

Supporting fathers at work?

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Work-family policy is driven by several competing, sometimes overlapping/coinciding, normative approaches. Existing literature has focused in particular on the tension between the logics of social justice (recognition claims from below: Fraser, 1995) and social investment (intervention from above, often responding to different or broader policy objectives) (Williams, 2012; see also Hobson, 2000). In an earlier paper (Gregory and Milner, 2011a) we note the tension between these logics in the construction of men as fathers in public policy, and explore the ways in which male agency has sought to make claims for recognition of men as fathers.

In so doing, we address Joan Williams' call to reframe the work-family debate by focusing on masculine workplace norms: "Because masculine norms are a prime mover of the social power dynamics within which both men and women negotiate their daily lives, feminists need to attend to masculinity" (Williams, 2010: 2).

The work-life balance policy model has been criticised, among other things, and in some contexts in particular (e.g. the French term conciliation), as being gendered in assuming that it is women who need to balance work and family life. In our chapter for the McDonald and Jeanes book which forms the basis of this symposium (Gregory and Milner, 2012) we question this gendered construction of work-life balance and provide evidence that men increasingly seek a better work-life balance in order to spend more time at home especially when fathers of young children. Following this, we therefore also reflect on which type of measures can best support men seeking better work-life balance.

As we note in our chapter, the dominant approach in work-family policy and academic writing on work-family support tends to proceed on the basis of a default model, that is,

assuming that policies which support mothers at work will also support fathers at work. The dual earner-carer model is commonly based on three broad types of measure: leave arrangements (maternity and paternity leave and parental leave); working time arrangements; and public provision of good quality childcare (Gornick and Meyers, 2009). We argue in our chapter that the impact of childcare provision may be ambiguous since, unless it is accompanied by other measures, it is likely to further strengthen maternalisation of care; however, investment in good quality childcare which also challenges gender segmentation in employment in the sector has the potential to contribute to a wider awareness-raising about the gendering of care as well as providing support to working parents.

Working time appears to be an even more decisive factor for fathers than for mothers, because gendered work practices have tended to frame reduced working hours arrangements as “mommy track” choices (Gregory and Milner, 2008). In addition, other types of measures targeted specifically at fathers, such as mentoring, information campaigns and so on, have been shown to encourage men to take up work-family measures.

Some scholars contend that men’s low take-up of such measures indicates their attachment to the patriarchal dividend and the impossibility or at least the very marginal rate of social change (for a discussion, see Dex, 2010). They point to the well-known discrepancy between men’s and women’s accounts of father care time in time-use surveys, as well as ambiguous attitudinal survey data. We argue however that there is sufficient evidence of men’s stated desire to achieve a better work-life balance to justify attempts to formulate appropriate support policies, even if such men form a minority of respondents.

The ambiguity of men's responses in attitudinal survey does not invalidate their demands for more family time; and just as some men may over-report eagerness to participate in care tasks, there is other evidence of hidden or latent caring capacity, particularly for working-class men whose cultural norms may over-emphasise "virile" occupational characteristics (Braun et al, 2011; Chesley, 2011). Economic pressures or changes in family circumstances result in men taking on childcare responsibilities regardless of ideological orientations towards gender roles (Doucet, 2006; Risman, 2004). In sum, detraditionalisation of both attitudes and behaviours appears to be occurring without the two necessarily coinciding, or for that matter for these changes to refer explicitly to policy frames (Williams, 2008). At the same time, there is now sufficient evidence of certain types of policy having the capacity to change behaviour (for example, changes in leave arrangements in Germany and Norway).

In practice, policies to support fathers at work and promote paternal involvement in childcare may respond to different logics or a combination of them.

1. A minority of fathers express a clear wish for more time with their children and are already struggling to uphold what rights they have. Policies accessed in this way will tend to be framed in terms of anti-discrimination and depend on the prior existence of policies framed for women. Their implementation will depend on individual men's agency.
2. A liberal choice approach would agree that more men desire more time and think that if measures are put in place men will access them. Such policies will tend to be constructed in gender neutral terms which do not necessarily recognise structural or

cultural barriers to uptake, and which tend to reinforce existing socio-economic inequalities (see Williams, 2010).

3. A “parental deficit” model which focuses on paternal absence as a negative factor in child development may tend to stigmatise men, thus restricting take-up and deterring men from identifying themselves as fathers in the public sphere.
4. Research indicates the existence of strong barriers to men taking up such measures, due to strong dominant norms of masculinity constructed as breadwinner not as carer, or a lack of alternative models to this traditional one even if it is eroding. Measures to counter such barriers focus on targeted measures for men which increase their visibility in the workplace (see Burnett et al, 2010) and therefore create a sense of entitlement. They may also depend on their championing by male role models.ⁱ
5. Social norms may also be internalised to the extent that men may need to be benevolently “forced” to take on more caring roles, not just for the good of children, or in support of mothers, but for their own benefit and life enrichment. Policies falling into this category construct men as primary carers rather than helpers of their female partner, in particular through “use it or lose it” paternity leave or carer’s leave which would be accessed once the mother has returned to work rather than being taken concomitantly with maternal leave.

So what kind of measures will depend on the dominant logics of public policy in a particular cultural setting, as well as the relative strength and commitment of advocacy groups and trade unions involved in setting and pushing the bargaining agenda (see Gregory and Milner, 2009; Williams, 2010, esp. pp.42-76). The Scandinavian model provides the most obvious

form of “enforced” or “compulsory” fatherhood in which “use it or lose it” rights for men are introduced within the context of a strong normative framework of involved fatherhood and support for the adult carer model (see e.g. Bergman and Hobson, 2002) which respond primarily to a social justice model.

The question then arises which mixture of policy best meets social justice and/or social investment objectives during transitional phases and particularly where existing gender norms are strongly entrenched, and also whether policy mixes which respond to different logics may even be counter-productive in terms of producing tensions between a maternalist form of a (feminist) social justice approach (see Brandth and Kvande chapter in McDonald and Jeanes book) or between bottom-up and more coercive top-down approaches (see Klett-Davies, 2012; and see Gregory & Milner, 2011a).

We use this framework in order to examine policies in specific settings and assess what is driving them.

France and the UK: reconciling different logics of work-family policy?

In our chapter (Gregory and Milner, 2012) we tracked recent and apparently similar changes in both France and the UK, countries with different employment, welfare and family regimes. We identified a “stalled” trajectory of change in France following government intervention around the turn of the millennium. Although high-level discussions in 2008 identified recommendations for reforming of its system of long maternal leave in order to promote higher paternal take-up of leave, little progress was made in enacting the proposals, despite relative consensus within a complex institutional and advocacy network. In the British case, we observed a strong social investment logic driving policy under New

Labour governments, conflicting but sometimes overlapping with a deficit model of paternal care (concern for the social and welfare costs of absent fathers), and accompanied by an emphasis on the business case for support for working parents and reliance on businesses as the main means of achieving policy change through dissemination of “good practice” (see also Gregory and Milner, 2011a).

In line with these findings, the 2012 presidential and subsequent legislative elections in France saw little commitment by the leading candidates to taking forward the proposals on a “daddy quota”. It was left to the Greens, whose candidate Eva Joly made little impact on mainstream debates and who scored only 2.3% of the first-round votes, and to some extent to the radical left Jean-Luc Mélenchon, to make specific commitments to gender equality measures. So far, moves towards an adult earner-carer model have not figured prominently on the incoming administration’s policy agenda. We see in this the impact of economic and financial crisis which skewed policy debates towards more traditional distributive demands and eclipsed recognition claims.

However, three factors may yet ensure that proposals will come forward in the first new parliament. First, the 2012 campaign was noteworthy for effective lobbying by the Laboratoire pour l’Egalité, which produced a set of detailed proposals to which the successful candidate François Hollande pledged commitment, even if the proposals themselves did not feature in his own campaign promises. The prominence of the Laboratoire pour l’Egalité, alongside other advocacy groups such as the Observatoire de la Responsabilité Sociétale des Entreprises (which has strong political resources through its network of large businesses, and whose studies on gender stereotypes in advertising and work-life balance of top executives received wide press and internet coverage) has changed

the face of family policy advocacy in France and marked a shift away from conservative pronatalism towards a more progressive and multidimensional social justice approach.

Second, although the socialists won an outright parliamentary majority and therefore do not need to bargain with their political allies the Greens, they have indicated their adherence to the parliamentary alliance manifesto, within which the Greens' more forthright support for working parents and gender equality would provide a relatively easy platform for agreement. Third, president Hollande's commitment to placing women in ministerial posts ensured strong support for gender equality measures in the social affairs and justice ministries. In this political context, although a focus on gender equality in pay has tended to obscure the wider dynamics of structural gender inequality in the workplace and at home, it has the potential to open up the debates in the longer term, as negotiations on low pay and equal pay have already started.

At present, therefore, it is too early to tell whether any proposals to come forward in the new parliament will provide a broad social justice programme including new measures for fathers, or whether policy-makers will take a minimalist approach overshadowed by distributive claims.

In the UK, the intention was announced in the Queen's speech on 9 May 2012 to introduce measures "to make parental leave more flexible so both parents may share parenting responsibilities and balance work and family commitments", alongside a commitment to consult on proposals to encourage both parents to remain involved in children's lives after divorce. So far, the proposals on leave remain to be specified and it is highly likely that a discourse of choice and flexibility (see Milner, 2010) will constrain any moves towards an "enforced fatherhood" model, particularly as the employers' lobby has voiced strong

concerns about the cost of such measures at a time of recession (see Ross, 2012). Moreover, proposals announced in the Queen's speech to allow "no-fault" dismissal could easily be seen as constraining any sense of entitlement to leave in the workplace.

Meanwhile, Conservative emphasis on coercive aspects of parenting (parenting classes for "troubled" families) is driving policy in a rather ambiguous way: creating opportunities for welfare professionals to engage fathers but also raising fears of stigmatisation.

Advocacy groups reacted cautiously to the proposals. Sarah Jackson, CEO of Working Families, expressed support for new leave arrangements for fathers but warned that the proposed reduction of maternity leave to 18 weeks is likely to result overall in decreased parental time with children, since maternity leave is more strongly embedded in workplace and household practices. Without stronger underpinning of support for working fathers, they are unlikely to take up leave in corresponding numbers. Meanwhile, many other family advocacy groups expressed concern at the limited scope of the proposals to support families, particularly those on low incomes, at a time of acute financial crisis when, as Katherine Rake of the Parenting Institute for example put it, "Families are facing a triple squeeze of tax and benefit changes, increasing living costs, and high childcare costs" (Gaunt, 2012).

Working time trends

We argued in our earlier work that working time constitutes a key component of fatherhood regimes (Gregory and Milner, 2008), noting the importance of maternal working time regimes (norms and patterns) in couple negotiations over care and employment. In our

comparative Franco-British case studies, we showed how organisational expectations on working time interact with gendered norms about the ideal worker and the ideal carer (Gregory and Milner, 2011b). Our chapter in the McDonald and Jeanes book also pointed to international surveys which show how stated male preferences on working time are shaped by perceptions of what is currently available (Hobson and Fahlen, 2009).

Specifically in the case of the two countries selected here, we showed the ambiguous effect of the reduction of working time in France. On one hand, the continued norm of female full-time employment creates pressures for greater paternal involvement which is also encouraged by relatively low working hours overall (OECD, 2011a, 2011b). On the other, policy since 2002 has sought to incentivise overtime in an attempt to reverse working-time reduction by erosion (abrogated by the incoming socialist administration in 2012), whilst France like other continental welfare states has responded to economic crisis by short-time working. This means that although aggregate working hours have remained stable, at a relatively low level, the combined although contradictory effect of economic crisis and public policy has been to encourage further labour market dualisation, which of course is gendered as well as strongly determined by age. However, part-time work appears to have decreased slightly and the norm for both sexes remains full-time employment (between 35 and 38 hours) which makes France stand apart from a more gender-polarised OCED model with much higher levels of long hours working (OECD, 2011b).

Working time overall has remained relatively in European and OECD comparative perspective, but working time and intensity have increased for some low-paid groups of workers. Thanks to high and increased full-time employment of women, there has been continued convergence between men's and women's time spent on household tasks,

contrary to trends in all other developed countries apart from Sweden (see Sayer, 2010), because women spend less time on housework whilst men's housework time has remained constant. Reduced working time has increased leisure time for men, however, and there has been some rise in the amount of time spent by men on childcare (Ricroch and Roumier, 2011).

In the UK in contrast, economic crisis appears to have entrenched further the modified breadwinner model, with a rise in part-time work which is overwhelmingly carried out by women. In the OECD context, the UK's long hours culture appears less atypical than is often assumed in debates on working time, but its highly gendered nature is very distinctive (62% of men and 27% of women working over 40 hours a week) and the relatively high proportion of women working part-time stands out (21% of women but only 6% of men working less than 19 hours a week) (OECD, 2011b). As a result, convergence between men's and women's housework time stalled in the 1980s (Sayer, 2010).

A countervailing trend, however, is the rising number of households where the effect of economic crisis has been to shift relational resources towards female employment and male caring (see Chesley, 2011), although OECD figures suggest this is still a minority phenomenon. Nevertheless we suggest that this shift may result in more bottom-up claims for recognition, particularly as and when men in this position seek to re-engage with the labour market and their career path.

Discussion and conclusion

Our overview and update here indicate the strong impact of economic crisis on existing gendered fatherhood regimes which is likely to further stall shifts towards the adult earner-carer model in France and the UK. On the other hand, it is possible to discern a countervailing impact of ideology in the French case, where strong social justice claims have been able to respond to the political opportunity offered by public desire for administration change.

The impact of European Union initiatives, which is often invoked as an explanation for the appearance of similar policy initiatives in different member states, appears to follow the same pattern. With hindsight, it is possible to see the mid-1990s as a high point of normative work-family policy-making responding to a social investment logic, marked in particular by the adoption of childcare targets and the 1996 directive on parental leave (Fusulier, 2009). Strong advocacy of an adult earner-carer model (Ray et al, 2010) created a policy framework to which member states were required to respond through a non-binding coordination mechanism, leading scholars to see the EU as “a vital organizational body for formulating work-family reconciliation frameworks” (O’Brien and Moss, 2010: 559).

However, a number of weaknesses or gaps have become apparent. First, the shift towards a social investment logic meant that to a large extent the abandonment of the earlier social justice framing (along with financial commitment to many of the advocacy groups which had promoted it), although the logic of social justice is still apparent in the ECJ’s legal activism within an anti-discrimination framework. Second, whilst the EU has provided strong ideational frameworks for policy, implementation mechanisms are weak, leading some to conclude that its gender equality norm is a “myth” (Macrae, 2010). Third, the most

recent period has seen an erosion of the social investment logic and a breakdown of the political consensus surrounding it, with disputes in the European Parliament and Council over maternity leave provisions (and strong employer lobbying against new provisions in some countries).

The revised parental leave directive, adopted in 2010 on the basis of a new social partner agreement, advocates shared parental leave, but does not specify how it should be shared or how it should be financed. Member states are therefore given a large amount of freedom to interpret the directive, and reports on implementation to date indicate a high degree of diversity not just of existing leave arrangements but also of efforts to comply with the directive. If policy initiatives in France and the UK depended on pressure from the EU, then, it would appear that they are likely to stall.

Our analysis therefore indicates that, whilst the “Scandinavian” model of involved fatherhood and support for working fathers continues to provide an attractive policy frame, the current economic crisis has further confused an already complex policy framework. This means that any new initiatives are likely to be limited in their scope and impact. At the same time, there are reasons to believe that the impetus for change will remain strong, as individuals and households seek to make their own sense of economic and social pressures, and as advocacy organisations use available political opportunities to influence policy. Shifts within the landscape of non-governmental actors in the broad area of work-family policy point to new opportunities for individual and collective agency. Overall, this is likely to increase divergence between countries in terms of policies and outcomes, rather than convergence.

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Men, Wage Work and Family

Edited by **Paula McDonald, Emma Jeanes**

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In the last two decades there has been a plethora of research on a range of subjects collectively and rhetorically known as 'work-life balance'. The bulk of this research, which spans disciplines including feminist sociology, industrial relations and management, has focused on the significant concerns of employed women and/or dual career couples. Less attention has been devoted to scholarship which explicitly examines men and masculinities in this context. Meanwhile, public and organizational discourse is largely espoused in gender neutral terms, often neglecting salient gendered issues which differentially impact the ability of women and men to successfully integrate their work and non-work lives. This edited book brings together empirical studies of the work-life nexus with a specific focus on men's working time arrangements, how men navigate and traverse paid work and family commitments, and the impact of public and organizational policies on men's participation in work, leisure, and other life domains. The book is innovative in that it presents both macro (institutional, how policy affects practice) and micro (individual, from men's own perspectives) level studies, allowing for a rich and contrasting exploration of how men's participation in paid work and other domains is divided, conflicted, or integrated. The essays in this volume address issues of fundamental social, labor market, and economic change which have occurred over the last 20 years and which have profoundly affected the way work, care, leisure and community have evolved in different contexts. Taking an international focus, *Men, Wage Work and Family* contrasts various public and organizational policies and how these policies impact men's opportunities and participation in paid work and non-work domains in industrialised countries in Europe, North America, and Australia.

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ⁱ There is also evidence from a new UK report that fathers going through couple separation and family breakdown "suffer in silence": that is, they do not avail themselves of available support or ask for help. See Jones, Burgess & Hale, 2012.