When the past comes back to haunt you: the enduring influence of upbringing on the work-family balance decisions of professional parents

Abstract

Research on work-family balance decisions generally presents them as an individual's rational choice between alternatives. The anticipatory socialisation literature highlights the role that early formative experiences play in shaping work and parenting decisions. We go further to emphasise the role of habitus – historically constituted dispositions –in the work-family balance decisions. This *relational* approach explores how the entrenched and historically formed dispositions of individuals interact dynamically with contextual (i.e. organizational) imperatives. Numerous studies have highlighted the difficulties of reconciling the intense demands of professional careers with family lives. Drawing on 148 interviews with 78 male and female professionals, our study looks at much deeper rooted causes of work-family conflict in professional service firms than have previously been considered. We identify four broad patterns of response to the work-family conflict: professionals may willingly reproduce their parental model, reproduce their parental model against their will, willingly distance themselves from their parental model, and distance themselves from the parental model against their will. We show that the impediments to greater equality lie not only in organizational and societal structures, but within individuals themselves in the form of historically constituted dispositions which contribute towards the maintenance and reproduction of those structures.

Keywords: socialization, professionals, professional service firms, work-family balance decisions, working parents, professional careers, habitus

Introduction

Bourdieu and others have drawn attention to the important role that parents play in the hereditary production of attitudes (Bourdieu, 1998; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964; Cunningham, 2001; Davis & Greenstein, 2009). Parents are influential in shaping decisions about whom their children marry, whether they are employed outside the home, future negotiations over household labour, and in inculcating gender ideologies more generally (Davis & Wills, 2010; Farré & Vella, 2013; Johnston et al., 2013; McGinn et al., 2015). Parents often act as role models, challenging societal expectations and attitudes about what is possible and desirable (Cunningham, 2001) and provide a career template that their children may mimic, consciously or unconsciously (Dekas &

Baker, 2014). These insights have been recognized by literature on anticipatory socialization (Jablin, 2001; Kramer, 2010), but hitherto not substantially by literature on work-family balance.

Working parents are an effective means of exploring the influence of early formative experiences on later career choices because becoming a parent can represent a 'shock' to an individual's life and career (Morrell, Loan-Clarke, & Wilkinson, 2004), forcing them to reflect upon what they value in their lives, what their responsibilities are, and what they perceive as now possible to achieve professionally given the new reality that they experience.

Within the extensive work-family balance literature, professional service firms, such as accounting, consulting, and law firms (Empson, Muzio, Broschak, & Hinings, 2015) have been a particular focus of researchers' attention because these organizations have been shown to inflict near totalizing pressures on individuals to internalize organizational and professional imperatives (Alvesson & Robertson, 2006; Anderson-Gough et al., 2000, 2001; Covaleski et al., 1998; Lupu & Empson, 2015; Spence & Carter, 2014). Most professional workplaces are characterized by a regime of excessive working hours (60-120 h/week) and escalating availability to clients and superiors (e.g. Costas & Grey, 2012; Lupu & Empson, 2015; Mazmanian, Orlikowski, & Yates, 2013; Michel, 2011; Perlow, 2012). As a result, professionals in these firms tend to experience high levels of work-family conflict (Anderson-Gough, Grey, & Robson, 2005; Perlow, 1998; Sturges, 2012; Wharton & Blair-Loy, 2002). To date, however, very little attention has been paid to the importance of upbringing and family influences on the later work-family decisions made by individuals in professional environments.

Adopting a Bourdieusian perspective, with its emphasis on the impact of historically constituted dispositions – or habitus (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) - we

argue that practices such as parenting and being a professional are grounded in individual experience and influenced by organizational context. Simultaneously, these practices help to structure that context (Gomez & Bouty, 2011). Habitus is, we argue, a means to complement and move beyond the insights offered by work-family balance and anticipatory socialization literatures that can help explain the decisions that professionals make in more relational terms.

Drawing on 148 interviews with 78 male and female professionals in two professional service firms (totalling more than 200 hours), our analysis provides new insights into the hereditary production of attitudes to work and parenthood. Understanding the role of past experience in shaping work-family deliberations, both latently and expressly, is important as organizations and society more broadly struggle to promote work-family balance and gender equality (Kornberger et al., 2010; Kumra & Vinnicombe, 2008). Given the limited success to date of organizational work-life balance and gender equality policies, we demonstrate the importance of developing more in-depth explanations for why some professionals find it easier than others to cope with the dual demands of career and parenthood. We suggest that a focus on habitus orients researchers towards such in-depth explanations.

We contribute to previous literature in three main ways. First, a focus on the habitus permits an understanding of work-family decision making as an embodied rather than merely a cognitive process, as is implied by much previous literature. Second, we contribute to literature on anticipatory socialization by showing the important role that habitus plays in mediating and actualizing the influence of upbringing on professionals' current work-family balance decisions, particularly by emphasizing the relational aspects of individual dispositions. We explore how this influence comes about and how it is addressed within the newly created family unit via negotiation with the spouse's

habitus. Third, we show how work-family balance decisions are both grounded in individual history and influenced by organizational context. In turn, work-family balance decisions are instrumental in structuring organizational context.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. The next section reviews key research in the area of work-family balance decisions and makes a case for why anticipatory socialization should be taken into account when exploring professionals' work-family balance decisions and outcomes. We then present our theoretical underpinnings relating to a Bourdieusian conceptualization of habitus and point out how this can help us yield richer insights than offered by anticipatory socialization alone. A subsequent section discusses our research methodology. We then outline in detail the main empirical findings. These findings are interrogated in our concluding section which outlines the paper's main contributions before offering some suggestions for future research.

Work-family balance decisions

In providing explanations for professionals' work and career decisions, previous work-family balance research has focused more on individual level and contextual (i.e. professional) factors. For example, extant research suggests that an individual's personal values, such as beliefs about what it means to be a 'good parent', impacts upon their decision with reference to number of hours worked (Greenhaus & Powell, 2012; Radcliffe & Cassell, 2014). An individual who identifies highly with his/her family role will view that as more salient and adopt rules that ensure the primacy of family-domain factors when making work-domain decisions (Powell & Greenhaus, 2006, 2010). This 'role salience' has been shown to be influenced by contextual factors, such as pressures exerted by managers and spouses, as well as by personal factors, such as levels of self-

esteem (Greenhaus & Powell, 2003). As work and life are interconnected, engagement in work and family roles are often in conflict since investing in one can undermine one's ability to fulfil the demands of the other (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Hochschild, 1997). This is especially true in settings such as accounting and law firms where long working hours and high organizational commitment are central features of socialization processes (Anderson-Gough et al., 2001, 2005; Ibarra, 1999; Pratt, Rockerman, & Kaufmann, 2006).

Family-supportive supervisors (Hammer, Kossek, Yragui, Bodner, & Hanson, 2009) and a family-supportive organizational culture (Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999) permit subordinates to adjust their work schedules and make other work accommodations to meet their family needs, as long as their job responsibilities are being met. In contrast, organizations which perpetuate high levels of work intensity will encourage an emphasis of work over family, which is likely to have a strong influence on those employees who identify most strongly with their career (Greenhaus & Powell, 2012).

Work-family balance literature can be criticized for isolating different levels of analysis, studying individual, organizational and societal factors separately (see Greenhaus & Powell, 2003; Greenhaus & Powell, 2012; Powell & Greenhaus, 2006). Thus, much work-life balance research posits differences in work-family decisions between individuals as either 'behavioral differences, a function of characteristics of the situation, or characteristics of the person' (Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 2002b: 303). Our perspective emphasizes instead the mutual constitution of persons and context, in particular the influence of personal history.

Much of this literature studying work-family decisions adopts a cognitive perspective of decision-making as a choice between alternative courses of action, when

the decision maker has sufficient control over the situation to have a choice (e.g., March & Simon, 1958; March, 1991, 1994). This cognitive approach is problematic for two key reasons. First, it strongly connotes a rational choice perspective in which individuals are free to choose without the constraining influence of personal history. Second, the emphasis on *cognition* precludes consideration of the role that *embodied* dispositions play in decision making. Our perspective emphasizes instead the way in which their personal history becomes inscribed into the bodies of individuals, something which has been flagged to some extent already by literature on anticipatory socialization.

Anticipatory socialization

The anticipatory socialization literature shows how individuals do not enter an organization as a completely 'blank slate' (Porter, Lawlor, & Hackman, 1975). Individuals bring with them a set of dispositions and expectations formed as a result of their education processes and social experience. Occupational identity formation starts early, beginning in childhood (Cohen-Scali, 2003). Career expectations are formed through the process of anticipatory socialization, whereby individuals anticipate the attitudes, norms and values of an occupation prior to entry. Anticipatory socialization, from this perspective, occurs before an individual enters the work force, when he or she 'intentionally and unintentionally gather[s] occupational information from the environment' (Jablin, 2001: 734, see also Lucas, 2011).

In the anticipatory socialization literature, the family has consistently been found to be the primary agent of work related values (Dekas & Baker, 2014; Levine & Hoffner, 2006; Jablin, 2001; Lucas, 2011; Medved et al., 2006). Children learn a great deal about work by observing their parents in work-related activities or by hearing their parents talk about their jobs (Levine & Hoffner, 2006; Roberts, 1991). Parents often act

as role models, challenging societal expectations and attitudes about what is possible and desirable (Cunningham, 2001). For instance, past research has shown that employed mothers foster non-traditional gender attitudes in their children (Corrigall & Konrad, 2007; Davis & Greenstein, 2009; Johnston et al., 2014; McGinn, Lingo, & Castro, 2015). These gender attitudes in turn are important predictors of the division of household labor (Davis & Greenstein, 2009; Fernández, Fogli, & Olivetti, 2004; Johnston et al., 2014). In particular, women's gender attitudes are important in maintaining more equitable divisions of household labor once couples become parents (Schober, 2013). Moreover, a son's time spent on household tasks as an adult has been shown to be associated with having a father who was more engaged at home (Cunningham, 2001). Recent work suggests that work orientations (such as considering work a job, a career or a calling) are socially transmitted from parents to children, even when environmental conditions change or adults work in different occupations from their parents (Dekas & Baker, 2014). Through socialization or social learning children observe the decisions and behaviours of their parents, learning skills and capacities that can be drawn upon as resources later in life (Bandura, 1977).

The literature on professional service firms, the context of the current study, also implicitly recognizes the role of anticipatory socialization when looking at recruitment processes. For example, Rivera (2011, 2012) has shown in the US how elite professional service firms attempt to find recruits that represent a 'cultural match', in terms of the past experiences of potential recruits and existing professional staff. There are two key ways in which this cultural match can be demonstrated: university credentials and extracurricular pursuits (Ashley & Empson, 2016; Cook et al., 2012). However, cultural matching goes much deeper than that, stretching all the way back to the social backgrounds (Ashley & Empson, 2013) and early childhood experiences of

potential recruits (see Berglas, 2006 and Empson, 2004). Human Resource professionals within firms acknowledge that they deliberately look for recruits such as insecure overachievers. As Berglas (2006) argues, the insecure overachiever is driven by a profound sense of their own inadequacy, stemming typically from experiences of insecurity in childhood with long lasting effects over their professional lives: 'they spent their childhoods looking intently for clues about whether or not they had fulfilled parental expectations' (2). Relatedly, Lupu & Empson (2015) argue that professionals who have within them the 'hunger' to enhance their social status, are likely to have a habitus that is more responsive to socializing pressures from the professional service firm (see also Maclean et al., 2012).

In summary, literature on anticipatory socialization points towards the crucial role of the family in shaping the life chances, attitudes to parenting, and future career trajectories of individuals. Recognition of this can help in the development of a richer understanding of work-family balance decisions. However, this literature has two limitations. First, by emphasizing observational learning, memorization and imitation of role models, it plays down the fact that attitudes to parenthood and work shaped by upbringing are mostly unconscious and embodied rather than conscious and intellectual, and hence are taken for granted and difficult to change. Second, anticipatory socialization often imbues the past with teleological properties, privileging continuity rather than looking at how the past interacts dynamically with the present in ways that can potentially lead to discontinuity and social change. These are particularly problems with the social learning and cognitive approaches to anticipatory socialization.

In order to understand more fully the work-family balance decisions of professional parents, a theoretical perspective is required that is capable of taking into account both of these aspects. Specifically, what is necessary is a *relational* (Bourdieu &

Wacquant, 1992) approach that considers how the entrenched and historically formed dispositions of individuals interact dynamically with contextual (i.e. organizational) imperatives. This would be more consistent with the more nuanced approach to change and reproduction that is found in the anticipatory socialization literature focusing on communication (see, for example, Medved et al., 2006). We propose an enhanced relational perspective here by drawing upon Bourdieu's extensive work on the habitus.

Habitus: a bridge between socialization and practices

Habitus is 'the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them' (Wacquant 2005: 316). Habitus is a form of knowledge that is learned by the body through socialization but that is difficult to explicitly articulate: 'It is because agents never know completely what they are doing that what they do has more sense than they know' (Bourdieu, 1990: 69). Of crucial importance here is the distinction between the primary habitus, acquired through socialization and repetition, mainly in the family, and the secondary habitus, acquired during subsequent experiences in the workplace (Wacquant, 2016: 48 and see also Wacquant, 2014). Work-life balance literature has tended to focus on the professional and/or her context, neglecting the role of early experiences. Yet research shows that early experiences are crucial in determining future responses, as agents will tend to react to new experiences by assimilating them to the generative principles previously acquired (Bourdieu 1990: 60). The acquisition of habitus during one's early years is done 'slowly and imperceptibly, through familial osmosis and familiar immersion… and it constitutes our baseline social personality as well as 'the basis for the ulterior constitution of any other habitus (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977 [1970]: 42–6)'(Wacquant, 2014). It is often

acquired tacitly in a non-discursive manner. Style is 'simply passed on silently from body to body … it is only by being an apprentice to one's parents and teachers that one gains … practical wisdom' (Dreyfus, 2001: 48):

> The essential part of the modus operandi which defines practical mastery is transmitted in practice… without attaining the level of discourse. The child imitates not 'models' but other people's actions. (Bourdieu, 2002: 87)

Gendered processes are classic examples of unconscious habitus formation: 'The acquisition of gender identity does not pass through consciousness; it is not memorized, but enacted at a pre-reflexive level' (McNay, 2000: 39). Modern society still divides certain kinds of labour along gendered lines, with most of the childrearing and household duties still being assumed by women. Habitus points to how this division of labour essentializes embodied cognitive structures about paternal and maternal characteristics. Practices, such as parenting or being a professional, are an enactment of a habitus that is historically constituted and 'which creates homogeneity in social groups that causes practices to be intelligible and foreseeable – and hence taken for granted' (Nicolini, 2012: 58). Thus, individuals' practices and decision-making is based not so much on the application of explicit or tacit rules as on responding to a feel for the game, or a gut feeling, a feel for what is appropriate within the existing conditions. This has two implications: first, most decisions are not the outcomes of a deliberate prior planning process; second, decisions are immanent and unfold through mundane everyday practices (Chia & Holt, 2006).

There are both continuities and discontinuities between pre-reflexive and reflexive modes of behaviour (Maclean et al., 2012). There are, on the one hand, de-traditionalizing forces that manifest themselves and which open up negotiations around gender relations pointing towards the possibility of altering established practices. For instance, men have increased the amount of domestic work they do in recent decades

and spend more time with their children than before (Lyonette & Crompton, 2015). Yet in spite of this trend men and women often retain 'deep-seated, often unconscious, investments in conventional images of masculinity and femininity which cannot easily be reshaped' (McNay, 2000: 41). Working mothers are particularly conflicted as 'living one's own life' seems to be in tension with 'being there for others' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995: 22).

Gradual transformations of the habitus pass, for the most part, unnoticed (Bourdieu 2000:11). More radical transformations, such as those required by an unexpected redundancy or becoming a parent, might call for a more abrupt process of adaptation and may increase the chances of dissonance between an individual and their surrounding field(s). In such situations, through reflexive practice, individuals can shape or alter the habitus they have inherited (Elder-Vass, 2007; Maclean, 2012). Crises or errors in the operation of habitus are such moments when individuals may reflect on things that were previously taken for granted or considered the natural order of things. As noted by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992): 'times of *crises*, in which the routine adjustment of subjective and objective structures is brutally disrupted, constitute a class of circumstances when indeed "rational choice" may take over, at least among those agents who are in a position to be rational' (131).

Habitus is, therefore, a rich means of exploring the impact of early formative experiences on professionals' work and family decisions. It constitutes a productive way of bridging the anticipatory socialization and work-family decisions literatures while simultaneously moving beyond these. First, because it is a historically sensitive, multi-layered (Wacquant, 2016) concept which actualizes the whole past of the person, it allows us to explore the continuities and discontinuities between earlier and later stages in one's life. Unlike anticipatory socialization, habitus presupposes a focus on the

interplay between historical and emerging dispositions. Second, habitus allows studying

the mutual constitution of persons and contexts because it clarifies how the cognitive,

affective and corporeal structures of persons, such as what they regard as normal and

moral behaviour as parents and professionals, generate and are generated by contextual

structures, such as organizational and societal practices (Michel, 2014). Third, because

the habitus is social and relational, it is shaped through multiple interactions, not just the

structures that pertain to surrounding fields, but also the habitus of other individuals,

notably spouses. In light of the foregoing, the present study seeks to answer the

following research question:

How does habitus influence the work-family balance decisions of working parents in professional environments?

Research Methods

This paper is based on an empirical study of 148 interviews with 78 professionals in the

accounting and law sector. Participants were drawn from two professional service

firms: AUDIT and LAW (pseudonyms), respectively a leading global auditing and law

firm. These firms were selected because auditing and law are notoriously demanding

professions and so likely to produce empirical sites where significant work-family

conflict is experienced by organizational actors. This paper draws on 200 hours of

interviews conducted in the UK, as well as archival data (e.g., human resources

documents) which provided contextual information about the firms and industry. All of

this data has influenced the conceptual development of this paper, although the first

round of interviews provided the richest narrative concerning the primary habitus and so

is given principal attention here.

Data collection

Participants were sampled based on characteristics such as sex, age, number of children, professional grade (see Table 1). The aim was to have a diverse sample, allowing us to develop or refine emerging theoretical categories (Charmaz, 2006), rather than to create statistically representative groupings. A similar process was followed in both firms to recruit participants: first a HR (Human Resources) manager sent an e-mail to all professionals based in London describing the study, specifying the criteria to be met in order to participate (have at least one child under eighteen years old). The e-mail assured individuals that their participation would be voluntary and confidential. Perhaps surprisingly, a much higher number of male than female parents volunteered for the study. So, secondly, HR contacted directly specific women they knew to fit the profile and who subsequently agreed to participate in the study. 25 individuals were interviewed at LAW and 53 at AUDIT. The focus on working parents meant that the majority were experienced professionals in either middle or senior management roles.[1]

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Because of the embodied and largely pre-discursive nature of habitus, it is imperative that the researcher penetrates, as much as possible, the taken for granted assumptions of actors in order to understand in more detail why they do what they do. Through their reflexive stance, gained through distancing from the field and practices they research, researchers are well placed to point out the underlying mechanisms producing institutionalized practices (Bourdieu, 1997a). By being a historically sensitive

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[1] During the course of our field research, seven participants left their firms: two in LAW (women) and five in AUDIT (four men and one woman). Three of these professionals (one in LAW and two in AUDIT) agreed to participate in an exit interview to talk about the reasons that prompted them to leave. Among those interviewed at AUDIT, there were two couples where both spouses worked for AUDIT at the time of the interview. Moreover, we also interviewed the wives of three male professionals who had previously worked at AUDIT (where they met their husbands), but who had left the firm in the last couple of years mainly because of work-family balance issues and/or lack of promotion perspectives. In total, we interviewed both spouses of five couples, all from AUDIT.

concept which actualizes the whole past of the person, habitus allows us to explore the continuities and discontinuities between earlier and later stages in one's life. In this sense, habitus is a rich methodological tool (Spence et al., 2015) which is not used mechanically to explain empirical findings but rather as a means through which unconscious processes, understandings and habits can be brought to the surface and then subject to critical scrutiny.

The first author conducted two rounds of interviews, one more open-ended which generated the majority of material reported in this paper, and a second one more structured which was used to gather more material on the participants' socialization and 'test' some of the emerging theories. Interviews lasted between 45 and 120 minutes; the majority were in the region of 75 minutes. The first round of interviews followed a narrative interview protocol (McAdams, 1993) with participants being asked to give an overview of their careers and family life, by starting with the first years, narrate their lives focusing on high, low and turning points in their lives. Participants were then asked about important influences on their decisions with regards to work-family balance (influential people, influential contexts and the influence of the work context in particular)[2]. As noted by McAdams (2001), individual life stories reflect cultural values and norms, including assumptions about gender, race and class.

The interviews were for many people privileged instances when they could take the time and piece together the puzzle of their lives and think about important influences. Although some may have remained reticent (especially in the first interview), the research team was often surprised by the raw nature of people's disclosures (e.g., planning to divorce, drinking problems). A number of participants

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[2] The overwhelming majority of participants named in the first instance their parents and the context of their upbringing as the most influential factors on their work-family decisions and outcomes. The influence of the spouse was also mentioned as of great importance.

referred to the process as 'cathartic' and many expressed gratitude for the reflection

space that the interview process allowed. Many individuals recognized that they do not

have the time, given their busy lives, to reflect with such depth on this issues. The

following are two representative quotes about the interviewees' experiences in our

research project:

> I think our sessions together and the questions that you ask actually help me or give me time to reflect because all of the things I'm telling you, I haven't rehearsed it. It's just on the spot. I'm telling you what I feel, and I think that's great for me because I hadn't realized what I was actually really doing…and the impact of that until you kind of sit down and think because, my day, I've got no time to sit down and think. It's good to have this time of reflection. (Female, ex-director)

> So I suppose if anything it was, it [research participation] sort of forced me a little bit to reflect upon sort of decisions that we'd made or I've made or, you know, as a family we've made about work because I suspect the tendency is that you don't actually sort of make those decisions consciously all the time, it just sort of happens. (Male, partner)

Data Analysis

We began data analysis by developing preliminary codes (in the qualitative data analysis

software, NVivo 10) based on our research question and theoretical concerns, which we

used in conjunction with inductive coding techniques to analyse the interview data

(Charmaz, 2006). Analysis and interpretation followed a non-linear path, moving back

and forth between theory and data. The initial phase of coding was descriptive, focusing

on codes such as: school and parental socialization, influential people, influential

contexts, and professional socialization. A second phase of coding was more

conceptually driven, seeking to explore a deeper level of insight into the significance of

anticipatory socialization for professionals as well as its perceived links with later work-

family choices and outcomes. Our analysis was explicitly informed at this stage by

Bourdieu's concept of habitus, because it provided a particularly good explanation for understanding continuities and discontinuities between the past and the present.

From this process we derived a categorization of professionals' narratives vis-à-vis family influences. This categorization was organized around *reproduction* (i.e. continuity/versus discontinuity), which is a key theme in Bourdieu's work on the intergenerational inheritance of attitudes (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964). This axis of categorization emerged out of the striking homology that many participants identified between their own work-family balance choices and the family models in which they grew up. However, adaptation of habitus is also possible due to exogenous events (Bourdieu, 1998) which mediate the influence of the primary habitus, often against the will or established dispositions of the individuals concerned. As Bourdieu has repeatedly stressed, habitus does not merely ensure reproduction but is a system of perceptions that is capable of adaptation in response to both reflexive action and exogenous shocks (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 136). In a further refinement of this categorization, we therefore developed a second axis around the theme of *volition* (i.e. willing versus unwilling) as data analysis revealed that the habitus of the professionals was not only shaped by the objective historical conditions surrounding its creation, but also by how they subjectively respond to this, i.e. the extent to which they looked favourably or not upon their childhood experiences.

Overall, crossing these two dimensions initially produced four statement categories that individuals articulated in the context of work-family balance decisions:

- *willingly reproducing parental model*: statements suggesting that the person wants/is comfortable reproducing the model of their parents because it makes sense for his/her situation;

- *reproducing the parental model against one's will*: statements suggesting that the person has ended up reproducing what they perceived as a 'negative' parental model in spite of their desire to avoid doing so;

- *willingly distancing from the parental model*: statements suggesting that the person has willingly distanced herself from the model of their parents, and

- *distancing from the parental model against one's will:* statements suggesting that the person has ended up distancing themselves from their parents' model in spite of his/her desire for continuity.

Although the majority of individuals can be grouped relatively easily into one of these four categories, there are a limited number who straddle more than one category. We make reference to these 'boundary spanners' below.

Interviews were coded individually by the first two authors and instances of disagreement were discussed until an agreement reached. Inside each statement category we compared and contrasted the experiences of males and females. Additionally, inside each gender group we considered the experiences and salience of individuals coming from traditional versus non-traditional backgrounds (see Table 4 below). To increase the reliability of our overall interpretation, we routinely discussed provisional interpretations among the three researchers and with some informants during the second rounds of interviews. We present the findings that emerged in the next section. In the analysis that follows it is important to note that participants are presenting rationalizations *a posteriori*. In other words, how participants have retrospectively sought to make sense of their work-family balance decisions.

Findings

[Insert Table 2 about here]

The majority of senior men in our study had stay-at-home spouses; this was very rarely the case for our female participants (see Table 2). In terms of family background, most came from *middle class families*[3] and typically had a stay-at-home mother and a breadwinner father (Table 3). Both parents serve as role models for their children's careers, but evidence suggests stronger effects for same sex role models (Basow and Howe, 1980). In this sense, it is noteworthy that only two men talked about their fathers as being hands-on fathers and another five said that their father had been actively involved in directing their life outside of the home (e.g. sport, church, school).

[Insert Table 3 about here]

[Insert Table 4 about here]

Willingly reproducing the parental model

Accounts of specific behaviours that have their origins in primary habitus formation, such as a hard work ethic, were recurrent in participants' narratives. The following quotes show that there is a continuity between hard work ethics as instilled through family and professional socialization. We start by looking at men from traditional families whose father was the main breadwinner. Having seen their parents work hard throughout their childhood and adolescent life, these professionals, who applied to and were selected by firms where long hours and hard work are the norm (Kosmala & Herrbach, 2006; Mazmanian, Orlikowski, & Yates, 2013; Michel, 2011), are prone to consider hard work as normal. In these cases, their habitus is already well adapted to the culture of their respective organizations so there will be less resistance and questioning of such norms:

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[3] Based on participants' self-definitions.

> I saw my father coming back late every day on the weekdays and actually he
> continued working on the weekends. [...]. It was normal, so I guess that's why
> when I am working now, I have never seen working over the weekend as
> something extraordinary, because that is something that I have seen all my life
> at home (Fred, senior manager, AUDIT, one child).

Fred has acquired during upbringing a habitus that conceives work as 'working late everyday' and 'working weekends'. This work ethic encompasses a variety of social backgrounds. Fred, for example, comes from a relatively privileged background - his father was the CEO of a medium-sized company. At the other end of the spectrum, Dean comes from a working-class background, having parents who achieved some degree of social mobility through hard work:

> I've always had a very strong work ethic drilled into me anyway, again by my
> parents, my family. So, I never needed anyone looking over my shoulder or
> giving me a kick up the backside and telling me I needed to do something – I'd
> get on and I'd do it. So, I found the environment [of AUDIT] in general one
> that suited me quite well (Dean, partner, AUDIT, two children).

Dean remarks how the culture of the accounting firm, with long working hours and professional empowerment, was well suited to his habitus. Thus, he was already predisposed, due to previous socialization, to actions that produce and reproduce existing structures. The above quote contains bodily cues (shoulder, backside), a key feature of habitus, hinting at the perceived embodied and corporeal nature of the acquired dispositions to work and to parent. Dean's narrative also alludes to how he was subtly but repetitively socialized into this work-family ethic through a process of osmosis:

> I grew up with stories of what my grandparents and my great-grandparents had
> done for their families. ... This sort of thing was not told to you as a kind of …
> "you know, this is what it means, …this is what you've got to do when you're a
> parent" or anything like that. It was just the sort of thing that goes on in your
> background, you hear these stories, people reminiscing at parties or wherever or
> just talking when they're remembering people and things that they did and it
> sinks in (Dean, Partner, AUDIT).

Fred's and Dean's cases illustrate how similar dispositions can be formed in individuals from quite different backgrounds. In both cases, the role of the family in inculcating particular values associated with hard work ethics is very important. Fred's and Dean's respective habitus were similarly inculcated during upbringing, mainly through observation of parental models, through shared narratives.

As work and family are intimately related, the reproduction of work behaviour is also often accompanied by the reproduction of a certain type of family model with a breadwinner husband and a stay-at-home wife. In other words, men who follow their fathers' work choices may choose spouses who are willing to reproduce their mother's choices. In making these decisions, professionals are mainly responding to a gut feeling for what is appropriate within the existing conditions:

> Having grown up with a model, where my father worked, my mother ran the house, that was kind of the model that made sense, because partnership in an organization like this is pretty much full on, so it's pretty difficult to juggle effectively with being an effective parent. (Steve, partner, AUDIT, two children)

Typically, men such as Steve assert the importance of work in their lives and look at themselves as having an important breadwinner role. This reflects their experiences of primary habitus formation, leading them to consider behaviours similar to those of their parents as normal and desirable. They are ideal professionals for their firms because their habitus is in sync with the long-hours culture. However, what is implied by Steve, even if not explicitly articulated, is that 'being an effective parent' is something that is the preserve of his spouse. Effective parenting is, one can infer, important to him, but is not something that he feels capable of undertaking.

Switching focus to look at women's experiences, Penny's is typical of women who had a traditional upbringing and who look positively upon this. Following the birth

of her child, Penny wanted to give up work in order to be a stay-at-home mother like her own mother:

> I just look back really positively on my experience in childhood of always having a parent around. I feel quite strongly that I didn't want to have a child and put them in to full time nursery five days a week so that I could come in to work. I've never really quite understood the point of that and I think that's probably shaped by my experiences. (Penny, manager, AUDIT, two children)

Penny's decision to slow down her career in order to spend more time with her children was clearly a very emotive one ('I feel quite strongly'). It was also one which is driven in part by taken for granted assumptions ('I've never really quite understood the point of that'). Indeed, many female professionals who were reluctant to delegate childcare had grown up in a family where the mother was very involved in childrearing and often a stay-at-home mother. Their socialization has inculcated them with high-standards of parenting that they hold themselves to. However, they have often found this maternal imperative difficult to reconcile with the realities of pursuing a demanding professional career. These women are often conflicted, finding themselves caught in a 'double bind' (Bourdieu, 1998): they want to mother as they were mothered, but their firms require them to work as if they were their (breadwinner) fathers:

> Mum didn't have a career. She did have a job when we went to secondary school but she still did all the housework and all the dinners […]. So Mum has been very influential but some of the things that she did, I've tried to distance myself from … *I'm trying to match her standard of parenting but adding a career on to that* [*emphasis added*] (Bonnie, manager, AUDIT, two children).

As the above quote shows, women are often ambivalent about their mothers - they want to emulate their mothers' parenting behaviour, but at the same time they also want to distance themselves from that and pursue a career. When this negative perspective is particularly pronounced they may 'willingly distance' themselves from their mother's life choices (see section below).

In the previous examples, professionals replicated conventional gender roles. However, within this category of 'willingly reproducing' there is a different instance of dispositional inheritance: of men and women who reproduced non-traditional gender roles. Jeremy is representative of an extremely small number of men who had a hands-on father and who asserts that this family socialization has shaped his own work-family aspirations:

> I've been very clear from a very early age that I wanted a family and I wanted to make that the priority. I do know that that's partly come from my father and I do remember him, … he used to get home from work same time every day. I never felt he wasn't there or [wasn't] interested, … even though he worked in a high-powered job. (Jeremy, director, AUDIT, four children)

Another subgroup in this category is constituted by women who reproduced a non-traditional family model where their mothers worked and instilled in their daughters the imperative of financial autonomy and strong professional ambitions. They tended to express less work-family conflict and have higher career aspirations than women whose parents fulfilled more 'traditional' masculine/feminine roles. For example, Maryam's views are emblematic of other women who had working mothers:

> My mum worked and she always drilled into both my sister and I that it was important to have your own income and have your own independence and not be reliant on anybody for money. So I think in my head, that was probably the key factor the whole time I never wanted to a) justify what I spent my money on and b) have to kind of ask for pocket money. My mum was actually - and still is - the main breadwinner in my family and the driven one (Maryam, senior associate, LAW).

Maryam reflects here on where her own aversion to feelings of financial dependence might come from, drawing a clear link in her memory to the didactic influence ('she always drilled into both my sister and I') of her mother. Women such as Maryam have grown up with hard-working, career-driven mothers. They have therefore been socialized in a context where mothering and career went hand in hand. Our research suggests that, due to the compatibility between their primary habitus and their

professional environment, such women are less conflicted about their work-family responsibilities and manage to cope better with the guilt of being committed to their careers. For instance, Cat has always worked full-time and is the main breadwinner; her husband was a stay-at-home father for the first year and a half of their son's life:

> Growing up, my parents both worked until I was about six or seven and during that time a lot of it, we had a full-time nanny at the house and what I remember is that having a nanny was great. I don't remember being distant from my parents or missing them or them not being around. I remember being totally normal, so I've never believed that being a working parent is a bad thing. I guess that's probably influenced a lot of why, right now, I think it's okay for me to be at work. (Cat, senior manager, AUDIT).

What is not articulated by Cat here is also important: she does not feel anxiety or a sense of failure as a mother in returning to work. Similarly, Sarah is fine with delegating childcare. It is interesting to contrast her views with Penny's (quoted above) who feels conflicted about having to put her children in a nursery:

> When your kids are very small they need a lot of care but I don't think that it necessarily needs to come from the mother; I think often as a parent, whereas as a mother you feel that you miss out but actually somebody else can give that care. What I notice more and more now is that actually, my children are very aware of who is giving them the care and they know who they want that care to come from. (Sarah, partner, AUDIT)

Sarah's views are consistent with many other women in our study whose family socialization exposed them to a more even distribution of parental responsibilities. Thus, their habitus better equips them to negotiate role sharing with their spouses than in the case of women who had stay-at-home mothers. Maryam (mentioned above) had an active negotiation with her husband who works at a similar level to her and who eventually came to accept that her career was as important as his:

> I think it was a critical point in my marriage in terms of make or break, because I think the most I have ever argued with my husband was at the point when I went back to work.... I think for him, mentally realizing that actually, 'my work is just as important as yours', was really, really hard. (Maryam, senior associate, LAW).

Women's gender attitudes are especially important in maintaining more equitable divisions of household labour once couples become parents (Schober, 2013). In both Maryam's and Cat's cases, their habitus was formed in a context where parents took on non-traditional gender roles, thus providing concrete examples of the skills and capacities that their children would need as adults if they, in turn, attempted to navigate non-traditional roles in their own lives. In Maryam's case her socialization into being a working mother was not only done tacitly (as seems to have been the case with Cat), but also discursively through a powerful emancipatory discourse which encouraged autonomy and financial independence.

These women's work-family decisions give themselves the means to be successful in professional firms as they perceive delegating childcare as normal and are able to negotiate with their spouses a more egalitarian sharing of parental duties. However, in certain cases, spurred by the competitive and fast-paced environment of firms, work may become a priority to the detriment of family life.

Reproducing the parental model against one's will.

Early family experiences continually resurfaces as an important influence on the choices of actors. The reproduction of a particular habitus formed during early years seems very strong, even in those actors who have looked at their dispositions from some kind of reflexive distance (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 136). Professionals who find themselves most often reproducing the parental model against their will are men from traditional backgrounds and women who had working mothers. We examine each of these sub-categories in turn.

Andrew (partner, LAW, four children) laments that he has somehow forgotten the promise that he made to himself about being a more involved parent than his father

was. He often finds himself 'going off into the office at the end of the garden on Saturday' or even dealing with pressing client demands on Christmas morning when the 'children are opening their stockings'. In spite of viewing his father as a negative role model and wanting to do things differently, Andrew realizes to his chagrin that he has essentially ended up just like him.

Andrew's situation is echoed in that of Jon, another 'unwilling reproducer', who has also stepped back and looked at his dispositions from some kind of reflexive distance, but has made the vexing decision to prioritize work over family:

> I think my biggest regret is that I regarded it as completely inevitable that I will work every weekend [as my father did] …and so undoubtedly there are things that maybe I would have done with the kids if I'd be thinking, 'how shall I use this time to do something with the kids?' (Jon, partner, LAW, two children)

Jon expresses not just regret here but a sense of despair and powerlessness over what he sees as his 'inevitable' descent into anti-social, weekend working. Andrew and Jon, like the majority of senior men in our study, have stay-at-home wives like their mothers. In reproducing this traditional family model, men and women repetitiously engage in gendered stereotypical behaviour, thus maintaining and reinforcing the status quo, even when they consciously find this regrettable or lamentable. Moreover, their habitus conditions them to perceive this model as the only one which could work for them, and makes it difficult for them to imagine an alternative mode of functioning. The fact that it is quite often the wife who sacrifices her career shows how both spouses' habitus work towards reproduction of masculine social order (Bourdieu, 1998):

> It's upsetting that you *have to* (emphasis added) make that decision; that we didn't feel that both of our careers were compatible with successfully bringing up our children. … my wife would have liked to have gone back to work but probably part time, but realistically, the logistics wouldn't have worked. So the influence that has on me is that I feel relatively divorced from the upbringing of our daughter. (John, director, AUDIT, one child)

In spite of wanting to distance themselves from their parental model and be more involved as fathers, many men end up reproducing that model. In John's narrative above, the word 'decision' connotes volition, but then he equally feels that this is the only decision available to him. In being forced to 'play the game of being a man' (Bourdieu, 1998: 106), these men are therefore subjugated by the masculine vision of the world just as women are, albeit in different ways. This reproduction of the male breadwinner habitus is facilitated by the fact that their immediate family is largely a reproduction of the traditional model of the family that they grew up in.

Whereas some men unwillingly reproduce the model of the male breadwinner laid down by their fathers, there are women who also perceived their mothers as negative role models, yet followed similar paths nonetheless. This is the case with Marsha who finds herself reproducing, against her will, both her mother's approach towards childrearing and her determination to work hard:

> My mother didn't attain the level of education that I have. She had this minimum wage job and she was just always working. She didn't have time for us, she was always just so miserable when she was around. Initially my objective was to do so well I didn't need to do that kind of job but I think I've found myself doing the same kind of hours, being just as irritable because I'm working these long hours. … she had this impeccable work ethic. She didn't miss work, she was always at work, she was always willing to work long hours even though it was at the expense of her family. I think somehow initially I took that on as well, I didn't want to miss work at whatever cost. My son was sick and I'd get somebody to stay with him because I had to be at work. (Marsha, manager, AUDIT, two children)

This quote shows how durable and transposable the habitus is from one context to the other. Even if the social and economic conditions within which Marsha's habitus were formed are quite different from those within which she currently finds herself, the habitus still finds ways to hold its sway over her and acts as a centripetal force of reproduction. Moreover, her organizational context constitutes a propitious environment

for Marsha's embodied dispositions towards hard work and the delegation of childcare to be activated.

The professionals in this category ('unwilling reproduction') have certain similarities to those from the previous category in that there is a striking intergenerational continuity between the places work and family occupy in these professionals' lives. However, the professionals in this category stand out by having at some point consciously decided to do things differently from their parents (generally in terms of working less and being more present parents). In spite of these conscious aspirations, attitudes formed during upbringing made them orient themselves towards 'choices' that ended up reproducing the status quo. This shows that rational decisions play only a minor part in work-family choices compared to more unconscious and embodied dispositions. Thus, professionals continued to reproduce an ethos of hard work while sacrificing family life even when their initial goals were explicitly geared towards a more balanced work and family life than their parents had provided for them. Their habitus might also be resistant to change because organizational and societal norms reward career commitment while devaluing childrearing and parenting (Hochschild, 1997).

Willingly distancing from the parental model.

The professionals in our study displayed differing levels of adaptation of the habitus. For instance, the habitus might not adapt very much at all, e.g. for men who produce a breadwinner discourse and willingly pursue a breadwinner role. However, the confrontation of habitus within couples as well as external events prompting a '*prise de conscience*' seem to play a major role in any adaptation that might take place. This section focuses on individuals who look negatively upon their socialization, as in

the previous section. However, in contrast, individuals in this sub-category have managed to successfully avoid reproducing their own parental model.

Duncan, a director at AUDIT and hands-on father, comes from a traditional family with a stay-at-home mother and a breadwinner father. In reacting against the family model that he was socialized into, he distances himself from his father who 'had my mum to do all the childcare and the cooking and the cleaning and the ironing and all that stuff'. Duncan currently does most of the child-related domestic work, while his wife (the main breadwinner in economic terms), pursues a very time-intensive, high-commitment career in an investment bank. In order to travel less and be closer to his children, Duncan moved four years ago to AUDIT from another professional service firm, accepting a 40% salary cut, to the detriment of his long-term career prospects:

> If I had carried on doing what I was doing, I possibly would have made partner, but the cost for the family life would have been too great, so I'm kind of reconciled now to the fact that I might not make partner. But it doesn't really matter, when you weigh everything else up, and again I'm lucky enough that my wife has this money. I might be more regretful if I was the sole earner in the family. (Duncan, director, AUDIT, two children)

Duncan made the decision to move to a less demanding work environment with all the concomitant career sacrifices that this entailed as this seemed the right thing to do, given his aspirations to be a hands-on father. These aspirations were allowed to take hold in his habitus by virtue of his wife's taking on the main breadwinner role. Similarly, the case of Shaun illustrates the role that adaptation and negotiation with one's spouse has on work-family balance decisions. Shaun is more involved in his children's lives than most men in our study:

> Jo, my partner, she's very organized and made sure that we shared the way we manage Max and his nursery. I hear of some stories where the mother is working as well but she's doing all the pick-ups and drop-offs. Jo wouldn't let me do that. [Laughter] But also I wouldn't want to do that either. [I] wouldn't think it was fair on her. But also it's great turning up and picking, doing your bit in terms of the parenting. (Shaun, Director, AUDIT, one child)

Intergenerational differences between fathers and sons notwithstanding, very few males'

habitus seems to have undergone significant mutation. Indeed, even where men try to be

more 'progressive' in terms of domestic contributions, they run up against countervailing

social messages signalling their inadequacy as carers. Take the following example of

Mark, a father who has a relatively egalitarian share of childcare responsibilities with his

wife who is also an accountant:

> And I suppose that sort of came to fruition when my son caught croup … [the nursery] weren't able to get hold of my wife, and it was like 'You should have just called me! Why did you try calling her like five times? (Mark, director, AUDIT, one child and expecting another)

Even where men try to be more egalitarian, the external masculine structures within

which people operate, mobilise against them to maintain the status quo. Gendered

practices and norms in public and private spheres act as barriers to men who want to take

on bigger roles at home (Croft, Schmader, and Block, 2015). Moreover, these individuals

may be perceived as less committed professionally because of their dedication to family

responsibilities. As a result, depending on how visible their family commitment is at

work, their careers may be penalized.

Just as a minority of men actively try not to emulate the domestic model set by

their parents, there are women who also seek to avoid what they perceive as the

'mistakes' that their parents (particularly their mothers) had made. There are two

subgroups which are well represented in our participants: women who want to distance

themselves from what they perceive as disengaged or excessively career-focused

mothers, and women who want to distance themselves from regretful stay-at-home

mothers. As an example of the first subgroup, Kathryn, a partner in LAW who has

envisaged stepping down in order to be a more involved mother, remembers vividly,

many years later how her mother was absent whereas other children's mother were

waiting at the school gates:

> Well, for me, I'm constantly challenging it, because my parents both worked, and I remember being picked up by a childminder, and if I was ill, I'd be outsourced to whoever happened to be available at the time…. I hated it, I hated it, because I felt like I just wanted to be with my mum and dad. My mum never picked me up from school when I was at primary school, and then everybody else's mums would be stood there at the gate, and my childminder would be there, and I'd go home with my […]. And it's only now that I've started re-thinking about that and thinking, well isn't that going to be the same for [my son] if I'm working the way I am, he's going to have somebody picking him up from school and maybe he won't like that and is that what I want for my child? (Kathryn, partner, LAW, one child and expecting another)

Her voice is charged with emotion as she recounts how she is constantly challenging

the image of her working and absent mother and struggles with the fear that her child

will feel the same maternal absence she felt as a child.

Kathryn and her husband – who holds a similar position in another professional firm -

shared equally their parental leave (each took six months off) and they both envisage in

the future the possibility of scaling down their work commitments in order to be more

invested in their children's lives. Women such as Kathryn 'discover' themselves to be

very dedicated mothers: Kathryn persisted in breastfeeding her baby for months after

coming back from maternity leave. Women such as Kathryn seem to be mindful of the

place they give to their family and if their balance is pushed too much towards work to

the detriment of family life, they may decide to quit their firms.

The second subgroup of women professionals who have 'willingly distanced'

themselves from their maternal model had mothers who stayed at home reluctantly.

These women instilled in their daughters a desire to be independent and encouraged

them to have a career so as not to repeat their own mistakes:

> I do remember my mother always regretting she didn't have a job outside the home and that was something that influenced me and all my sisters. […] She'd encourage us to find a career where we could work. She was quite academic

herself, more educated than my father, but because of the nature of families and young children, she'd had to become this stay-at-home parent. (Sinead, director, AUDIT, one child)

Sinead has always worked full time and has always been very committed to her career. Even though she has not followed the same path as her mother, her primary habitus formation may help explain why she is less conflicted about being a mother and pursues a more demanding career than some of her female colleagues. In this sense, habitus is not merely a tool of reproduction, but of change and transformation. In other words, the habitus can be formed in contradistinction to surrounding structural arrangements by actors who are reflexive about how dispositions are formed (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). In this sense, habitus is both conservative: a means of inheriting the views of her mother; and, transformative: creating a propensity to pursue the financial and personal autonomy that was denied to her mother.

In summary, the individuals from this category try to distance themselves from what they perceive to be the mistakes of their parents (being a work-oriented and somewhat absent parent, or a frustrated stay-at-home mother). They tend to manage both work and family at the same time, even if for certain periods the balance may tip one way or the other.

Reluctant distancing from the parental model.

This last section focuses on professionals who would have wanted to emulate their parents' orientations, but external circumstances prevented them from doing so. In these cases, the adaptation of the habitus is not the result of an individual becoming reflexive about their dispositions, as was the case for the 'willingly distancing' individuals, but of external events preventing the habitus from reproducing itself. For example, following the birth of her second child, Julie wanted to give up work to be a stay-at-home mother,

as her own mother had been. However, her desire to do so was thwarted by labour market realities:

> [The plan was] I would give up my job and my husband would carry on. But then he got made redundant, so plans had to quickly change. […] This was just at the start of the recession and the few jobs around were paying much less than his current job so we agreed that I would permanently go back to work full time and he would be a full time dad. (Julie, manager, AUDIT, three children)

Julie is one of the tiny minority of women whose spouse is a stay-at-home father. However, this is the result of strong external circumstances – labour market realities – that have undermined the propensities of the habitus in this instance, rather than a positive choice. Decisions regarding work-family balance are the product of an encounter between historically constituted dispositions and objective reality. These two can be out of sync, as in the above case. In this situation Julie is forced to adapt her habitus and become a different type of mother than she anticipated being, representing a 'reluctant distancing'. This does not, however, make her unhappy: habitus has the capacity to adapt itself. In this particular case, external circumstances imposed a reversal of roles with Julie assuming the breadwinner role.

There are some individuals who find themselves changing categories as time progresses. For example, at the time of our first interview with Evelyn she was working three days a week in a very senior position and felt extremely strained and conflicted between her work and the responsibility for her children. She was very emotional, describing an acute feeling of failure at not being able to rise to the standard set by her mother:

> My mum raised us, she was a stay-at-home mum ... So she was always at home and to some extent I feel guilty for not giving my children the same because I feel she raised me well and she had control over the situation. I'm not there every day … and I feel like I've failed them in a way because I leave them with somebody else. I sometimes think maybe I should be at home with them until they are a bit older. (Evelyn, director, AUDIT, two children)

Six months after our first interview, we interviewed Evelyn a second time on her last

day at AUDIT. After struggling several months to emulate her mother while simultaneously pursuing a very demanding, high responsibility job, she decided to quit work to become, temporarily, a stay-at-home mother. She thus went from reluctant distancing to willing continuity with her family socialization. This seems to indicate that, unless women in this category find an acceptable compromise between their historically embodied dispositions and current work demands (as Julie did), they may decide to either scale down their work engagement or abandon an environment that thwarts their aspirations of motherhood.

These women experience a gap between their embodied dispositions and their current situation, which heightens conflict. Schooling also has an important role in reinforcing this double standard. For example, Kate went to an all-girls private school that instilled into pupils an aspirational discourse of 'having-it-all'. Following her failure to attain partnership in her firm, after 'having almost killed [herself] in the process', she resolved to take some time to be a stay-at-home mother and to rethink her work engagement:

> Part of the disappointment for me in terms of not ticking the partnership box, is that I don't feel like I've reached my potential because of the children. … it's very difficult to accept because you've been brought up in [that] particular way to do everything. There's difficulty accepting that it isn't actually achievable and there has to be compromises (Kate, senior associate, left LAW, two children).

Kate has come to the conclusion that it is not possible, in spite of what she was taught to believe, to 'have it all'. For her, there are real and irreconcilable conflicts between work and family life - a dissonance between her subjective aspirations and what is objectively feasible. Kate also goes from 'reluctant distancing' from her primary habitus to 'willing continuity'. In making the decision to quit she looks back nostalgically on her upbringing with a stay-at-home mother, which she uses to comfort herself that she is making the right decision:

I think I now look at everything that I had as a child growing up and think, you know, that was actually really, I had a really good upbringing (Kate, senior associate, left LAW, two children).

Kate evinces a palpable sense of relief at having decided to give up work. Her quote suggests that in spite of her school's exhortations to "have it all", her habitus has not acquired the requisite dispositions to negotiate a more egalitarian share of domestic responsibilities. In Kate's case, her husband's career took precedence over hers, leaving her to juggle for years the management of the household and children with a demanding career and an often absent husband. Thus, her habitus predisposes her to decisions that prioritize family (such as working three days a week) and that, in her view, have had the consequence of thwarting her objective of attaining a partnership. Although she expresses some degree of frustration at this, she is ultimately relieved to no longer be pursuing what she sees as mutually exclusive objectives.

It is noteworthy that there are no men that we could place into the reluctant distancing category. The greatest proximity of any male to this quadrant was a LAW partner who at some point, when his first child was young, gave up his career in an elite law firm to become a more engaged father. His wife was a doctor, so also had a career, though more flexibility. He later resumed his career and made partner. Looking back on that period, he is happy to have done it. However, he notes that had we interviewed him ten years earlier he would have said that he had failed his career and would have felt sorry for what had happened.

Discussion and conclusion

Our study has asked: *How does habitus influence the work-family balance decisions of working parents in professional environments?* In exploring this question via 148 in-depth interviews with 78 individuals in two professional service firms, we identified two

dimensions of differentiation along which individuals discursively position themselves: reproduction (continuity/discontinuity) and volition (willing/unwilling). The first dimension explores the extent of reproduction or adaptation of the habitus, whereas the second dimension explores the extent to which individuals look favourably upon their childhood experiences. These different dimensions have enabled us to illustrate the various forms of influence that upbringing has on individuals as they wrestle with work-family balance decisions following parenthood. We have shown how dispositions embodied during early years have, in a rich variety of different ways, an enduring influence on professionals' work-family balance decisions and practices.

This research offers new insights into why some careers are more affected than others following parenthood. Our study extends work-family balance literature by showing how the habitus offers important explanations as to why people make decisions to prioritize work or family, with individuals concomitantly being more or less aligned with the rules of the game in professional organizations. In this respect, the axes of differentiation highlighted by this study are highly gendered. For example, men whose careers are relatively unaffected by parenthood tend to exhibit a remarkably tight coupling between the primary habitus and the secondary habitus, where they themselves reproduce the role of principal (if not sole) breadwinner, with a spouse taking on the vast majority (if not all) of the tasks related to management of the household. Men who are slightly more conflicted by work-family balance issues are much more likely to come from households where fathers were involved in childrearing or where they perceive the father as absent and cast him into a negative role model.

In contrast, the generally greater conflict experienced by female professionals on the whole can be explained, not in naturalised gender terms, but by reference to the greater degree of discontinuity between their habitus the organizational context in which

they find themselves. In other words, the female experiences recounted in this study can be explained, not so much by reference to gender as by reference to habitus. This encourages thinking about gender in less essentialized terms. As with men, the majority of women participating in the study come from traditional households where the father was the main breadwinner and the mother took responsibility for the majority of household duties. The professional women studied (selected on the basis that they were currently working) obviously did not reproduce that parental model. Rather, they tended to experience the dual pressures of a maternal role model that was overwhelmingly traditional and professional aspirations that were overwhelmingly consistent with the archetype of the modern career woman. This also reflected the ambiguous and contradictory messages they might have received during socialization (Medved, Brogan, McClanahan, Morris, and Shepherd, 2006) when growing up in a traditional family where the mother was the main carer and by attending scholarly institutions that promulgated a 'you can have it all' discourse.

More specifically, and importantly, habitus also helps to explain why some women are more conflicted than others and, by extension, why some women find it easier than others to delegate childcare in order to pursue demanding careers. This finding is consistent with research suggesting that daughters of traditional mothers are more prone to reducing their work commitments after giving birth than daughters of working mothers (Johnston et al., 2014). However, our study also suggests that an exception to this was represented by women whose traditional mothers had inculcated strong career aspirations into them from an early stage, sometimes setting themselves up consciously as 'negative role models', whose plight was to be avoided at all costs. The dispositions of these women - whose mothers discouraged them from 'making the same mistakes as they did' - were formed during childhood and adolescence and continue to

significantly influence the 'choices' that they make today. Their habitus was also resistant to change because organizational and societal norms tend to emphasize career commitment while disparaging childrearing and parenting (Hochschild, 1997).

Specifically, our research makes three principal contributions to extant literature. First, in contrast with a general tendency in work-family balance studies, we suggest that professionals' work-family balance decisions may not be simply based on rational calculation, but emanate from embodied dispositions, such as largely unconscious sentiments vis-à-vis what it means to be a good father or mother. The concept of habitus is a useful means of capturing the deeply engrained and embodied nature of professionals' working and parenting practices, which continue to structure action even when professionals exhibit a desire to act differently. A habitus oriented towards hard work is all the more resistant to change to the extent that organizational and professional norms encourage its perpetuation by rewarding career commitment. A contribution of the current study, therefore, is to illustrate the important ways in which individual history bears upon work-family balance decisions, thereby adding subtlety and nuance to a body of literature which has hitherto been framed largely in terms of either rational, cognitive decisions or organisational and societal norms.

Second, we contribute to anticipatory socialization literature by illustrating how dispositions learned during one's upbringing can largely transcend time and space and produce certain types of professional and parenting practices. Unlike most previous anticipatory socialization studies, habitus emphasizes the relational aspects of socialization which explain *both* the enduring influence of upbringing *and* how those influences become subject to revision and adaptation in specific circumstances. Becoming a parent activates the dispositions that were inculcated during early formative years through participation in daily activities, such as repeatedly watching one's parents

enact their roles, hearing stories or seeing their parents deal with their own work-family decisions. These embodied dispositions influence attitudes about what is 'right' and 'normal' for working mothers and fathers. However, and this represents a crucial advance on much anticipatory socialization literature, dispositions can adapt as a result of either reflexive distancing or an encounter with objective circumstances, leading the secondary habitus to be discontinuous vis-à-vis the primary habitus.

Third, our research points out that professionals behave in certain ways because of the encounter between context and embodied dispositions. Via habitus, we show how work-family balance decisions are both grounded in individual history and influenced by organizational context. In turn, work-family balance decisions are instrumental in structuring organizational context. For instance, professionals who decide to prioritize work to the detriment of family contribute to reproducing a certain type of professional culture that will in turn further constrain their own future discretion in decision-making by normalising extreme work patterns and delegitimizing work-life balance.

Our findings have implications for future research. Literature on professional service firms has tended to focus on either post-entry organizational socialization or recruitment screening processes (Cook et al., 2012), with only a glancing consideration of pre-university experiences (Rivera, 2011, 2012; Scholarios et al., 2003). As a result, this literature says very little about why certain individuals might be more responsive to professional socialization processes and why others will resist the pressures to conform, following parenthood, for instance. Building on recent work that suggests professionals' backgrounds have a big influence on future professional dispositions (Lupu and Empson, 2015), our results argue that literature on professions and careers should pay greater attention to the historical antecedents of professional socialization. Professionals

who join organizations are not blank slates, but are shaped in enduring ways by previous socialization processes, with family socialization playing an important role.

The findings of this study are important because current approaches to promoting diversity in society focused at the organizational level in the form of flexible working schemes or, family-friendly benefits have too often shown a limited impact of these policies on employees' lives (Kossek and Lambert, 2005). We show here that the impediments to greater equality lie not only in organizations and society, but within individuals themselves in the form of historically constituted dispositions which contribute to maintaining and reproducing existing structures. Organizations have grappled with promoting women in recent years but have reached plateaus in terms of female representation at senior levels. If fundamental constraints on gender equality can be identified in terms of historically constituted dispositions, then organizational responses to diversity problems might have to become much more elaborate than merely flexible working schemes. Our research raises awareness of the gap that often exists between unconscious expectations and conscious ambitions related to career and parenting. If individuals are to reach their full potential, they have to be aware of how the person that they are has been shaped through previous socialization and how their own work-family actions and decisions further reproduce the structures constraining these decisions. This does not, however, obviate the responsibilities of professional organizations to address the consequences of the work-family dilemma which so many professionals face (men as well as women, as this study has emphasised). As long as professional organizations continue to amplify professionals' innate dispositions to intense work commitment (Berglas, 2006; Lupu and Empson, 2015; Empson, 2017) their initiatives to promote work-family balance among their staff will likely yield only the most marginal changes.

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Table 1. Interviewees' profiles

Participants				Age range (years)		#
Gender	M	39		20-30		3
	F	39		31-40		44
AUDIT	Assistant Manager	2		41-50		29
	Manager	6		51+		2
	Senior Manager	17				
	Associate Director	2		No. of children		#
	Director	18		1		29
	Partner	8		2		35
	Total	53		3+		14
LAW	Associate	2		Total		78
	Senior Associate	6				
	Senior Professional Support Lawyer	2				
	Legal Director	3				
	Partner	11				
	Total	24				
Other	D&I Manager	1				
Total participants		78				

Table 2. Family configuration for each sex

Geder	Dual career couple	Main breadwinner	Stay at home partner	Grand Total
F	67%	28%	5%	100%
M	41%	15%	44%	100%

Table 3. Primary family configuration

Gender	Working mother	Stay-at-home mother	n/a	Grand Total
F	44%	56%	0%	100%
M	29%	68%	3%	**100%**

Table 4. Subcategories used in the analysis[4]

Subcategories	Willingly reproducing	Unwillingly reproducing	Willingly distancing	Reluctant distancing
Men from traditional families				
Women from traditional families				
Men from non-traditional families				
Women from non-traditional families				

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[4] The shaded boxes show that we do not have data to fit in those categories. Interrupted lines show that it is possible for individuals to pass from one category to the other. First of all, we had very few men coming from non-traditional families, i.e. with fathers involved in childrearing. Second, because of the competitive and driven nature of professional careers, and because all our participants are currently working, we do not have in our sample women from traditional families who unwillingly reproduce the model of their mothers. Third, we do not have men and women from non-traditional families who have reluctantly distanced themselves from the parental model. Future research could potentially access these other groups that were not represented in our sample. Doing research in different types of environments than the professional service firms would allow exploring these other categories.