'Bad Mum Guilt': The Representation of 'Work-Life Balance' in UK Women's Magazines

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The social policy climate, labour market trends and gendered arrangements for paid and family work mean that 'work-life balance' remains a key social issue in the UK. Media representations of 'work-life balance' are a key source for the construction of gender and working motherhood. Despite evidence of gendered representations in media coverage of other social issues, little attention has been paid to the construction of work-life balance in UK women's magazines. Articles from the highest circulating UK women's magazines are analysed using a discursive approach to explicate constructions of work-life balance and working motherhood. The analysis reveals that multiple roles are constructed as a problematic choice leading to stress and guilt. Problems associated with multiple roles are constructed as individual problems, in a way that decontextualises and depoliticises them and normalises gendered assumptions and a gendered division of labour. Parallels can be drawn between this and wider discourses about women's daily lives and to the UK social policy context.

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Introduction

The concept of 'work-life balance' has received increased attention from academics, policy makers and the media in recent years (Gregory and Milner, 2009). Researchers have considered the functioning and consequences of multiple roles for many decades and there is considerable evidence that the degree of fit between work and family roles influences psychological and physical well-being (O'Driscoll, Brough and Kalliath, 2006). Although there is increased acknowledgement that multiple roles can be experienced in both positive and negative ways (Poelmans, O'Driscoll, Beham 2005), when they lead to conflict and stress this has negative outcomes for organisations and families (Gregory and Milner, 2009). The continued rise of maternal employment (Fagnani, 2007) and a social policy context that increasingly promotes paid employment for lone parents (Lewis, 2009) continue to make work-life balance an important social and psychological issue in the UK.

It is important that any research on work-life balance acknowledges the gendered nature of work and family roles. The division of labour between paid work and family work was fundamentally gendered from its inception in the Industrial Revolution (Runté and Mills, 2004) and has long been a source of gender inequality (Gregory and Milner, 2009). The inequality that accompanies the gendered division of labour means that when we analyse how the division of labour is represented we must acknowledge the ideological nature of those representations. That is, we must acknowledge the role of these representations in "*the constitution, reproduction, and transformation of social relations of power*" (Fairclough, 2006 page 23). This paper focuses upon media representations as ideological and this term is being used here to mean that these representations are significant for the shaping of power relations.

One reason why the gendered division of labour remains is that women's increased participation in paid employment has not been matched by an equivalent rise in men's participation in family and domestic work (Lewis, 2009). The social policy context in the UK, in spite of placing increased emphasis on employment for lone parents, still rests fairly uncritically on the notion that a mother's family role is of primary importance and her role in paid employment secondary, and sees breadwinning as principally a male responsibility (Hague, Thomas and Williams, 2001). This is reflected in the relatively high levels of part time employment amongst mothers in the UK (Lewis, 2009). Research has identified various conceptualisations and representations of the relationship between paid work and other aspects of life and has shown that these are gendered.

A study of people working at home and their families, for example, showed a tendency to construct temporal flexibility as inherently different for men and women, and as something that is used by women specifically to balance work and family (Sullivan and Smithson, 2007). Similarly, Smithson and Stokoe (2005) found that although organisational policy documentation may be written in superficially gender-neutral terms, implicit notions of a 'generic female parent' are deployed when employees discuss work-life balance. Also, evidence from Canada shows that the way in which work-life balance is represented in news media reflects a 'male breadwinner/female caregiver' ideology (Gazso, 2004). A similarly gendered representation of parenting roles has been revealed by a UK study of UK parenting magazines (Sunderland, 2006). Although such studies of representations of work and family roles and work-life balance in interviews, policy documents and the media are becoming more common, there are still relatively few studies that examine how work-life balance issues are constructed in the UK media.

The media is a key element of the way in which social issues like work-life balance are made sense of and women's magazines are potentially a key site for the construction and contestation of 'work-life balance' for women in the UK. Media representations provide frameworks that are used to understand and make sense of complex phenomena, and also shape sense making by promoting particular constructions and conceptualisations of these phenomena (Hellgren *et al*, 2002). Increasingly, media representations are investigated from a discursive approach, which emphasises the contested nature of media representations, or media discourses, and sees these discourses as offering people a way of making sense of social issues and of themselves (e.g., Gazso, 2004; Roy, 2008; Wood and Finlay, 2008).

In general, discourse is seen as providing us with ways of making sense of things and also as helping to shape our sense of who we are (Edley, 2001; Whittle, 2008). Women's magazines contain representations of the practice and identity of femininity (Machin and van Leeuwen, 2003) and as Roy (2008, page 464) argues, from a discursive perspective, they carry resources that women can use for understanding *"how to be women"*. Discourses help us to understand what is normative for us as men or women and examining discourses, in media accounts and other texts, helps us see the various ways of making sense of themselves that people have 'on offer' (Edley, 2001; Madden and Chamberlain, 2004). The capacity for media representations to offer us various ways of making sense of ourselves can be understood in terms of the concept of 'subject positions', which are the various roles, conceptualisations or versions of ourselves that discourses implicitly offer to us (Parker, 1992). The 'subject positions' offered by media discourses of working mothers are not seen here as providing an unlimited set of choices, but as part of a system where *"the ways in which people can understand themselves are structured both by the available discourses in their social milieu and the material conditions in which they find themselves"* (Sims-Schouten and Riley, 2007, page 107). In the present study, however, it is these discourses that are the main focus.

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The way that women's multiple roles are constructed in the media is not simply an abstract question; such constructions are significant because they have practical consequences for social action and social relations (Machin and van Leeuwen, 2003). Edley (2001) illustrates this with reference to the various forms of protest used by African-American men in the 1960s to negotiate their masculinity and resist mainstream representations of themselves as sub-human or childlike. What was at stake in such protests was not just how African-American men were conceptualised, but access to *"the social and economic privileges that are associated with"* being conceptualised in a particular way (Edley, 2001, page 194). In addition to offering us ways of making sense of the world and ourselves, discursive representations can be seen as an important way in which gender inequalities are perpetuated (Weatherall, 2002). Research has highlighted the way in which dominant representations of work-life balance issues are utilised by policy makers to legitimise certain forms of social policy rather than others (Hiilamo and Kangas, 2009). Gazso (2004) argues that media discourses have an ideological effect, in that they convey judgements about what is right and wrong, and that this is one of the levels upon which gender operates to give rise to inequality. In terms of women's multiple roles, whether paid employment is conceptualised as a normative aspect of motherhood, for example, has direct implications for women's access to the financial and social privileges related to paid employment and has consequences for social relations between men and women. The study of discursive representations is important as a way of understanding how practical and social arrangements come about and change.

Studies have revealed and explicated gendered constructions of other issues in women's magazines, such as health messages and eating behaviour (e.g., Madden and Chamberlain, 2004; Roy, 2008; Whitehead and Kurtz, 2008), but there are few discursive analyses of work-life balance issues in

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popular media forms, such as magazines, in the UK. This study, therefore, investigates the discursive construction of work-life balance in a sample of popular UK women's magazines collected over a 12 month period. Particular attention is paid to the gendering of 'work-life balance' and the analysis aims to:

1.   Examine the way(s) in which work-life balance is represented, with particular reference to gender.

2.   Examine the subject positions offered by these representations.

3.   Analyse the ways in which practical aspects of work-life balance and gender equity are represented.

Method

Sampling

The initial sample consisted of 12 months worth of issues of four of the most highly circulated women's interest magazines in the UK. These magazines were identified using the following sampling method: A search was performed on Media Disk (UK) for UK magazines categorised as women's interest magazines. The Media Disk records were then inspected and the sample was further reduced by rejecting the following publications: Free publications; publications that are only available through annual subscription or to customers of a particular company; E-zines; publications that are circulated only in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland; publications that are supplements to newspapers; publications that are specifically focused on a particular geographical

area within the UK; and, weekly publications (leaving only those published less frequently). From

the remaining publications, the four with the highest circulation figures were selected.

Twelve months worth of issues for each of these magazines were examined and any articles

(excluding advertisements) that related to issues of women's employment, work-life balance,

division of work-family labour or working parents were selected for more detailed analysis. One

magazine did not contain any articles that made reference to these topics. The remaining three

magazines contained a total of 8 articles, which were subject to more detailed analysis.

Figure One: Magazine Articles in the Sample

Article 1: 'I need to stop the clock', Top Sante, May 2005, pp43-44.

Article 2: 'Are you at Risk?', Top Sante, February 2006, pp92-94.

Article 3:'I Love My Mummy, but She's Always Busy', Top Sante, June 2005, pp40-41.

Article 4: 'What do you want from the election – the full-time mother', marie claire, May 2005, p152

Article 5: 'Can counselling rescue this couple?' marie claire, June 2005, pp. 115-120

Article 6: 'Who are you calling a feminist?' marie claire, April 2005, p191

Article 7: 'Do you love your job?', Company, February 2005, pp. 54-57

Article 8: 'My mum, my inspiration', Company, March 2005, pp. 78-80

Analytic strategy

The analysis aimed to describe and examine the ways in which issues of work-life balance are

conceptualised and positioned within popular women's magazines. It also aimed to consider the

implications of these representations for gender relations and for practical arrangements for work-

life balance. Therefore, the analysis was based upon established techniques for the analysis of discourse in textual data. The approach used is particularly influenced by critical discourse analysis (e.g., Edley, 2001) and critical realist approaches to discourse analysis (e.g., Sims-Schouten and Riley, 2007). Critical discourse analysis, like many forms of discourse analysis, involves identifying the ways in which the object under study are constructed, made sense of or defined in texts but also goes on to consider the interests that might be served by these constructions and definitions and the implications for power relations and social action (Edley, 2001). This means not just focusing on the ideological nature of discourse (that is, for example, its capacity to be normative) but also specifically conceptualising ideology as a *"modality of power"* (Fairclough, 2006). A critical realist approach to discourse analysis, in this context, involves viewing discursive constructions as part of a network of influences on how people are able to make sense of themselves and their identity (see above).

The analysis was performed in a similar fashion to the method used by Roy (2008). Initially, the various constructions and representations of multiple roles, work-life balance, working motherhood and related issues were identified. Articles were repeatedly read and all sections containing implicit or explicit references to work-life balance, working motherhood were selected. These were then further analysed with a focus on examining representations and constructions of key concepts and issues, and argumentation relating to these. Those aspects of this developing analysis most closely related to the research aims were then crafted into a narrative account that also identified and discussed their implications for the way that women are positioned within them (that is, the representations were examined to see what possibilities they offered for women with multiple roles to make sense of themselves). A further stage of analysis involved the consideration of the potential consequences of the representations identified here for practical matters related to work-life balance and for a wider context of social and organisational practices.

Analysis

The analysis revealed a number of different representations of multiple roles, of their consequences and of how they should be handled. The analysis consists of two major strands. First, the construction of multiple roles as a problematic choice that leads to stress and guilt. Secondly, in terms of how to cope with multiple roles, they are constructed as a woman's own individual problem that she must take personal responsibility for and, largely, cope with on her own. A detailed presentation of these two main themes follows.

Multiple roles: A problematic choice?

One of the basic aims of the analysis was to determine the ways in which the multiple roles and responsibilities associated with family and paid employment are constructed – for example, as positive or negative, as a stressor or as a rewarding challenge.

Within the articles analysed there was some evidence of multiple roles being constructed as rewarding and personally satisfying. For example, a married woman with children who has been away from paid employment describes how she would like to return to paid work *"not only for the money, but for the sense of independence that it gives me"* (Article 4). In an article about famous entrepreneurial mothers and their daughters (Article 8), working mothers are mainly presented as positive role models for their daughters. Although this article does not deal explicitly with issues of work-life balance, it contains implicit messages about the potentially positive effects of maternal employment for women and their children. However, this was a relatively unusual portrayal of maternal employment within this sample of articles, which presented a complicated and not always

entirely positive picture. Engaging with paid employment is most commonly presented as a choice that mothers may make, but one that is difficult - for example, by presenting women returner's relatively low earning potential and the cost of childcare as making the return to paid employment difficult economically and practically (Article 4, for example).

Paid work is constructed as fundamentally in conflict with idealised notions of motherhood. Mothers are cast as asking how they can *"go back to work* and *be a good mum"* (Article 4). In many cases representations that are ostensibly very positive, such as those in the article about entrepreneurial mothers as inspirational role models, also present a message about the fundamentally difficult nature of maternal employment (although it should be noted that this message is secondary and the overwhelming message of the article is one of positive effects). Anita Roddick's (founder of the Body Shop) daughter is quoted as saying *"as an angst-ridden teenager, I resented the Body Shop because it seemed Mum's main priority ...."* (Article 8). Another daughter is quoted as saying that as she grew older she *"realised how amazing Mum is ... she worked tirelessly … so she could support me and my brother"* (Article 8). So, whilst mothers are presented as inspirational and as highly positive role models, there is still the message that the combination of parenting and paid work is something that is highly challenging for women, something with which they must struggle.

This gendered portrayal of the conflict between motherhood and paid work is part of a set of complex mixed messages that leave women in a problematic position. On the one hand, participation in paid employment for mothers is seen as fairly inevitable. For example, one hypothetical overburdened working mother is described as *"one of an increasing number of women who **have to** combine a job … with full-time childcare and managing a home"* (Article 2 with my

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emphasis). On the other hand, however, maternal employment is also presented as inherently problematic and incompatible with ideal motherhood.

Furthermore, although these articles mainly present the juggling of multiple roles as an inevitable part of women's lives, there is also a tendency to present maternal employment as a matter of personal choice. For example, in an article that seems to be aimed at younger women who are single (or perhaps "*still dating*") and do not have children, women are given the following advice:

> *Hopefully [you] don't have to feel guilty if you are happy in your current job but are ready to give it up if children come along. Nowadays, the choice really is up to you. … We decided to find out more about … work, life or a nice balance between the two.*

Article 7

The article then goes on to focus entirely on work plans and aspirations (with one mention of balancing work with a social life) without any discussion of how to achieve the balance described at the outset. This utopian vision of the future as being about choice and freedom to combine roles in a balanced way is a very positive view of women's lives. There it is also noteworthy that although young women are told that it is *"up to you"* this is based on the earlier presumption that you can only avoid guilt if you like your job but are *"ready to give it up"*. Also, this view of future freedom and choice for women who are yet to be mothers is in stark contrast with the dominant presentation of multiple roles as being inevitably stressful and problematic and with the message about inherent tensions between motherhood and paid work. The presentation of women as choosing, and in control of their lives, also provides a mechanism for blaming women for their own difficulties and

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the negative consequences of stressful role juggling (see below). Also, there is little insight within these articles about how young women are to avoid becoming the 'hurried, guilty women' of the future who are 'damaging their own health'. It is a woman's choice as long as she makes the right choice – that is to prioritise childcare over income generation – and the implications of this for the social power of women individually or as a group is not acknowledged.

Multiple roles and maternal employment are firmly cast as problematic, as even positive messages about personal fulfilment, family provision and positive female role models tend to be tempered with talk about problems, guilt and difficulty. In particular, multiple roles are seen as stressful and a threat to well-being and, whether viewed as a choice or an economic necessity, maternal employment tends not to be represented as something that we can uncritically take for granted.

Commonly, and perhaps unsurprisingly, the articles portrayed multiple roles as a major source of stress for women and as a potential threat to their well-being. Multiple roles are commonly presented as stressful and problematic for a number of reasons.

First, multiple roles are portrayed as leading to stress because they increase time pressure. Readers are asked *"Are you shaken into your day by screaming kids? Is your drive to work an hour of frustration and your lunchtime a stream of chores plus a sandwich on the run?"* (Article 1) and the problem of multiple roles is summed up as *"there just aren't enough hours in the day"* (Article 2). Secondly, multiple roles are seen as problematic because they lead to *"being overworked"* (Article 2). However, this is a somewhat vague reference and there is little explicit discussion within these articles of issues such as long working hours, workload issues or demands placed on employees by

their employers. A third factor that gets a brief mention as a cause of women being overburdened is the division of household labour and childcare. Lack of gender equity (*"women don't have it all. We're too busy doing it all to have it all"* [Article 6]) and the unequal division of labour (*"[women] still do the lion's share of housework and childcare"* [Article 2]) are presented as leading to women's greater multiple role burden.

The stress and time pressure of multiple roles are seen as leading to a number of negative consequences. They are linked with problematic everyday functioning, such as *"driving into a police car at the red lights"* (Article 1), and as leading to ill-health:

> *When stressed, your blood pressure and blood sugar … increases [sic], which raises the*
> *risk of heart disease and diabetes. Your immune system also becomes compromised,*
> *making you less resistant to illness … [and this can] lead to increased feelings of*
> *tiredness and depression*

Article 2

The articles also present women's multiple roles as causing conflict and guilt. For example, a description of work-family 'role reversal' (her career success and him as stay-at-home dad) is presented as leading to both maternal guilt and marital conflict (Article 5). Multiple roles are seen as fundamentally leading to 'Bad Mum Guilt', where modern life is characterised by multiple roles clashing with idealistic views of motherhood:

Modern motherhood – with its glossy 'I must have a flexible career, a great figure and

five different ways to develop my children's gross motor skills' benchmark – is a

minefield of guilt tripwires.

Article 3

The use of the first person tense here also brings connotations that it is women's desires and aspirations that are the essence of this problem. This raises the issue of who is responsible for the 'problem' of multiple roles, and that of how this 'problem' should be dealt with, which are key themes of the articles.

Coping with the 'problem' of multiple roles

To a small extent there is acknowledgement within this sample that government and social policy have a potential role in reducing the stress associated with multiple roles (Article 2). However, the emphasis is placed upon women finding out what resources there are and devising clever and resourceful strategies to use them to best effect. One article specifically presents work-life balance as a political and social policy issue, but within this article childcare costs are presented as deducted from the woman's earnings not the household income: *"finding a job that's interesting, flexible and pays enough for **me to afford** childcare is proving impossible"* (Article 4 with my emphasis). The articles also do sometimes present a role for employers, but again the emphasis is on women being responsible for negotiating reduced working hours and 'family friendly' employment (Article 3). So, fundamental assumptions about the gendered division of labour are unchallenged here and multiple roles, and the problems associated with them, are seen not only as something that women do to themselves (see below) but as their own problem.

Women are encouraged to use coping strategies, making minor modifications and managing the situation as best they can, rather than change or challenge an inequitable situation in more fundamental ways. To avoid being 'bad mothers', women must manage being disempowered successfully in order rather than challenging the structures and ideological representations that disempower them. They are presented with suggested coping strategies that are *"short of assuming a fake identity and moving to the Outer Hebrides"* (Article 1). This reflects a tendency within the articles to present fundamental challenges or solutions to the problem as theoretically possible but slightly comic and faintly ridiculous – that is, as unrealistic. A woman's only realistic option, according to this message, is to take responsibility for the problem herself and cope with it as best she can without asking for any fundamental change in society, her family or her employer.

The subtitle for one article states baldly that women are too busy and that they are damaging their own health. This, and the article itself, specifically position women not as being damaged by an intolerable situation that is imposed upon them by forces beyond their control, but as damaging themselves.

> *This woman is up at 5am every morning doing the washing and cleaning before her children wake up. She doesn't get to bed until after midnight and there are days when she doesn't even eat a proper meal. She's one of a growing number of women who are so busy they're damaging their health*

<div align="right">Article 2</div>

Women with multiple roles and heavy temporal demands are presented as almost entirely responsible for the harm that they are doing to themselves. Notice, for example, that she *"doesn't even eat a proper meal"* as opposed to alternatives such as 'she is denied the time for a proper meal'. Although in other parts of this article, and in some of the others, alternative causes are also identified ('modern life', 'unequal division of labour'), the overwhelming message is that ultimately women are damaging their own health if they do not take the necessary steps to solve this problem or to cope with it effectively. The women readers of these magazines are urged to *"S.L.O.W D.O.W.N. before you **damage your own health**"* (Article 1 – with my emphasis). This is also reflected in the fact that the solutions are invariably presented as strategies that must be adopted by individual women, as we shall see below.

Within these articles 'work-life solutions' (e.g., scheduling) are something that should be planned by women themselves and then communicated to the rest of the family - *"my husband is then filled in on plans for the day while I get ready for work"* (Article 1). Family members can be asked to help – for example, you can *"get your kids to sort out their school bag"* (Article 1) – and it is stressed that family members need to be encouraged to accommodate the working mother's needs:

> *Try to limit your children to one activity each per week – and make yourself time for a ten-minute cuppa before you start on dinner. And don't feel guilty about that tea – stress is infectious and if you feel hassled, so will the kids.*

Article 1

Note that there is no mention in this article of anybody else making the tea and the knock on effect of getting 'hassled' is that it is bad for the children. Husbands and fathers (and each of these articles assumes that there is one) are presented as a resource that women can use to get 'help' with domestic labour and childcare: *"he helps put the kids to bed while I do a bit more work and cook dinner" (*Article 2). More equal role sharing between mothers and fathers is mentioned at times - e.g., *"could your partner spend more time at home?"* (Article 3) – but tends to be presented as a luxury that women may be able to negotiate rather than as something that they are entitled to.

Women are encouraged to enjoy the spurious luxury of breaks that last only minutes. During these short breaks, they can use behavioural and cognitive strategies to relieve stress, guilt and anxiety – for example, they can take two minutes to sit down and think of the good things in life such as *"replaying laughing with your child or a moment of affection with your partner"* (Article 1). This battery recharging means that *"you may still have the ironing to do afterwards but you'll feel more relaxed when doing it"* (Article 1). It is also interesting to note that the good things in life are still strongly related to women's family roles and relationships rather than to positive experiences that may also come from other aspects of women's lives.

In many ways these representations fail to challenge traditional gendered assumptions about work and family roles and responsibilities. One particularly stark example of this comes from the way in which the issue of 'Bad Mum Guilt' is dealt with.

In one article (Article 3), which appears at first to be sympathetic to mothers, the point is made that ideal standards of mothering are unrealistic and damaging. Initially one gets the impression that

women are being encouraged to fight against 'Bad Mum Guilt'. However, when looking more closely

at the section that deals specifically with paid employment (entitled *"I spend most of my time at

work"*), a more complex picture emerges. The problem is presented as follows: *"so you leave the

lion's share of day care to a childminder or relative but … you worry you're doing the wrong thing"*.

The article then draws upon the advice of a 'child development expert' to help women deal with this

work-related 'Bad Mum Guilt' – the following quote shows her advice but note carefully where the

quote from the expert ends and the magazine article author's own voice takes over:

> *"This situation touches the nerve of working mothers everywhere" says child*
>
> *development specialist Anita Pflock. "Chances are, you're doing what's best for you and*
>
> *your family so feel free to defend your choice by asserting yourself as The Expert when it*
>
> *comes to the needs of you and your family." If you work long hours or you genuinely*
>
> *feel your kids are suffering, don't beat yourself up. But do start to make moves to try to*
>
> *increase your hours at home.*

<div align="right">Article 3</div>

Note two main things here. Firstly, the use of 'if you work long hours **or** if you feel your kids are

suffering' presents long hours for mothers as bad even if the kids are not suffering. Secondly, what

initially appears to be a rallying call to fight against 'Bad Mum Guilt' is actually a clear message that

mothers should prevent 'Bad Mum Guilt' by reducing work hours and spending more time doing

childcare. So, mothers are urged to free themselves from guilt over what they did wrong in the past,

but to make sure they don't feel future guilt by doing the right thing from now on.

Discussion

Women's multiple roles are presented in a conflicting way, as maternal employment is positioned as normative and inevitable yet also depicted, at times, as a choice that women make. This is consistent with the way in which British social policy positions working mothers; that is, as having a duty and a right to engage in paid employment but also as primary caregivers who are responsible, individually, for securing appropriate childcare while they work (Repo, 2004; Sims-Schouten and Riley, 2007).

Traditional ideals of motherhood and the gendered division of labour are not challenged here, and this is consistent with research findings on women's magazines in other areas (e.g., Madden and Chamberlain, 2004; Roy, 2008). Although some involvement in paid employment is presented here as a normative part of motherhood there is an inherent conflict as there is also a strong message that good motherhood and excessive amounts of paid employment are incompatible. Women are positioned as inevitably having to sacrifice ideal motherhood and must walk a tightrope seeking the right balance between being good enough as mothers while still fulfilling their obligation to do paid work. In contrast, men's combination of parenthood and paid employment is not positioned as problematic within these articles. Similarly, the domestic work of fathers is not given much attention, but where it is mentioned, it is cast as 'help'. This is consistent with the way that men's domestic work is often constructed in everyday talk and within interviews with men and women (Dempsey, 2000; Sullivan and Smithson, 2007). A fair balance of domestic labour is not presented as something that women are entitled to.

Multiple roles are clearly cast in these articles as stressful, potentially damaging to health and as leading to guilt. One could argue that this is a relatively realistic picture to paint. There is evidence to suggest that the demands of multiple roles can be a threat to well-being and to social and organisational functioning (O'Driscoll, Brough and Kalliath, 2006; Gregory and Milner, 2009). Furthermore, there is evidence that women themselves construct the balancing of work and family roles as a highly challenging balancing act involving ideals of good parenting and obligations as an employee (Repo, 2004). However, Repo (2004) also reports that UK women were likely to construct work-life balance issues as one of women fighting for equality and reform, which conflicts with the dominant construction in this sample of magazines. Also, as noted above, there is evidence that multiple roles can be positive (Poelmans, O'Driscoll, Beham 2005) yet this message is given very little space here – and, where it is, it is always tempered by the message that these positive effects are only gained through great struggle and difficulty. However, what seems significant here is not necessarily the idea that multiple roles are presented as challenging, but the clear ideological messages about the nature of the problem, who is responsible for the problem and what they should do about it. These messages support gendered arrangements and do little to challenge inequality.

The focus upon guilt is particularly interesting because it gives the impression of empathy with women's emotions and experiences but, crucially, it simultaneously makes the idea that working mothers should feel guilty seem inevitable and, therefore, unquestionable. If guilt is normal, then there must be something to be guilty about. It is also important to note that there is a strong message that the key to tackling guilt is for women themselves to minimise the extent to which paid employment interferes with their domestic work and childcare. Although women are warned against the trap of feeling too guilty, they are also positioned in such a way that makes their guilt seem logical because if they are struggling with multiple roles it is their own fault because either

they have made the wrong choices or have failed to cope effectively. This kind of contradictory positioning of women and their problems has been noted elsewhere in media discourses. For example, an analysis of the media representation of eating disorders highlights how women's magazines construct eating disorders as a serious problem and a source of suffering while simultaneously bolstering discursive constructions that can be seen as contributing to the problem (Bishop, 2001).

Characterising maternal employment as a choice, and a matter of personal responsibility, positions working mothers as responsible for their own ill-health and guilt (and, implicitly, for the reduction in income and financial independence that might result from what is portrayed as the only realistic option for solving the problem of multiple roles). The problem of stress associated with women's multiple roles is not cast as a problem principally for families, for government, for society or for employers but as a problem for individual women, as is consistent with the wider social policy context in the UK in particular. The other stake holders in work-life balance issues are mentioned, but they are not central to the discussion and are not positioned as primarily responsible for solving the problem, even though women may be encouraged to seek their help. The focus on women dealing with this individually is also not entirely surprising because women's magazines generally focus upon what may be seen as the reality of women's everyday lives, offering solutions to everyday problems (Machin and van Leeuwen, 2003; Hinnant, 2009), and although on many levels we can critique the notion that this is done realistically, it nevertheless makes an individual focus less than surprising. However, this focus upon women's individual lives does not necessarily have to also position work-life balance issues as a woman's own individual problem to solve. For example, articles could focus more on parent's rights and employers obligations and give practical advice for women to access their entitlements or could challenge the unequal division of household labour rather than taking it for granted as inevitable and normal.

The tendency to focus upon individual struggles, and to position these as a woman's own responsibility, seems to be a wider phenomenon within women's magazines. Other research has also noted women's magazines' tendency to position women as individually responsible, for example in terms of their health (Roy, 2008) and eating behaviour (Madden and Chamberlain, 2004). So, in addition to being consistent with the social policy context in the UK, this may also be part of a wider trend for positioning women as responsible for their own 'problems' in an individual way. In a detailed discursive analysis of a globally best-selling women's magazine, Machin and van Leeuwen (2003) identified a broad trend for constructing issues affecting women's lives (including challenges associated with relationships, employment, study, social situations, self-confidence and sex) as individual personal problems that are unrelated to social or political contexts – that is, as specifically not ideological. Similarly, a discursive analysis from the US of the ways in which work-life balance are constructed on a popular women's website (which is very much like an online women's magazine) revealed similar individual, decontextualised and depoliticised representations of these issues (Worthington, 2005). This is also consistent with a general discourse that has been identified in UK women's magazines of women as strong individuals who suffer and cope with lives characterised by difficulty and challenge (Blackman, 1999).

This analysis highlights the representations contained in a part of the UK media that is a key ideological influence for UK women, but like all research it has limitations. As has been argued above, media representations can be seen as important on more than a symbolic level because they have consequences for social action and for power relations However, it is still important to note that the ideological effects of media representations are not the only forces that shape what is possible or practicable in the world (Fairclough, 1989). It has been noted that families' opportunities

and constraints are shaped by ideology and also by institutional factors such as the availability of childcare (Repo, 2004). So, while the analysis presented here provides insight into some of the ideological elements of this process, other research that uses different methodologies and has a different focus will be beneficial in examining other elements. Also, the importance of analysing imagery in critical discourse analysis is being increasingly recognised (e.g., Wang, 2014). Yet, like many discursive studies, this was an analysis of the written text included in these articles and did not aim to analyse pictures. t is also important to acknowledge that this research focuses on a specific part of the UK media and uses a relatively small sample of material to do this, so it is important for further research to build on this analysis by examining representations of work-life balance in other parts of the UK media (e.g., news media).

It is important also not to presume that the readers of women's magazines are an entirely passive audience who are simplistically conditioned by the messages that they read. Working mothers actively draw upon wider discourses (e.g., those around motherhood) to *"construct the social world they are living in and do ideological work"* (Repo, 2004). Therefore, future research could usefully address this by exploring the ways in which UK women respond to these kinds of magazine representations and examining how these might relate to their own everyday talk and the construction of work-life balance within it (as done, for example, by Kates and Shaw-Garlock, [1999] in relation to advertising in women's magazines).

Conclusions

The articles analysed here overwhelmingly present multiple roles and work-life balance as problematic, stressful and damaging for women. Tensions between paid employment and

motherhood are also highlighted and gendered assumptions of work and family roles remain largely unchallenged. Indeed, these articles generally present a very conservative picture of gender relations and offer little in the way of challenge to gendered arrangements. In some respects the articles appear sympathetic to women – the challenge of multiple roles is presented as a problem that dogs many modern women's lives and is presented as being caused to some extent by forces beyond women's own control. However, ultimately the 'problem' is overwhelmingly presented as each individual woman's own problem. Women are told not to feel guilty about 'Bad Mum Guilt' in the same sentence as being explicitly told that they must reduce their work hours and take steps to solve the problem.

The solutions that are presented for work-life balance firmly position women as responsible for solving their own problem, and there is evidence to suggest that this is related both to the social policy context in the UK and to wider discourses that position women's as struggling individually with situations that are remote from any political and social context. The employers' role, for example, is to respond to the woman's attempts to negotiate more family friend working (thereby implying that if they do not provide this better way of working it is caused by women's failure to negotiate sufficiently well). Similarly, women are encouraged to enlist the help and understanding of their male partners and children – rather than being encouraged to demand that their partners fulfil their responsibilities equally or suggesting that women do only 50% of the household labour even in the event that their partner is unwilling to do the other 50%. The 'modern woman' is clearly positioned as someone who must be strong, emotionally capable and independent in coping with the inevitable stress of multiple roles. Responsibility for successful coping is clearly placed with women themselves and they will be held accountable individually whether they fail or succeed in surviving.

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