

Leeds University Business School: Research and Innovation Podcast

International Women's Day 2023: Episode 2

Speakers: Jennifer Tomlinson and Jack Daly

[00:00:00] **Jennifer:** Hello, welcome to the Research and Innovation Podcast. I'm Jennifer Tomlinson, professor of Gender and Employment Relations at Leeds University Business School.

[00:00:15] **Jack:** Hi, I'm Jack Daley, a postdoctoral research fellow in work and employment relations.

[00:00:20] **Jennifer:** So today's episode is part of our International Women's Day 2023 mini-series, and we're going to be discussing Jack's doctoral and postdoctoral research on the role of men and masculinity in the gender pay gap in the context of the financial and legal services. Jack, can you tell me about your PhD and your ongoing research?

What made you so interested in researching the gender pay gap, and particularly with a focus on men and masculinities?

[00:00:49] **Jack:** Yeah. So very broadly, my entire sort of research does explore equality, diversity and inclusion in traditionally male dominated industries. It does span a lot of different sectors, but I think especially for the discussion of today's topic, really within the financial and legal services, my PhD explored how men contribute to the gender pay gap, but just as importantly, how we as men can facilitate further progress made on that.

And I think that's really where my topic lies, especially within the gender pay gap. We often focus solely on women's careers and how they differ from this assumed normality, but that normality is one which is often rooted within masculinity. But rarely actually named or problematized as such. So my research interest really lies within that space.

Problematizing what is often assumed as non-gendered structures, such as careers themselves, as something that's ingrained with masculinity in a way that benefits the careers of men, but also then looking at men as both signs of resistance, but also agents of progressive change in the sphere of equality and diversity.

[00:01:49] **Jennifer:** And so Jack, what is it about the professional services - law and finance - that interests you so much?

[00:01:55] **Jack:** I think the finance, law, and really the wider professional services, provides a really interesting case study to locate my research in, not only because they represent the highest gender pay gaps across all industrial sectors, but in some of the issues of diversity that we already know exist within careers within these sectors.

So women are now entering the professions at greater rates compared to men, but do still remain underrepresented in the most senior high-paid roles. So, we take finance, for example, women now represent 44% of all workers, but just under 10% of all senior leaders. So it really suggests that

something's happening somewhere along the career, that's either causing women's careers to either stagnate or for women to leave the professions entirely.

There are already some specific barriers, call them that, that we note cause issues in careers in financial and legal services that were reflected in my research as causing women to suffer specific career and pay penalties. So to be successful it's assumed that you'll work extreme long hours, you'll demonstrate a near constant commitment to the firm.

You'll also have continuous full-time employment and be able to demonstrate high entrepreneurial skills in order to bring clients into the firm. And alongside this, there's this notion of your behaviours being always used, Louis Ashley's notion of being "polished". So you'll be able to network and almost get along with potential clients through their own specific interests.

And those sorts of skills is conflated with suitability for high-paid roles. Again, these specific interests are often rooted in assumptions of middle-class white masculinities, and that was something huge within my research. Men that I interviewed who were in senior positions, placed huge value on their ability, in inverted commas, to drink pints and talk nonsense, engage in a bit of a "work hard, play hard" lads culture where they did need to almost behave like one of the lads and dress like one of them also.

So they offered this, the sets offered this fantastic set for me to locate my research in based upon that existing issues of diversity and inclusion with the highest gender pay gaps. Where to be successful in your career, you do need to conform into very specific behaviours and traits, and that allowed me to then focus and perhaps identify further practices and careers that can incur certain gendered pay penalties or even premiums.

[00:04:06] **Jennifer:** Yes, and I can relate that to my own research and, and lots of research actually on organizational contexts. So could you talk a little bit in a bit more detail about the notion of kind of pay premiums as well as pay penalties?

[00:04:23] **Jack:** Yeah, so I think one of the most important findings from my research is that a lot of pay premiums and penalties all depend on how successful careers are almost narrowly defined. So you have to, to be successful, you must commit to specific practices and exhibit certain behaviours, and it's here where you can access penalties and premiums.

The key ones in my research were extreme working hours. The need to then do out of work, social networking on top of that. Accumulating work experience, in an already male-dominated occupations and specialisms, in order to bolster the CV to look suitable for promotions and performance metrics always favouring what we assume is traditionally masculine traits.

But importantly, the people who really struggle to exhibit these traits or gain from these experiences often then suffered career and paid penalties are more often than not, those who couldn't, were women.

I think one of the best examples of this as well is the hours demanded by the sector. Not only are you expected to have a physical presence in the office beyond the traditional nine to five and the contracted hours, but you are then expected to be networking outside of this to develop your own professional networks and meet clients.

Focusing on that hours aspect, extreme hours was seen almost throughout all participants as this badge of honour in which the physical presence in the office space is conflated with your performance and suitability for promotions. And immediately, obviously this creates huge issues for anyone with caring responsibilities.

Careers are assumed that you can dedicate all of your hours to the job if needed. So when you can't do this because you have childcare or any other caring responsibilities and you also don't really have that ability to offset that through using paid childcare or relying on family perhaps to take on care responsibilities.

I saw that many women were immediately almost having their wages penalized over their careers by not having promotion opportunities available to them because they weren't seen as suitable for these roles because they weren't committing the hours. And often this was in spite of actual performance.

Many of the women I interviewed still cited performing at the exact same rates, if not higher than male colleagues around them. But because men could commit more hours to the office, they were seen as more high-potential workers who would be able to progress into a much further rate compared to women who couldn't.

But a really interesting finding for me as part of this, as someone who's interested in men in the gender pay gap, was then looking at what time outside of the office was deemed acceptable within the working day. I found that men's leisure time within the working day was almost seen as favourable - that was an okay use of your time. So men will have the ability to leave the office to go to the gym, get a coffee with their colleagues, and that was seen as okay. Whereas mothers almost had to justify their time out of the office for childcare responsibilities that were seen negatively by firms.

So where we do sometimes talk about part-time penalties in the gender pay gap, this is not really what we're discussing here. Rather, it's that working patterns that demand extreme hours outside the traditional and contracted nine to five of actual performance can penalize women's wages where they simply can't commit to the same level of hours as men.

Again, the hours themselves are valued over actual performances when considering for promotion and bonuses. But I think considering performance in itself within that performance and how you actually receive promotions and bonuses and pay within the sector is often framed upon billable hours to clients completed, and then the clients that people bring into the firm.

But the issue here again, is that I often found in my research, the person who benefits most is the person who seals the deal and brings that client into it. Where any skills outside of that, including all the technical work to ensure that the right systems are in place to actually secure that client, isn't valued as equally as the person who actually goes out and brings them in. And due to issues of long hours, and then social networking on top of that, these technical skills were often there within women.

That's not to state, and I'm not stating in my research that women are perhaps more naturally inclined to technical skills within law and finance, but that this was often a rational strategy of women to excel in their, excel their abilities and skills within technicals of law and finance in which

they recognize that they might struggle to embody the long working hours and social networking demands.

But the issue still remains that these skills were not viewed as equally to client development and women who were really excelling within technical skills that added massive value to firms were not seen as equally suitable for promotions and pay rise compared to men.

[00:08:47] **Jennifer:** I mean, that's so interesting, Jack. There's so much detail there and it's clearly a complex issue as we know the gender pay gap is. What I really think is so interesting is that you aren't looking at, you know, kind of problematizing women. And we know that so often in research, you know, people kind of make these assumptions about women that they maybe lack commitment or they aren't ambitious or they don't have the time to invest in their careers.

And so what I think is really interesting about your work is looking at the perspectives of men and the actions of men and masculinity. So can you tell me about what men can do to help reduce the gender pay gap and support equal pay?

[00:09:32] **Jack:** Yeah, of course. I mean, I think the most important part of, and one of the core arguments I was making from my research is, if we look at senior leadership, that does still remain as male dominated. And if we are looking at people who can enact meaningful change within financial and legal services, that is predominantly men, and they're the ones perhaps who can make a real statement in making progress on the gender pay gap.

But to do so, there does need to be this recognition that careers are structured in a way that disproportionately benefits men and perhaps people who behave like them as well. I do think broader, there is a critical role for men to become much more involved, not with just within the gender pay gap, but within equality and diversity as a whole. To learn and understand the issues that women face within the workplace, and then taking steps to remove these, rather than simply, say, fixing women into this masculine mould.

And I know this isn't a unique perspective and it's not a new perspective, it's one that's been written about for years. Bell hooks writes extensively about the role of men of in feminist causes to listen and understand the experiences of women and to then use their positions within society and firms, support and progress, positive change, and I think that's where men's role may be most important in the gender pay gap.

Recognizing that careers are structured in a way that supports traditionally masculine behaviours and experiences. And then taking steps to ensure that careers are reconstructed in a way that truly places value on a diversity of experiences and behaviours.

[00:10:57] **Jennifer:** Thanks, Jack. I couldn't agree more. So the reason we're here today is to discuss this research alongside the theme of International Women's Day. And how do you think your research really speaks to the current theme?

[00:11:12] **Jack:** Yeah, the idea that equal opportunities are not enough speaks volumes to my research and the fact that it's not enough for financial and legal services to ensure that women can enter the profession at the same rates if men are then afforded more opportunities to progress their careers at a much faster rate than women.

First of all, and it's something we haven't really discussed, but my research looked at the policy side of the gender pay gap and how firms are responding. And more often than not, those responses don't go far enough, and that might be one of the reasons we are seeing progress stagnate. And that's because these policies again, often rely on fixing women into this masculine norm and showing equal opportunities into there, rather than taking the steps to address the barriers faced by women throughout their careers.

So I do think now for firms to move forward with EDI and the gender pay gap, in a way that ensures women not only have equal opportunities to enter and progress in the sector, they need to start to look at how we can remove the barriers to progress faced by women, and importantly, place equal value on skills and experiences that add massive value to firms but aren't currently recognized as such.

[00:12:10] **Jennifer:** Yeah, I couldn't agree more, looking at the structural causes and the institutional and organizational dynamics is really, really important. So I'm really looking forward to hearing more about your research and seeing it published. So, what's next for you, Jack?

[00:12:27] **Jack:** Yeah, so there is, obviously, I'm looking at publishing papers over the next couple of years, but I'm currently doing further interviews from this project to explore a concept that really came later in the research where one of the women who participated when exploring their career and barriers faced, said that, you know, the concept of the glass ceiling wasn't an issue for them. Rather, that their job existed in this almost glass bubble.

Their job had no promotion opportunities available to them rather than this invisible barrier to progression. Not in the sense of being passed up for promotions, but that there simply wasn't a job for them to move into. No job existed above them in the organizational hierarchy.

This in itself really stood out to me. And then I started noticing a pattern of women who had left the traditional career path of financial and legal services, but still remained in the sector in very highly skilled roles. They contributed massively to firm performance and added high value to the firm, often in supporting those in client facing roles or in an in-house function.

But there was this issue here in which the movement into these glass bubble roles often incurred a significant pay penalty, not only immediately but across their career, in which there's no promotion opportunities available to them, in which they exist in isolation from the career path. And if a person within one of these glass bubble positions was actually to pursue a promotion, they'd have to move back into the career path, but a much more junior level, mainly because the skills that they were exhibiting in these glass bubble roles weren't recognized as valuable or transferable back into the financial and legal careers.

But alongside this, obviously Jenny, we have a new project that's just been funded with Ioulia Bessa and Vera Trappmann, conducting research into the current state of diversity into the foundation industries. So we'll be looking at how to reduce gender and ethnic pay gaps alongside current issues of retention for minority demographics.

And from this we really hope to explore how increased diversity can not only address some of the skills shortages in the sector, but looking at helping to transform the need to decarbonize and hit sustainability strategies.

[00:14:24] **Jennifer:** Yes, and I'm really excited to get started on that research with you, Ioulia and Vera, which is funded by the UKRI Transforming the Foundation Industry's Small Grant Scheme. I'm really looking forward to working with you on that and really seeing your ideas and research develop for publication. And I think the Glass Bubbles concept is really quite distinctive and I think there'll be quite a lot of interest in that. So, that's all from us. Thanks Jack.

[00:14:52] **Jack:** Thank you chatting with me, Jenny. Thank you for hosting.

[00:14:55] **Jennifer:** And thanks to everybody who's been listening, and if you'd like to get in touch with us, our contact details are on the podcast website.