; Johnston and Swanson, 2007), which was also evident in our data. However, family identities were transformed to a limited extent, always remaining focused on *both* financial provision and hands-on care (i.e. dual-centric family narratives) and shifting only to enable greater alignment with available work narratives. We therefore argue that work identities are particularly important to consider here; a focus often lacking within the work–family literature, which limits a more complete understanding of how the two work together when navigating work–family ideals.

The importance placed on work was framed by our participants in three distinct ways, each drawn upon strategically to navigate conflicting ideals and stigmatization. Provider work identity narratives offered a way in which work roles could be viewed predominantly as a means of financial provision for their family. Single mothers drawing primarily on such narratives tended to present work as commensurate with intensive mothering ideals (Hays, 1996) by narrating financial provision as an integral element of this. Such accounts support recent research focused on single mothers suggesting they largely sought to conform to intensive mothering ideals (Moilanen *et al.*, 2019b). Here, we found that conceptualizing work in this way aligned with part-time working, organizing work around caregiving and only working as much as was financially necessary for their family. Interestingly, fathers drawing on provider, or breadwinner, identity narratives have been shown to prioritize work, organizing caregiving responsibilities around workplace demands (Gatrell *et al.*, 2015). We therefore theorize that provider identities may present quite differently for mothers and fathers. Given that we know more about fathers enacting breadwinner identities (McLaughlin and Muldoon, 2014), we propose that further examination of such identities in single mothers is an interesting area for future research.

Other single mothers in our sample depicted work as much more than only a means of attaining financial provision for their family. These participants tended to work longer, often full-time hours. Performer narratives focused on achievement and progression in the work domain, which invariably

meant navigating ideal worker norms (e.g. Reid, 2015). These narratives also involved a shift away from intensive mothering ideals (Hays, 1996), challenging dominant cultural expectations by justifying ambitions in the work domain as important beyond being part of maternal roles. Instead, narratives focused on hard work, intensive commitment and pride in societal contributions via paid employment. While this enabled further distancing from the stereotypical, non-respectable image of the working-class single mother (e.g. Skeggs, 1997; Tyler, 2008), it coalesced with reports of identity-based WFC, likely due to lack of conformity to maternal and feminine ideals (Gatrell, 2004). Previous literature has highlighted how ongoing identity conflict has negative consequences for well-being (Dutton, Roberts and Bednar, 2010), and we suggest here that identity-based WFC should be explored as a distinct type of WFC in its own right.

In contrast, protector narratives focused on stereotypical notions of the feminine, emphasizing adoption of caring and empathetic roles in the workplace. Much prior research has demonstrated how women often take on more stereotypically feminine roles at work (e.g. Hochschild, 1983), which are frequently undervalued (Acker, 1990). While such narratives seemed to enable a sense of self-coherence, reducing identity conflicts (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010), they aligned with reports of intense daily stress, suggesting a detrimental impact on well-being. While breadwinner identities have previously been suggested as enabling a congruent and positive sense of self across roles for fathers (e.g. Miller, 2010), a focus on feminine and maternal ideals at work may enable such congruence for women, but at a cost. This raises questions around notions that identity integration is necessarily always beneficial (e.g. Ramarajan, 2014).

Participant accounts also demonstrated transitions between narratives, generally suggestive of single mothers engaging with performer narratives where possible. This is potentially reflective of stigma associated with unemployment, particularly for single mothers (Tyler, 2008), and attempts to dissociate from this stigma (Ashforth *et al.*, 2007). However, our data concurrently highlight the additional challenges they faced in striving to perform at work within the context of strong ideal worker norms and single motherhood, and suggest that organizational expectations and support influenced their work narratives. When opportuni-

ties for progression were limited, single mothers appeared to avoid engaging in the 'ideal worker game', instead engaging in identity work (Snow and Anderson, 1987) to shift work narratives away from performing, seeking other, more viable ways to construct meaning around work, either as part of their maternal role in the family domain, or as a way to protect and care for others across domains. In line with compensation theory (Lambert, 1990), previous research suggests that men look to their family for satisfaction when unsatisfied at work, and here it would seem that this also applies to single mothers. Such identity work tended to coincide with downskilling, or no longer seeking progression, yet in all cases continuing to find a way to narrate work as integral to who they are. Further, it was the availability of different work narratives that appeared to influence conformity, or a lack thereof, to intensive mothering ideals, extending previous research (Hays, 1996; Moilanen *et al.*, 2019b) by considering when and why intensive mothering norms may be challenged in the context of single motherhood.

One limitation of our research is the lack of some aspects of demographic diversity in our sample. It is not our intention to generalize from our findings in the traditional statistical sense, yet there may be opportunity for transferability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) to similar samples in equivalent economic contexts, for example across parts of the westernized world. Indeed, future research could explore the extent of resonance of these work identity narratives across single mothers in other socio-economic contexts. A specific class-based analysis could add further nuance to our findings and a consideration of different cultural backgrounds could also impact how women perceive work and maternal roles. For example, previous research has suggested that Afro-Caribbean mothers hold more integrative perceptions of maternal and work roles, leading to potentially different ideals (e.g. Christopher, 2012). Therefore, future research should explore the work–family identities and pressures experienced by those from different cultural, class and ethnic backgrounds to examine how pressures and management strategies may differ. It would also be interesting to explore whether parents across diverse family types attach meaning to work in similar or different ways depending on family circumstances. Single fathers would provide an interesting comparison in terms of attaining insights into the influence of

gender on single parenthood work–family experiences. Relatedly, we need to explore experiences of blended families, including considering how work–family identities may change as single mothers re-partner.

To conclude, from our empirically distinct sample, our theoretical contribution has firstly been to demonstrate the intensified pressures faced by employed single mothers as they attempt to negotiate work and family identities; namely, exacerbation of conflicting ideals and reduced viable identity narratives with which to reconcile this conflict. Further, we have extended the existing work–family literature, which currently focuses predominantly on how family identities may differ (e.g. Masterson and Hoobler, 2015), by highlighting how different work identity narratives may be employed to negotiate conflicting ideals. Importantly, our findings also highlight how none of the available work–family narratives were unproblematic for single mothers. Within the context of current incommensurate work and maternal ideals, combining who they are at home and at work always comes at a cost.

References

Acker, J. (1990). 'Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations', *Gender & society*, **4**(2), 139–158.

Ashforth, B. E. and G. E. Kreiner (1999). '"How can you do it?": dirty work and the challenge of constructing a positive identity', *Academy of Management Review*, **24**, pp. 413–434.

Ashforth, B. E., G. A. Kreiner, M. Clark and M. Fugate (2007). 'Normalizing dirty work: managerial tactics for countering occupational taint', *Academy of Management Journal*, **50**, pp. 149–174.

Bagger, J., A. Li and B. A. Gutek (2008). 'How much do you value your family, and does it matter? The joint effects of family identity salience, family-interference-with-work, and gender', *Human Relations*, **61**, pp. 187–211.

Bakker, W. and L. Karsten (2013). 'Balancing paid work, care and leisure in postseparation households: a comparison of single parents with co-parents', *Acta Sociologica*, **56**, pp. 173–187.

Baxter, J. and M. Alexander (2008). 'Mothers' work-to-family strain in single and couple parent families: the role of job characteristics and supports', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, **43**, pp. 195–214.

Becker, G. S. (2009). *A Treatise on the Family*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Blair-Loy, M. (2009). *Competing Devotions: Career and Family among Women Executives*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Brewis, J. and R. Godfrey (2018). '"Never call me a mercenary": identity work, stigma management and the private security contractor', *Organization*, **25**, pp. 335–353.

Cassell, C., L. Radcliffe and F. Malik (2019). 'Participant reflexivity in organizational research design', *Organizational Research Methods*, **23**, pp. 750–773.

Castro, M. (2012). 'Time demands and gender roles: the case of a big four firm in Mexico', *Gender, Work & Organization*, **19**, pp. 532–554.

Christopher, K. (2012). 'Extensive mothering: employed mothers' constructions of the good mother', *Gender & Society*, **26**, pp. 73–96.

Cohen, L. and J. Duberley (2015). 'Three faces of context and their implications for career: a study of public sector careers cut short', *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, **91**, pp. 189–202.

Collinson, D. L. (2003). 'Identities and insecurities: selves at work', *Organization*, **10**, pp. 527–547.

Crocker, J., B. Major and C. Steele (1998). 'Social stigma: the psychology of marked relationships', *The Handbook of Social Psychology*, **2**, pp. 504–553.

Crozier, S. E. and C. M. Cassell (2016). 'Methodological considerations in the use of audio diaries in work psychology: adding to the qualitative toolkit', *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, **89**, pp. 396–419.

DfE (2018). 'Childcare and early years survey of parents in England: 2018'.

Dutton, J. E., L. M. Roberts and J. Bednar (2010). 'Pathways for positive identity construction at work: four types of positive identity and the building of social resources', *Academy of Management Review*, **35**, pp. 265–293.

Eby, L. T., T. D. Allen, C. L. Noble and A. L. Lockwood (2004). 'Perceptions of singles and single parents: a laboratory experiment', *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, **34**, pp. 1329–1352.

Elsbach, K. D. and C. B. Bhattacharya (2001). 'Defining who you are by what you're not: organizational disidentification and the National Rifle Association', *Organization Science*, **12**, pp. 393–413.

EUROSTAT (2017). 'Household composition statistics'. http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Household_composition_statistics

Francesconi, M. (2001). 'Determinants and consequences of promotions in Britain', *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics*, **63**, pp. 279–310.

Gatrell, C. (2004). *Hard Labour: The Sociology of Parenthood*. London: McGraw-Hill Education.

Gatrell, C., S. B. Burnett, C. L. Cooper and P. Sparrow (2013). 'Work–life balance and parenthood: a comparative review of definitions, equity and enrichment', *International Journal of Management Reviews*, **15**, pp. 300–316.

Gatrell, C. J., S. B. Burnett, C. L. Cooper and P. Sparrow (2014). 'Parents, perceptions and belonging: exploring flexible working among UK fathers and mothers', *British Journal of Management*, **25**, pp. 473–487.

Gatrell, C. J., S. B. Burnett, C. L. Cooper and P. Sparrow (2015). 'The price of love: the prioritisation of childcare and income earning among UK fathers', *Families, Relationships and Societies*, **4**, pp. 225–238.

Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma. Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. New York: Simon & Shuster.

Greenhaus, J. H. and G. N. Powell (2012). 'The family-relatedness of work decisions: a framework and agenda for theory and research', *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, **80**, pp. 246–255.

Greenhaus, J. H. and G. N. Powell (2017). *Making Work and Family Work: From Hard Choices to Smart Choices*. London: Routledge.

Haddock, S. A. and K. Rattenborg (2003). 'Benefits and challenges of dual-earning: perspectives of successful couples', *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, **31**, pp. 325–344.

Hays, S. (1996). *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Hochschild, A. R. (1983/2003). *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Holt, N. L. and J. G. Dunn (2004). 'Longitudinal idiographic analyses of appraisal and coping responses in sport', *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, **5**, pp. 213–222.

Ibarra, H. and R. Barbulescu (2010). 'Identity as narrative: prevalence, effectiveness, and consequences of narrative identity work in macro work role transitions', *Academy of Management Review*, **35**, pp. 135–154.

Johnson, P., A. Buehring, C. M. Cassell and G. Symon (2006). 'Evaluating qualitative management research: towards a contingent criteriology', *International Journal of Management Reviews*, **8**, pp. 131–156.

Johnston, D. D. and D. H. Swanson (2007). 'Cognitive acrobatics in the construction of worker–mother identity', *Sex Roles*, **57**, pp. 447–459.

Kamenou, N. (2008). 'Reconsidering work–life balance debates: challenging limited understandings of the "life" component in the context of ethnic minority women's experiences', *British Journal of Management*, **19**, pp. S99–S109.

King, N. (2004). 'Using templates in the thematic analysis of text'. In C. Cassell and G. Symon (eds), *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research*, pp. 256–287. London: Sage.

King, N. and J. Brooks (2016). *Template Analysis for Business and Management Students*. London: Sage.

Ladge, J. J., B. K. Humberd, M. B. Watkins and B. Harrington (2015). 'Updating the organization MAN: an examination of involved fathering in the workplace', *The Academy of Management Perspectives*, **29**, pp. 152–171.

Lambert, S. J. (1990). 'Processes linking work and family: a critical review and research agenda', *Human Relations*, **43**, pp. 239–257.

Lincoln, Y. S. and E. G. Guba (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Liss, M. and M. J. Erchull (2013). 'Differences in beliefs and behaviors between feminist actual and anticipated mothers', *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, **37**, pp. 381–391.

Lutgen-Sandvik, P. (2008). 'Intensive remedial identity work: responses to workplace bullying trauma and stigmatization', *Organization*, **15**, pp. 97–119.

Masterson, C. R. and J. M. Hoobler (2015). 'Care and career: a family identity-based typology of dual-earner couples', *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, **36**, pp. 75–93.

McAdams, D. P. (1996). 'Personality, modernity, and the storied self: a contemporary framework for studying persons', *Psychological Inquiry*, **7**, pp. 295–321.

McLaughlin, K. and O. Muldoon (2014). 'Father identity, involvement and work–family balance: an in-depth interview study', *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, **24**, pp. 439–452.

Millar, J. (2008). 'Making work pay, making tax credits work: an assessment with specific reference to lone-parent employment', *International Social Security Review*, **61**, pp. 21–38.

Miller, T. (2010). '"It's a triangle that's difficult to square": men's intentions and practices around caring, work and first-time fatherhood', *Fathering*, **8**, p. 362.

Moilanen, S., K. Aunola, V. May, E. Sevón and M.-L. Laakso (2019a). 'Nonstandard work hours and single versus coupled mothers' work-to-family conflict', *Family Relations*, **68**, pp. 213–231.

Moilanen, S., V. May, E. Sevón, M. Murtorinne-Lahtinen and M. L. Laakso (2019b). 'Displaying morally responsible motherhood: lone mothers accounting for work during non-standard hours', *Families, Relationships and Societies*, **9**, pp. 451–468.

Nadim, M. (2016). 'Undermining the male breadwinner ideal? Understandings of women's paid work among second-generation immigrants in Norway', *Sociology*, **50**, pp. 109–124.

Nieuwenhuis, R. and C. M. Laurie (2018). *The Triple Bind of Single-Parent Families*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Okimoto, T. G. and M. E. Heilman (2012). 'The "bad parent" assumption: how gender stereotypes affect reactions to working mothers', *Journal of Social Issues*, **68**, pp. 704–724.

ONS (2017). 'Working and workless households in the UK'. https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/workingandworklesshouseholds/apriltojune2017_employment-rates-byparental-status

ONS (2019). 'Working and workless households in the UK'. https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/familiesandthelabourmarketengland/2019

Özbilgin, M. F., T. A. Beauregard, M. P. Bell and A. Tatli (2011). 'Work–life, diversity and intersectionality: a critical review and research agenda', *International Journal of Management Reviews*, **13**, pp. 177–198.

Park, A., Bryson, C., Clery, E., Curtice, J. and Phillips, M. (eds.) (2013). *British Social Attitudes: the 30th Report*. London: NatCen Social Research.

Powell, G. N. and J. H. Greenhaus (2006). 'Managing incidents of work–family conflict: a decision-making perspective', *Human Relations*, **59**, pp. 1179–1212.

Rabindrakumar, S. (2015). *Paying the Price: The Childcare Challenge*. London: Gingerbread.

Radcliffe, L. S. (2013). 'Qualitative diaries: uncovering the complexities of work–life decision-making', *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, **8**, pp. 163–180.

Radcliffe, L. and C. M. Cassell (2014). 'Resolving work–family conflicts: the complexity of decision-making and the introduction of a new framework', *Human Relations*, **67**, pp. 793–819.

Ramarajan, L. (2014). 'Past, present and future research on multiple identities: toward an intrapersonal network approach', *Academy of Management Annals*, **8**, pp. 589–659.

Reid, E. (2015). 'Embracing, passing, revealing, the ideal worker image: how people navigate expected and experienced professional identities', *Organization Science*, **26**, pp. 997–1017.

Salter, E. (2018). 'A media discourse analysis of lone parents in the UK: investigating the stereotype'. In L. Bernardi and D. Mortelmans (eds), *Lone Parenthood in the Life Course*, pp. 55–74. Cham: Springer.

Saunders, M. (2012). 'Choosing research participants'. In G. Symon and C. Cassell (eds), *Qualitative Organizational Research: Core Methods and Current Challenges*, pp. 35–52.London: Sage.

Sawyer, K., C. Thoroughgood and J. Ladge (2017). 'Invisible families, invisible conflicts: examining the added layer of work–family conflict for employees with LGB families', *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, **103**, pp. 23–39.

Schmidt, E. M. (2018). 'Breadwinning as care? The meaning of paid work in mothers' and fathers' constructions of parenting', *Community, Work & Family*, **21**, pp. 445–462.

Schwartz, P. (1994). *Love Between Equals: How Peer Marriage Really Works*. New York: Free Press.

Sellers, P. (2018). *Work Your Proper Hours Day – Tackling the Culture of Unpaid Overtime*. London: Trades Union Congress.

Simpson, R. (1998). 'Presenteeism, power and organizational change: long hours as a career barrier and the impact on the working lives of women managers', *British Journal of Management*, **9**, pp. 37–50.

Skeggs, B. (1997). *Formations of Class & Gender: Becoming Respectable*. London: Sage.

Smyth, C. and L. Craig (2017). 'Conforming to intensive parenting ideals: willingness, reluctance and social context', *Families, Relationships and Societies*, **6**, pp. 107–124.

Snow, D. A. and L. Anderson (1987). 'Identity work among the homeless: the verbal construction and avowal of personal identities', *American Journal of Sociology*, **92**, pp. 1336–1371.

Sveningsson, S. and M. Alvesson (2003). 'Managing managerial identities: organizational fragmentation, discourse and identity struggle', *Human Relations*, **56**, pp. 1163–1193.

Toyoki, S. and A. D. Brown (2014). 'Stigma, identity and power: managing stigmatized identities through discourse', *Human Relations*, **67**, pp. 715–737.

Tyler, I. (2008). 'Chav mum chav scum': class disgust in contemporary Britain', *Feminist Media Studies*, **8**, pp. 17–34.

US Census (2016). 'America's family and living arrangements'. https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2016/demo/families/cps-2016.html

Valiquette-Tessier, S. C., M. P. Vandette and J. Gosselin (2016). 'Is family structure a cue for stereotyping? A systematic review of stereotypes and parenthood', *Journal of Family Studies*, **22**, pp. 162–181.

Warren, T. (2015). 'Work–life balance/imbalance: the dominance of the middle class and the neglect of the working class', *The British Journal of Sociology*, **66**, pp. 691–717.

Watson, T. J. (2009). 'Narrative, life story and manager identity: a case study in autobiographical identity work', *Human Relations*, **62**, pp. 425–452.

Williams, J., M. Blair-Loy and J. L. Berdahl (2013). 'Cultural schemas, social class, and the flexibility stigma', *Journal of Social Issues*, **69**, pp. 209–234.

Working Families (2016). 'The modern families index'. https://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Modern-Families-Index-2016.pdf

Laura S. Radcliffe is Senior Lecturer (Associate Professor) in Organizational Behaviour and Director of the Masters of Research Programme at The University of Liverpool Management School, UK. Her research focuses on how people manage their roles and identities, with a particular interest in the relationship between those enacted in the work and home domains, associated gender dynamics and implications for inclusivity. To explore these issues, she draws on methodological approaches that have the ability to capture rich insights into lived, daily experiences.

Catherine Cassell is Professor of Organizational Psychology and Dean at Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham, UK. Her research interests cover diversity, inclusion and organizational change, and she has a particular interest in the use of qualitative methodologies in business, management and organizational research.

Fatima Malik is Lecturer in Human Resource Management & Organizational Behaviour at Leicester Castle Business School (De Montfort University). Previous practice-based research interests have included examining the impact of work–life balance organizational policy on SME business, exploring the impact of public policy and supply versus demand-side training across the UK's high-skill context. Contributions in the area of work–life conflict are published in *Organizational Research Methods* and the *British Journal of Management* (forthcoming).