Geographies of family formations: spatial differences and gender cultures in Britain

Simon Duncan* and Darren Smith†

The significance of national differences in family formations has been addressed through the social policy debate over women’s position in different welfare state regimes. However, the nature and effects of sub-national family geographies remains under-researched. In this paper we use census mapping to describe regional and local differences in partnering and parenting within Britain. We develop an index of the ‘Motherhood Employment Effect’ to indicate different geographical levels of adherence to the ‘traditional’ male breadwinner/female homemaker family, and use a ‘Family Conventionality’ index to describe geographical differences in the social evaluation of marriage. The geography of family formations thus described does not follow the better known ‘north–south’ or ‘urban–rural’ geographies of economic performance and prosperity. We use the example of Lancashire and Yorkshire to explore further the socio-economic associations of this family geography, employing additional indicators of ‘household conventionality’ and ‘family restructuring’. Finally, we speculate as to how this relatively unfamiliar family geography may be related to the existence of regional gender cultures, and briefly outline some implications for social policy.

key words Britain Lancashire and Yorkshire family gender culture census mapping

*Applied Social Sciences, University of Bradford, Bradford BD7 1DP email: s.s.duncan@bradford.ac.uk
†Geography Division, School of the Environment, University of Brighton, Brighton, BN2 4GJ, UK
revised manuscript received 27 May 2002

Introduction: families, diversity and space

In the debate over the ‘decline of the family’, it is now established that the ‘traditional’ male breadwinner/female homemaker family model was itself created historically – it emerged as an ideal in Europe over a relatively short historical period, and always many families found it impossible to live up to it (see Lewis 1989, 1992; Pfau-Effinger 1998). What is often overlooked in this debate is that families have not simply changed over time, they also vary over space at any one time. The ‘traditional family’ itself emerged in particular parts of Britain and the Netherlands in the seventeenth century, and subsequently developed in other countries and regions, although even in western Europe some areas and social groups long remained relatively untouched (Todd 1985; Pfau-Effinger 1998; Fraser 1999). In short, family formations have a geography, as well as a history. In turn, these geographies of family formations have important implications for normative expectations, social behaviour and social policy. For example, research has established that understandings of what constitutes ‘good mothering’ vary significantly between different social groups in different geographical areas. Furthermore, these understandings are, in part, maintained and reproduced through local social networks where what is seen as deviant behaviour is unsupported and conforming behaviour is rewarded (Duncan and Edwards 1999; Holloway 1999). In turn, the economic and income effects of training and
educational policies will partly depend upon whether mothers are expected – and expect – to be basically carers at home (perhaps with some part-time work organized around this prime responsibility) or full-time workers using childcare services.

This ‘geography of family formations’ has been addressed at the national level, particularly for western Europe, in the context of the social policy debate over women’s position in different welfare state regimes (for example, Sainsbury 1994, 1996; O’Connor et al. 1999; Hakim 2000). This debate has been limited, however, in focusing on women’s paid work and welfare rights, rather than on their position in families. This body of work can also be criticized for overly focusing on the national level, and neglecting important regional and local dimensions to gender inequalities and family behaviour (Duncan 1995, 2000; for criticisms of the ‘state centrism’ of much social science see Williams 1995; Brenner 1999). The rich vein of geographical research on regional and local gender differences, from Doreen Massey’s Spatial Divisions of Labour (1984) onwards, has been almost completely neglected in this debate.

Recent work on ‘gender cultures’ – social understandings about what men and women are, what they do and expect, and how families vary as one part of this – is a partial exception (Pfau-Effinger 1998, 2000). First, it shifts attention from social policies towards contrasting cultural definitions of gender divisions of labour. This includes how childhood and parenting is conceptualized, and how it is practised, although most comparative social policy discussion of differential gender roles ignores this arguably crucial part of family life (cf. Pringle 1998). In some countries (type case Finland), mothers are culturally defined, in families as well as institutionally, as full-time workers, while in others (type case former West Germany), mothers are culturally defined as homemakers and carers. Pfau-Effinger (1998, 2000) sees such differences in gender culture, rather than differences in national social policy, as primarily explaining national variations in rates of women’s paid work. Of course, social policies – such as childcare provision or benefits for caring at home – will affect the relative ease with which women can take on, or avoid, paid work. However, in this view, such social policies (conceptualized by Pfau-Effinger as belonging to the ‘gender order’ of institutions and structures) also result from gender culture expectations about women’s and men’s roles. This position is supported by historical evidence, which normally shows that women, including mothers, enter the long-hours labour force in large numbers before the development of state support, not afterwards. (The current situation in Britain, where New Labour’s National Childcare Strategy is more a response than a breakthrough, seems a case in point.) This argument turns the normal social policy argument on its head, which assumes that it is variations in national welfare and tax/benefit policies which determine national differences in women’s behaviour in combining paid work and motherhood. Any local differences then become, by implication, trivial and almost random variations around this national standard.

Secondly, feminist geographers have developed Pfau-Effinger’s work in describing regional gender cultures in the case of Sweden (Forsberg 1998) and Switzerland (Bühler 1998). In Sweden, some regions possess ‘traditional’ gender contracts, despite an overall national equality gender contract, while other areas show different ‘modernized’ and ‘non-traditional’ gender contracts. In Switzerland, ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ gender cultures map onto linguistic divisions between German and French speaking areas. Analogously, different social and ethnic groups of lone mothers in Britain show different ‘gendered moral rationalities’ towards combining paid work and motherhood, despite living within the same policy regime (Duncan and Edwards 1999). This differentiation within national social policy regimes supports Pfau-Effinger’s argument that both variations in women’s uptake of paid work, and the different availability of welfare services associated with these (public childcare etc.), result from differences in deep-seated and long-lasting gender cultures about the position of women in families, and how they should combine caring and economic work.

However, it remains that local and regional differences in family formations remain underresearched. Research in sociology on families and family practices almost completely ignore spatial variation, while, as we have seen, interest in social policy is mostly confined to national differences. On the other hand the ‘new regionalism’ of contemporary economic geography remains overly focused on the space economies of formal employment, neglecting those other social and cultural processes – like those in families – that help create and reproduce regional differences (cf. Webb and
Similarly, the literature on the geography of labour markets pays little attention to family practices despite their arguably central importance to understanding gender role construction. Ironically, geography itself has come to neglect its earlier tradition of research on gender differences over space (Perrons 2001). Our purpose in this paper is therefore to describe the nature and level of regional and local variations in family formations within one country, using Britain as an example.

We concentrate on partnering and parenting as constituting the ‘core’ of families, although of course there are many other social relationships carried out within families. First, we briefly discuss how we measure spatial differences in partnering and parenting. We then go on to show how there is no standard British family in any geographical sense. Rather, different sets of regions and localities hold their own statistical norms for family life. For descriptive clarity, where data presentation can be complex and where explanation requires detailed comment, we have illustrated our arguments using Lancashire and Yorkshire as an example. This discussion leads to the question of origins – where do these different spatial norms come from, and how are they reproduced? In the absence of definitive British research, we speculate as to how this family geography may be related to the existence of regional gender cultures.

Methodologically, the paper is based on ‘extensive’ research, where we use statistical data to describe overall patterns and distinguishing features in the British geography of family formations. This methodology does not allow us to do much more than to speculate about how and why these patterns emerge. For this, ‘intensive’ research would be needed, probably using qualitative methods, which can access more directly the social and cultural processes creating these patterns. However, we follow Andrew Sayer (1992) in seeing these alternative research designs as complimentary, where each design has its particular strengths and weaknesses. The tendency for researchers to privilege either extensive work using quantitative methods, or intensive work using qualitative methods, not only cuts off this complimentarity, but also encourages unwarranted claims about the scope and strength of research results. (Typically, intensive research is often used to make unwarranted claims about generality and representativeness, while extensive research is often forced into making unwarranted claims about process and explanation.) In this case, description of the geography of family formations can be seen as a starting point when the research issue remains generally unexplored, and where its nature and scope is uncertain. Not only may these spatial patterns be important enough in themselves, but they also point the way to further work. What is the reason for these variations? Acknowledgement and description is necessary in order that explanation and application can proceed. In this way, we hope that our work will stimulate complementary intensive research, which can take further the issue of how geographical variations in the social construction of family formations come about. It is with this in mind that we attempt, in the Conclusion, to link our descriptive information to some of the more intensive, process-oriented research that has been published to date. Similarly, we only briefly mention some of the implications for social policy in our Conclusion. Again, this is something we hope will be taken up by future work.

**Measuring and theorizing variations in family formations in Britain**

We measure spatial differences in partnering and parenting practices by using four indices. First, a Motherhood Employment Effect (MEE) describes geographical variations in adherence to and deviation from ‘traditional’ male breadwinner/female homemaker partnering practices. Second, a Family Conventionality (FC) index indicates spatial differences in the social evaluation of the importance of marriage for parenting. We combine these two indices to provide an overall measure of adherence to, or departure from, the ‘traditional’ family formation – the married breadwinner/homemaker parent couple. Third, a Traditional Household index (TC) describes patterns in adherence to and departure from the ‘traditional’ heterosexual couple/dependent wife household model more generally, for non-parents as well as parents. Finally, a Family Restructuring index (FR) gives information on spatial patterns in departure from marriage as a partnering and parenting form.1

We have mapped these indices on the District Council (DC) scale, the smallest standard local government level in Britain at the time of the 1991 census, which is our chief source of data.2 This is for two reasons. First, we can build up from this
scale to discover regional groupings and, secondly, DCs can also be taken to approximate Travel to Work Areas (TTWAs) – which spatially link commuting to job opportunities – at a scale appropriate for women and the lower skilled.3

This research design introduces some further general problems. First is that of representing social relations through spatial patterns. Variable spatial units themselves will aggregate or cut across information, different social processes can lead to the same spatial outcome, and the ecological fallacy prevents any simple projection from aggregate patterns to social behaviour. On the other hand this is better than the normal social science assumption of just one uniform spatial unit – the nation state! More positively, visualization through mapping is an efficient way to represent simultaneous universality and diversity. Secondly, the source material is largely restricted to the 1991 Census, a now outdated snapshot of an unfolding social landscape. At the same time our statistical indicators depend upon making proxy assumptions, some more heroic than others. Nevertheless, we consider that the indicators do indeed provide an indication of relative variation, and we are encouraged in that they do produce recognizable and coherent geographies which can be associated with other social geographies. We can at least provide a descriptive baseline. Because of these limitations, we feel it is important to describe the theoretical basis for these measures and how they were constructed, and we do this below. Readers who are impatient with methodological discussion can simply skip this and proceed to the discussion of the empirical results.

The motherhood employment effect (MEE)
The MEE is a standardized measure of the difference between the full-time employment rate of partnered mothers (i.e. with dependent children) and the full-time employment rate of partnered non-mothers (i.e. without dependent children) in the prime ‘motherhood’ age range of 20–45 years. It is constructed from the individual 2 per cent Sample of Anonymised Records (SARs, where some smaller DCs are spatially aggregated) derived from the 1991 British census,4 and is inspired by Sackmann’s (1998, 2000) analogous ‘motherhood effect’ index for EU countries.

The MEE represents the withdrawal of mothers from full-time paid work into either what the GB Census labels ‘economic inactivity’ – in fact usually full-time, but unpaid, caring and domestic work – or into part-time employment combined with such unpaid work. Most part-time paid work by partnered mothers in Britain – as in much of the EU – can be taken as an index of withdrawal from a paid worker role in that it is usually seen (by both partners) as supplementary to a caring role. It becomes organized around the priority of unpaid caring and domestic work both in terms of taking up employment and hours worked. Partly for this reason, mothers’ part-time employment is often short time and low paid. Certainly it is with fathers and mothers of dependent children that gendered divisions in employment, and disparities in earned income, are strongest in Britain (Dex 1999, Breughel 2000). It is important to point out here that we are not arguing that women’s part-time work is unimportant, either to themselves or to household incomes. It is usually much more than ‘pin money’. Some mothers, indeed, may be able to use part-time work (usually long part-time) as a temporary expedient in maintaining a worker role. But we do claim that, for most, part-time work indicates withdrawal from a worker role in a social and cultural sense. Partnered mothers who work full-time also usually carry out much more unpaid caring and domestic household work than male partners (Sullivan 2000), but in this case much caring work has also to be carried out by someone else apart from the mother, while unpaid work schedules must be organized around paid work times, rather than vice-versa. Full-time work also offers substantially increased income. In this way the ‘traditional’ male breadwinner/female homemaker duality is severely qualified when a female partner works longer hours. Using the difference between mothers and non-mothers further controls for the effects of local economies. Lone mothers are excluded because of their particular position in terms of childcare and income needs, and where their frequency also varies dramatically between areas.

The theoretical basis for the MEE follows the concept of gender cultures as described earlier. This claims that regional and local differences in women’s employment patterns are not only influenced by geographical variations in the availability of jobs at the local labour market level (which the MEE attempts to standardize), or by the varying provision of welfare services supporting working women. According to this argument, these are
secondary, exogenous influences, where instead variations in women’s employment rates are crucially influenced by local social and institutional ideas about what men and women ought to do. In some places mothers are generally seen as mothers caring for children at home, maybe with some part-time paid work when the children are at school. In other places mothers are seen as workers, where children are cared for by others in work hours. The MEE is thus designed to measure geographical differences on a male breadwinner/female homemaker–two adult workers normative continuum, as an index of this varying social interpretation of motherhood.

There are four indicator weaknesses with the MEE. First, partnered women sometimes carry out substantially more ‘gainful’ work than officially recorded, for example in family businesses. However, this work is again usually socially and temporally placed as supplementary to the social role of homemaking and caring. Indeed it is often unpaid. This problem can therefore be discounted given our aim of measuring relative differences in socially ascribed gender roles. Second, older ‘non-mother’ women will have often been mothers with dependent children in the past, and will have lost both human capital and labour market orientation. This ‘inherited’ motherhood effect will be on the wrong side of the equation, as it were. Third, caring for elderly or sick parents and other relatives and friends is not distinguished, and again will appear on the wrong side of the equation among non-mothers. Our formulation of the MEE will minimize these latter two problems however, as partnered women without dependent children aged over 44 years are excluded from the index and it is in this age group that the majority of ‘previous’ mothers and carers for the sick and elderly – especially those with heavy responsibilities – are located (ONS 1998). These first three problems with the MEE should have a minimal effect on its efficacy in indicating relative spatial differences.

A more troublesome problem can arise if some areas have low employment rates for both partnered mothers and partnered non-mothers, where the MEE will be reduced simply because of this statistical equivalence. Similar effects have been noticed on an international scale, where in Ireland, Greece and Japan for example, women often leave the labour market on marriage, not when they later become mothers (Sackmann 1998). While this was common in Britain before the war, this does not seem to be the case over recent decades (Lewis 1989, 1992). There may, however, be a limited effect of this type in Britain in local labour markets where there are few jobs available for any women, mother or non-mother. This would be a classic indicator problem where different processes produce the same patterns. However, an analysis of female job availability (the ratio of total female jobs to the total number of females aged 20–45 in 1991) showed that this problem was only marked in a few areas, mostly in Wales. We have distinguished these areas in mapping the MEE in the next section.

The family conventionality index (FC)
The FC measures the ratio of births to married couples : births to cohabiting (non-married) couples, and was constructed from the Population and Vital Statistics (1997) which aggregates 100 per cent birth register information at DC level. Lower ratios, with more births to cohabiting couples, are taken as indicating less conventionality in parenting practices, and vice versa. Births to lone mothers are excluded, as these are both strongly clustered and associated with social deprivation (Duncan and Edwards 1999). The number of lone mother births can have an indirect effect on the index however, where in some areas cohabitation is seen more as an alternative to lone motherhood, while in other areas it may be more of an alternative to marriage.

This index sees the social response to childbirth, by couples, as a good indicator of the evaluation of the value of marriage in parenting, and, through this, as an indicator of how far parenting has become ‘individualized’ rather than ‘conventional’. Cohabitation without marriage is now accepted, and practised – at least for a time – by most social groups and strata in Britain (Barlow et al. 2001 – the elderly and the religious are relative exceptions, but even for them acceptance is increasing). Cohabitation as ‘trial marriage’ is now widespread. Theoretically, the steady advance of unmarried cohabitation can be linked to an increasing ‘individualization’ of modern society, where externally applied moral codes like the necessity to marry have less salience for people’s lives, and where individual fulfilment is given greater weight (Lewis 2001). Nonetheless, as two leading individualization theorists put it ‘As traditions become diluted, the attractions of a close relationship grow’
Cohabitation should increasingly replace marriage, therefore. Whatever its social provenance, however, the practice of unmarried cohabitation is geographically variable (Duncan and Edwards 1999; Haskey 1999). Cohabiting outside marriage as a parent, although not generally seen as necessarily inferior, is less accepted and less practised than childless cohabitation. Indeed, childbirth often triggers marriage for unmarried couples (Barlow et al. 2001). There is also evidence that the needs of children are given particularly high moral status (Ribbens-McCarthy et al. 2002), and in this way qualify individualization trends even if – as Anthony Giddens (1992) claims – this is because children act as some sort of reference point in the formless sea of individualization. The proportion of childbirths to cohabiting couples will therefore provide the more discriminating indicator of the relative levels of traditional attitudes to marriage and parenting. While 28 per cent of births were to unmarried parents living at the same address by 1997, this proportion was highly variable geographically, as we shall show in the next section. In some areas having a child is generally viewed to mean marriage (‘conventional’ in accepting a traditional, externally imposed moral code), while in others having a child outside marriage is commonly seen as good enough (‘individualized’).

The traditional household and family restructuring indices

These two measures are both based on variables taken from the 100 per cent Local Base Statistics (LBS) of the 1991 Census. The Traditional Household (TC) index was constructed from the number of single, multi-couple or same-sex households as a proportion of all households with members up to retirement age, and the proportion of ‘married domestic workers’ (defined as married women without paid work). The first variable gives an indication of the relative prevalence of alternatives to the normative ideal heterosexual couple family. We have excluded households over retirement age, where it is most common that deviation from this ideal is involuntary due to the death of one partner. The second variable gives a more direct measure of household ‘traditionality’, where women are both without an independent income (including part-time work), and are generally subject to the informal, but socially well recognized, ‘marriage contract’ specifying responsibility for domestic and caring work (see Duncan 1991a, 1991b).

Finally, a measure of Family Restructuring (FS) was constructed from the number of lone parents (with a dependent child) as a proportion of all families with children, and the proportion of adults aged 16–59 who were divorced or widowed. The first variable represents the degree to which the normal status of childrearing no longer corresponds to co-residence in a couple family. The second variable approximates a divorce rate, when widow(er)hood is uncommon in this age range, and represents the degree to which marriage no longer corresponds to lifelong partnership.

The geography of family formations in Britain

The motherhood employment effect

Figure 1 maps the MEE for the 278 SAR areas in Britain. An index of 100 indicates total withdrawal from full-time paid work by mothers, and 0 indicates no withdrawal. In fact, the index ranged between just over 50 per cent for areas in inner London and Lancashire, where only half of mothers withdrew from the worker role (lighter shading in Figure 1) to almost 90 per cent for outer suburban towns in the South-East of England, where almost all mothers withdrew from the worker role (darker shading).

Using Sackmann’s pioneering work (1998, 2000) on European gender roles, Britain overall appears as one of a more ‘traditional’ group of countries, with a high score (−34) on Sackmann’s ‘motherhood effect’ index (also indicating mothers’ withdrawal from the labour market but constructed in a different way to the MEE and not directly comparable). Only west (old länder) Germany (−39), the Netherlands (−43) and Ireland (−51) show higher withdrawal rates. In contrast, France and Belgium showed much lower rates (−17 and −16). Dramatically, Denmark gave a positive rate of +2. In this case motherhood stimulates women to take on more paid work. The reasons for these national variations have been discussed extensively elsewhere. Our point here is to show the importance of regional variations that disappear in using national averages (see Forsberg et al. 2000 for women’s employment in Europe). Some areas in Britain resemble ‘little Irelands’ in terms of the MEE, while
Index of couple mothers labour market withdrawal

Quartiles

- 78.3 - 88.4
- 74.8 - 78.2
- 70.1 - 74.7
- 53.4 - 70.0

low job availability

0 = no withdrawal
100 = complete withdrawal

Source: Individual (2%) SAR, 1991 Census

Figure 1 The motherhood employment effect: Britain 1991
others are more like ‘little Frances’ – although there are no ‘little Danmarks’.

The broad regional patterns in the MEE do not correspond with patterns of either economic growth or decline. Thus both Lancashire and Merseyside (areas of relative economic stagnation) and west London (with better job prospects for women) show low withdrawal rates, indicating low adherence to male breadwinner/female homemaker norms. Similarly, areas with the highest employment growth in Britain – the outer South East and East Anglia, and those with high job losses – such as the former coalmining and steel-making areas in South Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire (Beatty and Fothergill 1996), both show high withdrawal rates and hence higher adherence to male breadwinner/female homemaker norms. Nor does the MEE rate correspond with urban–rural differences. Thus some large towns show high withdrawal rates (like Bristol, Hull, Sheffield and Newcastle) as do some of the more remote rural areas in Cornwall or Galloway in south-west Scotland. However, other large cities (such as Liverpool and Manchester) and small town/rural areas show low MEEs, and hence low withdrawal from the worker role.

This regional pattern is a relatively unfamiliar one, however. In popular consciousness the more familiar regional map of Britain is that of the ‘North–South divide’. This simple picture is of course debatable, not least in terms of current government policy where even Tony Blair has been drawn in to first denying and then (under pressure from Northern MPs fearing cuts in state aid) accepting this dichotomy (Tran 1999; Travers 1999). The alternative, as originally favoured by Blair and his advisors, is to point to more precise inner-city–suburban–rural labour market differences, with ‘succeeding’ and ‘failing’ areas in both North and South. Some echoes of this can be seen in Figure 1. Overall, however, neither the simple North–South dichotomy nor more detailed labour market regionalizations, which are both based upon economic indicators of growth and prosperity and on social indicators of class and well-being, show much correspondence with the geography of gendered divisions of partnering as shown in Figure 1.

This conclusion is supported through examination of the distribution of MEE scores by local authority socio-economic type, as provided by the ONS classification (Wallace and Denham 1996) (see Table I). The ONS classification is largely based on variables reflecting social class and employment levels, although somewhat confusingly it mixes descriptive categories, using simple geographical location (‘Scotland’, ‘Inner London’) with economic geography (‘ports’, ‘coalfields’) and the geography of economic growth (‘growth areas’, ‘most prosperous’). Nonetheless, every ONS LA type (apart from Inner London) is represented in every MEE class. Those associations between MEE scores and ONS classifications which do exist are the result of definitional ‘accidents of association’. For example, the ONS ‘manufacturing’ LAs are skewed towards low MEEs, but this category is in fact dominated by former textile towns and leaves out many other towns and cities with large manufacturing sectors. In like manner the ONS ‘prospering areas’ are skewed towards high MEEs, but in fact this category is largely made up of the South East outside London. While the ‘coalfields’ category is skewed towards low MEEs (unlike our data), this small category in fact includes areas only partially associated with coalmining, and sometimes with quite different histories of gendered divisions of labour (for example, Cardiff, Stoke, Sefton and Wirral). In other words, the geography of family formations we described above does not follow the ONS class and employment geography.

This regional pattern of the MEE, and its autonomy from the geography of the space economy, is replicated in similar work. Jarvis (1997) finds that ‘traditional’ households (men in full-time work, women working as full-time housewives) are most common in the high growth areas in the south-east of England, while low growth Lancashire, together with Greater Manchester, have the lowest proportion of traditional households and the highest rates of ‘dual-earner/career’ households. These regional patterns seem enduring. In Britain, the 1981 map of women’s work roles was essentially the same as that for 1991 (Duncan 1991a; Duncan and Edwards 1999). For Germany, Sackmann and Häussermann (1994) found that the relative propensity of women to take up paid work, by region, was the same in 1990 as in 1890 – despite dramatic shifts in regional economic performance in Germany over the intervening 100 years, not to mention other fundamental social and political changes over the century. It is the regional pattern which dominates in the geography of gender divisions of labour. In more general terms, the geography of gender is not the
same as the geography of class or the geography of the space economy.

Family conventionality and individualization

Figure 2 shows the FC index for the 476 DCs in Britain. The less conventional, lighter shaded, areas include some coastal and inland resort areas, some older and disadvantaged industrial areas like South Yorkshire and the North East, and relatively disadvantaged cities like Hull, as well as some higher status towns with universities, such as Lancaster and Oxford. Some low FC areas combine several of these elements, as with Brighton and Manchester. The darker shaded areas show great swathes of ‘conventionality’ in the more prosperous South East, including west and north London, East Anglia and much of rural/small-town north England and Scotland. Some suburban DCs, and those with a large proportion of Muslim residents (for whom cohabitation outside marriage is rare) also show high conventionality. 7 In the Western Isles, strongly influenced by extreme Prestbyterianism (MacDonald 2002), the FC reached a remarkable 13.5.

Again, it is useful to place these results in an EU context, this time drawing on Duncan’s (1996) work on the ‘political family’. Here four groups of countries were distinguished, using rates of births outside marriage and divorce. First was a ‘traditional’ group of Mediterranean countries and Ireland where children were born within marriage and divorce rates were low. In a second ‘modernized traditional’ central European group, including former West Germany, children were born within marriage, but divorce rates were relatively high. Third was a ‘restructured’ or ‘alternative’ group, of Scandinavian countries and former East Germany, where divorce was high and where around half of children were born outside marriage. Finally, there was a group of ‘restructuring’ countries, including Britain and France, which were moving towards the third group. However, as with the MEE, if we look at local and regional patterns within Britain we can readily distinguish ‘little Swedens’, ‘little Germanies’ and ‘little Greeces’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ONS category</th>
<th>Low breadwinner</th>
<th>Medium low % share where GB share=100</th>
<th>Medium High</th>
<th>High breadwinner</th>
<th>GB % total ONS areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coast and country</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed urban and rural</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospering areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth areas</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most prosperous</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matured areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services and education</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resort and retirement</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban centres</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed economies</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining and industrial areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ports and industry</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalfields</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner London</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner London</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*For 243 of the 278 SAR areas: 35 were excluded where constituent DCs straddled categories
Sources: calculated from Wallace and Denham (1996), 2% Individual SAR, 1991 GB Census
Figure 2 Family conventionality: Britain 1991

Source: Key population and vital statistics, 1997
The geography of individualization and conventionality in childbirth does not completely replicate the geography of the breadwinner family, however. Some low MEE areas (with low adherence to the breadwinner family) are dominated by married-couple births (that is, with high adherence to conventional parenting norms). For example, mothers in west inner London – a high status and economically buoyant area – may usually have full-time jobs, but they tend to stay within marriage as far as having children is concerned. Conversely, some areas of higher MEE scores show low FC scores, with high proportions of ‘individualized’ cohabitant births; these are often higher status areas which attract people living ‘alternative’ family lives outside the married heterosexual family, such as Brighton and some university towns, as well as more rural areas known for escape from the ‘rat race’ of modern metropolitan life like west Cornwall and parts of Wales. Nonetheless, it appears that tradition persists in terms of the gender division of labour. These might be called areas of individualization by choice, where people actively choosing alternative lifestyles congregate often, in the process, displacing more conventional families (Butler 1997; Smith and Phillips 2001). Some old coalmining and industrial areas previously dominated by male manual work also show high adherence to the breadwinner family (high MEE scores) with high FC scores (a high proportion of births to cohabitants). These may be areas with family individualization through lack of choice. Severe economic and social dislocation since the 1980s has underpinned family change, as many potential partners simply have few assets to bring to a partnership (cf. Smart and Stevens 2000). The ex-coal and steel areas of South Yorkshire are prime examples, devastated by the economic restructuring and cuts of the Thatcher era, and now achieving ‘objective 1’ status in the EU for disadvantaged regions with incomes far below the EU average (Fieldhouse and Hollywood 1999; Charlesworth 2000; Turner 2000). Finally, some large cities like Manchester and Glasgow appear to combine elements of both metropolitan ‘individualization by choice’ and disadvantaged ‘individualization by lack of choice’.

Analysis by the ONS local authority category supports this spatial interpretation (see Table II). ‘Prospering areas’ dominated by the South East and Outer London, are highly conventional. Inner London, as Figure 2 also suggests, is more polarized; most now joins the conventional South East with only south Inner London, Islington and Barking (among the poorest London boroughs) with low FCs. Similarly, the more disadvantaged mining and industrial areas are strongly skewed towards ‘individualization’. But the association of conventionality with prosperity does not always hold. Table II shows that ‘resort and retirement’ areas (including the ‘escape zones’) are highly ‘individualized’ as far as childbirth is concerned, as are LAs in the ‘mixed economies’ category (mostly large towns and cities including Bristol, Leeds and Southampton).

These mapping results – which show both universality and diversity – allow us an insight into the debate over cohabitation and social class. Briefly, it has now been established that there is no longer any association of cohabitation as a whole with class, although there is with age and religiosity (Barlow et al. 2001). So far, so good for the individualization thesis. But there is a continuing strong link between class and childbirth within unmarried cohabitation, where unskilled and semi-skilled cohabitants show more than double the likelihood of having children outside marriage than do professionals and managers. This is reflected in Figure 2, which in part picks out such class differences in space. This class distribution is taken as support by those who see cohabitation as part of the ‘breakdown of the family’. Certainly the idea that individualization in parenting is developed more among the more disadvantaged does not at first sight bed well the very idea of individualization, which depends upon an increased ability to choose one’s own biography. Rather, as we have suggested, is cohabitation childbirth among poorer social classes an aspect of lack of choice? This may still represent a type of individualization, in that cohabitation has replaced the earlier social norm of the ‘shotgun marriage’. Furthermore, as Figure 2 also shows, some high status areas do buck the national average and show low FC scores (high individualization). This underlines the point that different groups, in different cultural and locational contexts, may ascribe different meanings to cohabitation in general and to childbirth within it in particular (cf. McRae 1999). If all this is individualization, then it will be a different sort in these different contexts.

We will now go on to examine spatial differences in both the geography of breadwinner/adult worker families and conventionality/individualization in
more detail, by using Lancashire and Yorkshire as a case study. We will examine more closely the relationship of the MEE and FC indices to social and economic factors in more detail, and also employ the Traditional Household and Family Restructuring indices to widen the scope of the analysis.

The geography of family formations in Lancashire and Yorkshire

Figure 3 combines the MEE and FC measures for the 46 SAR areas in Lancashire and Yorkshire (defined as Greater Manchester, Humberside, Lancashire, Merseyside, North, West and South Yorkshire, and some contiguous areas in Cheshire, Cumbria and Derbyshire). This area, containing 20 per cent of the British population, can be taken as reasonably representative of the range of DC differences in Britain as a whole, on a number of measures (see, for example, Forrest and Gordon 1993; Gordon and Forrest, 1993). It includes DCs classified among both the richest and most advantaged in Britain (e.g. Harrogate, Macclesfield, Ribble Valley) and the poorest and most disadvantaged (e.g. Hull, Knowsley, Liverpool). It also includes dynamic metropoles with fashionable inner-cities (Leeds and Manchester), highly conventional suburbs (e.g. Otley and Wetherby in Leeds DC), older industrial towns and coalmining areas, expanding regional centres with universities (Lancaster and York), seaside resorts, and rural, small town areas. As Figures 1 and 2 show, the area also contains dramatic contrasts in both adherence to the breadwinner family and in the value placed upon marriage for parenting.

Figure 3, although clearly representing a continuum, shows three main ‘family regions’. First, is a ‘traditional’ region with both high MEE (a traditional breadwinner norm) and high FC (conventional valuations of marriage for parenting). This is largely made up of high status and ‘nice’ small-town/rural DCs of North Yorkshire and the former East Riding, together with similar areas in south Cumbria and Derbyshire. (Ryedale and Selby DCs are ‘dragged down’ by their SAR area combinations with Scarborough and York, which

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ONS category</th>
<th>Individualized</th>
<th>Conventional</th>
<th>GB % total ONS areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low (MEE)</td>
<td>Medium Low (MEE)</td>
<td>Medium High (MEE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coast and country</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed urban and rural</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospering areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth areas</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most prosperous</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maturing areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services and education</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resort and retirement</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban centres</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed economies</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining and industrial areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ports and industry</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalfields</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner London</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*For 243 of the 278 SAR areas: 35 were excluded where constituent DCs straddled categories
Sources: calculated from Wallace and Denham (1996), 2% Individual SAR, 1991 GB Census
Figure 3 Partnering and parenting: Lancashire and Yorkshire 1990s

Sources: Individual (2%) SAR and Key Population and Vital Statistics

Figure 3 Partnering and parenting: Lancashire and Yorkshire 1990s
as subsequent indices show are somewhat less traditional). The high status satellite towns of Harrogate, Macclesfield and Trafford are included (although Harrogate has a low MEE). An extreme outlier is the Eden/S. Lakes SAR area, centred around the expanding, picturesque small towns of Penrith and Kendal, respectively. It would appear, therefore, that traditional partnering and parenting practices have a high association with class and 'rurality' in this regional context.

The only exceptions to the high status/small town/‘rural’ pattern in this ‘traditional’ region are Bradford and, to a lesser extent, Kirklees (centred on Huddersfield). There are two likely reasons for this. First, these are DCs with large Muslim Pakistani populations: for this group cohabitation outside marriage is rare and mothers’ employment rates are low. Second, Bradford and Kirklees also incorporate substantial high status, semi-rural, small town areas (including Ilkley – the ‘Islington of the North’ according to The Guardian – in Bradford, and the Holme Valley – or ‘last of the summer wine country’ – in Kirklees).

In contrast an ‘adult worker’ region shows low MEEs, as well as generally lower FC scores. This is composed of the working class, former cotton towns of east Lancashire. Here women were traditionally full-time workers in textile mills and had achieved greater social power in households, trade unions and in local politics by the 1930s (Mark-Lawson et al. 1985; Mark-Lawson 1998). The ‘classic’ cotton town DCs of Burnley/Pendle and Rossendale/Hyndburn are extreme outliers. Blackburn, with the second highest Muslim population in Lancashire and Yorkshire, has a relatively high FC score.

The third, ‘de-traditionalized breadwinner’ region shows a traditional household division of labour (high MEE), but marriage is not necessarily seen as part of good parenting (low FC). The South Yorkshire/Humberside core of this region is associated with male, manual industry where women’s traditional role was very much one of unpaid domestic and care support workers at home. So too are the port towns of Birkenhead (Wirral) and Salford on the Manchester Ship Canal. This region is now substantially ‘deindustrialized’, however, with the collapse of coal, docking, fishing, shipping and steel. Barnsley and Hull, both archetypical of this tradition, are the extreme outliers here. Manchester and Salford, where women were employed but usually part-time in casual work (Glucksman 2000), are just included in this sector.

The former textile towns of West Yorkshire – Calderdale (centred on Halifax), Leeds and, as far as the MEE is concerned, Bradford and Kirklees – are transitional both in terms of family formations and geographically, between ‘adult worker’ east Lancashire and ‘de-traditionalized breadwinner’ South Yorkshire/Humberside. This conforms to a history of lesser, if still significant, involvement of women in textile work in these towns, together with the major presence of better paid male dominated industries like engineering and chemicals.

Disaggregation at ward level of ‘upper Calderdale’ – Todmorden and Hebden Bridge – showed that these former, single industry, textile mill towns shared the ‘adult worker’ position of east Lancashire as well as being nearest to it geographically and historically. (Although upper Calderdale is also experiencing a revival led by an ‘alternative’ middle-class seeking an idealized ‘escape’ area for downshifting, ‘greenness’ and alternative sexualities – Hebden Bridge is often hailed as the ‘lesbian capital of the Pennines’, see Hill 2001; Smith and Phillips 2001). Leeds is the largest DC in Lancashire and Yorkshire in terms of population where, unlike Manchester and Liverpool, surrounding areas are incorporated rather than situated in other DCs. It is also the city with the highest percentage job growth in the UK during 1981–96, led by the financial and business service sector in which 20 per cent of the workforce are employed. Further disaggregation at the ward level (see below) showed that the large suburban areas of north Leeds, together with the small towns to the north and east (like Otley and Wetherby) were placed firmly in the ‘traditional’ category which they also abounded geographically. Working class and partly de-industrialized south Leeds was placed within, and is geographically contiguous to, the ‘de-traditionalized breadwinner’ region, while parts of inner city ‘yuppy’ Leeds moved into the adult worker category. Merseyside, the more middle-class Manchester suburb of Stockport, and Lancaster (once a working-class industrial town, now restructured around middle-class occupations in public services, Bagguley et al. 1990) are also situated in this transitional category.

The Traditional Household (TC) index, as described earlier, includes non-parents in indicating relative differences in adherence to, and deviation from, the conventional heterosexual,
breadwinner–homemaker, couple family. As Figure 4 shows, the same three broad regions as described above, with some variations in emphasis, can be distinguished from the continuum. In addition, a ‘polarized metropolitan’ category is also distinguished. First, the small town/rural and outer suburban areas, including Harrogate and ‘conventional Leeds’ (the suburban and small town wards in the north and east of the city), are dominated by traditional households. There is an east–west distinction here, where East Yorkshire and Humberside tend to be the more traditional. Second, the adult worker region re-emerges centred on the old female manual textile towns in east Lancashire. These show low scores for married domestic workers as well as quite high levels of non-couple households. (The exclusion of Blackburn, with a high score for traditional but also for non-couple households, presumably reflects the high proportion of Pakistani Muslim residents.) As before, Burnley, Hyndburn and Rossendale are outliers but now joined by the disaggregated upper Calderdale. York also joins this category, perhaps reflecting the local importance of a university; indeed further analysis of other indicators of ‘unconventionality’ (such as the proportion of single person households headed by an employed woman) picks out other smallish towns with universities. The ‘de-traditionalized breadwinner’ region of South Yorkshire and Humberside also re-emerges (although Sheffield and Wakefield are now transitional), where a continuing emphasis on breadwinner/homemaker roles is accompanied by a high proportion of non-couple households (with Hull as the extreme). As before, towns in West Yorkshire and Merseyside tend to be transitional.

The most obvious distinction in Figure 4 is a new ‘polarized metropolitan’ category, where the proportion of non-couple households is far greater than the national average, but also with a high proportion of married domestic workers. Manchester, Liverpool and its suburb Knowsley fall into this group. This perhaps represents DC averaging of inner-city gentrifying ‘alternative’ areas with more conventional inner city disadvantaged areas and inner suburbs. This possibility is supported by the inclusion in this category of two contrasting inner-city areas following ward level disaggregation for Bradford and Leeds. This used additional indicators of ‘alternativeness’ (% mothers in full-time work, % employed women living alone, ratio full-time : part-time women in paid work), and ‘transnationality’ (% international migrants and % non-English speaking). An inner-city, gentrifying area of Leeds combining both students and affluent young professionals, appeared highly alternative. In contrast, the main area of Asian and East European residence in inner Bradford showed substantial departure from the couple household norm, but at the same time remarkable traditionality in maintaining married domestic workers.

Figure 5 uses the Family Restructuring (FR) index, as described earlier, to indicate how far families are restructuring away from the couple family, both for partnering (divorce) and parenting (lone parenthood). The distribution is different to the other graphs, where the two indices are highly correlated, in that divorce often leads to lone parenthood. Given what we have discovered earlier, most DC locations will come as no surprise. Small town/rural areas, together with high status satellite towns (Harrogate and Macclesfield) and outer suburbs (conventional Leeds, Stockport) are located in the highly traditional and traditional sectors. York is again an exception. Most working-class industrial towns are located in the restructuring part of the graph, with West and South Yorkshire more traditional and Humberside moving into the restructured category. Coastal resorts are highly associated with family restructuring probably reflecting an ‘escape’ role as well as the availability of out-of-season rented accommodation, often DSS funded. (Blackpool is a regional, and national, extreme outlier.) Again, Liverpool (with Knowsley), Manchester (with Salford) and the wards of ‘alternative Leeds’ form a distinct highly restructured group.

Overall, we can distinguish four regions in the geography of family formations in Lancashire and Yorkshire – the ‘traditional’, adult worker, ‘de-traditionalized breadwinner’ and ‘metropolitan polarized’ regions as discussed above. On the one hand, as with most regionalizations, these are parts of a continuum with significant transitional areas; on the other hand the same cores and transitions are reproduced for a number of different indices, and equally cores and transitions show both spatial and social rationales. Figure 6 summarizes this in map form, although for the sake of clarity neglecting emphases, variations and transitions (for which see the text and Figures 3–5).

It has been shown above that the geography of family formations in Britain do not simply follow
Source: Local Base Statistics, 1991 Census

Figure 4 Traditional and alternative households: Lancashire and Yorkshire 1991
Source: Local Base Statistics, 1991 Census

Figure 5 Family restructuring: Lancashire and Yorkshire 1991
patterns of economic growth and decline, or patterns of prosperity and poverty. Nevertheless, we can relate these factors to family geography at the level of detailed example, as we have done here for Lancashire and Yorkshire. This more detailed analysis suggests that geographical differences in partnering and parenting practices, as indicated by the MEE, FC, TC and FR, are bound up with the history of gendered divisions of labour in the workplace and the household, and with current class, ethnic and religious distributions. This is in itself not surprising, and accords with detailed qualitative work (for example, Glucksmann 2000). The question remains, however, of how we can conceptualize the social process which bring these various associated factors together, and in so doing produces spatial patterns of partnering and parenting practices – what we might call (in ironic opposition to the hegemonic term ‘space economy’) the ‘space family’. What are the mechanisms that create the ‘space-family’? We will then be in a position to make more general statements. We will address this issue next.

Explaining the geography of family formations

Why does the geography of partnering and parenting not follow the better-known ‘North–South’ and
geographies of the space economy? While more research is needed to arrive at a satisfactory answer, the existing literature does provide some leads and speculations.

A first solution has been to appeal to historical lags in the primacy of the space economy, where current gender geographies can be seen as a hangover from earlier economic conditions. To use Doreen Massey’s (1984, 1995) memorable and now classic title, the division of labour in capitalism is also a ‘spatial division of labour’. Particular jobs, skills and occupations are differentially distributed to different local labour markets – and hence job opportunities, the development of human capital and income levels will also vary on a local level. But the spatial division of labour is also highly gendered. Established patterns of gendered work would then set traditions in which later gendered divisions of labour would develop. For example, in areas where women had long been exploited as a supplementary and ill-paid labour force in agriculture (as in East Anglia) women would remain in similar status jobs even when, as in this example, such areas entered a boom based on services and high-tech manufacturing. Similarly, but conversely, women’s high orientation to paid work in areas of past economic growth where women were central to the labour force would be maintained even when these areas went into decline. The Lancashire textile towns in Britain are a particularly striking example, where the factory system first erupted on the world and where women and mothers have worked full-time in cotton mills from the eighteenth century (McDowell and Massey 1984). In other areas, immigration and the concentrated residence of different ethnic groups may bring different traditions about women’s work to particular localities; for example, in parts of Inner London, Black mothers see full-time paid work as the proper thing to do (Duncan and Edwards 1999). Indeed, all three of these areas can be readily distinguished in Figure 1.

However, this very reasoning suggests that the ‘local economic hangover’ explanation is too simple, for appealing to ‘tradition’ emphasizes how spatial divisions of labour are intimately bound up with other social and cultural changes. It was in industrial Lancashire, for example, that women in Britain first gained greater power both within households and in public life. Women in Lancashire often have greater control over male income and ‘joint marriages’ (that is when partners share the same social network) first became a norm in this area. Similarly, Lancashire women joined trade unions on a scale unknown elsewhere in the country and became a potent force in local politics. Local welfare services were sometimes highly developed as a result. This re-negotiation of gendered power does not simply result from women taking up paid work and contributing more to the household wage. Empirical studies generally show that this has little impact in itself on the definition of gender roles within households. Rather, gender role re-negotiation seems to follow cultural redefinitions. Thus, within Lancashire towns it was the type of work undertaken by women compared with men, their relative wage levels and above all the dissolution of gendered relations of authority and subordination in the workplace that appear to be important in explaining the local level of women’s political influence (Mark-Lawson et al. 1985; Mark-Lawson 1988). Similar processes can be discerned in other areas, for example in west Inner London where more career-oriented women have gained some measure of institutional and political independence (Duncan 1991b). At the other extreme, social institutions and gender relations in family farming areas combine to minimize women’s independent role. ‘Farmer’s wives’ may be crucially important in the production economy of the farm, as well as to reproduction tasks – but socially they remain just that: farmer’s wives (Whatmore 1991). It seems that the ideology of the ‘rural idyll’, where the wife plays a central symbolic function at its domestic core, contributes as much to women’s continuing domestic role in outer suburban commuting areas as do the long commuting times undertaken by breadwinning men (Little 1987, 1997; Agg and Phillips 1998).

In other words, economic causality, even if historically lagged, is only one part of the story. It is not just spatial divisions of labour that define women’s role, it is also people’s own gendered expectations, negotiations and demands about what being a women or a man is, and what they should do in consequence. These understandings are not only informed by current or past economic conditions in local labour markets, but also by other social relations in households, neighbourhoods and community networks. Miriam Glucksmann (2000) in her book Cottons and Casuals, examining the lives of women workers in Lancashire between the 1930s and 1970s, describes just such a process. Full-time weavers (the ‘cottons’
in the title), and the less securely employed ‘casuals’, organized and conceptualized their lives in quite different ways. The cottons thought of themselves as workers. They bought ready-made meals, clothes and laundry services, as well as consumer durables, and bought childcare on a daily or even weekly basis. They took particular pride in their employment skills and earnings, clearly demarcated the public from the private, and were often engaged in the wider world of public events. Domestic labour was a less important private matter, and husbands even helped. Casuals, in contrast, took great pride in women's domestic work and performing it according to community norms. They sold their expertise in this labour to women employed full-time, providing laundry and childcare. 'Work' meant domestic work, and their daily lives were structured by domestic routines and prescriptions – even though their wages were often essential to the household and they often worked long hours in total. Help from husbands was noteworthy by its absence. The interconnectedness between domestic and paid work limited 'free time' and underpinned their self-identity as principally wives and mothers, not workers, and their memories stressed births, marriages and deaths more than public events. The cottons in Glucksmann’s study lived in Bolton – in the adult worker region of east Lancashire – while the casuals lived in Salford – included in the ‘de-traditionalized breadwinner’ category (see Figure 6).

This returns us to the idea of gender cultures. Employment structures, or social policy (such as public daycare provision), do not determine mothers'/women's differential participation in labour markets and in caring work – although these may be important in a secondary sense. Rather, different countries and regions have established different trajectories as a consequence of the differing balance between alternative concepts of the normal and ideal family, and of what is 'the proper thing to do' as far as women and men, and in particular mothers and fathers, are concerned.

Conclusions

We began this paper by pointing out that, just as there has never been a standard family historically, there has never been a standard geographical family at any one time. The paper has demonstrated this through an examination of variations in partnering and parenting practices within Britain. Different areas show different norms in terms of their relative adherence to the male breadwinner family, as revealed by the MEE and in understandings of the value of marriage in parenting, as indicated by the FC. This 'geography of family formations' does not simply correspond to the better known regional geographies of economic and social prosperity. More detailed analysis of Lancashire and Yorkshire, additionally using Traditional Household and Family Restructuring indices, showed that more particularistic explanations of spatial differences in partnering and parenting practices can be related to the history of gendered divisions of labour in the workplace and the household, and linked to current class, ethnic and religious distributions. We concluded that the social processes that bring these factors together, and in so doing create a geography of family formations, seem to be associated with regional gender cultures.

Within this regional scale we would also expect a more 'micro' geography of family formations by neighbourhoods, although we have not examined this micro scale in any detail here (see, for example, Duncan and Edwards 1999; Holloway 1999). Local housing markets sort residents by class, ethnicity and income, and informal social processes of support and allocation, or condemnation and denial – for example, through moral judgement or informal childcare – are partly carried out through local social networks.

These regional and local geographies are in their turn aggregates – all sorts of partnering and parenting practices will be found in all areas. Our claim is twofold, however. First, there will tend to be a numerical dominance – and an idealized normative dominance – of certain forms of partnering and parenting in particular areas. Secondly, these trends are important for how communities work and for how individuals and families interact with others. Idealized and practised notions of what constitutes 'good' partnering and parenting can be quite powerful, and it is difficult to buck the trend when approval, support and resources (like informal childcare) favour certain practices above others. This is indeed a powerful reason explaining why people move – they do not do so just for the economic reasons of jobs, housing and transport, but also to move to what they see as a more sympathetic area in terms of gender roles and
family ideals (see Forsberg 1998 for Sweden). This will then confirm differences in the geography of family formations all the more.

There are two wider implications. First, we need particular, geographically situated accounts of changing families, and of the way this relates to changing socio-economic circumstances. As Jackie West (2002) concluded in her review of Gluckmann’s work, a commitment to difference and diversity requires more than postmodern rhetoric, and substantive research is needed to understand ‘the patterning, layering and structuring’ of ‘lived experience’ (West 2002, 199). In turn this implies that policies and strategies aiming to influence family life, work and employment must take into account these geographical differences in partnering and parenting. For example, in formulating policies to ameliorate the ‘work–life balance’, it is often assumed firstly that ‘work’ determines how ‘life’ will change (so that all that is needed are better means to allow ‘life’ to adapt) and, secondly, that one policy fits all. The geographical variation in family formations that we describe in this paper is one more reason for family and social policy to be supportive, rather than prescriptive.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the CAVA (‘Care, Values and the Future of the Welfare State’) research group and advisory board, to John Stillwell and to anonymous referees, for comments on earlier drafts. The work was carried out as part of ESRC Research Programme M5664281001.

Notes

1 The term ‘gender contract’ can in this context be taken as synonymous with ‘gender culture’. See Duncan (1995) for the theoretical development of these terms.

2 This paper uses only part of our research on spatial differences in partnering and parenting in Britain, with a number of additional indicators, as originally developed for the ESRC Group on ‘Care, Values and the Future of the Welfare State’ (Cava). See the Cava website <www.leeds.ac.uk/cava>.

3 Since 1991 some District Councils have been promoted to ‘unitary authorities’ which combine the local government functions of both DCs and Counties, either singly (e.g. Bristol, Derby) or in combination (e.g. Brighton and Hove, the East Riding of Yorkshire combining Beverley, Holderness and East Yorkshire DCs). In Scotland and Wales Counties have been removed entirely.

4 In Britain TTWAs are conventionally defined by a cut-off point where 75 per cent of work trips begin and end, and are therefore often much larger than DCs. This arbitrary boundary condition conflates the TTWAs of different social groups, and is biased towards full-time employed middle-class males, masking the smaller TTWAs of women – especially mothers and carers of relatives (Flowerdew and Green 1993).

5 Data had to be disaggregated, through averaging, for those 1997 Unitary Authorities that combined DCs. While all our other indices are based on 100 per cent census or birth registry information, the 2 per cent sample base for the MEE will introduce sample error. However, this is likely to be small where average SAR area sample count was 448 (the lowest was 225).

6 For the geography of employment see Atkins et al. (1996), Green and Owen (1998), Turok and Edge (1999).

7 Most of the 20 variables used in the ONS classification are direct, or indirect (for example, car use and housing) indices of class and economic growth. While there are some ‘family’ variables (e.g. per cent lone parents, lone carers and ‘dinkies’) these seem to be based on assumptions of advantage and disadvantage. None replicate the indices used here.

8 See Haskey (1996) for cohabitation rates by ethnicity. For the adherence of British Muslims to ‘traditional’ family values see Hussain and O’Brien (2000), Modood et al. (1997).

9 According the ONS classification of British wards (Wallace and Denham 1996) the Lancashire and Yorkshire area as defined here has more than twice the national average of ‘deprived industrial areas’ (an index of 289 where the UK=100) and of ‘lower status occupation’ (216). It has less than half the national average of the London dominated categories ‘deprived city areas’ (23), ‘metropolitan professionals’ (30), ‘inner city estates’ (45) and ‘transient populations’ (46). The remaining categories are ‘established owner-occupation’ (79), ‘industrial areas’ (102), ‘mature populations’ (89), ‘middling Britain’ (112), ‘prosperous areas’ (63), ‘rural areas’ (89), ‘rural fringe’ (117) and ‘suburbia’ (88).

10 The census category ‘non-English speaking’ is in fact purely based on birthplace and includes those born in the West Indies.

References


Beatty C and Fothergill S 1999 Life after mining: some observations from Presbyterian Scotland Social and Cultural Geography 3 1

Beck U and Beck-Gernsheim E 1996 Labour market adjustment in areas of chronic industrial decline: the case of the UK coalfield Regional Studies 30 627–40


Brenner N 1999 Beyond state centrism? Space, territoriality and geographical scale in globalisation studies Theory and Society 28 39–78


Bühler E 1998 Economy, state or culture? Explaining regional differences in gender inequality in Swiss employment European Urban and Regional Studies 5 27–39

Butler T 1997 Gentrification and the middle classes Ashgate, Aldershot

Charlesworth S 2000 A phenomenology of working class experience Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

Dex S 1999 Families and the labour market Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York

Duncan S 1991a The geography of gender divisions of labour in Britain Transactions of the Institute British Geographers 16 420–39


Forsberg G 1998 Regional variations in the gender contract: gendered relations in labour markets, local politics and everyday life in Swedish regions Innovation 11 191–210


Fraser K 1999 Same or different: gender politics in the workplace Ashgate, Aldershot


Glucksmann M 2000 Cottons and casuals: the gendered organisation of labour in space and time Palgrave, London


Green A and Owen D 1998 Where are the jobless? Changing unemployment and non-employment in cities and regions Policy Press, Bristol


Haskey J 1999 New estimates and projections of the population cohabiting in England and Wales Population Trends 95 1–17

Hill A 2001 ‘Lesbians the toast of the two ferrets’ The Observer, 29 July

Holloway S 1999 Mother and worker: the negotiation of motherhood and paid employment in two urban neighbourhoods Urban Geography 20 29–53

Hussain F and O’Brien M 2000 Muslim communities in Europe: reconstruction and transformation Current Sociology 48 1–14

Jarvis H 1997 The tangled webs we weave: household strategies to coordinate home and work Work Employment and Society 13 225–47

Lewis J 1989 Labour and love: women at work and home 1850–1939 Blackwell, Oxford


Lewis J 2001 The end of marriage? Individualism and intimate relations Elgar, Cheltenham

Little J 1987 Gender relations in rural areas: the importance of women’s domestic role Journal of Rural Studies 3 335–42


MacDonald F 2002 Towards a spatial theory of worship: some observations from Presbyterian Scotland Social and Cultural Geography 3 1

McRae S 1999 Cohabiting mothers: changing marriage and motherhood Policy Studies Institute, London


ONS (Office for National Statistics) 1998 Social focus on men and women Stationery Office, London

Perrons D 2001 Towards a more holistic framework for economic geography Antipode 33 208–15

Pfau-Effinger B 1998 Gender cultures and the gender arrangement – a theoretical framework for cross-national gender research Innovation 11 147–66

Pfau-Effinger B 2000 Gender cultures and the gender arrangements and social change in the European context in Duncan S and Pfau-Effinger B Gender, economy and culture in the European Union Routledge, London 262–76

Pringle K 1998 Children and social welfare in Europe Open University Press, Buckingham


Sackmann R 1998 European gender roles: public discourses and regional practices Innovation 11 167–90

Sackmann R 2000 Living through the myths: gender, values, attitudes and practices in Duncan S and Pfau-Effinger B eds Gender, economy and culture in the European Union Routledge, London 233–61


Smith D and Phillips D 2001 Socio-cultural representations of greentrified Pennine rurality Journal of Rural Studies


Todd E 1985 The explanation of ideology: family structures and social systems Blackwell, Oxford

Tran M 1999 Notion of north-south divide simplistic The Guardian 6 December

Travers T 1999 For richer, for poorer The Guardian 8 December

Turner R 2000 Coal was our life Sheffield Hallam University Press, Sheffield

Turok I and Edge N 1999 The jobs gap in Britain’s cities Policy Press, Bristol

Wallace M and Denham C 1996 The ONS classification of Local and Health Authorities of Great Britain HMSO, London

Webb D and Collis C 2000 Regional development agencies and the ‘new regionalism’ in England Regional Studies 34 857–64


Williams F 1995 Race, ethnicity, gender and class in welfare states: a framework for comparative analysis Social Politics 2 127–39