**Paradox Lost: The Disappearing Female Job**

**Satisfaction Premium**

*Colin P. Green, John S. Heywood, Parvinder Kler and Gareth Leeves*

**Abstract**

Using the original data source of Clark (1997), we show that over the last two decades the female satisfaction gap he documented has vanished. This reflects a strong secular decline in female job satisfaction. This decline happened both because younger women became less satisfied as they aged, and because new female workers entered with lower job satisfaction than their early 1990s peers. Decompositions make clear that the decline does not reflect deteriorating job characteristics for women but rather their increasingly less favourable evaluation of job characteristics. These findings fit with the suggestion that women in the early 1990s had a gap between their labour market expectations and actual experience that has since closed and that the gender satisfaction gap has vanished as a consequence.

**Keywords:** Job Satisfaction; Gender; Expectations

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*Colin Green is at the Economics Department at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. John Heywood is at the Economics Department at the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee. Parvinder Kler is at Griffith Business School. Gareth Leeves is at the School of Business, Monash Malaysia.*

**1. Introduction**

This paper documents a secular decline in the job satisfaction of female workers in Britain. Indeed, we show that the decline has been so substantial that women may no longer be more satisfied at work relative to men. The decline comes both because female workers from the 1990s express lower job satisfaction as they age and because newer cohorts of women enter work with lower job satisfaction than did older cohorts. Decompositions suggest that the decline in female satisfaction primarily reflects not changing characteristics of women's jobs but rather an increasingly unfavourable net evaluation of those characteristics, an evaluation that now comes closer to matching those of men.

Self-reported wellbeing provides insight into life events and, in the case of job satisfaction, the utility workers receive from the sum of all aspects of a given job (Hamermesh 2001). This has led to an increase in our understanding of how workers respond to variations in job and contractual conditions such as job security, temporary employment and performance pay (Booth et al 2002; Clark 2001; Green and Heywood 2008). At the same time, the so-called 'paradox of the contented female worker' has attracted enormous attention from researchers examining job satisfaction: female workers with worse labour market outcomes routinely reported markedly higher job satisfaction (Clark 1997). At best this has represented a puzzle worthy of investigation. At worst it poses questions regarding the value of job satisfaction as a metric of worker utility from the job.

The large subsequent literature on female job satisfaction has often taken as given the original ‘paradox of the contented female worker’ and seeks explanations for its existence (Bender et al. 2005; Kifle et al, 2014; Kristensen and Johansson 2008; Mumford and Smith 2015; Sloane and Williams 2000). As Carleton and Clain (2012: 331) put it, "the common approach to the issue has been to search for some previous overlooked factor, that once included in the analysis, causes the gender difference to disappear."

This paper revisits the paradox of the contented female worker, returning to the original specification and data source used by Clark (1997) and estimates the trajectory of female job satisfaction over the two decades since that seminal paper.[[1]](#endnote-1) We confirm the original female job satisfaction premium highlighted by Clark in the early 1990s using the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS). Yet, rather than take its current existence for granted, we demonstrate that the premium has now essentially disappeared as a result of a sharp decline in female job satisfaction over the intervening years. Thus, the task of explaining the original contented female worker should be augmented with the task of explaining the loss of that contentment.

Our detailed examination of job satisfaction in Britain fits into a broader debate over the gender pattern of self-reported life satisfaction. Stevenson and Wolfers (2009) document that subjective life satisfaction of women has declined in the United States such that the traditional gender gap has vanished and the new gender gap is one with higher subjective well-being for men. This they see as a paradox in its own right as the lives of women (and perhaps especially the work life of women) improved over the time examined.[[2]](#endnote-2) While not focusing specifically on job satisfaction, they show a remarkably robust decline that applies to those working and those not working and to those with and without dependent children. Moreover, they present evidence that the decline relative to men is common across other countries. Nonetheless, Herbst (2011) uses different data with a particularly large range of subjective measures of health and well-being to show that the decline for women in the United States has been fully matched by an equally large decline for men. Again, the focus is not on job satisfaction but it certainly leaves open what a detailed focus on British job satisfaction might find.

Sousa-Poza and Sousa-Poza (2003) do examine British job satisfaction and reveal a period of decline in the female job satisfaction premium in the latter part of the 1990s but they continue to show that a substantial female premium remains up to 2000, the last year of their data. We confirm this decline in the mid to late 1990s, reveal a period of stabilization in the early 2000s but then a continuation of the downward trend such that the advantage for women essentially vanished by 2014. Beyond simply adding years and documenting a further decline, we move beyond the earlier work in several ways. We confirm both age and cohort effects.[[3]](#endnote-3) Following the older cohort of women over time reveals a decline in their relative satisfaction as they gain additional experience. Moreover, there exist differences across cohorts with the more recent cohorts entering the labour market with lower relative satisfaction than did the earlier cohorts. Thus, each effect supports the decline. Such a demonstration is possible only because of our use of panel data and has not been examined either by those looking at broader trends in life satisfaction or by the Sousa-Poza and Sousa-Poza (2003) examination of British job satisfaction. In addition, we uniquely present decompositions identifying the changing role of differences due to characteristics and differences due to evaluation of those characteristics. This analysis suggests that the job characteristics of women have improved relative to men even as their evaluation of these characteristics has become less favourable and more similar on net to men.

While the original paradox of the contented female worker was not unique to the UK, early evidence indicated that it was most evident in Anglo-Saxon countries (Sousa-Poza and Sousa-Poza 2000). Yet, more recent work suggests that the female job satisfaction advantage may be most evident in Nordic countries, long considered leaders in gender equality (Hauret and Williams 2017). This finding may be hard to reconcile with the contention by Kaiser (2007) that the gender premium will disappear when women have the same opportunities as men in the labor market. Moreover, Westover (2012) shows that the set of countries for which there is a link between gender and job satisfaction varies dramatically over time. Thus, we are careful not to claim that the trends we identify extend beyond the UK and leave such comparisons for future work.

We do argue that our evidence is largely consistent with Clark's original prediction. He argued that the paradox of the contented female worker resulted from women's improved position in the labour force relative to their expectations.[[4]](#endnote-4) He came to this conclusion by first supposing that expectations were closer to reality for younger and more educated workers and then showing that there was little or no satisfaction gap for the youngest and most educated workers in his sample (a finding confirmed by Donohue and Heywood 2004 for the US). This led him to predict that the contented female worker would be a temporary phenomenon and that over time expectations would adjust to match reality. Once that match happened, the paradox would be resolved.

Our evidence shows a decline in both the raw gender satisfaction gap and the unexplained gender gap. We show this decline has been more marked for older workers. As emphasized, the decline comes from less favourable net evaluation of characteristics by women. Thus, if current women workers faced the job characteristics prevalent for the women in Clark's sample of the early 1990s, they would report lower job satisfaction than observed by Clark at that time. This seems to match the view that women are developing expectations about the labour force that increasingly reflect actual experience, that are closer to those of men, and that, as Clark anticipated, the paradox is disappearing.[[5]](#endnote-5)

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows: Section 2 describes the data source and provides initial evidence with respect to the gender job satisfaction gap; Section 3 examines how this gap has changed over the past 2 decades; Section 4 decomposes this trend while Section 5 concludes.

1. **Data** **and Preliminary Evidence:**

The data used in this paper are drawn from the BHPS and its subsequent expansion into Understanding Society (US). The BHPS is a nationally representative yearly survey. Initially it sampled approximately 10,000 individuals from roughly 5,500 households, this was later increased in 1999 by 3,000 additional households from Scotland and Wales, and then in 2001 with 2,000 additional households from Northern Ireland. We use the waves of the BHPS corresponding to 1991-2008, after which the BHPS was discontinued and replaced with US. The coding of US allows us to follow the participants from the BHPS for every year to 2014 with the exception of the starting year 2009.[[6]](#endnote-6) Our sample is limited to those who are part of the BHPS from 1991 to 2014 and so we do not include those observations in US that were not part of the BHPS.

Respondents to the BHPS and US answer a variety of job satisfaction questions, some of which have changed over the time of the survey. All job satisfaction questions in the BHPS are reported on a 7 value Likert scale, 1 being the least satisfied, 7 the most satisfied. Five job satisfaction questions are available over the entire BHPS panel. These are overall job satisfaction, satisfaction with pay, satisfaction with hours worked, satisfaction with job security, and satisfaction with the work itself. While the primary focus is on overall job satisfaction, subsequent examination of the sub-domains of job satisfaction is instructive insofar as they convey information regarding the sources of any gender differences. We restrict our sample to those individuals aged 16 to 64 (to 60 for women, following Clark 1997) and exclude those with missing data. This yields an unbalanced panel of 22,328 individuals. We broadly match the controls of Clark although a few changes of definitions over time force a modest deviation in specification.[[7]](#endnote-7) As will be seen, we remain able to essentially reproduce Clark's 1991 point estimates.

The full list of control variables and descriptive statistics are in Appendix A1. These demonstrate substantial changes in several of the underlying determinants. The average work hours of men and women have moved closer together. The share of women in public employment has increased dramatically while the share of unionized men has decreased. Other determinants have moved substantially but without large gender differences. These include the increase in those with a degree or higher and a decline in general health.

Figure 1 presents the mean level of overall job satisfaction on the 7-point scale by gender from 1991 to 2014. The observations from 2010 to 2015 include all BHPS respondents who formed the basis of the larger US sample. The pattern for men shows remarkably little change with nearly all the observations, including the earliest and most recent, within a narrow band between 5.1 and 5.3 satisfaction points. The change for women has been dramatic with high values in the early years nearing 5.7 points declining over the 1990s and then in the later 2000s. Indeed, the last few observations have means for women in the 5.2 to 5.3 range that is common for men. This dramatic narrowing of the gap motivates our more detailed examination.

<Figure 1 about here>

Table 1 documents the well-known gender gap in overall job satisfaction as it existed in the early 1990s. For the sake of easy comparison to Clark’s main results we report average effects from ordered probits. Column 1 displays the raw differential from a simple regression on gender in 1991 to be 0.305 satisfaction points. We then include the full set of individual and job characteristics as controls. As expected, these decrease the gender gap, but not hugely. It is also worth noting that these follow the standard patterns observed in the literature. For instance, age has the typical u-shaped pattern, pay is positively associated with job satisfaction while education is negatively associated with job satisfaction (Clark, Kamesaka and Tamura 201; Clark and Oswald 1996).

< Table 1 >

As column 2 shows, the resulting conditional gap of 0.242 matches very closely to Clark's similar single equation estimate of 0.240. Having established an approximate replication of Clark’s results, we now take the same specification to 2008, the last year of the original BHPS. The estimate in column 3 indicates a raw differential of 0.189. Even more dramatic is the drop by nearly 60 percent in the conditional gender differential in column 4 to a value of 0.108. If we move to 2012-2014, the conditional differential is 0.027, essentially zero, and statistically insignificant. In unreported pooled and fully interacted models, we confirmed that the female coefficients for 1991 is statistically different at a 1% level from that for 2008 and 2012-14, respectively. The 2008 and 2012-14 female coefficients are statistically different from each other at the 5% level. By the end of the time frame there appears to be no paradox. Men and women have essentially similar job satisfaction holding characteristics constant.

<Figure 2 >

Figure 2 presents the full time series of point estimates on the conditional gender differential from single equation OLS estimates within each individual year. While subject to fairly large variation, it shows differentials in the early years of 0.2 to 0.3 that shrink over the 1990s, partially recovers but then shrinks again from the late 2000s onwards. This period of no change in the gender satisfaction gap in the late 1990s may reflect sample variation or may reflect a process of changing expectations that does not occur continuously. In any event, very few of the estimates from 2006 to 2015 are significantly different from zero at the 5 percent level as shown by the lower confidence bound. This largely mirrors the dynamics seen in the raw differential in Table 1.

<Table 2 >

Table 2 shows that the patterns reported in Table 1 are broadly true across all domains of job satisfaction. The table provides analogous estimates for the four dimensions of job satisfaction that are consistently measured across the BHPS.[[8]](#endnote-8) In the case of job satisfaction with pay, security and the ‘work itself’ there is a male-female gap in job satisfaction initially. As with overall job satisfaction, these gaps tend to disappear by the end of our time series. In the case of satisfaction with hours worked there is initially no difference across genders. Yet, by the end of the time series, there is weak evidence that female workers are less happy with their hours than are men. We now turn to further exploration of downward trend in female job satisfaction and, critically, what drives it. This we see as broadly confirming the vanishing paradox of the contented female worker.

1. **Exploring the Trend and its Causes**

We now examine the dynamics of how the conditional gender gap has changed over time (see Table 3). As an initial step we include a yearly time trend along with an interaction between this and gender. These are included into a multi-year specification that simply pools all years of the data and is estimated by ordinary least squares with standard errors clustered by individual.[[9]](#endnote-9) The male time trend (given by the year coefficient) is negative but essentially zero, while female job satisfaction trends down at a fast rate over the period. The difference in the rates is sufficient that projections indicate that the initial job satisfaction premium of a 0.285 for women is completely eliminated within the sample period, such that it is zero by 2012. This is reflected in the actual within year estimates that show no significant difference in male-female job satisfaction in the most recent years. The second column includes squared terms for the both the trend and the interaction. The squared terms have positive significant coefficients which fits with the pattern reported in Figure 2 showing that the decline is greater early in the time period with the substantially larger decline in female satisfaction in the linear term again generating a projection of no difference in satisfaction by the end of the period. Finally, not shown is a third variation that simply includes a dummy for each year after 1991 and an interaction of that dummy with the female indicator. The patterns of these interactions again indicate that by the end of the period, there is no difference in job satisfaction by gender. Thus, if we estimate a separate equation within each year as reflected in Figure 2, or a single specification across years as in Table 3, the pattern of decline to essentially zero remains evident.

<Table 3>

We examine one potential source for the dynamics documented in Table 3 by examining the evolution of the gender satisfaction gap among workers over time. In Table 4 we report estimates where the sample is limited to those workers who are in the survey throughout the time series. By construction these workers are younger than average in 1991 as older workers will attrit out of the sample. By doing this we are effectively identifying the young in Clark's sample and following them over the time series of more than 20 years. Using the same specification as before, we find that a significant female satisfaction gap exists among these younger workers in 1991 estimates. The estimate is, however, only about 66 percent of the estimated gap on the entire 1991 sample from Table 1. This merely reproduces the observation by Clark that at that time there was a smaller gap among younger workers. We then re-estimate the identical specification on this cohort as it ages. In the last year of the BHPS, the point estimate has diminished markedly and is no longer statistically significant (column 2). Moreover, there is no significant satisfaction gap in the years of the US for which we can follow the cohort. Thus, it seems clear that the 1991 sample "aged" out of a significant gender differential in satisfaction. Put differently, the cohort of younger women in 1991 reported decreasing job satisfaction as they aged.

<Table 4>

Following a given group of workers over time means that the decline shown in Table 4 is not simply due to later entrants to the labour market having lower job satisfaction. Such a result might generate a decline in a repeated cross-section and merely reflect the changing gender composition of the labour force. Thus, over time a larger share of women select into the labour market and this changing selection pattern might drive a change in job satisfaction. In such a selection story one imagines that when only very few women select into the labour force they are those with unusually high job satisfaction but that this satisfaction diminishes to match men as their entry share approximates that of men. Table 4 demonstrates that something more is happening. Again, Clark's workers aged out of their gender gap.

Having established that the original Clark cohort of younger female workers has become relatively less satisfied over time (an age effect) we next ask what has happened to the job satisfaction of workers of different ages over our sample period. Table 5 reports estimates of gender job satisfaction gaps across the entire sample in the respective years simply dividing them by age. We arbitrarily take 35 as a cut-point but have experimented with other cut-points.[[10]](#endnote-10) Here, rather than following the cohort through the time series, we focus on cohort effects. The first two columns show that in 1991, among both the young and old, there exists a significant female satisfaction advantage but this advantage is greater for older workers.[[11]](#endnote-11) By the last two years of the BHPS both point estimates are markedly reduced. While statistically insignificant for older workers, there remains a smaller statistically significant gender gap for younger workers. By the US period, both young and old workers show a vanishingly small point estimate that is very far from statistical significance.

< Table 5 >

This revealing result suggests that while the young 1991 cohort aged out of a gender gap, the young workers of 2012 never had one! Our ability to demonstrate both age and cohort effects seems to fit with Clark's view that the accumulating experience of women in the labour force generates expectations that more closely match reality and those of men.

1. **Decomposing the Trend**

We now retain the central measure of overall job satisfaction and explore differences in the determinants of job satisfaction by gender and how those differences have changed. Our initial step is to estimate separate equations for job satisfaction by gender within each year. We apply a standard Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition by estimating these equations by OLS[[12]](#endnote-12). We stress that these linear estimates largely match the patterns evident in the ordered probit, and they are reported in full for critical years in Appendix Table A2.

We adopt the approach outlined by Oaxaca and Ransom (1994) to choose the appropriate weighting matrix for the decomposition. This determines the ‘non-discriminatory’ coefficients for each year by weighting the male and female coefficients by the sample shares of males and females in that year. Note, however, that the basic results remain if we use more extreme options such as assuming either male or female coefficients are the true non-discriminatory coefficients.

This methodology generates modestly different measures of the unexplained female satisfaction premium than those from single equation estimates. The solid line in Figure 3 presents the unexplained difference (the portion due to differences in coefficients) from separate decompositions undertaken in each year of the panel. The female premium begins at 0.4, modestly higher than those from the single equation estimates in Figure 2. The decline is even more dramatic and seemingly also more continuous. Again, by the end of the time period, the premium is essentially zero.[[13]](#endnote-13)

<Figure 3>

Table 6 summarises the results of the decomposition exercise for critical years. Focusing on the changes over time is the most instructive. In 1991 there was a difference in favour of women of 0.400 on the 1-7 job satisfaction scale. This raw gap is the difference evident in Figure 1. The decomposition demonstrates that this is more than entirely driven by differences in coefficients. The unexplained differential is the 0.422 as shown in Figure 3. The difference in perception by females of given characteristics generates their job satisfaction premium. In fact, on average, when female workers had average characteristics associated with modestly worse job satisfaction than their male counterparts, the explained gap is -.022. This fits with the view that female workers in 1991 had lower expectations than their male counterparts and were simply more satisfied with a given set of working characteristics because of these lower expectations.

< Table 6 >

Conti and Pudney (2008) stress that the 1991 BHPS has incomplete narration of each of the seven categories of job satisfaction. Complete narration (describing each of the seven potential responses rather than just the extremes) was introduced from 1992 onward. To make sure this is not driving any of our trends we also decompose 1992 in Table 6. The overall gender gap in 1992 is actually slightly larger than in 1991 and the decomposition changes only modestly. The coefficient component remains positive and equally large and many times larger in magnitude than the characteristics component. Thus, the overall point remains essentially unchanged. The importance of coefficients is enormous in the early years and, as we will see, shrinks dramatically over time.

By 2008 the gap in job satisfaction had more than halved. This reflects two countervailing influences. First, there is a marked reduction in the magnitude of the coefficient effect (that the overall perception of women is becoming more similar to that of men). Second, the job and personal characteristics of women improved relative to men. The explained portion of the decomposition is positive and so holding the evaluation of the characteristics constant, the mean characteristics of women generate greater satisfaction than the mean characteristics of men.This suggests that if female characteristics had not improved in the period between 1991 to 2008 we would have witnessed an even more marked reduction in the raw female to male job satisfaction gap.

Finally, we conduct the same exercise for 2012 to 2014. By this time there is essentially no gender gap in job satisfaction for several years. Again, the years are combined to improve precision. Female characteristics remain very close to those of men but slightly better and their judgement of those characteristics remains only very modestly better than men. The differences in satisfaction due to differences in characteristics and due to differences in coefficients are both essentially zero. These estimates indicate that the reduction in female job satisfaction across the past two and a half decades reflect a dramatic downward re-adjustment of female evaluation of their jobs. By the end of the period there is virtually no unexplained difference relative to men.

Table 7 presents decomposition results for individual covariates with the aim of exploring which are associated with the most marked changes in female-male job satisfaction over time. For clarity, we again report only 1991 and 2012-2014. This reveals many, but not all, of the coefficient effects moving toward zero. Among those with the larger movements toward zero include the coefficient effects for hours of work, having a degree or higher, being married and occupation of employment.

To illustrate these changes we consider hours of work in 1991. Here women worked greater than 8.5 hours less than men on average and that difference makes them 0.07 of a satisfaction category more satisfied at the weighted average of male and female evaluation. At the same time, women dislike hours of work much more than men and so at average hours of work, women are a remarkable 0.457 of a satisfaction category less satisfied than men. By the end of the sample period a different story emerges. Now the difference in average hours worked has fallen to less than 7 and at the same time the large difference in coefficients has vanished. Thus, men and women no longer evaluate hours of work dramatically differently and so there is little contribution to the gender gap from differences in evaluation of hours of work.

The net pattern of a shrinking gender gap due to a declining difference in coefficients is matched by responses to being married, general health and several other variables. In the case of hours of work, the declining difference in coefficients actually increases the gender gap. Women had a large negative difference due to coefficients in 1991 that vanished as just described. Thus, their relative satisfaction actually increased. In addition, some characteristics are associated with an increasing role for the difference in coefficients. This increase in this difference due to coefficients can move relative satisfaction in either direction. The positive difference due to coefficients for the public sector doubled and so is associated with increased female job satisfaction. The negative difference in coefficients due to earnings became substantially more negative and so is associated with decreased female job satisfaction. Thus, in those cases where the difference due to coefficients is growing it can move either in favour of increasing or decreasingly relative satisfaction for women. The net effect remains a smaller role for coefficient differences.

Despite some changes, the basic role of age and of pay seem to have largely carried over across the years. Thus, even at the end of the time period, men appear to value additional pay more than women. The traditional differences in how men and women value pay and hours has been evaluated by Conti and Pudney (2008). They argue that the common findings that women dislike addition hours more than men and like additional pay less than men largely reflect differences in socialization by gender when being interviewed. They show that a self-completed questionnaire that was run parallel with standard interviews for some years of BHPS may be more accurate in identifying the scope of gender differences. This questionnaire exists only for an interrupted subsample of 10 years in the BHPS. It does not exist for any of the years in Understanding Society.

Unfortunately, the years of the self-completed questionnaire largely match the period of essentially no change in the gender satisfaction gap in the data series. Nonetheless, to examine the influence of the self-completed survey we estimate the gender satisfaction decomposition for each year that it is available. The estimating equation is in all ways identical for both men and women as before other than that the measure of job satisfaction comes from the self-completion survey rather than the interview. The dashed line in Figure 3 shows the share of the gap that is unexplained by characteristics (i.e. due to coefficients). As might be expected, the unexplained difference does not exactly match that from the interview yet it is not so very different. It is above that from interview about as often as it is below and the average difference over the years is close to zero. Moreover, the two series do not show markedly different trends. While not questioning the gender differences Conti and Pudney find between the two survey techniques, it seems unlikely that the broad trend we show would be completely absent. Moreover, as we identify, the gap between how women and men evaluate hours of work shrinks dramatically even in the interview which Conti and Pudney claim exaggerates that difference. While it would be interesting to examine self-reported questionnaires from the 1991 to 2014, they simply are not available.

The evaluation of the BHPS suggests that the raw gap in gender satisfaction has fallen dramatically and that this drop is due to harsher evaluation of job characteristics by women. The premium for women in the early years was largely driven by substantial differences in coefficients (how the characteristics were evaluated) and the decline in this component accounts for the observed decline in the raw difference. The difference due to many individual coefficients shrunk while some increased but often in offsetting directions. While survey design issues caution against putting too much emphasis on any one characteristic, the overall pattern of a declining overall role for coefficient differences seems clear. We do recognize that this finding is conditional on a set of observable characteristics, which may not entirely capture all changes in working conditions over time.

1. **Conclusion**

Much attention has been paid to explaining the paradox of the contented female worker initially highlighted by Clark (1997). We take a different approach and suggest that the contented female worker has essentially vanished by 2012. The raw gender difference in job satisfaction and the unexplained gender difference in job satisfaction shrunk in the 1990s and again in the late 2000s and early 2010s. By the end of our time series, both were essentially zero. Critically this happens for the 1991 cohort as it ages. The finding by Clark that older women in 1991 had a particularly high level of job satisfaction appears to be a vintage effect. As the younger women of 1991 aged, their job satisfaction decreased rather than increased. Moreover, the younger women of the later part of the survey enter without any elevation in job satisfaction relative to men.

Limiting the focus to women we find a decline in job satisfaction generated entirely by differences in coefficients. Women evaluate jobs differently in 2012 than in 1991. If anything, there is modest evidence from both the over-time comparison and male-female comparison that the characteristics of women's jobs have improved modestly even as they evaluate them more unfavourably. We find this less favourable net evaluation consistent with the original claim by Clark that women of the early 1990s had lower expectations from their work life than did men and that this explained the initial paradox. Clark suggested that greater experience would cause women to have more realistic expectations that were more similar to those of men. When this happened, job satisfaction would be the same and, indeed, that parity seems be occurring. We are careful not to claim too much as there remain differences due to coefficients for some characteristics. While they offset each other in net, they remain. Thus, we do not suggest that men and women evaluate every set of job characteristics identically but, rather, that the net evaluation of average characteristics has converged.

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**TABLE 1**: Gender Differences in Job Satisfaction, Ordered Probit Coefficients, 1991, 2008 & 2012-2014

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
|  | I 1991 | II 1991 | III 2008 | IV 2008 | V 2012-14 | VI 2012-14 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Female | 0.301\*\*\* | 0.242\*\*\* | 0.189\*\*\* | 0.108\*\*\* | 0.005 | 0.027 |
|  | (0.0343) | (0.045) | (0.0316) | (0.039) | (0.043) | (0.051) |
| age |  | -0.050\*\*\* |  | -0.024\*\* |  | -0.004 |
|  |  | (0.012) |  | (0.0107) |  | (0.017) |
| Age2 |  | 0.0007\*\*\* |  | 0.0003\*\* |  | 9.21e-05 |
|  |  | (0.0001) |  | (0.0001) |  | (0.0002) |
| Married |  | 0.065 |  | 0.017 |  | -0.030 |
|  |  | (0.044) |  | (0.037) |  | (0.052) |
| Dep Child |  | 0.054 |  | 0.019 |  | 0.039 |
|  |  | (0.041) |  | (0.037) |  | (0.053) |
| A-Level |  | -0.264\*\*\* |  | -0.064 |  | -0.007 |
|  |  | (0.047) |  | (0.042) |  | (0.060) |
| Diploma |  | -0.229\*\*\* |  | -0.068 |  | -0.043 |
|  |  | (0.068) |  | (0.062) |  | (0.076) |
| Degree + |  | -0.441\*\*\* |  | -0.172\*\*\* |  | -0.118\* |
|  |  | (0.063) |  | (0.050) |  | (0.069) |
| Ln(pay) |  | 0.079\*\*\* |  | 0.077\*\*\* |  | 0.025 |
|  |  | (0.025) |  | (0.024) |  | (0.037) |
| Hours |  | -0.008\*\*\* |  | -0.008\*\*\* |  | -0.002 |
|  |  | (0.002) |  | (0.002) |  | (0.003) |
| Overtime |  | 0.001 |  | -0.001 |  | 0.004 |
|  |  | (0.003) |  | (0.003) |  | (0.004) |
| Union |  | -0.051 |  | -0.053 |  | -0.115\*\* |
|  |  | (0.041) |  | (0.040) |  | (0.051) |
| Public Sector |  | -0.089 |  | 0.098\* |  | 0.075 |
|  |  | (0.061) |  | (0.056) |  | (0.072) |
| Temporary Job |  | 0.162 |  | -0.118 |  | -0.084 |
|  |  | (0.105) |  | (0.096) |  | (0.109) |
| Manager Supervisor |  | 0.101\*\* |  | 0.020 |  | 0.026 |
|  |  | (0.042) |  | (0.038) |  | (0.052) |
| General Health |  | 0.159\*\*\* |  | 0.215\*\*\* |  | 0.227\*\*\* |
|  |  | (0.0220) |  | (0.021) |  | (0.024) |
| Travel Time |  | -0.001 |  | -0.002\*\*\* |  | -0.001 |
|  |  | (0.001) |  | (0.001) |  | (0.001) |
| Performance Pay |  | 0.0321 |  | 0.039 |  | 0.087\* |
|  |  | (0.0399) |  | (0.036) |  | (0.049) |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Observations | 3,849 | 3,849 | 4,558 | 4,558 | 2,463 | 2,463 |

Model 2, 4 and 6 include controls for occupation, industry, firm size, temporary contracts. Robust standard errors in Parentheses \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

**TABLE 2**: Changes in the Male-Female Job Satisfaction Gap by Domain between 1991 and 2008, Ordered Probit Estimates, BHPS

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
|  | Pay | Security | Hours | Work |
| VARIABLES |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| 1991 | 0.227\*\*\* | 0.0834\* | 0.024 | 0.215\*\*\* |
|  | (0.045) | (0.046) | (0.045) | (0.046) |
| 2008 | 0.117\*\* | 0.100\*\*\* | -0.072\* | 0.106\*\*\* |
|  | (0.038) | (0.038) | (0.038) | (0.039) |

All controls as per Model (2) in Table 1. \*\*\*,\*\*,\* indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% level respectively. Robust standard errors clustered at the individual level in parentheses.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  | (1) | (2) |
|  |  |  |
| Female | 0.327\*\*\* | 0.353\*\*\* |
|  | (0.032) | (0.042) |
| Year trend | 0.001 | -0.0008 |
|  | (0.002) | (0.005) |
| Year trend2 |  | 7.41e-05 |
|  |  | (0.0002) |
| Female \* Year trend | -0.013\*\*\* | -0.020\*\*\* |
|  | (0.002) | (0.007) |
| (Female \* Year trend)2 |  | 0.0002 |
|  |  | (0.0003) |
|  |  |  |
| Observations | 93,544 | 93,544 |

**TABLE 3**: The Evolution of the Male-Female Job Satisfaction Gap, OLS Estimates, BHPS/US 1991-2014

All controls as per Model (2) in Table 1. \*\*\*,\*\*,\* indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% level respectively. Year trend is a variable taking the value of 1 to 24 according to calendar year of interview. Robust standard errors clustered at the individual level in parentheses.

**TABLE 4** – Cohort Effects and the Female Job Satisfaction Premium, Tracking the Clark Sample, Ordered Probit Estimates

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) |
|  | 1991 matched | Clark Sample in 2008 | Clark Sample  US (2009-2014) |
| Female | 0.148\* | 0.027 | -0.013 |
|  | (0.081) | (0.091) | (0.050) |
| Observations | 1,165 | 980 | 2,961 |
|  |  |  |  |

Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\*,\*\*,\* indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% level respectively. All controls as per Model (2) in Table 1. Column (1) is only those individuals observed in both 1991 and 2008; Estimates for 1991. Column (2) individuals observed in 1991; Estimates for 2008. Column (3) individuals observed in 1991; Estimates for Understanding Society waves 2 through 6.

**Table 5**: The Gender Satisfaction Gap by Age Heterogeneity Estimates, 1991, 2008 & 2012-2014.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
|  | 1991 | | 2008 | | 2012-14 | |
|  | ≤35yrs | >35yrs | ≤35yrs | >35yrs | ≤35yrs | >35yrs |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Female | 0.263\*\*\* | 0.224\*\*\* | 0.162\*\*\* | 0.0620 | 0.019 | 0.005 |
|  | (0.0607) | (0.0698) | (0.0601) | (0.0521) | (0.048) | (0.035) |
| Observations | 1,906 | 1,943 | 1,773 | 2,785 | 2,627 | 5,541 |

All controls as per Model (2) in Table 1. \*\*\*,\*\*,\* indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% level respectively.

**Table 6** – Linear Decompositions of Gender Job Satisfaction: The Contribution of Characteristics and Coefficients in 1991, 2008 & 2012-2014.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Decomposition Results - Summary | | | |
|  | 1991 | 1992 | 2008 | 2012-2014 |
| Gap (female-male) | 0.400 | 0.459 | 0.181 | 0.013 |
| Characteristics | -0.022 (-5.5%) | 0.021 (4.6%) | 0.080 (43.9%) | 0.006 (44.4%) |
| Coefficients | 0.422 (105.5%) | 0.438 (95.4%) | 0.101 (56.1%) | 0.007 (55.6%) |
|  |  |  |  |  |

Estimates generated from OLS estimates with all controls as per Model (2) in Table 1. These are reported as appendix table A2.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1991 | | 2012-14 | |
|  | Characteristics | Coefficients | Characteristics | Coefficients |
| Age | 0.071 | 1.164 | 0.030 | 1.433 |
| Age2 | -0.097 | -0.543 | -0.035 | -0.694 |
| Married | -0.002 | 0.074 | -0.001 | 0.011 |
| Dependent Child | -0.002 | -0.007 | 0.002 | -0.033 |
| A Level | 0.021 | -0.018 | 0.004 | -0.018 |
| Diploma | 0.001 | -0.011 | -0.001 | -0.005 |
| Degree or higher | 0.009 | -0.050 | -0.002 | 0.011 |
| Ln(pay) | -0.065 | -0.686 | -0.005 | -0.879 |
| Normal Hours | 0.070 | -0.457 | -0.015 | 0.005 |
| Normal Overtime | -0.013 | 0.049 | -0.004 | -0.017 |
| Union Coverage | 0.004 | -0.029 | -0.006 | 0.005 |
| Public Sector | -0.007 | 0.039 | 0.036 | 0.072 |
| Temporary Contract | 0.003 | 0.002 | -0.001 | -0.009 |
| Manager/Supervisor | -0.015 | 0.036 | -0.002 | -0.035 |
| Firm Size 50-99 | -0.001 | -0.019 | -0.001 | -0.024 |
| Size 100-499 | 0.008 | -0.074 | 0.005 | -0.039 |
| Size 500+ | 0.015 | 0.013 | 0.002 | -0.023 |
| General Health | -0.023 | 0.089 | -0.001 | -0.010 |
| Travel Time | 0.009 | 0.020 | 0.004 | 0.006 |
| Performance Pay | -0.009 | 0.039 | -0.006 | -0.016 |
| Industry Total | 0.058 | 0.015 | -0.001 | 0.054 |
| Occupation Total | -0.054 | 0.139 | -0.007 | -0.028 |
| Regional Total | -0.002 | 0.012 | -0.003 | 0.007 |

**Table 7**: Detailed Decomposition Results, 1991 and 2012-14

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |

Figure 1 Average Job Satisfaction, Males and Females 1991-2015, BHPS and US (BHPS Subsample)

**FIGURE 2** – Estimated Unexplained Gender Gap in Satisfaction 1991-2014, BHPS and US (BHPS Subsample)

Note: The coefficients and the 95 percent confidence interval come from a single linear regressions estimated separately for each year. The specifications include all controls from column 2 of Table 1.

**FIGURE 3** – Estimated Unexplained Gender Gap in Satisfaction 1991-2014, BHPS and US (BHPS Subsample) from annual Decompositions

Note: The differential comes from separate linear regression for men and women and the associated decomposition for each year. The specifications include all controls from column 2 of Table 1.

**Appendix Table 1**, 1991, 2008 and 2012-2014, Summary Statistics

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1991 | | 2008 | | 2012-2014 | |
|  | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male |
| Age | 36.15 | 37.03 | 38.95\* | 39.61\* | 40.69\* | 41.70\* |
| Married | 0.61 | 0.65 | 0.52\* | 0.53\* | 0.53\* | 0.57\* |
| Dependent Child | 0.29 | 0.33 | 0.33\* | 0.31 | 0.40\* | 0.37\*\* |
| A Level | 0.15 | 0.21 | 0.24\* | 0.26\* | 0.26\* | 0.29\* |
| Diploma | 0.06 | 0.07 | 0.08 | 0.08 | 0.14\* | 0.10\* |
| Degree or higher | 0.10 | 0.12 | 0.24\* | 0.22\* | 0.30\* | 0.27\* |
| Ln(pay) | 5.70 | 6.11 | 6.75\* | 6.97\* | 6.96\* | 7.21\* |
| Normal Hours | 31.28 | 39.89 | 31.18 | 38.58\* | 31.29 | 38.26\* |
| Normal Overtime | 2.46 | 5.55 | 2.77\*\* | 4.05\* | 3.32\* | 4.37\* |
| Union Coverage | 0.37 | 0.43 | 0.36 | 0.28\* | 0.26\* | 0.17\* |
| Public Sector | 0.36 | 0.22 | 0.42\* | 0.21 | 0.52\* | 0.26\* |
| Temporary Contract | 0.03 | 0.02 | 0.04 | 0.02 | 0.05\* | 0.04\* |
| Manager/Supervisor | 0.33 | 0.43 | 0.35 | 0.42 | 0.37\* | 0.44 |
| Firm Size 50-99 | 0.27 | 0.26 | 0.27 | 0.27 | 0.28 | 0.26 |
| Size 100-499 | 0.23 | 0.27 | 0.21 | 0.26 | 0.23 | 0.26 |
| Size 500+ | 0.14 | 0.21 | 0.20\* | 0.19 | 0.20\* | 0.22 |
| General Health (1-5) | 4.04 | 4.16 | 3.98\*\* | 4.00\* | 3.75\* | 3.75\* |
| Travel Time | 21.30 | 26.20 | 22.31 | 26.77 | 22.65\* | 27.72\*\* |
| Performance Pay | 0.24 | 0.37 | 0.29\* | 0.42\* | 0.17\* | 0.27\* |
| Observations | 1,853 | 1,996 | 2,339 | 2,219 | 4,194 | 3,974 |

Where \* and \*\* indicates that the mean is statistically different from the corresponding 1991 value at the 5% and 1% level, respectively.

**Appendix Table A2** OLS estimates of job satisfaction by gender, 1991, 2008 and 2012-2014

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1991 | | 2008 | | 2012-2014 | |
|  | female | male | female | male | female | male |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Age | -0.0648\*\*\* | -0.0966\*\*\* | -0.0198 | -0.0171 | -0.0129 | -0.0477\*\*\* |
|  | (0.0234) | (0.0220) | (0.0165) | (0.0152) | (0.0167) | (0.0146) |
| Age2 | 0.000948\*\*\* | 0.00132\*\*\* | 0.000240 | 0.000231 | 0.000169 | 0.000550\*\*\* |
|  | (0.000309) | (0.000272) | (0.000210) | (0.000184) | (0.000210) | (0.000175) |
| Married | 0.126 | 0.00673 | 0.0728 | -0.0474 | 0.0258 | 0.00530 |
|  | (0.0800) | (0.0925) | (0.0539) | (0.0591) | (0.0464) | (0.0509) |
| Dependent Child | 0.0453 | 0.0698 | 0.0277 | 0.00303 | 0.0336 | 0.120\*\* |
|  | (0.0801) | (0.0800) | (0.0551) | (0.0569) | (0.0528) | (0.0518) |
| A Level | -0.393\*\*\* | -0.294\*\*\* | 0.0222 | -0.129\*\* | -0.151\*\*\* | -0.0853 |
|  | (0.101) | (0.0925) | (0.0625) | (0.0630) | (0.0569) | (0.0545) |
| Diploma | -0.336\*\* | -0.168 | -0.0227 | -0.0570 | -0.0479 | -0.00502 |
|  | (0.156) | (0.150) | (0.0963) | (0.0993) | (0.0711) | (0.0788) |
| Degree or Higher | -0.817\*\*\* | -0.367\*\*\* | -0.113 | -0.162\*\* | -0.122\* | -0.160\*\* |
|  | (0.136) | (0.137) | (0.0752) | (0.0784) | (0.0659) | (0.0646) |
| Ln(Pay) | 0.0954\*\* | 0.212\*\*\* | 0.0925\*\* | 0.0928\*\*\* | -0.0384 | 0.0856\*\*\* |
|  | (0.0481) | (0.0519) | (0.0397) | (0.0328) | (0.0366) | (0.0307) |
| Normal Hours | -0.0148\*\*\* | -0.00190 | -0.00850\*\* | -0.00464 | 0.00219 | 0.00205 |
|  | (0.00426) | (0.00463) | (0.00332) | (0.00390) | (0.00283) | (0.00296) |
| Overtime | 0.0105 | -0.00185 | -0.00516 | 0.00244 | 0.00157 | 0.00601\* |
|  | (0.00750) | (0.00487) | (0.00505) | (0.00408) | (0.00394) | (0.00339) |
| Union Member | -0.0947 | -0.0223 | -0.0723 | 0.00698 | -0.0620 | -0.0873 |
|  | (0.0814) | (0.0853) | (0.0600) | (0.0638) | (0.0523) | (0.0598) |
| Public Sector | 0.0168 | -0.119 | 0.0559 | 0.0792 | 0.232\*\*\* | 0.0461 |
|  | (0.114) | (0.129) | (0.0744) | (0.0959) | (0.0614) | (0.0741) |
| Temporary Job | 0.308 | 0.247 | -0.210 | 0.0461 | -0.191\* | 0.00974 |
|  | (0.189) | (0.241) | (0.130) | (0.166) | (0.0972) | (0.109) |
| Manager/Supervisor | 0.203\*\* | 0.107 | 0.0468 | -0.00441 | -0.0121 | 0.0746 |
|  | (0.0832) | (0.0859) | (0.0576) | (0.0610) | (0.0510) | (0.0515) |
| Firm Size 50-99 | -0.109 | -0.0376 | -0.0796 | -0.0266 | -0.105\* | -0.0172 |
|  | (0.0851) | (0.0979) | (0.0632) | (0.0683) | (0.0562) | (0.0587) |
| Size 100-499 | -0.342\*\*\* | -0.0413 | -0.0612 | -0.188\*\*\* | -0.227\*\*\* | -0.0646 |
|  | (0.0941) | (0.101) | (0.0699) | (0.0714) | (0.0607) | (0.0604) |
| Size 500+ | -0.175 | -0.253\*\* | -0.0812 | -0.0954 | -0.133\*\* | -0.0246 |
|  | (0.113) | (0.111) | (0.0734) | (0.0799) | (0.0661) | (0.0652) |
| General Health | 0.213\*\*\* | 0.191\*\*\* | 0.212\*\*\* | 0.232\*\*\* | 0.248\*\*\* | 0.251\*\*\* |
|  | (0.0387) | (0.0437) | (0.0296) | (0.0317) | (0.0221) | (0.0227) |
| Travel Time | -0.00135 | -0.00218 | -0.00356\*\*\* | -0.00130 | -0.000762 | -0.000989 |
|  | (0.00202) | (0.00135) | (0.00124) | (0.00116) | (0.00119) | (0.000871) |
| Performance Pay | 0.136 | 0.00666 | -0.0249 | 0.0815 | 0.0277 | 0.0975\*\* |
|  | (0.0849) | (0.0741) | (0.0576) | (0.0528) | (0.0586) | (0.0494) |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Constant | 6.899\*\*\* | 6.091\*\*\* | 6.597\*\*\* | 5.993\*\*\* | 4.748\*\*\* | 4.514\*\*\* |
|  | (0.686) | (0.524) | (0.469) | (0.431) | (0.378) | (0.360) |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Observations | 1,853 | 1,996 | 2,339 | 2,219 | 4,194 | 3,974 |
| R-squared | 0.103 | 0.073 | 0.049 | 0.068 | 0.053 | 0.065 |

All models include controls for industry, occupation and region. Standard errors in parentheses \*\*\*,\*\*,\* indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% level, respectively

1. Indeed, Google Scholar lists over 1500 citations to Clark (1997). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Lalive and Stutzer (2010) suggest that this paradox may also be reflected in their finding that women in countries with stronger equal protection legislation report lower not higher life satisfaction. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. The age effect is the change in satisfaction of given workers over time and the cohort effect is the difference in satisfaction of later entrants compared to earlier entrants holding age constant. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Dawson (2017) used the BHPS to support this notion by showing that during the period of the large female advantage in job satisfaction non-employed women were pessimistic about (underestimated) their eventual wage upon working while men were, if anything, overly optimistic. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. We note that while the net evaluation of characteristics is more similar, there will remain differences in the evaluation of specific characteristics. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. The original BHPS participants were not initially asked to participate in US and hence are missing from wave 1. They were subsequently invited to join US and entered in wave 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. For example, prior to 1999, flexible contracts were aggregated not allowing variations within sub-groups of flexible contracts. For instance, fixed term contracts and agency workers were grouped together. We also add an indicator for performance related pay and general health. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Questions on these domains of job satisfaction were not included in Understanding Society.

   [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. In unreported results we also estimated these models by ordered probit, random-effects ordered probit and Mundlak’s correlated random effects model. Doing so has little substantive effects on the tenor of our main estimates. We present the OLS results as the interpretation of the interactions is more straightforward (Ai and Norton, 2003). [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. The same cut-points have been used previously in the literature, see for instance Long (2005) and Kifle Kler, and Shankar (2014). [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Indeed, in estimates available from the authors, including an interaction of age and gender in a 1991 full sample estimate reveals that the female satisfaction gap increases significantly with age. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. In unreported estimates we also estimated our models via POLS as per (Ferrer-i-Carbonell and Frijters, 2004) and the tenor of the subsequent decomposition is essentially unchanged. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. There are typically no confidence intervals associated with the unexplained portion of the decomposition. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)