

Fathers, Mothers & Working Lives

Introduction

The purpose of this work is to discuss the impact of the changing role of fathers in caring for their children on mothers and fathers working lives. The changing role of fathers is evident in the way many countries, including social democratic nations like Norway but also other countries in the EU like UK and France (Gregory & Milner, 2011), are trying to strengthen the involvement of fathers in children's lives. This is executed through various policy initiatives that aim to achieve work-life balance for not just the mother, where scholarly research and policy attention has historically been based (Hilbrecht, et al., 2008; Wattis, 2013), but increasingly the father (O'Brien & Shemilt, 2003). Although these national policies to help parents achieve work-life balance are well-intentioned, the evidence shows the pressures exerted by globalisation perpetuates the division of labour based on gender by creating new masculinities, like 'transnational masculinity' (Børve & Bungum, 2015), that creates certain norms at work. There are real implications on mothers and fathers working lives as a result of these changes, including the mom having to give up a career, assuming more home and care responsibilities, to name a few, while fathers experience bias and discrimination if they want to assume the parental role that many national policies are trying to enforce. But before assessing the implications on mothers and fathers, done in the second section, the changing role of the father and the way it competes, unsuccessfully, with global economic priorities are assessed.

The Changing Role of the Father

The idea of fatherhood, at least in the Western context, is changing notably in the last few years. Once the 'moral overseers' (Burnett et al., 2013) who engaged in meaningful employment and remained distant from their children, fathers are now ideally conceived as the co-parent

(O'Brien & Shemilt, 2003). Acting in that capacity, fathers are to assume greater responsibility of childcare, something they expressively have desired, with Collett et al. (2015) finding fathers "wanting to have close relationships with their children, and place great value on being involved [and] emotionally engaged" (p. 345), giving rise to the "new father" ideology (Shuffelton, 2014). This cultural, ideological shift is responsible for generating policies at the national context that aims to achieve work-life balance for fathers in particular. There are certainly other pressures identifiable, including the need for full employment in social democratic countries like Norway where the state shoulders the burden for childcare expenses (Burnett et al., 2013). There is, moreover, a body of research (Milkie et al., 2004) demonstrating negative spillovers from the conflict of work and family, which has a negative impact on parents' relationship with their children. These are factors likely influencing policy changes at the national level where the goal is to try to create 'present' fathers and reduce the incidence of 'absent fathers.' The evidence presented here does reveal that policy discourse plays a role in "making men fathers" (Borve & Bungum, 2015, p. 311) rather than merely being seen as workers, a norm facilitated by expectations of men and masculinity more generally (Daverth, 2007).

The More Things Change, The More Things Stay the Same

Even though the idea of fatherhood may be changing at the national level in some countries, practically within organisations things remain the same. Fathers still work long hours and more intensely after birth, and mothers assume home and child responsibilities (an issue that will be shown more in depth in the next section) (Daverth, 2007). Hence, little changes at all in the traditional division of labour. Studies (Dermott, 2001) show only about 2 to 3% of men make use of parental leave whereas some 90 to 96% of women take parental leave. The very few men who do take time off find it very rewarding, with one employee interviewed in a qualitative

study by Kvande (2009) who said that taking six months off "was fantastic" and taught him how to "get your priorities right, family before work" (p. 72).

Why, however, more men do not take up the opportunity was explained by Borve and Bungum (2015) who attribute this situation to the global corporate economy and the way that it creates, through norms and expectations, the 'transnational business masculinity' (Connell & Wood, 2005). Transnational business masculinity expressed the idea that global markets and global corporations set the pattern of business masculinity (Connell & Wood, 2005), where for instance men cannot assume dual roles as fathers and professional workers because of employer expectations in global firms. There are many expectations, indeed, such as working long hours, time pressure, imbalances in family life and work (such as evident in the increasing lack of boundary between work and home, demanding employees to be 'always available') (Ozbilgin, et al, 2011); that is, 'total commitment organisations' (Coser, 1974). Men and therefore may want to be fathers, but it coincides with what organisations want, their complete and total commitment to the organisation. Workplaces thus constitute a site forming ideologies and practices of masculinity since this site still believes in the "men as breadwinner" (Borve & Bungum, 2015, p. 310) mentality, a mentality that devalues the caregiving role men would otherwise be able to provide for their children. Globalisation and corporations are thus implicitly involved in structuring gender inequalities.

The 'men as breadwinner' mentality may be supported by the prevailing idea of what constitutes as 'good mothers', where the requirement is usually mothers the "visible as care-ers" (Burnett et al., 2013, p. 637) and therefore would not encourage or perhaps even tolerate the mother leaving a newborn baby in the care of the father. Furthermore, the discourse surrounding the gendered 'body' may also be facilitating some of the reasons why men do not assume more

childcare responsibilities in comparison with women (Doucet, 2011). By the 'gendered body', this means, as Burnett et al. (2013) argue, women's bodies are associated with "unreliability, unpredictability, irrationality or poor health" (Burnett, et al, 2013, p. 638) whereas the masculine body is seen as "healthy, rational, reliable and highly committed, literally embodying the norm at work" (Burnett, et al, 2013, p. 638), and besides women are often 'doing' the performances of gender such as care which places their (unpaid) labour in the home (Butler, 2011). As a result of the discourses surrounding the gendered body, men are at a disadvantage in being able to access family-oriented policies. Family-friendly initiatives and policies are thought to merely apply only to women as they access them more (Singley & Hynes, 2005), and that men do not need to access them, nor desire to do so, when in fact this is not true (Kvande, 2009). Thus, for a variety of different reasons, organisations fail to take account of these social changes when it comes to the parenting role (Borve & Bungum, 2015).

The Implications for Fathers' and Mothers' Working Lives

Whatever the reason, the outcome is that it has real implications for both the working lives of mothers and fathers. As it pertains to fathers, Burnett et al. (2013) found in her qualitative study based in the UK that because of the prevailing norms that link men to work, some of the line managers denied the right men have to flexibility, even if the company did have generous organisational policies for it. Burnett's et al. (2013) results suggest that, like women, men also have to make compromises or trade-offs between family and employment (Cousins & Tang, 2004). Moreover, Burnett et al. (2013) found that on many occasions the requests made by men (fathers) to change work patterns to care for children were not taken seriously are seen as relevant in comparison with the request made by mothers. This seems to demonstrate the fact that organisations are unwilling to recognise men as fathers, a finding also shared by Gregory

and Milner (2011) who found that (male) managers are often not permitted to access work-life balance policies. In fact, many did not even try because those who "worked all hours" were classified as "good" while others who did not were looked down upon (Gregory & Milner, 2011). Fathers thus may be internalising the time commitment norm associated with transnational business masculinity, trying to live up to it by working all of the time and giving all of themselves. Complicating this may be the fact that working life in the space in which constructed male identity (Halrynjo, 2009), where, traditionally, meaning and identity is found in this space rather than the space or world of the family.

This finding may be especially true for men employed in the "post-bureaucratic forms of organisation" (Kvande, 2009, p. 59) (characterised by a project team based structure, dynamic networks, higher levels of 'empowerment'). "Post-bureaucratic forms of organisations" rely on a higher degree of employee autonomy and flexibility of working hours so that men (fathers) are increasingly spending more time in the workplace and less time with families. For instance, a qualitative study with Norway workers conducted by Kvande (2009) showed that one employee named John is given the independence to decide when he wants to take time off, but John does not use the opportunity. John justifies this decision, saying, "there is always a great deal of work to" (Kvande, 2009, p.64). This means, in other words, the "boundless work" presents a work intensity problem where a father cannot ignore work or shoulder the burden to another person if he wants to succeed in the corporate environment and fathers, just like mothers as will be discussed more below, can be influenced in negative, psychological ways (Higgins & Duxbury, 1992) because of it.

In some cases, even when fathers requested for time off, it created professional problems and prejudice. Peers looked at one working father as if he was, in the words of one interviewee in

Burnett's et al. (2013) study, a strange creature with 'two heads' whom they do not understand. This suggests men as fathers are experiencing gender inequality and finding themselves marginalised, having to endure negative peer relations when they express the desire to live up to the change in the fatherly ideal (Kvande, 2009). This may be heightened in team-based environments where for instance Kvande (2009) found team members will not ask for time off because members of the team will not understand. In that way, the work environment has a "disciplining effect" to keep men (fathers) working and committed to organisational goals. The evidence also shows that fathers are also impacted in other ways, such as their fathering practices when they are available. For instance, the case with John shows that when working in the Far East, time was lost with the children in the mornings whereas, when working in Austria, the time with the kids had to be adjusted to the working hours in Austria and these men are sometimes unhappy with their lack of leisure time (Kvande, 2009).

Fathers are not the only ones influenced by the situation. There are also significant implications for the mother, too, and mothers have been the focus of most of the research (Hilbrecht, et al, 2008; Wattis, 2013) because of the gendered nature of care work (Sullivan, 2013) and because of the duality of demands they experience as they are increasingly pulled into paid work outside of the home (Noon et al., 2013). In the case of women, because only policy changes are happening (meaning fathers are not assuming as much of the responsibility of caring for children as mothers), the physical absence of a father means that the mother has to be dependent on others to attend to activities outside the home. As an example, the mother has to change/modify her work schedule so she can assume caring responsibilities. The mother's assumption of this dual role affects her career prospects a situation aggravated by the "as hyper-masculine work cultures" in which women serve as a 'helping' role (Sommerlad, 2016)) or

perhaps the mother give up her dreams and desires of a career altogether and stay at home (Burnett et al., 2013). The mother may also assume part-time work perhaps receive lower pay, or work that is dull and boring, rather than the intrinsically rewarding (Berger, 2013).

Women also (Russell et al., 2009) experience higher levels of work pressure. Work pressure refers to the physical and mental intensity of work demands. Women experience extraordinarily more pressure when compared with men in similar occupations and positions, and as Hill (2005) found, they are also more likely to experience more work-family conflict individual stress, less family satisfaction, marital satisfaction, life satisfaction than compared with typical working fathers because of the dual demands they fulfill. This is because, as argued:

"The discourse on work-family life balance is traditionally constructed in dichotomous terms, and its gender subtext is taken for granted. It portrays a supposed universality of gender conditions based on the implicit assumptions that when women work their family life is under threat, that work and family are two separate and separable spheres of activities, that it is a woman's responsibility to keep them in balance" (Gherardi, 2015, p. 649).

In short, it creates a situation where the division of labor based on gender is perpetrated, thereby proving the time resource hypothesis (Børve & Bungum, 2015) which suggest the person who has more time available will assume more of the responsibility at home.

However, it is also important to note that there are fathers who deviate from the norm and assume the caring co-partner, "with substantial domestic work and care responsibilities", and when they assume this role the fathers, much like working mothers, they tend to earn less than their partners and may suffer from a lack of satisfaction with life because they feel that they are 'sacrificing themselves' (Borve & Bungum, 2015). Moreover, the men who use flexible work

arrangements to try and find a balance between work and being a father are paradoxically found to suffer from work intensification because of the "constant omnipresence" (Russell, et al, 2009) of work, making it difficult to leave work in the physical structure of the work environment. Further, the men who chose, and can access work-life balance policies, may not be changing anything even though these men are acting in gender expectations that deviate from the norm. As Halrynjo (2009) argues, "challenging the gendered expectations of those who inhabit privileged and underprivileged positions is not equivalent to changing the overall privilege structure that favours the hegemonic position in working life based on overwork and 'outsourcing of life' to the care position" (p. 101).

Conclusion

Overall, the work shows that there is a changing perception about the role of fathers in caring for their children. This is especially notable in countries such as Finland, Sweden and the UK where the government is trying to create policies in which will strengthen the involvement of fathers in the lives of their children. While the government's intentions may be oriented towards an important cause, this does not do much in changing the overwhelming mentality of organisations that still adhere to the breadwinner mentality and influence and propagate the transnational masculinity in which enforces long hours and limits the potential to take advantage of accessing work-life balance policies. The implications this has on mothers and fathers are numerous and mostly negative, where fathers may experience prejudice, bias and the inability to spend time with their children and mothers have to pick up the bulk of burden, with adverse effects on life and work satisfaction, as well as career prospects.

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