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Margaret O'Brien
Karin Wall *Editors*

Comparative Perspectives on Work-Life Balance and Gender Equality

Fathers on Leave Alone

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This book is dedicated to our friends and colleagues of the International Network on Leave Policies and Research from whom we have learnt so much.

We give special thanks to its founders, Fred Deven and Peter Moss, who have encouraged collaborative research between members of the network, on gender and care, particularly on fathers and leave.

Thanks also to all the interviewees and fathers who participated in the eleven national studies of fathers taking leave alone.

Contents

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Chapter 1
Fathers on Leave Alone: Setting the Scene

Margaret O'Brien and Karin Wall

1.1 Main Aims and Theoretical Issues

The aim of this book is to present original research findings on the experiences of fathers taking "home alone leave" in different country policy contexts. It seeks to illuminate fathering experiences of work-family balance and the gendered divisions of parental responsibilities in diverse countries across Europe, North America and Asia, specifically Japan.

Providing care for a newborn child and negotiating work-life balance during the first years of a child's life may be seen as crucial life events in the transition to fathering and mothering. To support this transition to parenthood, public policies in countries across the world have developed earnings-compensated leave systems as well as daycare services in order to help parents reconcile work and care responsibilities (Kamerman and Moss 2009; ILO 2014; Moss 2015). Maternity leave was the first type of leave to be introduced and developed. However, over the last 30 years parental as well as individual entitlements have been introduced, thereby providing diverse and more flexible leave options to be negotiated by parents after the birth of a child. In particular, there has been a continuing enhancement over the last two decades of fathers' entitlements in order to increase men's participation in the care of their newborn children (Geisler and Kreyenfeld 2011; Moss and Deven 2015).

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Depending on eligibility criteria and type of leave scheme, fathers may be on leave part-time or full-time, at the same time as the mother or alone after the mother returns to work. An increasing number of studies are examining fathers' use of leave entitlements, the factors shaping take-up, and the impact of leave use on family relationships, division of housework and the care of children (e.g. Lammi-Taskula 2008; Haas and Hwang 2008; Huerta et al. 2013; Buenning 2015). However, little is still known about fathers' understandings and experiences of leave or their perceptions of the consequences of leave (Deven 2005; Seward et al. 2006; McKay and Doucet 2010). In particular, there is scant evidence on the lived *experience of fathers taking up the more radical form of "leave alone"*, implying daylong care while the mother works. Also lacking in the research literature is a *comparative perspective* seeking to explore and compare father's experiences of leave alone in differing policy contexts. Although there has been some pioneering research on fathers' taking leave alone in a few national settings (e.g. Norway – Brandth and Kvande 2002; Sweden – Chronholm 2002; Portugal -Wall 2014), research has yet to draw the evidence together and to take an international comparative perspective.

Research on this twenty-first century form of father-care raises four important theoretical issues which will be tackled in this book. The first is whether this type of leave for fathers tends to shift parental care away from the male breadwinner-female carer model, thereby reinforcing gender equity both in paid and unpaid work. Welfare state literature and gender studies (e.g. Sainsbury 1996; Hobson 2002) aiming to incorporate gender into the former reveal complex and often contradictory consequences of leave policies. For example, paid leave schemes and childcare services are generally seen to strengthen women's ties to paid work by raising female employment rates, reducing new mothers' labour-market exits, and decreasing their job turnover (Jaumotte 2004). However, leave provisions of longer duration are also shown to have negative effects on women's employment by eroding their human capital and making them less attractive to employers, when compared to the male workforce (e.g. Datta Gupta et al. 2008).

Similarly, entitlements for fathers and policy measures promoting the gender sharing of leave have also revealed complex consequences. Individual and non-transferable leaves of fathers are generally seen to strengthen men's ties to unpaid work by involving men in care work, promoting father-child bonds and allowing men to increase their ability to reconcile work and family life (e.g. Haas and Hwang 2008; Eydal et al. 2015). On the other hand, the evidence base is still mixed on the scale and sustainability of changes within families associated with fathers' use of leave.

A second issue is whether leave-taking by fathers is shifting the perceptions and practices of fathering and mothering and in which directions. The literature on fathering and fatherhood underlines a strong trend, in all developed countries, towards ideals and practices of more involved fatherhood (Hobson 2002; Lamb 2010). Nevertheless, the debate on what constitutes the growing involvement of fathers in parental care reveals different approaches, with some scholars emphasizing the extent to which states and societies support fathers as secondary caregivers (rather than questioning their role as breadwinners), while others underline the role

of policy in granting men entitlements to "equal" parenthood, thereby recognising men's competences for primary caregiving (Holter 2012; Hobson 2014). These two perspectives do not necessarily clash. As some research literature has pointed out, changing policies and social contexts do not always have clear-cut effects. A common trend towards changing perceptions and practices of fatherhood is not necessarily linked to gender equality in parental roles. In fact, *involved fatherhood* and *gender egalitarianism* may emerge as different dimensions and have to be conceptualized and analysed separately.

The question of changing fatherhood is related to a third, complex theoretical issue: conceptualizing the nature and type of social processes underlying the experiences of fathers on leave alone. Differing approaches and concepts are related to different disciplines (Oechsle and Hess 2012; Cabrera and Tamis-LeMonda 2013). Approaches drawing on disciplines such as child development and social psychology focus on specific processes and dimensions of parenting such as bonding, personal/physical caregiving (sometimes labelled as 'direct' care), indirect caregiving (e.g. coordination of education or childcare). Literature drawing on sociology of family and the transition to parenthood, in particular those linked to qualitative approaches, focus on processes such as the 'negotiation' of time and engagement in caregiving, the 'doing' of daily parenting, the 'learning' process related to the acquisition of new emotional and practical competences and the 'individualisation' process leading to more autonomous relationships and parent-child interactions which are less mediated by others or by social norms (Kaufmann 1996; Morgan 1992). Gender studies, on the other hand, have highlighted the processes of 'doing' and'undoing' gender, thereby suggesting that gender equality in parental roles depends strongly not only on policy and normative context but also on the agency and personal perspectives of the social actors themselves (Butler 2004; Walby 1997).

A fourth and last issue is related to the impact of differing policy and social context on the understandings and experiences of fathers taking leave alone. Comparative social policy literature has shown that states reveal different levels of attention to fatherhood, work-family balance and gender equality in early parenthood. Moving beyond the typology of welfare regimes proposed by welfare studies (Esping-Andersen 1990), leave policy research has pinpointed a variety of leave policy models, some focusing clearly on gender equality, some promoting the ideal of choice for parents rather than gender equality in parenting and others still promoting ideals of mother-centred care and secondary female breadwinning (based on part-time employment or female exiting from the labour market while children are young) (Wall and Escobedo 2013). Thus fathers who take leave alone may do so on the basis of a long-standing leave policy model promoting equal parenting (e.g. Nordic countries), of more recent policies promoting the involvement of fathers (e.g. Canada, Portugal) or of weaker state-supported solutions (e.g. France; UK); some may also take leave alone as a private family-based solution, opting out of the labour market in a context where the social legitimacy and support of new fathering practices is extremely low or non-existent (e.g. Switzerland, Japan). Policy context has been shown to impact strongly on social norms and practices, within families

and in society at large, regarding father's roles and the organisation of work-family balance (Gregory and Milner 2008; Hobson 2014; Rush 2015). The lived experiences of fathers and the consequences of leave, as understood by fathers themselves, will be also be influenced by these differences in leave policy regimes and their implication for paid and unpaid work.

A life course perspective has the potential to connect individual pathways, adult and child, with policy and societal contexts in specific historical junctures and so link the theoretical approaches described above (Elder and Shanahan 2006). Men's family and work trajectories, choices and actions are constrained by policy and societal contexts and also intersect with their partner's and child's lives (Shanahan and Macmillan 2008). That is, the phenomenon of fathers taking parental leave alone is embedded in an interconnected set of societal and personal life course processes.

In summary, the first objective of the book is to portray men's experiences of home alone leave and how it affects their lives and family gender roles in different policy contexts. A second objective is to explore how this unique parental leave design is implemented in these contrasting policy regimes. The authors' theoretical frameworks draw on three major theoretical strands: social policy, in particular the literature on comparative leave policy developments; family and parenting studies, in particular the analysis of family processes related to parent-child interactions and the care of young children; and gender studies, in particular the literature focusing on the gendered divisions of work and care and recent shifts in the gendering/de-gendering of work-family balance.

1.2 Developments in Fathers and Leave Policies: Research Messages

National policy developments provide fathers with different entitlements and opportunities for work-family balance, encapsulated by Gregory and Milner (2008) as "fatherhood regimes". In this book, we compare specific countries (Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, Canada, Portugal) which have introduced generous fully-compensated leave entitlements for fathers, such as well-paid paternity leave and explicit father-targeted policy schemes (daddy months, bonus month) allowing fathers to take up one or more months of paid parental leave on a full-time or part-time basis, with countries where policy developments have focused weakly on the enhancement of fathers' entitlements to leave (UK, Spain, France, Switzerland, Japan). The former set have been characterised by O'Brien (2009) as a "premier league" in that they offer both high income compensation with father-care sensitivity design. Comparison between countries with different policy profiles and pathways allows us not only to understand the impact of social and policy context but also to explore how the latter influence fathers' experiences and their negotiation of leave with employers and within families.

Although Sweden was the first country in 1974 to introduce parental leave open to fathers as well as mothers, Norway was the first country in 1993 to reserve 4 weeks of well-paid parental leave exclusively for fathers – the non-transferable "daddy month" (Haas and Rostgaard 2011). Sweden and Iceland followed suit, and the so-called "fathers' quota" came to symbolize the Nordic gender equality model (Eydal et al. 2015). Since then nearly all European countries and many others across the world, have introduced new individual and non-transferable leave rights for fathers, mainly in the form of 'paternity leave', that is the right to a few days of paid leave taken with the mother after childbirth (ILO 2014).

1.2.1 What Is Known About Fathers Taking Leave and Fathers Taking Leave Alone?

Despite early research (e.g. Haas 1992) empirical enquiry into the specific personal and family experiences and impact of maternal, paternal and paternity leave is still relatively undeveloped. There is still surprisingly little empirical research on what parents 'do' during parental leave and even less on what fathers 'do' (Deven 2005; Seward et al. 2006; Haas and Hwang 2008) and as such understanding the processes by which parental leave may operate to promote or hinder gender equity or child and family well-being are still unclear.

In addition, in attempting to understand the impact of parental leave policies there are important macro and micro-level methodological considerations. At a macro level, parental leave is a black box of diverse arrangements which vary both within and between countries despite common nomenclatures. Eligibility criteria also vary; although in general tend to exclude insecure and informal workers. Also in attempting to understand the specific impact of parental leave it is important to contextualize parental leave as part of societal level public investment. In most countries public investment in paid leave policies is often highly associated with more general public spending on family benefits as a proportion of GDP (Adema and Ali 2015). As such claims from macro-level studies of impact have been controversial, with pathways of influence difficult to disentangle, particularly as any gains can be linked to prior characteristics of fathers (gender egalitarian and child-oriented) rather than the policy itself. Methodological issues, for example about sample selectivity, are also relevant for micro-level analyses although qualitative research has the advantage of fine-tuned dimensional sampling not always available for large-scale administrative or survey data sets.

Where impact research does exist the focus has been mainly on the effects of maternity leave provision with several studies showing child health benefits for instance in immunization uptake and employment retention (Tanaka 2005; Han et al. 2009). Positive health gains for children are maximized when the maternity leave is: paid, provided in a job secure context and with a duration of at least 10 weeks.

In terms of fathers and leave, the logic has been that giving fathers the opportunity to spend more time at home through leave after childbirth should result in greater involvement in domestic life and childcare. More studies on fathers taking leave have been published over last decade spanning both comparative and within country policy analysis, particularly concerning implementation and impact at a macro-level (e.g. Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel 2007; Huerta et al. 2010; Kotsadam and Finseraas 2011; Rege and Solli 2013; Buenning 2015). Research on fathers' lived experiences of leave-taking, the focus of this book, are relatively uncommon.

The Nordic countries have provided fertile ground for "before and after" studies of impact at a country level (Ekberg et al. 2005; Duvander and Johansson 2012) and more recently Germany, with its parental leave reform of 2007 which created a new incentive for men to take parental leave by introducing two well-remunerated daddy months (Schober 2014; Buenning 2015). The natural experiment paradigm, which has framed many of these studies, has produced evidence for greater engagement of fathers in the care of children after policy reforms, in comparison with father who do not take leave. For instance, Kotsadam and Finseraas (2011) found that men whose last child was born in the year after Norway's father quota introduction in 1993 reported 11 % lower levels of conflict over household division of labour and were 50 % more likely to share clothes washing than men whose last child was born just before the reform. However, there has been some concern that greater engagement by fathers who have taken leave may be short-lived rather than long-term and so have a weak impact on the gendering of care. Indeed German longitudinal analysis by Schober (2014) suggested that fathers increased their participation in childcare only temporarily during the first year after taking parental leave but subsequent research has suggested sustained longer term effects up until the third year of the child's life (Buenning 2015; Reimer et al. 2015).

Notably, Reimer et al.'s (2015) study also found a large effect of paid parental leave taken alone by the father. In particular, an observed relationship between fathers' use of leave and their time for childcare only persisted when at least one leave month was taken alone by the fathers: an important selection criterion for this book's qualitative sample. Both Buenning (2015) and Reimer at al.'s (2015) studies were able to use nationally representative German panel data sets (German Socio-economic panel and Families in Germany) which include item on duration and whether leave is taken alone or with a partner. Also the data sets allow the same fathers to be tracked before and after they take parental leave which enable exploration of selection effects.

Other country level natural experiments have assessed "duration" effects of fathers' leave on wide range of outcomes. In a further Norwegian case, it has been found that 4 weeks' exposure to the leave quota during a child's first year was associated with a 1–3 % drop in fathers' earnings over the next 5 years (Rege and Solli 2013). In an another study of duration and fathers' engagement in childcare, research in Australia has found that taking some leave (2 or 4 weeks) increased the likelihood of fathers engaging in sole care at week-ends when the child was older 4–19 months (Hosking et al. 2010). Notably, studies are emerging about child outcomes of non-normative fathers with respect to parental leave in particular countries; for instance, Flacking et al. (2010) found that Swedish infants whose fathers did not take pater-

nity leave in the first year were significantly less likely to be breast fed at 2 and 6 months. Although the body of macro-level research is still emergent it does suggest that fathers' as well as mothers' leave-taking has direct as well as indirect influences on infants, family and work life. Moreover, there are indications that leave-taking alone by fathers may be especially salient in priming subsequent greater engagement in the care of infants.

It is our view that in order to understand *how* paternal leave-taking alone may have benefits for infants, gender equality and wider subjective well-being in families more qualitative research is needed, the objective of this book. Earlier qualitative studies have suggested that being home alone sensitises or enhances fathers' awareness of infant life "slow time" (Brandth and Kvande 2002) and other studies of fathers taking primary care of infants have found tendencies towards increased paternal happiness with increased time spent with the child (Lewis et al. 2009).

The studies presented in this book provide the first opportunity to explore a new form of "situated fathering" (Marsiglio et al. 2005) in a wide range of national policy and norm creating settings. In some of the countries profiled, a father's opportunity to take leave is an individual social right, independent of his partner, whereby in other contexts a father's access to parental leave is a second order entitlement, mediated by the child's mother. Contributors in the book portray how men's capacity to be involved in the care of infants is shaped by the policy contexts of leave policy and design, as well as gender cultures in the workplace and at home.

1.3 Methodological Approach and Research Design

Each national research team has adopted a similar qualitative approach to researching fathers who have recently taken leave alone. Drawing on a symbolic interactionist approach that prioritizes the agency and subjective perspectives of social actors (Finch and Mason 1993; Kaufmann 1996), in-depth interviews were carried out in all eleven countries with fathers who had taken leave alone for at least 1 month or, in some national contexts, with fathers who had taken leave alone part-time. All fathers belonged to dual earner couples in which fathers had taken recent (preferably over the last 3 years) leave for a newborn child.

Most national research teams drew on a common interview guide which was originally structured, tested and revised in the Portuguese project on fathers on leave alone (cf. Chap. 4). Each team adapted the formulation of the questions to national leave policies and context. The interview instrument included eight core topics acting as prompts for fathers' narratives: description of the leave taken; the decision to take leave in this way; the reactions of others (family; employers, colleagues and friends);the experience and practices of being on leave, including the first days alone and the weeks that followed; the consequences of leave (on fathers' work and family life, on the father-child relationship, on ideals and practices, on conjugal and family life in general); the meanings of fatherhood, motherhood, masculinity and femininity and attitudes to family and gender roles; opinions and critical assessment of the current leave policies.

A non-probability purposive sampling procedure was used to ensure participants were fathers who had taken leave alone for 30 or more days, although in some countries with minimalist parental leave provision for fathers, selection on this dimension of duration was not possible. Contacts were made through word of mouth (snowballing) and personal relationships. Formal contacts with firms in the private sector were made in some countries so as to bring in diversity of sectors of employment. In order to achieve variation in the lived experiences of fathers, the study aimed at sample sizes of 12–20 interviews (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). The interviews usually lasted between one and a half and 3 hours and responses were taped and fully transcribed. Only pseudonyms identify the respondents in order to maintain confidentiality.

1.4 Book Structure

The book consists of 13 chapters including the introduction which has presented some key contextual issues. In Chap. 2 Andrea Doucet examines significant theoretical challenges raised by the phenomenon of fathers taking parental leave alone, which are returned to by the editors in Chap. 14 when they review the research, policy and theoretical implications of main results. In Chaps. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13 the reader will discover the research findings on fathers taking leave alone from eleven different national policy contexts.

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Chapter 2
The Ethics of Care and the Radical Potential of Fathers 'Home Alone on Leave': Care as Practice, Relational Ontology, and Social Justice

Andrea Doucet

2.1 Introduction

It was several decades ago that feminist, fatherhood, and family scholars began to argue that father involvement has significant generative benefits for families, for children's development (e.g., Lamb 1981), for men (e.g., Chodorow 1978; Parke 1996), for women (Pleck 1985; Okin 1989), and for the attainment of gender equality and wider social change. In relation to the latter, gender and feminist scholars speculated that father's enhanced participation in childrearing could reverse the metaphoric relation between "rocking the cradle and ruling the world" (Dinnerstein 1977) and could potentially inhibit "a psychology of male dominance" (Chodorow 1978, p. 214). As Sara Ruddick put it, "the most revolutionary change we can make in the institution of motherhood is to include men in every aspect of childcare" (1983, p. 89). My focus in this chapter is on father involvement as part of a larger field of gender divisions of labour, with specific attention to changes and continuities in gendered parental responsibilities and how fathers taking home alone leave, as advanced in this collection, constitutes an innovative approach to the intransigence of shifting gendered parental responsibilities. This chapter focuses on the benefits of fathers taking parental leave time alone, while also pointing to some of the challenges, inside and outside the home, for fathers who engage in primary caregiving. I also attend to several conceptual and social issues that underpin this field of research.

This chapter is framed by an ethics of care perspective, which highlights: everyday care practices and ways of thinking and being that evolve out of these practices; care identities and processes as constituted by relational ontologies; and connections

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between care and social justice. An ethics of care perspective helps to illuminate what caregiving responsibilities *are*, why they remain gendered, and the on-going challenges both for families and for researchers who study these issues. I also take up one specific point mentioned in the Introduction to this book, which is that "involved fatherhood and gender egalitarianism may emerge as different dimensions and have to be conceptualized and analyzed separately" (O'Brien and Wall 2016, Chap. 1, this volume). I agree that these are not always synonymous, and, moreover, I argue that greater attention must be given to the conceptual fit, broadly speaking, between equality and care, and, more specifically, with specific reference to parental leave policies, the complexity of drawing causal links between the uptake of leave and its potential effects.

The chapter is organized into five sections. After briefly positioning myself as a fatherhood and feminist scholar, the first section provides a brief sketch of a large field of research on gender divisions of domestic labour, with its recurring finding of the resilience of gendered parental responsibilities. Second, drawing from ethics of care theorists Sara Ruddick and Joan Tronto, I define and explore parental responsibilities as a three-fold set of practices (emotional, community and 'moral'). In the third section of the paper, using a select set of research findings, including my own work in Canada and the United States, I point to changes and continuities in the taking on of parental responsibilities; I also highlight how this book's project, which promotes the importance of fathers having time at home alone with children is critical to the shifting of deeply rooted everyday processes of gendered responsibilities, especially around infant care. Fourth, I draw from two key insights from the ethics of care literature on care as practice and as a relational ontology. Finally, in the fifth section, I discuss how an ethics of care is also an ethic of social justice and I discuss the conceptual fit between care and equality.

2.2 Where I Am Writing From

I come to this chapter from a twenty-year history of writing about fathers as primary, or shared primary, caregivers. My journey with this topic began with a doctoral thesis on men and women trying to share housework and childcare in the early 1990s in the south-east of England; it was the stories told by one of the stay-at-home fathers in that study, Sean,[1] that led me into another fifteen years of researching fatherhood with varied foci on fathers who were primary caregivers for at least one year; fathers who took parental leave in two Canadian provinces; new fathers, particularly gay fathers and recent immigrant fathers; and two recently completed

[1] "Sean", a stay-at-home father I interviewed three times between 1992 and 1993, appeared in several of my first research articles, and his words appear in the title of one of my articles: "There's a huge gap between me and other women" (Doucet 2000).

longitudinal research projects on breadwinning mothers and stay-at-home fathers: a 5-year Canadian and American study and a 14-year Canadian study.[2]

While my research was initially concerned with *what* is occurring in these households and who-does-what-and-why, I have increasingly moved to consider *how* we study and make sense of the narratives that arise in these simultaneously intimate and political corners of social life. Informed by Bourdieu and Wacquant's concept of "epistemic reflexivity," which entails a "constant questioning of the categories and techniques of sociological analysis and of the relationship to the world they presuppose" (1992, p. 41), I have thus turned more and more of my focus towards scrutinizing the theoretical, methodological, epistemological, and ontological underpinnings of this field, as well as the taken-for-granted concepts that guide research, constitute data, and produce findings. Some of these reflections on concepts of care, responsibilities, and equality underpin this chapter.

2.3 Gender Divisions of Domestic Labour and Gendered Parental Responsibilities

As indicated in this book's Introduction, the study of fatherhood has been approached through many disciplinary and conceptual lenses using a broad array of questions and methodological approaches. One large area of work on changing father involvement is a burgeoning cross-national and cross-disciplinary field of research of gender divisions of domestic labour, which focuses on assessing gendered changes in domestic time, tasks, and responsibilities. This field evolved slowly with key works emerging in the 1980s (e.g., Berk 1985; Pahl 1984) and, concurrent with feminist work, focused on how households renegotiated domestic labour in the context of male unemployment, redundancy, and rising rates of female employment (e.g. Brannen and Moss 1991; Morris 1990; Wheelock 1990). In the last twenty years, a large subfield of family and feminist sociologies has emerged (for excellent overviews, see Bianchi and Milkie 2010; Coltrane 2000, 2010; Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard 2010; Sullivan 2013).

The overwhelming consensus from many of these studies across many countries in the global North is that men's participation in housework and especially childcare have increased gradually, in terms of time and tasks. However, it remains the case that women take on most of the *responsibilities* for care and domestic life (Fox 2009; Hochschild and Machung 2012; Kan et al. 2011). That is, across time, ethnicities, social class, and culture, mothers overwhelmingly organize, plan, orchestrate, and worry about children. As Sarah Fernstermaker Berk (1985, p. 195) noted thirty years ago, there has been an "outstanding stability" in mothers' responsibility for children. Similarly, Arlie Hochschild recently confirmed, over twenty years after

[2] A sampling of my work includes Doucet 1995, 2006, 2009, 2015, 2016. My writing from my longitudinal research program on stay-at-home fathers and breadwinning mothers is still in progress (for an overview, see Doucet 2015, 2016).

her initial comments on women's "second shift" of gendered responsibilities, that mothers "felt more responsible for the home" (Hochschild and Machung 2012, pp. 7–8); that is, they "kept track of doctors' appointments and arranged for children's playmates to come over," "worried about the tail on a child's Halloween costume or a birthday present for a school friend," and were "more likely to think about the children while at work and to check in by phone with the baby-sitter." Building on Hochschild's arguments about a "stalled revolution," Michael Bittman writes that "Although recently men have shown a willingness to spend more time with their children… change has been very slow and the proportion of men assuming equal responsibility is currently very small" (Bittman 2004, p. 200; see also Bianchi et al. 2006; Doucet 2006; Fox 2009).[3]

The fact that "equality" has been very slow to materialize, inevitably raises the question of how it is defined and, thus, measured. Indeed, a recurring challenge for researchers who study gender divisions of labour is the issue of how to effectively measure change and to define and assess issues of gender equality in domestic life. In this vein, there has been some critical attention paid to the importance of distinguishing between housework and childcare, both conceptually and methodologically (e.g., Mannino and Deutsch 2007; Perry-Jenkins et al. 2013; Sullivan 2013). However, there has been less attention given to determining what parental responsibilities *are* and how to measure them. Scott Coltrane has argued that one of the problems is that the field of gender divisions of labour is dominated by an approach that has added childcare and parental responsibilities to household labour without fully considering the conceptual implications of an "add and stir" approach. He writes:

> In most studies, the concept of housework or household labour is rarely defined explicitly, except for explaining how variables are measured and providing some indication of whether childcare is included in its definition…. Although this concept can include child minding, household management, and various kinds of emotional labour, most household labour studies have excluded these less visible or overlapping types of 'work' from study … The lack of attention to child care and emotional labour continued to be a major shortcoming of research on housework (Coltrane 2000, p. 1210; see also Perry-Jenkins et al. 2013; Sullivan 2013).

As Lamb, Pleck, Charnov and Levine argued over three decades ago, although parental responsibility "is extremely important, it has been researched much less thoroughly" (1985, p. 884). I build on this recognition of the critical lack of attention to conceptual issues in measuring childcare and emotional labour (see also Budig and Folbre 2004; Leslie et al. 1991) and argue for a wider understanding of parental caregiving responsibilities. To do this, I begin with well-known work in fatherhood studies and then consider how these are widened by insights from ethics of care approaches.

[3] This does not mean that there has not been changes in father involvement and fathers' taking on of parental caregiving; indeed, the changes in many countries have been significant (for an overview in the United States, see Pleck 2010).

2.4 The Ethics of Care and Parental Responsibilities

One of the most comprehensive definitions of parental responsibilities comes from the work of fathering scholars Lamb et al. (1985) who defined it as a broad range of practices, including meeting children's needs through interaction (direct engagement), accessibility (physical and psychological presence and availability), and responsibility (indirect childrearing tasks, such as planning and scheduling). This conceptualization attends to how the first two practices (interaction and accessibility) also have dimensions of responsibility woven into them, in that they also require cognition and commitment (Palkovitz 1997); moreover, all three dimensions of responsibility are "complex phenomenon to operationalize" (Milkie and Denny 2014, p. 3; see also Leslie et al. 1991; Marsiglio et al. 2000; Palkovitz 2002). Pleck's recent work (2010) takes this definition even further by deepening the meaning and scope of the three practices originally envisioned thirty years ago and also adding two additional dimensions that tie in well with the arguments that I make below. In revisiting the original formulation, he emphasizes that this definition "refers to responsibility as both a *process* ('making sure the child is taken care of') and to *indirect care*, a type of activity ('arranging for resources to be available')" (Pleck 2010, p. 65); he also goes further to extend responsibility (as planning and scheduling) to include the "fostering of community connections" (2010, p. 67) and "process responsibility" which refers to ensuring that needs are met (2010, p. 67).

Ethics of care writer, Sara Ruddick also approaches parental responsibilities as a set of processes and *practices*[4] (see also Morgan 2011). She argues that the practices of caring for a child involve "preservation, growth and social acceptability" (1990, p. 22); in my work, I have worked closely with her conceptions and have adapted and named her three-fold approach as emotional, community, and 'moral' responsibilities (see Doucet 2006, 2015). Another leading ethics of care scholar, Joan Tronto provides useful contributions to this discussion, particularly her long-standing and recent scholarship on "processes of care" as a series of interconnected practices that are "nested" together (2013, pp. 22–23). These interconnected phases include caring about someone's unmet needs, caring for these needs, caregiving or making sure the work is done, and care-receiving or assessing the effectiveness of these care acts (Tronto 2013, p. 22–23; see also Fisher and Tronto 1990; Tronto 1993).

[4] While Ruddick's work was framed around *maternal* responsibilities, it is important to read her in terms of her overall intention, which was to argue that these were responsibilities of primary caregivers. She wrote in a historical moment when it was mainly women who took on primary care. She argued that men could be primary caregivers but rather than allow for the possibility of fathers as primary caregivers, she argued that when men were taking on primary caregiving, they were mothering. In her words: "Briefly, a mother is a person who takes on responsibility for children's lives and for whom providing child care is a significant part of her or his working life. I mean '*her or his*'" (Ruddick 1995, p. 40). She held firm to this philosophical position throughout her life; nevertheless, she did acknowledge to me that she understood the basis for my own overall argument, based on empirical qualitative research, which is that men who take on primary caregiving are not mothering (personal communication 2007; see also Doucet 2010).

While agreeing with Tronto's assessment, I also maintain that these care practices are entangled with social, emotional, community, relational, moral, temporal, embodied, and power dimensions (see Doucet 2015; Gabb 2011; Morgan 2011).

Weaving together Ruddick and Tronto, I thus conceptualize parental responsibilities as emotional, community, and 'moral' responsibilities. Emotional responsibilities in parenting are skills and practices of attentiveness and responsiveness; they include "knowledge about others' needs" and "attentiveness to the needs of others" (Tronto 1989, pp. 176–8; see also Fisher and Tronto 1990; Tronto 1993), "parental consciousness," and steady processes of "thinking about" children (Walzer 1998, pp.15, 33). To conceptualize community responsibilities, one must recognize that parenting is not only domestically-based but also community-based, inter-household, and inter-institutional and involves a set of cognitive and organizational skills and practices for coordinating, balancing, negotiating, and orchestrating those others who are involved in children's lives (Collins 2000; Di Leonardo 1987; Hansen 2005; Marsiglio 2008). These parental responsibilities—emotional and community responsibilities—bring together all of Tronto's four caring phases, and especially the phases of caring about, caring for, and care-receiving. As Pleck argues, these point to responsibilities as processes.

The third type of parental responsibilities, 'moral' responsibilities, emerge partly from Sara Ruddick's argument that parental caregiving is a set of practices that is not only governed by children's needs and responding to those needs but by the "social groups" with associated "social values" within which parenting takes place (Ruddick 1995, p. 21). This concept of moral responsibilities is also rooted in a wide scholarly literature on gendered ideologies and gendered discourses of mothering and fathering and studies on parenting rooted in symbolic interactionism, which refers to people's identities as moral beings and how they feel they ought to and should act in society as parents and as workers (see Daly 1996, 2002; Finch and Mason 1993; McMahon 1995; Wall 2014). These moral responsibilities also encompass expectations and gendered norms about breadwinning and caregiving where "masculine norms create workplace pressures that make men reluctant or unable to contribute significantly to family life" and that women face "hydraulic social pressure to conform to societal expectations surrounding gender" (Williams 2010, p. 149; see also Bianchi et al. 2000). They are also entangled with emotional and community responsibilities, as women and men often feel that they should take on particular emotional and community responsibilities based on social, community, peer, and kin judgments, gendered "habitus" (Bourdieu 1977, 1990), and ideologies and discourses about mothering and fathering, breadwinning, and caregiving. This approach also has resonance with ecological approaches to studying families (see Allen et al. 2012; Bronfenbrenner 1986; Doherty et al. 1998; Perry-Jenkins et al. 2013), which highlight how the care of children unfolds in wide intra-connected networks that comprise individual family members, family relations, communities, institutions, and socio-economic cultures.

2.5 Fathering and Parental Responsibilities: Is Change Happening?

In recognizing and categorizing these responsibilities, it is also important to consider whether they have shifted across time between women and men, and how and why change has occurred or not. While all three responsibilities are, as Tronto (2013) argues, "nested" into one another, I will pull them apart for analytical purposes. With regard to *emotional responsibilities*, ample studies from diverse groups of fathers in a number of countries have found that men can and do take on this responsibility of attentiveness and responsiveness to children (e.g., Biblarz and Stacey 2010; Chesley 2011; Coltrane 1996; Doucet 2006; Doucet and Merla 2007; Goldberg 2012; Kaufman 2013; Marsiglio and Roy 2012; Rehel 2014; Wall 2014). Stay-at-home fathers and fathers on parental leave demonstrate how time at home alone with children is a critical pathway for shifting emotional responsibilities. As revealed in the chapters in this book, it is the hands-on practices of care that can lead to confident and competent caregivers.

North American research has pointed to how fathers' involvement in *community responsibilities* have also shifted over time, with men becoming more involved and accepted as primary caregivers in schools, community organizations, parenting programs, and the sites where adults and children cluster, and they have increasingly been accepted as the parent to take on responsibilities for connecting home, school, and community activities (Doucet 2006, 2013; see also Kaufman 2013; Marsiglio and Roy 2012; Ranson 2013).

In spite of these changes, I would argue that, even in stay-at-home-father families, women still take on much of the organizing, networking, and managing of children's activities and lives (Doucet 2006, 2015; see also Lareau 2011). Part of this slow movement of change in community responsibilities relates, in turn, to how, in many countries, the community landscapes of parenting, especially with infants and pre-school children, are still female-dominated, by mothers and female caregivers. Across the past decade, my research has pointed to continuing challenges for men, where they can feel like misfits in what one father called "estrogen-filled worlds" (Doucet 2006, 2013). In fact, with few exceptions, most of the stay-at-home fathers I have interviewed have narrated at least one uncomfortable experience in community settings with children, especially in parent–infant playgroups. One Canadian stay-at-home father, Bruno, told me in 2003, "It's like a high school dance all over again: girls on one side, boys on the other." Ten years later, Geoff, a laid-off factory worker and now stay-at-home father and part-time school bus driver, said, "I never felt like I belonged there… I totally felt out of place. I felt like I was intruding on their sort of little world, and that I wasn't part of it." In spite of these narrations of discomfort, it is also important to add that the "dad-in-the-playgroup" narrative has shifted over the past decade. In some North American communities, more and more fathers in urban settings are joining these groups, either as members of female-dominated groups or as participants in fathering groups (Solomon 2014; Doucet 2013). Fathers in community spaces help to shift assumptions, and this is

another reason why fathers home alone on leave represent critical interventions into the material-discursive widening of community parenting spaces. This also begins to slowly shift gendered moral dimensions of parenting so that men are seen less as intruders and more as part of the relational landscapes of parenting.

From my longitudinal research on stay-at-home fathers and breadwinning mothers, I maintain that one of the slowest gender changes in parental responsibilities has been in the *moral responsibilities* of parenting, which remain tied to the "shoulds" and "oughts" of what it means to be a good mother or a good father as set against a persistent shadow of hegemonic ideals of the male breadwinner and female caregiver family (Townsend 2002). Social class matters in this articulation (Williams 2010); being a male primary caregiver without having achieved success as a breadwinner can conflict with what many communities consider a socially acceptable male identity (Doucet 2006, 2009).

Moral responsibilities are especially marked with infants where there are strong assumptions that the care of infants is women's work. This is partly related to how parental leave policies, outside of the Scandinavian countries, have only slowly come to recognize fathers' roles in the care of very young children. These conceptions are, in turn, rooted in the many social, relational, institutional, embodied, ideological and discursive forces that coalesce to lead women (in heterosexual couple households) to start off as the primary parent and therefore the assumed expert in infant care (Doherty et al. 1998; Fox 2009). Mother presence and assumptions of expertise then shadow negotiations between parents and workplaces around parental leave time for infants (Bygren and Duvander 2006; McKay and Doucet 2010). One example from my longitudinal research in Canada is from a stay-at-home father, Peter, a part-time home-based web designer who has been at home for over a decade while his wife works as a high school teacher. From our four interviews across 10 years, he told me how when his two sons were infants, he felt constantly judged by onlookers.

> When he was a tiny baby, there was always that sense that I was babysitting rather than taking care of my child like I do every day—where I had to understand his wants and needs because he can't speak. That's where I felt it was very different from women. There was a bit of an assumption that I felt like I was just tiding things over until the *real mother* showed up, or the person who really knew what they were doing would show up.

Nine years later, Peter gave a frank assessment of the social acceptability of fathers as carers: "Even in a society where people believe that men and women are equal and can do just about everything, they don't really believe that men can do this with a baby, especially a really tiny baby."

Gender differences do continue to occur in parental caregiving responsibilities, especially in relation to the care of infants and young children. These differences are created and recreated through interactive relations with persistently gendered social institutions, ideologies and discourses (Folbre 1994; Fox 2009; Williams 2010). Fathers taking time alone with infants, however, can begin to engender change and to lay a foundation for an on going dismantling of gendered responsibilities. As Almqvist and Duvander recently argued, father involvement with infants and young

children "matters for fathers' care later in their children's lives" (2014, p. 24). This is yet another reason why this book on fathers' caregiving is critically important for shifting community norms around men and parenting, as well as the still gendered moral responsibilities of parenting. As Karin Wall writes (2014, p. 8), when fathers have time at home alone, they not only discover a new found confidence and set of skills, but "this type of leave seems to challenge, in varying degrees, the notion of parental care mediation as a female prerogative." As Kathleen Gerson notes, "dissolv[ing] the link between gender and moral responsibility" could lead to a "social order in which women and men alike are afforded the opportunity to integrate the essential life tasks of achieving autonomy and caring for others" (2002, p. 25, 26; see also Gerson 2010).

2.6 Lessons from the Ethics of Care: Care as Practice and Ontology

Drawing on the philosophical work of Habermas (1971) and Wittgenstein (1953), Ruddick's ethics of care approach argues that primary caregiving of children is neither an identity nor a set of tasks; it is "work and practice." This work encompasses both a rational and an emotional set of practices (see also Duffy 2011). As a set of practices, it leads to new ways of thinking and being; that is, "all thinking, arises from and is shaped by the practices in which people engage" (Ruddick 1995, p. 9). She also argues that primary caregiving leads to ways of thinking and being that prioritize "concrete" (p. 93), and "contextual, [and] flexible" (p. 89) ways of thinking and being; it is a "deeply rewarding, life-structuring activity that tends to create … distinctive capacities for responsibility, attentive care, and non-violence." These observations are of particular importance to this book, where it is confirmed that being at home alone with children can lead to profound changes for men. This is an argument that I have also made in my work on stay-at-home fathers and single fathers: when men have time at home alone, without relying on women to take on primary responsibility, they come to know through everyday trials and tribulations of their caring practices, the depth of what it means to be fully responsible for a child. As I wrote about a decade ago:

> It is this responsibility for others that profoundly changes them as men. That is, having the opportunity to care engenders changes in men, which can be seen as 'moral' transformations. Three such changes can be mentioned. First fathers notice generative and personal changes in themselves as men. Second, many come to recognize the value and the skill involved in caring work. Third, men begin to question what social commentators have referred to as 'male stream' concepts of work, and to adopt perspectives traditionally espoused by women on the need for work–family balance (Doucet 2006, p. 208).

An ethics of care approach also underlines how care is governed by and enacted through a *relational ontology*. That is, the ethics of care "has a different starting point" where "individuals are conceived as being *in relationships*" (Tronto 2013, p. 41). As Tronto argues, this conception is informed by a "different ontology and

epistemology." To view care as part of the "relational revolution, is to move it further away from standard theories of justice which starts from the premise of competing separate parties" (Tronto 2013, p. 183). As Fiona Robinson argues (2011, p. 12), "the relational ontology of care ethics claims that relations of interdependence and dependence are a fundamental feature of our existence."

This is a critical point that brings to light how fathers home alone on leave signifies a critical metaphoric and policy perspective. Yet, it is also important to underline the relationality that underpins these 'at home alone' experiences. The decisions for fathers to take parental leave are negotiated relationally with their partners and workplace bosses and peers within a larger relational network that can include other parents, peers, and kin. Father are not alone in their daily practices, which are enacted through inter-actions with others, or even more strongly put, through *intra-actions* where their own subjectivities are being shaped by and are shaping other inter-dependent others (see Doucet 2013; Lynch 2007; Lupton 2012). In short, an ethics of care perspective recognizes the importance of fathers caring on their own, while also highlighting the conceptual limitations of pairing 'alone' and 'care'.

2.7 Care, Equality, and an Ethic of Social Justice

In addition to Tronto's four stages of care processes mentioned earlier in this chapter (caring about; caring for: caregiving; and care-receiving) she further argues that we need to think about larger democratic processes of care. She writes: "In order to think about democratic care … it now seems to me that there is a fifth stage of care" (Tronto 2013, p. 23). She titles this fifth stage as "caring with" and defines it as "a final phase of care" that "requires that caring needs and the ways in which they are met need to be consistent with democratic commitments to justice, equality, and freedom for all" (p. 23). For Tronto, all five stages of care practices are "nested within one another" and the "goal of such practices is to ensure that all of the members of the society can live as well as possible by making the society of democratic as possible. This is the essence of 'caring with.'" (Tronto 2013, p. 40). Tronto also assists us with thinking through complexities in the meanings and enactments of the concept of care. She argues that "care, like any concept, can be situated in a number of theories, and depending upon the theory within which it is placed, it will have different meanings. The normative adequacy of care does not arise from its conceptual clarity, but from the larger political and social theory within which it is placed" (p. 36).

The issues that I want to raise in this final section of the paper relate to the conceptual fit between care and equality and the varied ways that this conceptual combination might be approached and with what effects. Here I will make four points. First, drawing from Tronto, her version of democratic caring "presumes that we are equal as democratic citizens in being *care receivers*" (Tronto 2013, p. 40). In the context of this particular book, this would mean considering parental leave policies and their possible generative effects for fathers and for families, but also considering

social justice issues that highlight the interplay between parental leave policies and class inequalities between families. With specific reference to fathers and parental leave, an ethics of care approach draws our attention to class and racial inequalities tied up with parental leave provision and eligibilities. As Mignon Duffy argues, while a focus on care as a set of nurturant practices "illuminates many important pieces of the care–inequalities puzzle, it obscures others. In particular an approach to care work that focuses exclusively on relationality does not provide a clear picture of critical racial–ethnic and class hierarchies" (Duffy 2011, p. 10). Moreover, a focus away from intra-household gender equalities towards class and racial inequalities also leads to a focus on how these inequalities affect the cared-for, in this case infants and young children. As Margaret O'Brien has argued so well, "Tensions associated with differential access to statutory leave raise the possibility of a new global polarization for infants: the risk of being born into either a *parental-leave-rich or a parental-leave-poor household and indeed country* (O'Brien 2009, p. 190, emphasis added).

Differential access to parental leave is evident in Canada, for example, where a full quarter to a third of mothers, and an unknown number of fathers, have been consistently ineligible for parental leave benefits.[5] The divide between a majority of parents who receive benefits and sizable minority that do not receive them is consistent since data collection began in 1997 (Marshall 2003). Thus, in Canada a loosening of parental leave provision from its current ties to full-time standard employment, a widening of eligibility to parental leave, and greater access to "employer top ups" to current levels of leave replacement (70–75 % in Quebec and 55 % in the rest of Canada), are several ways of facilitating these "democratic processes of care" and greater equality in caregiving conditions of possibility.[6]

A second point about care and equality also builds from Tronto's work but is well addressed through the work of feminist legal scholar Martha Fineman (2008, 2009) and her argument for a shift from the concept of equality towards that of "vulnerability." Fineman moves away from formal equality, which is often defined as "sameness of treatment," as well as away from her earlier position (Fineman 2004) which argued for "some notion of substantive or result equality" that considers "equality of outcome" (Fineman 2009, p. 122). Like Tronto, Fineman recognizes that the concept of equality has diverse meanings depending on the context within which is it used. With specific reference to state and family policies and approaches to care, she argues that "vulnerability analysis concentrates on the structures our society has and will establish to manage our common vulnerabilities" (Fineman 2008, p. 1). Working implicitly with a relational ontology on the interdependence of the human

[5] Statistics Canada does not collect data on the eligibility of fathers for parental or paternity leave other than posing this question to mothers.

[6] As argued by Katherine Marshall (2010), only about one in five mothers across the country received a top-up for an average duration of 16–19 weeks. Statistics Canada does not collect top-up data for fathers (See Doucet and McKay 2016, McKay et al. 2016, for a fuller analysis of class inequalities in parental leave provision in Canada).

condition and the "profound insights that come from confronting dependency and vulnerability on a day-to-day basis," (Fineman 2009, p. 107) she argues that,

> Our equality is weak, its promise largely illusory because it fails to take into account the existing inequalities of circumstances created both by inevitable and universal vulnerability inherent in the human condition and the societal institutions that have grown up around them, most notably the family and the state (Fineman 2009, p. 113).

Fineman reminds us about the effects of inequalities in access to and eligibilities for parental leave benefits; this includes countries like Canada where benefits are tied to full-time standard employment. As she argues, "those who care… through essential caretaking work are themselves dependent on resources in order to undertake that care. Those resources must be supplied by society through its institutions" (Fineman 2009, p. 110) and must be approached through a lens that prioritizes "our collective destiny of vulnerability and dependency" (Fineman 2009, p. 116).

My third point about equality is one that draws together relational ontologies and concepts of equality. The conceptualization of parental responsibilities put forward in this chapter as constituted relationally, intra-actively, temporally, and contextually raises epistemological and methodological questions about how to begin to determine what equality would look like in practice. Here it is important to consider the historicity and cultural specificity of the concept of equality. As Fineman (2008, p. 2) argues, "the concept of 'equality' in Western thought has been associated with John Locke's philosophy of liberal individualism (and the creation of the liberal subject)." These underpinnings of liberal subjects and a focus on individual rights have several shortcomings in relation to care practices. For Fineman, this "version of equality" is "weak in its ability to address and correct the disparities in economic and social well-being among various groups in our society. Formal equality leaves undisturbed—and may even serve to validate—existing institutional arrangements that privilege some and disadvantage others" (Fineman 2008, p. 2). A related issue is one that ethics of care and feminist scholars have highlighted for three decades, which is how liberal notions of equality cannot adequately address interdependency and the multiple relational matrices that constitute daily practices (e.g. Fineman 2004, 2008, 2009; Gilligan 1982; Held 1995; Kittay 1999; Sevenhuijsen 1998; Tronto 1993, 2013; Williams 2010).

A final point about equality and parental leave is the need to consider the ontological compatibility between care and equality as well the methodological and epistemological dilemmas that arise from attempting to measure a relational object of investigation. In other words, how do we, as researchers, define and assess equality in relation to parental responsibilities? In the case of parental leave, does equality mean that men and women take the same amount of parental leave time? Or does it mean that the outcomes of this time will be the same? If the latter, how will these outcomes be measured, and from *whose* accounts? That is, if care is relationally constituted, and if it is an object of investigation that is constantly in a process of flow and change, is it possible that "equality" might not be the most apt concept?

My own approach, informed by the assumption that it is difficult, if not impossible, to measure parental responsibilities, has been to argue for a shift from

measuring gender equality in parental caregiving responsibilities towards making sense of gender differences in these responsibilities (Doucet 2013, 2015). Shifting from equality to differences would mean, as Barrie Thorne (1993) has argued, looking at "how, when, and why does gender make a difference—or not make a difference" and "when gender does make a difference, what sort of difference is it?" (p. 36). As Deborah Rhode (1989) asked many years ago, in her reflections on gender, law, and the interplay of gender differences and gender equality in specific contexts, it is important to ask, "What difference does difference make?" (p. 313). In the case of parental leave, this would link back to the points made by Tronto above; this would imply a shift from attempting to measure gendered parental responsibilities to studying wider processes of inequalities, including politically urgent questions, such as how "affective inequalities" unfold in a "nested set of power, class, gender and global race relations" (Lynch 2007, p. 564).

2.8 Conclusions

This chapter – informed by an ethics of care theoretical and ontological approach as well as research on gender divisions of domestic labour and a 14-year longitudinal qualitative research program on breadwinning mothers and stay-at-home fathers – confirms the radical potential of this overall book project and its case study chapters. I also highlighted how an ethics of care perspective, especially the work of Sara Ruddick and Joan Tronto, widens and deepens a research focus on 'fathers home alone on leave' and, more broadly fathers' caregiving. It does this by attending to parental responsibilities as a set of unfolding practices, ways of thinking and being that emerge from these practices, the relational ontologies that underpin an ethics of care approach, as well as the importance of connecting an ethics of care with ethics of social justice. I also outlined a series of reflections on the conceptual limitations that recur when attempting to link parental care and intra-household gender equality while also pointing to the critical importance of attending to class inequalities in caregiving provision and practices between households and families. Finally, there is a need for greater attention to the conceptual fit between concepts of equality and caregiving. The concept of equality brings with it questions of 'equal to whom?' and 'equal in what'? Applied to parental leave provision and fathers' time alone at home, this means reflecting on the complexities of causalities between parental time in the home and longer-term processes of gender equality in paid work and care work.

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Chapter 3
Fathers on Leave Alone in Norway: Changes and Continuities

Elin Kvande and Berit Brandth

3.1 Introduction

In the Nordic countries, family policies are based on the ideal of a symmetrical family of two worker-carers, within which time taking care of children is given a high priority. A parental leave system, which includes earmarked leave for fathers, is considered to be one of the main components of the earner/carer models (Gornick and Meyers 2005, 2009). In 1993, Norway introduced a parental leave scheme exclusively earmarked for fathers, while Sweden and Iceland have subsequently later followed suit. The father's quota is a welfare state contribution to mobilize fathers as carers. The aim of this chapter is to explore how using the father's quota and being on leave alone impacts on fathers' caring practices.

In the course of the 20 years that the father's quota has existed, it has been extended and become a mature institution. In this chapter, we are concerned with the consequences that a long leave has for the use and understanding of parental leave for fathers by studying it from the perspective of their everyday practices. The father's quota has changed the norms for fathers, as they are expected to use their quota, to be more than family providers and to be involved in caregiving (Brandth and Kvande 2003a; Brandth and Kvande 2005).

The fathers in this study have recently been home alone with their toddlers, and they represent the second generation of Norwegian fathers who have used the earmarked leave 20 years after its introduction. The first generation of fathers who experienced an earmarked leave was subject to exploration in a study published in 2003 (Brandth and Kvande 2003a). These fathers used the father's quota when it constituted 4 weeks, while the second generation of fathers has experienced a much

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Table 3.1 Norwegian parental leave; changes in the distribution of weeks with a 100 % wage compensation[a] between mothers and fathers during the project period

Year	Total parental leave length	Mother's quota	Sharable part[a]	Father's quota
2009	46	3 + 6	27	10
2011	47	3 + 6	26	12
2013	49	3 + 14	18	14
2014	49	3 + 10	26	10

Source: Nav (Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration) (2014). Foreldrepenger. (Parent benefits) Statistics per 2013/12/31

[a]If parents choose 80 % wage compensation, the sharable leave period is prolonged by 1 month

longer period of leave, because the leave period had been extended to 12 weeks when they were interviewed. In this chapter we ask how these fathers do fathering alone. How does being home alone for a longer period of time impact on their caring practices? Can we observe any changes compared to the experiences and practices of the first generation of leave-taking fathers?

3.2 The Norwegian Parental Leave System for Fathers

During the past two decades, fathers' rights and obligations to provide care for their children have been the most important focus in the development of parental leave policies in Norway. Since the individual right to leave was granted to fathers as a non-transferable father's quota of 4 weeks, it has been prolonged and more fathers have become eligible. Currently, the total parental leave period is 49 weeks, with 100 % wage compensation.

As seen from Table 3.1, mothers have an earmarked period in 2014 of 13 weeks, of which three have to be taken before birth.

Twenty-six of the weeks are sharable between mothers and fathers. Included in the total parental leave period is also the father's quota of 10 weeks of individual, non-transferable rights for fathers. The 10-week period is down from 14 weeks after the conservative government reduced this in 2014. In addition to parental leave, fathers have 2 weeks of paternity leave to be taken after the birth of the child to assist the mother.

The father's quota may be taken together with the mother at home at the same time. This means that not all fathers in Norway who take up the quota will necessarily have the experience of fathering alone. Before the quota was extended to from 6 to 10 weeks in 2009, surveys demonstrated that approximately 50 % of the fathers who used the quota were home, while the mothers returned to their work on a full-time basis (Brandth and Øverli 1998; Brandth and Kvande 2003a; Grambo and Myklebø 2009). The length of the leave affects the pattern of use, and a longer father's quota has made it more difficult for mothers to be home during the entire father's quota period, as a "double leave" will reduce the total leave length. Most parents are interested in reducing the care gap between leave and the start of kinder-

garten, and in many cases this implies stretching the leave period as much as possible. However, it does seem to have become more common for mothers and fathers to have a shorter period of overlap, which is often defined as a family holiday.

In addition to earmarking a father's quota, another element in the system that concerns the father's use of the quota is flexibility. Since the quota was introduced on a take-it-or-leave-it basis, choice and flexibility have increasingly been accentuated in Norwegian political debates. While the Norwegian parental leave system has always had elements of flexibility, the father's quota, which is the subject of this chapter, was not made more flexible until 2007. Previously, it had to be taken within the first year of the baby's life; now it can be taken over a period of 3 years. One type of flexible use is part-time leave, in which part-time work may be combined with part-time leave. This makes it possible to stretch the father's quota over a longer period of time so that, e.g. a take-up of leave on a 50 % basis doubles its length. A second form of flexible use involves deferring the leave, in which it can be divided into blocks and taken at different times, although these two forms of flexible leave use may also be combined. The alternative to flexible use is full-time, uninterrupted leave, and leave can be taken until the child turns 3 years of age.

In combination with its flexibility, the extension of the leave opens for many choices and variations in how it is used, including what mothers do during the father's quota. When fathers take their quota, the mothers may return to work or stay home with the father on a full- or part-time basis. Because the father's quota has been extended, a combination of models has become quite common.

3.3 Previous Research

Fathering is not fixed, but instead is formed in historical moments and follows shifts in discourses and policies. The idea of equal rights for mothers and fathers was a strong rationale for developing parental leave in the Norwegian context. During the 1980s, the parents had the right to share the parental leave, but this opportunity was little used by fathers. In order to stimulate fathers to take parental leave, the father's quota was introduced in 1993. In addition to equality between mothers and fathers, an additional rationale was introduced – the child's need for a caring father.

During the first 5 years of the quota, there was an increase in fathers' uptake from 4 to 78 %. Every time the quota has been increased (2005, 2006, 2009, 2011), the father's uptake has also increased, which means that more fathers are taking longer parental leave. This is why the earmarked leave has been called a success when it comes to the number of fathers using it to stay home to care for their small child (Brandth and Kvande 2013). On the whole, there is a high frequency of fathers using the father's quota, as approximately 90 % of eligible fathers use some of- or the entire quota. Twenty-four percent of fathers take the leave on a part-time basis (NAV 2014). An effect of the extension is that fewer fathers seem to use other parts of the parental leave in addition to the quota. They take their quota and only the quota, with the average in 2013 being 46 days of leave for fathers (NAV 2014).

Based on representative survey research, Lappegård and Bringedal (2013) show how Norwegian parents are very positive to the father's quota and the parental leave system. Research on why the quota system works (Brandth and Kvande 2013) focuses on two factors. Firstly, that having an earmarked right which is not transferable to the mother prevents negotiations between mothers and fathers on who should stay at home. Secondly, because it is a collective, statutory right for all working fathers it makes employers and employed fathers accept and adopt it. In fact, the top leaders of the employers' and the employee's organizations are very much in favour of the father's quota.

Nonetheless, there are various cultural models for parenting, and it has been pointed out that parents' different class positions may influence how they chose to organize their leave (Stefansen and Farstad 2008). In other words, even if the take-up of the father's quota is high all over, fathers may use and define it differently. Farstad (2010) argues that the meaning fathers attribute to the father's quota is important for their use of it.

Five years after the introduction of the father's quota in Norway, we carried out a study in which we interviewed fathers about their experiences of being on leave. As part of this study, we compared the care practices of fathers who took their 4 weeks of earmarked father's quota while the mother went back to work, with fathers who were home with the mother while they were on leave (Brandth and Kvande 2003b, c). The ones who fathered alone had partners with full-time jobs and often used more of the parental leave days than the quota, whereas the fathers who took their quota with the mother at home had partners who often worked part-time and/or had quit their jobs after they had the baby. This group took a shorter leave.

The results showed that caring for the child alone influenced their narratives of fathering practices in significant ways, and that their practices held characteristics that were less salient among the fathers who were not caring for their child alone. First of all, fathering alone allowed the men to develop their care competence and enhance their sensitivity to children and their confidence in reading a small child. Consequently, they learned to carry out a "need-oriented" care practice in which the child's needs determined the content of the daily realities. Moreover, the days on leave were characterized by "slow time", which implied letting the routines of childcare determine the content of what fathers did during the day, and they did not try to combine care work with many other tasks. The importance of being home alone became significant, in contrast to fathers who did not use their father's quota to have the sole responsibility for the child while the mother went back to work. The mother's main responsibility for the child was not interrupted in these cases, and the father became her support person. These fathers needed the mothers to translate the child's needs for them, and care practices based on knowing the child were not well developed. As a result, they felt more comfortable with older children, often giving a priority to older siblings. Not being home alone also implied putting more priority to work and "fast time".

Being home alone, then, means taking greater responsibility for the child, which helped to facilitate a move from being the mother's helper to being a more equal co-parent. Thus, our study confirmed what Norma Radin and Graeme Russell

(1983) reported many years earlier, namely that being in charge of the children alone seemed to be the "cutting edge" with respect to fathers' positive feelings of involvement and competence. Interestingly, Radin and Russell also reported that solo fathering was important when it came to feelings of overload and discontent/distress. The proportion of fathers who took care of their children when the mother was not home was low in their study, and several other studies that have examined the amount of time fathers spend with their children reveal that fathers are more likely than mothers to spend time with the children in the presence of the other parent (Craig 2006; Kitterød 2003). Hence, there should be plenty of room for fathers to increase their level of involvement by parenting alone. In a study in which the father's quota is analysed from the perspective of the child, the findings show how fathers, through having to interpret the wordless language in interacting with babies, develop a relational competence (Bungum 2013).

In our previous study from the early years after the father's quota was introduced, the fathers were very determined that their primary task when on leave was to take care of the child. Ascribing meaning to the leave, the father-child relationship was front and centre, while housework was not understood as part of the deal for fathers on the father quota leave. The study reported conflict and tension between the parents with respect to housework. Moreover, there were many ways in which fathers sought to adjust: outsourcing, reducing and downgrading the standard, but there was also a slow acceptance with some fathers that doing housework was part of being home on leave (Brandth and Kvande 2003a). Norwegian time use studies measure how much time fathers use on family and work, and how this has changed over the last few decades. Recent time use data documents that today most fathers of small children do housework on a daily basis, and that this is a change during the period that the father's quota has existed (Kitterød 2013). It will therefore be interesting to explore what the fathers report when on leave alone for a longer period of time.

The previous study of the father's quota focused on what fathers actually did when they had their quota alone. Thus, it was a contribution to a research question that still requires more exploration (O'Brien et al. 2007). In this chapter, we ask what fathers report when on leave for a longer period of time and in a normative context, in which fathering might have changed during the 20 years it has existed.

3.4 Sample and Data

The analysis in this chapter is based on 12 interviews with heterosexual fathers living and working in Norway who had been home alone on leave with the father's quota. Except for one father who worked every Friday, all the interviewees had been home alone on a full-time basis for a minimum of 8 weeks. As seen from in Table 3.2, leave length ranged between 8 and 40 weeks. The variation in leave length is caused by some fathers using more than the father's quota weeks, and some less, while the father's quota length itself also varied during the interview period.

Table 3.2 Overview of the sample

	Name	Occupation	Total no of p.l. weeks taken	No. of weeks home alone	Full-time (F) Part-time (P)	With mother at home?
1	Adam	Electrician	15	15	F	No
2	Douglas	Designer	8	8	F	No
3	Emil	Painter	40	40	F	No
4	Ian	Social worker	14	14	F	No
5	Omar	Warehouse worker	12	12	F	No
6	Simon	Grad. Engineer	12	12	F	No
7	Roberto	Engineer	10	10	F	No
8	Mons	Photographer	20	20	P (80 %)	No
9	Steinar	Grad. Engineer	14	12	F	Two weeks of overlap
10	Martin	Architect	16	12	F	Four weeks of overlap
11	Johannes	Architect	16	12	F	Four weeks of overlap
12	Max	Painter	11	8	F	Three weeks of overlap

In our previous study, we defined "home alone" as full-time leave during the 4 weeks available at the time. In the current study, we have excluded fathers who use the father's quota on a part-time basis to construct a comparable sample.

Most of the interviews were conducted in late 2012/early 2013, and included questions from the project, "Fathers on leave alone in a changing policy environment." Some participants were found through the researchers' professional networks, and additionally, the snowballing method was employed, as interviewed fathers were asked if they knew of other fathers who might be contacted for interviewing. Information letters to the participants explained the objectives of the project, the ethical research rules and the rights of the participants. To keep the interviewees' identities anonymous, names were not recorded and pseudonyms have been used. The interviews were semi-structured, lasted from 1 to 2 hours, and for the most part the fathers were interviewed in their homes. Nearly all the quotations used in this article have been translated from Norwegian into English by the authors.

To help ensure a sample of fathers who had taken a leave of some length, the criteria for choosing participants were that they had become fathers after the father's quota was extended to 10 weeks in mid-2009 and to 12 weeks in 2011. Thus, at the time of the interview, their leave experiences were quite recent. Most fathers normally take their leave after the mother, i.e. starting when the child is from 9 to 12 months old, and at the time of the interview the oldest child was two and a half years old. Several of the fathers also already had a child, and some were expecting their next child.

Considering the Norwegian eligibility rules, in which the right to parental leave is earned through employment, the fathers and mothers had been employed previous to the birth of the child. As has become common in interview studies, people with a higher education more easily accept being interviewed, so an extra effort was put into finding interviewees with lower educational backgrounds. All the interviewees lived in one of Norway's largest cities.

In the 2003 study, we compared the fathers who were home alone with the group of fathers who were on leave while the mother was present. In the present analyses, we have concentrated solely on the fathers who have been home alone with their children. The design is comparative in the sense that it analyses the experiences of fathers using the extended father's quota in the light of the experiences of fathers who were home alone on a shorter quota 15 years ago.

The analysis started with an open, inductive approach, in which we carefully read the interviews with our attention focused on how fathers described their doings when being home alone on leave. In the next stage, we read them with the main findings from our previous study of home-alone fathers in mind. We expected similar findings concerning the fathers' motives for taking leave, their enthusiasm in getting to know the child and their description of a newly acquired care competence. The similarities and differences with the fathers' experiences from the earlier study became our point of departure for developing the new categories.

3.5 Care Work as Hard Work

One distinct difference from the first study is that the fathers tended to describe childcare as hard work. They talked about it as challenging and tiresome (and wonderful). In the first study, the fathers' stories were dominated by the positive and thrilling aspects of being able to spend time with their young children. However, staying home alone for a period of 2 months or more seems to give the fathers insight into care work as "real" work. With the extension of the father's quota to two and a half months, the fathers may have raised their expectations as to what they wanted to accomplish while they were home on leave. While staying at home for 4 weeks (fathers in the first study) might be experienced as just "visiting", they were now taking the main responsibility for the child and the household during their leave, and learning that childcare required a reorganization of priorities to focus on the child. In short, the fathers experienced that caring for a baby could be very time consuming, more time consuming than they had expected.

When these fathers are home alone with their young children experiencing how exhausting it is to have the primary responsibility for doing care work, they acquire a new understanding of the amount of work that the mothers have to do. They talked about this as an eye-opening experience. Adam was a 32-year-old electrician married to Siri, a civil servant. He stayed at home alone for 15 weeks, and talked about his experience of being home alone and having the main responsibility for doing the care work:

> It's a big responsibility too. You have to put them first. Before we had kids, you only had to think about yourself. Whereas now you have to think every day okay, there's someone else you have to think about. And that's the way it was when I was on leave, your shoulders were always kind of like this (raises his shoulders) because you had to, you had responsibility for this little person. And as soon as mommy came home I could relax, and I didn't feel that until after maybe eight weeks. And we talked about it, and Siri was like now you understand what it was like for me for a year. I was like: "Wow, yeah." So I bought her some champagne and flowers, and said: *"you're the champ."*

Adam stayed home for quite a long period of time and experienced how having the sole responsibility could be exhausting, but at the same time fantastic. He had to focus on the child's needs and not on himself as he used to do before. It took 8 weeks before he felt he could relax a bit, which gave him a better understanding of the work and responsibility that his wife had experienced. When we ask if he was pleased that he acquired this insight into how his wife might have experienced her year at home with the baby, he said: "Yeah, totally, and I tried to say that to friends too."

He had learned from being home alone: "I was a bit back to the old ways too. Thinking 'okay, Siri has to take a bit more than me.' Changing the nappies and stuff, but now… Before I probably would have argued about changing the nappy, now I just do it. So, it was a really good experience." He accepted that this was a responsibility that they shared and did not bother to negotiate with his wife about whose turn it was to change the nappies. Thus, his previous understanding of care work had been challenged, and he had changed his practices towards more equal parenting.

We noticed the same experience with many of the other fathers who compared care work to having physically demanding jobs, and who became much more tired from being home. This also makes them think about the mother and the work she does when staying at home. Through experiencing both types of work, they are able to recognize the heavy workload that mothers have, as well as commenting on how unfair this division of work between parents has been.

Steinar is a 33-year-old graduate engineer married to Anna, a pre-school teacher. They had two daughters, one who was two and a half and the other 4 months when we interviewed him. He stayed home alone with the oldest daughter when he had his father's quota of 12 weeks. Because the family moved to a new flat shortly after he started on his leave period, he really had two different experiences while staying at home. He started out thinking that he would have ample time for himself, that care work would mean pleasant times and that he might even be a bit bored. Nevertheless, he was warned by his more experienced friends that he would have little spare time. During his period at home, he experienced two phases. He followed his friends' advice in the first phase and focused on only being there for the child, which he called his "good father's quota" period: "And it was … it was just as I had envisioned. Bliss, really. It was so nice, and peace and lots of cosy times with the baby." He talks about his experiences in the following way:

> Sure, you think you'll have oceans of time with a pleasant … and almost boredom. And that's where you go wrong. The funny thing is that I was told by I don't know how many friends who'd been there, done that, that "Don't plan. Don't think you'll be able to do

> redecorating and ridiculous ideas like that, you won't be able to do squat, Steinar. You can't plan loads of projects. Just … buy a book, you'll have time for that when she's sleeping.

His description has very much in common with the fathers in our first study when the leave period was much shorter. They experienced the "slow time" meaning that they concentrated on the child and did not try to combine this with other tasks. The second phase was very different because the new flat needed to be renovated. In this period he tried to combine doing care work with renovation tasks, and he describes this period as "awful" because of the stress of trying to combine care and renovation work.

> …you're chasing breaks from the kid to get things done, and every time you're like doing something and just need to get finished, then you hear her quack and start crying, and then you're working with a totally different sense of stress. You're not only working with the stress of having to hurry to mind the baby, but you're also full of guilt because you aren't there already. And then you can't let go of whatever you're doing, because then water will leak or whatever you were busy with. It really sucks, in other words.

He felt caught between doing the handyman jobs and taking care of the child. Caring for the toddler required total commitment, and he experienced guilt when the child woke up and he was not able to be with her immediately because he was plumbing or in the middle of some other maintenance task. He saw very clearly that this was an impossible combination and he had only negative remarks about this period, which contrasted very much with his first period at home when he experienced unconditional joy from being together with and looking after his baby daughter.

3.6 Integrating Caring, Cleaning and Cooking

As reported in our previous study (Brandth and Kvande 2003a, b), housework was not part of what they expected to be doing when on leave. When fathers in the current study discovered that being home on leave with a young child was very work-intensive, housework was included in their stories about the workload they had to deal with. In other words, the three Cs: caring, cleaning and cooking were all part of their total workload. This might be attributed to the length of the leave period, as they were not just popping in for a short period to be with the child. Being home alone on a longer leave meant more obligations. Steinar's opinion was that doing housework was expected from men today: "It's been two generations since men couldn't manage to do the laundry on their own." He explained that young men have had to learn to do it when they were students and/or living alone before starting a family. "However, the amount of work in a family," he said:

> …can't compare to what you have to do when you have a partner and children. That's how it is … a whole world of difference! And, you can't understand this before you have children yourself. Before I had children I thought that this would be a "piece of cake", and I couldn't see why people made such a fuss about running a house. I could do it with my little finger along with all the rest.

Being home alone for a longer period, the fathers learned what house- (and care) work really meant in terms of effort. It is healthy for men to experience what mothers have been doing, according to Steinar, who stayed home alone for 4 months. The experience helped to develop equal parenting practices. Emil, who took all the parental leave, including the father's quota, while the mother returned to her nursing studies, confirmed that he did most of the housework during the leave. "She wasn't always satisfied, though, ha, ha, because she's very strict about the cleaning." His wife had a higher standard of cleanliness than he had.

Having been home on leave with their children, the fathers told us how exhausting it could be, but also that they gradually got better at multitasking. After the first months of trial and error, when the daily routines were better established, things were running more smoothly, and it became less tiring. Adam, who was home alone with his daughter for 15 weeks, starting when she was 6 months old, described his daughter as a very active child who slept much less than he had anticipated she would. "Kids that age usually sleep for 3 hours maybe… she never slept that long. Maybe one and a half hours, and then I had to [entertain her]. (…) I would start with something [in the house], and then I'd just give that up." What he managed to do was "basically cleaning and vacuuming and stuff like that. And making the dinner when she was sleeping". His description of a typical day during his leave showed how care work and housework were intertwined:

> A typical day would be… all the family would get up at the same time because my kids are up at six o'clock. So we'd get up, and me and my daughter would set the breakfast table because I knew I didn't have to rush, so I'd make breakfast for everyone. And Thelma would sit and eat her breakfast. And afterwards we'd tidy up together. And it would be sunny, so we'd go out on the back balcony and then we would have all the toys out. And she'd play and we'd play, and we would go around the garden. Then it would maybe be time for her to sleep. So then she'd sleep, and then I would clean up the breakfast and vacuum and do the washing. And, just like my sister said, you'll be the housewife.

The quotation shows how he involved his daughter in setting the table and making breakfast. Some of the housework became a common project for father and child. Moreover, Adam put value on the housework, as it gave him something to do while she slept, "It's like what I'm used to doing at work," he said. Ian, a social worker, described a typical day as follows: "He [the son] slept twice a day, normally an hour each time, perhaps a little more. (…) In the mornings, I did tasks around the house, like tidying, remembering to take bread out of the freezer and making lunch. And then an activity and a trip in the afternoon."

While some of the fathers anticipated taking trips to town and visiting cafes to have coffee with friends, Max (who was a painter) had thought that he and his daughter "would go for trips in the woods, sleep in a tent, do some climbing and enjoy ourselves". In neither case did this turn out as expected. "I had to be home to make dinner every day," Max explained. Steinar had been warned by his more experienced friends that he would have little spare time. "You need to do the laundry and you must … really, take over the housekeeping." Even though he listened to his friends, he was disappointed that he did not get more done, for example reorganiz-

ing his computer files: "I had to rename the 'father's-quota-to-do list' to the 'when-I-have-retired list.'"

Generally speaking, the fathers described periods of little sleep, exhaustion and loneliness, but at the same time they praised the leave period as having been very positive. This dichotomy was expressed by Steinar, who said: "You really get completely worn out, and then it's worth it. And nobody will understand this before they have their own kid." The Norwegian sociologist Helene Aarseth (2013) has studied the meaning of everyday work in the home as expressed by fathers. She maintains that there is no contrast between delight and responsibility since everyday life practicalities and delight are embedded within each other.

3.7 Embodied Emotions

The fathers usually take their father's quota after the mother has returned to work and the child is approaching 1 year, which often means that the children were awake many more hours than when they were new-borns. This led to fathers doing a lot of activities with their children, and these activities were experienced as very emotionally rewarding. Steinar especially recalled when his daughter went on the swings:

It was great fun. She still thinks it's great fun. But it's one of the first times I remember where I really know she had one of those special moments. Sitting safely on a swing and gaining speed, swinging back and forth, and it was all wonderful laughter. Because that's the true original definition of joy, complete joy, no conditions. That's very good. So this is one of those moments you always recall."

Fathers also talked about this period with enthusiasm: "It's the greatest feeling in the world. It's a beautiful thing I think." Talking about what he did together with his child, Adam said: "And after she woke up, we would sing and read. Old English songs and stuff, and she'd enjoy that. Some days were different; we'd try to make new things." Because he was from another country, he wanted to teach his daughter his native language so he read and sung for her. He took great pride in being able to teach her, and he loved being with her:

> It was just being with… Seeing her grow, and her understanding of English. And everything was just coming, and she just changed so much. I witnessed her saying her first words and teaching her how to eat and everything. It was great! She just makes you laugh as well; Thelma, she's a great character.

When he said, "I witnessed her saying her first words", he implied that this was a combination of interpreting her words and her body language in a special context. Because he had spent a long time with her they had connected, and he understood what she was trying to express. He was also able to describe his emotions in a detailed language. His relationship with his daughter had benefited from the period when he stayed at home with her, and he compared their communication with his son who was older and with whom he had not stayed at home:

> Yeah, I think we have got a lot closer. … I don't know… we seem like a little team. She understands when I talk to her, she just understands like this, whereas I really miss that I didn't do that with John.

When his son was born he had only been in Norway for half a year, and did not have the right to parental leave. He compared the two situations, stating: "It seems that it worked out a lot better when I had the time." He learned how to interpret the unspoken words (Bungum, 2013) of his daughter: "But she's really clever. I understood. She actually would come up and grip the chair, and I knew after a while that it meant she was hungry." Because he spent a lot of time with her, they developed a way of communicating between them. In fact, in the end the baby understood English better than Norwegian, and therefore understood the mother less well. He said:

> After a while I think… I saw that Thelma didn't understand Norwegian after the 15 weeks [of father's quota]. Siri would talk to her after she came home from work, and Tea would be like: "Huh, what are you saying?" And then I would talk to her and she understood. Later, she went to daycare so she understands both languages now, so it's just amazing that they can adapt like that.

This pattern might exemplify a father who developed a close relationship with his child because he was alone with her at home while on leave for a long period. He was the parent who spent time at home when his daughter started to talk, so she learned his language. Again, he made the comparison to his son: "I know… we have a little bond. I have that with John as well, but it just seems a little different." When he is asked if that might be because he had time off and stayed at home alone, he answers: "Because of the father's quota, yeah." His best memory from when he was home with his daughter also illustrates their close relationship:

> I had a hammock sitting out on the lawn, and on sunny days she would lay on top of me and I would read my book, and she would just play with the trees and stuff. It was awesome. And I bought a trampoline, and that is what we did in the morning. We would go on the trampoline and roll some balls, and I would just lie in the middle and she would just roll around on top of me and it was a great time.

Both in the hammock and on the trampoline they would be together, and the baby girl would be close to his body while he was reading or while they were playing. This is a story about how he experienced the days on leave as "slow time", in which he could concentrate on the child and be emotionally absorbed with her.

Max also focused on how being home alone has impacted his relationship with his daughter. When we ask if it would have been the same if he had not been home alone, he talked about how nice it was to feel that she was dependent on him and to show her that he was a care person for her. An illustration of this bonding was that his daughter no longer automatically reached out for her mother when she was crying and needed comforting: "Yes, like suddenly it was … she wasn't interested in her mother when she came home from work, and her mother was almost in tears. So then it was like … it's so nice." These stories illustrate that the fathers staying home alone for a long period of time developed a need-oriented care (Bungum, 2013). Having had the main responsibility for their children, they had learned how to read

and understand their emotions. The fact that the toddlers had not yet developed a spoken language when the fathers were staying at home meant that they developed a different repertoire for understanding their children. They were doing fathering and taking part in the process of developing a dual caring in these families.

Adam told us about feeling tense and not being able to relax for 8 weeks because he had the sole responsibility for his little daughter. His story might be understood as an example of bodily alertness, with his lying in the hammock with the baby on top of him also being an example of embodied care. Another example was helping out when it was time to breastfeed the baby. Steinar's wife was working as a preschool teacher in a daycare centre and had time off to breastfeed while he was home with their baby. He told us how he would go to his wife's workplace every day with the baby so that she could be breastfed:

> Then I would put on my cross-country skis every morning and ski with Anna strapped to my body, and I would ski to her mother's workplace in the morning. And when I arrived, there would be a break for breastfeeding, and I would sit and read part of a book for Andrea while she was breastfeeding. Fantastic to have an hour or one and a half hours off in the middle of the busy working day, where we just sat and read a book and enjoyed being with the baby. And then … skiing back home. Really nice!

He explained how he actually took an active part in the breastfeeding by strapping the baby to his own body and skiing to the mother's workplace. While his wife was feeding the baby, he read for both of them. In this way they could both be together with the baby during the feeding session, and the baby could also hear her father's voice while she was being fed. By constructing a place for himself in the breastfeeding, he also deconstructed this as a strictly motherly or feminine practice. In spite of this he reflected on the biological difference, which represented limitations for what he could do while home on leave: "Because it's of course a drawback, that I'm not as free during my father's leave as she is in her mother's leave, because of the breastfeeding. And that's a little bit hard. I wouldn't mind having breasts. That would have been truly smart." Instead, he had to remember to bring "packed lunches" with him when he took his daughter outdoors, but he preferred this because it made him feel freer to plan his day with her.

Mons, a photographer married to Elise who worked as a hair-dresser, was home alone with his 11-month-old son during 20 weeks of father's quota 4 days a week. He described how this experience had an emotional impact on him, and he felt that being home alone with his son had affected their relationship: "I notice that now he's just as pleased whether it's me or Elise who comes in the door, but earlier it wasn't so important whether I came home or not. See? He probably feels more confident." His son displayed the same type of feelings whether his mother or his father was home. The child accepted both parents as his close care persons:

> That's really wonderful. You really go all soft and are touched and proud. Many strange emotions come to the surface in this context. But there aren't so many of these "finally I have managed to procreate" emotions. It's a bit more infinite, sounds a bit tacky, but infinite love. And I get even more emotional over these feel-good stories than before. I get a feel for things more in situations others may have experienced. I'm probably getting more empathetic, if that's what it's called? Sympathetic? To the situations of others. And then it's how

> you understand that he's more important than you are. There is no half-way, plain and simple. It's difficult to explain.

He focused on the emotional impact from having a child and getting to know him well, and felt that he had changed, though not dramatically, but felt that he had become less categorical. In addition to having an effect on the relationship between his son and himself, he explained how his caring qualifications had increased by becoming what he labelled as more "empathetic".

3.8 Conclusion

For more than 20 years, Norway has had an earmarked quota of leave for fathers as part of the parental leave system. The father's quota has received a lot of attention, both nationally and internationally, and there has been a great amount of interest in how the father-child relationship has been affected by this measure. Over the years, the father's quota has been substantially extended. Based on interviews with fathers who have used the longer quota and have been home alone with their young children, we have explored in this chapter how being home alone has impacted their caring practices. We find that staying home alone for a longer period of time (12 weeks) works together with general changes in the normative context of parenting and cultural models of fathering that have taken place during the 20 years that the fathers' quota has existed. During these years, there has taken place what might be labelled a "normalization process" of fathers as carers in the Norwegian society. The long duration since the implementation of earmarked parental leave for fathers may have created an historical path dependency. Seeing fathers alone (without mothers) with prams in the middle of a normal work day has become a common picture in the Norwegian context. The father's quota has contributed to this general change by providing fathers with the opportunities to stay at home. When it comes to fathers doing housework, there has also been a general change towards fathers doing more housework. In spite of these general changes, we are also able to identify the impacts of having a longer period at home alone.

The chapter is an answer to the question put forward by several researchers: What do fathers do when they are home on leave? When the fathers describe their practices when they are home alone, they focus on care work as hard work. In the first study, the fathers primarily tended to talk about the positive aspects of staying home alone looking after their toddler. This change may be interpreted as a result of fathers being home longer with their child due to the extension of the quota. By staying home alone for a longer period of time, the fathers experience the total commitment that caring for a small child requires, as they are not only "visitors" staying for a short period. This is an "eye-opening" experience, which challenges their previous understandings of care work and leads to a greater respect for the care-work that mothers have done.

Their stories of hard work also include the housework. While the fathers in our first study concentrated on taking care of their children when they stayed at home, and housework was an area of conflict in the family, the current fathers integrate cleaning and cooking with caring. This may reflect the general pattern of a gendered change in society, in which fathers' take-up of housework works together with having a longer period of leave, and manifests itself in them taking on more responsibility for the household. Thus, they also experience how staying at home on leave with the baby means taking on many tasks, and they learn how to do multitasking. They do not see themselves as assistant carers, but as full-fledged carers and house-persons.

The fathers in both studies expressed enthusiasm with being given the opportunity to stay at home. Because the second generation of home-alone fathers were home for a longer period and had the primary responsibility for their children's well-being, they seemed to develop a close bond to them and a possible intensification of the emotional ties. When the child only understands the fathers' language, when they turn to him for comfort just as often as to the mother, it gives the fathers a confirmation of these emotional ties to their children. Consequently, being given the opportunity to spend time alone with the child for a longer period seems to promote the development of relational competence.

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Chapter 4
Fathers on Leave Alone in Portugal: Lived Experiences and Impact of Forerunner Fathers

Karin Wall and Mafalda Leitão

4.1 Introduction

In Portugal there has been a continuing enhancement of fathers' leave entitlements over the last two decades. Policy goals have underlined the improvement of work-family balance for both parents and the well-being of the child as well as the promotion of gender equality, in particular through the increased involvement of fathers in child care. The last reform of the parental leave system, in 2009, addressed all these objectives but put a strong emphasis on fatherhood and gender equality by increasing paternity leave to 4 weeks of fully-compensated leave (taken with the mother after childbirth) and, more importantly, by introducing a 1-month 'bonus scheme' in case of gender sharing of leave (Wall and Leitão 2014).

The main aim of this chapter is to examine the consequences of the 'sharing bonus' policy measure from the perspective of fathers themselves. Drawing on a qualitative study carried out in 2011–2013, we will explore the understandings and experiences of fathers who took at least 30 days of parental leave in a 'home alone manner' implying daylong care for a few-months-old baby while the mother works. Which motivations and constraints underlie the decision to share parental leave? How do others, in the family and in the workplace, react to this decision? What are the lived experiences of leave alone for fathers, do they differ and why? To what extent does this type of leave lead to changes in fathers' perceptions and practices of parenting and gender roles?

The main results of the qualitative study presented in this chapter were analysed previously in an article published in *Fathering*. We would like to thank the Men's Studies Press for allowing us to use and quote from this article: Wall, K. (2014) "Fathers on leave alone: does it make a difference to their lives?" *Fathering*, *12*(2): 186–200.

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The chapter begins by describing the policy setting of the study and the theoretical and methodological framework. We then examine the experiences and profiles of fathers on 'home alone' leave. Finally, the main findings and their relevance for leave policies are discussed.

4.2 Developments in Leave Policies

Work-family policies in Portugal started out late, only after the transition to democracy in 1974. For nearly 50 years, during the right-wing dictatorship, pro-traditional policies promoted a male breadwinner model emphasizing women's subordinate role as homemakers and men's role as 'head of family' and provider. Family policies after the transition to democracy rejected previous gender cultural models and promoted state responsibilities to support full-time working men and women, leading to a gradual but steady increase in parents' entitlements to leave and in publicly subsidized services to support dual-earner couples with children (Wall and Escobedo 2009).

In this context, a well-paid but short 'early return to work' leave policy model was introduced in 1976, with a job-protected, fully-compensated leave of 3 months for employed women. Over the next three decades, leave entitlements were made more generous for both mothers and fathers, with a new focus on 'parental' entitlements emerging in the 1980s and 90s: individual entitlement to 3 months unpaid additional parental leave (today called "complementary parental leave") was introduced; 2 days of paternity leave, to be taken with the mother during the first month after childbirth, were introduced in 1995 and extended in 1999 to 3 weeks of fully-compensated leave for fathers; maternity leave, as from the mid-90s, could be divided between parents by mutual agreement and was extended to 4 months at 100 % or 5 months at 80 % of previous earnings.

More recently (Labour Law 2009), the term 'Maternity Leave' was replaced by the more gender neutral 'Initial Parental Leave' and three major changes came into effect. First, a 'sharing bonus' was introduced: an extra month of fully-compensated leave is available if the father takes 4 weeks or more of initial parental leave on his own after the first 6 weeks reserved for the mother. There are two options: 5 months at 100 % of previous earnings or 6 months at 83 %. The second change was an increase in paid 'paternity leave' to 4 weeks. Finally, compensation of complementary parental leave was introduced (at 25 % of previous earnings), if taken immediately after initial parental leave.

Fathers in Portugal can therefore take paternity leave, initial parental leave and complementary parental leave. With the new policy, fathers' leave periods have become longer, and fathers' use of initial parental leave has increased substantially. Before the 2009 reform only 0.6 % of fathers shared the leave. In 2010, one year after its introduction, 20 % of parents divided the initial parental leave, either in the form of the longer (58 %) or the shorter option (42 %).

Four factors may be seen to have encouraged the use of the bonus scheme by fathers in Portugal: first, it has a full earnings compensation; secondly, it allows parents to prolong childcare when the child is still very young (5–6 months); thirdly, it has been facilitated by the use of paternity leave (taken with the mother during the first month after childbirth), which increased from 17 % in 2000 to 82 % in 2014. Lastly, compared to men who began to take up leave in the mid-90s, this generation of fathers grew up in a society where the meanings associated with fatherhood were shifting dramatically (Wall et al. 2007). Other factors, however, have been introducing constraints, in particular those related to the impact of the economic crisis. Job instability and unemployment, both for men and women, rose dramatically over the last few years, making it more difficult for employees to access entitlements and to assert their rights.

4.3 Past Research on Fathers and Men's Roles: Main Approaches and Findings

There has been a considerable amount of research on men's roles in families and gender equality, mainly focusing on the need to understand how policy and cultural transformations have paved the way for the emergence of new models of masculinity and fatherhood underpinned by a renewed vision of the gender contract. Quantitative findings drawing on survey data reveal new attitudes and practices, with men's participation in unpaid work changing steadily, but still lagging behind levels of participation in most EU countries, in particular in household tasks. This has challenged research to seek to understand the changes from the perspective of men themselves: how are men negotiating old and new masculinities? And how are policy changes imprinting the way fathers and mothers perceive their household and care responsibilities and their entitlements to leave and work-family balance?

For the research issues raised in this chapter, three sets of results are important. A first set of findings concerns the changing cultural models of fatherhood in Portuguese society. There is a generalized consensus around the ideal of a caring and involved father (Torres 2004; Wall et al. 2007). Most men vehemently reject the old ideal of a distant and authoritarian father, criticize the former generations of fathers, and value the norm of the involved father who participates in the daily responsibilities of parental care, education and emotional involvement. Fatherhood also emerges as a key dimension in the building of new forms of masculinity: to a great extent, in Portuguese society, the reconfiguring of the father figure has been a powerful driving force in challenging traditional masculinities (Aboim and Marinho 2006; Aboim 2010).

Moving beyond this general trend, research also shows a diversity of fatherhood models (Wall et al. 2010). "Provider" fathers still identify with female domesticity and traditional masculinity involving the father's educational and playing role rather than caregiving, while "Helper" fathers see themselves as secondary, less competent,

caregivers who help mothers in the parental routines, relying on their guidance and mediation in parental responsibilities. "Companionship" fathers emphasize the importance of togetherness in conjugal life, seeing themselves as involved fathers who "share", though not necessarily on an equal basis, all parenting tasks. "Career-oriented" and "egalitarian" fathers underscore the importance of gender equality and symmetry in men and women's roles in both private and public spheres, but their work-family strategies develop along different lines: the first give priority to their professional careers, thereby seeking to be involved in parenting tasks through "quality time" with children, whereas "egalitarian" fathers tend to build up their involvement on a fifty-fifty basis, making a point of being autonomous and competent in all parenting and household tasks; contrary to expectations, this profile of fatherhood was found in different social classes, not only in highly qualified couples.

A second important set of findings concerns men's work-family balance. Several studies have shown that men also feel that work life is acutely affecting their role as fathers and have difficulty in reconciling family and work, in particular when there are young children. In fact, men's work-family stress, not only women's, is particularly high in Portuguese society (Torres 2004; Guerreiro and Carvalho 2007). The key factor in men's stress is long working hours and lack of time to be with the family and the children, making it difficult for men who feel an obligation and a need to spend more time at home to find their place in parenting routines (Wall et al. 2010). Men in manual or low paid occupations also mention shift work and the need to put in extra hours to provide a better life for their children; highly qualified men underscore the ideal of a totally career-invested and time-flexible male worker, thus finding it difficult, in particular in the private sector, to ask for more family-friendly schedules and leaves. Overall, the findings underline that employers and families still have strong expectations, despite the predominant dual-earner model, that men in families will assume the role of primary provider and secondary caregiver, also meaning that they will be available for work and long hours, less likely to take leave and more invested in their careers.

Studies adopting a comparative social policy approach and seeking to tap fathers' and mothers' expectations of leave entitlements represent a third set of results. A pioneer survey carried out in the late 90s revealed that a vast majority (82 %) of men approve the extension of paternity leave (1 week at the time), without loss of earnings, from 1 to 2 (34 %) or 4 (39 %) weeks; but only a minority (14 %) indicated a leave period for fathers similar to the mothers (4 months) (Perista and Lopes 1999). On the other hand, most of the interviewed men (70 %) expected negative reactions from employers to increased leave entitlements for fathers. Recent research has also shown that the sharing of leave by fathers is related to average or high educational levels and public sector employment, and that acceptance on the part of employers increases when there are other cases of fathers on leave (Ferreira and Lopes 2004). A qualitative study on motherhood and fatherhood penalty highlighted the perceived importance of full earnings compensation by both male and female interviewees as well as a leave period that should last from between 6–12 months after the birth of the child (Ferreira 2009). Analysis of the meanings of leave use revealed

that most fathers think of taking a fairly short leave with the aim of supporting the mother as the main caregiver; fewer discourses underlined the importance of sharing leave equally with the mother.

4.4 Theoretical Background

The study which informs this article is rooted in principles of symbolic interactionism and draws on a rich tradition of qualitative family research that uses them. It is also influenced by theory on changing masculinities and fatherhood, as well as the social policy literature on leave policies and the impact of leave use. Combining the three theoretical strands, our analytical framework brings together a specific set of concepts and research issues.

Drawing on family research, particular emphasis is placed on fathers' accounts of their own meanings and actions, as well as how they interpret and negotiate the latter in light of other actors' expectations (Finch and Mason 1993; Morgan 2011). Two major contributions from men and masculinities scholarship stand out. The overarching concept of hegemonic masculinity highlights complicity with patriarchy and traditional conceptions of fathers as authority figures, educators and breadwinners (Connell 1995; Hobson 2002). But the literature also emphasizes the plurality of masculinities across and within settings, thereby recognizing a more complex process of change in the new understandings of masculinity and fatherhood.

Finally, one of the major contributions of research on parental leave has been to assess the connections between parental leave and gender equality. A first major strand of research has focused on gender equality incentives and the factors which facilitate or hinder father's take-up (Bygren and Duvander 2006; Chronholm 2002; Duvander and Johansson 2012; Haas et al. 2002; Haas and Rostgaard 2011; Lammi-Taskula 2008; Pajumets 2010). Cultural, workplace, conjugal, and social variables have been shown to influence fathers' use of leave. Public policy also plays a role, with leave schemes offering individual, non-transferable and well-compensated entitlements for fathers reported as important incentives for the gender sharing of leave (O'Brien et al. 2007; Ray et al. 2010; Rostgaard 2002).

A second major strand of research has focused on fathers' experiences of leave and the impact of leave on fathers' participation in childcare and relationships with children. Nordic research carried out in the 90s suggests that fathers who were taking the 'daddy month' on a 'home alone' basis became more aware of infant life and 'slow time' than those who took parental leave with their partner (Brandth & Kvande 1998, 2001). Men on leave also valued the strengthening of father-child bonds (Haas 1992; Huttenen 1996). Slow time is described as a daily life rhythm related to caregiving which is perceived as less stressful than daily life at work. Initial findings also pointed to confident, highly educated fathers who shape their own form of carework: rather than closeness to the child, 'masculine care' emerged as committed to 'doing' things with the child and 'teaching' the child independence; also, most of

the men interviewed did not do much housework as they perceived caring for the child as the main reason for taking leave.

According to this literature then, fathers' caring activities seem to be linked to a hegemonic form of masculinity, drawing on the importance of men's role in educating and connecting the child to the outside world. Moreover, although research was expecting to find transgressive gender relations, in line with the major hypotheses on changing masculinities, 'degendering' of unpaid work did not emerge as a major trend (Ekberg et al. 2005; Deven 2005). In contrast, however, recent qualitative research on Swedish fathers (Almqvist 2008) and stay-at-home fathers who opted out of the labour market to care for a child points to some engagement of men in innovative forms of masculinity (Doucet and Merla 2007; McKay and Doucet 2010). Findings unveil important changes in fathers, such as a new child-orientated masculinity and the valuing of unpaid work. Positive effects on fathers' involvement and autonomy in childcare, in particular when more days of leave are used, has also been highlighted by quantitative data (e.g. Haas and Hwang 2008; Seward et al. 2006; Sundstrom and Duvander 2002).

The key aims of our research are therefore to explore the lived experiences of fathers on leave alone and to see if they confirm or challenge more conventional understandings of gender role models and fathering. To what extent do the social processes and consequences of the experience of leave alone imply little change in these understandings, largely confirming previous findings? To what extent do they lead to some disruption in fathers' gender identities and their perceptions of fatherhood and motherhood? Given the 'familialistic' background of the Portuguese welfare state and the relatively high gender imbalance in unpaid work, particular attention will be given to the idea of 'masculine care' identified in previous studies.

4.5 Methods and Sample

In-depth interviews were carried out with twenty fathers who had taken leave alone. In line with the topics used by most researchers in this book (see Chap. 1), the interview instrument included eight core questions acting as prompts for fathers' narratives: Could you please describe the leave you took after your child was born? Why did you decide to take leave in this way? How did people around you react to your decision (workplace, family, friends)? What was it like to be a dad on leave, can you recall the first days alone and the weeks that followed? Do you think taking up leave had any consequences on your life (career, family and conjugal bonds, work-family balance, opinions)? How was going back to work? What does it mean to be a father and a man? What is your opinion of the current leave scheme?

A non-probability purposive sampling procedure was used to ensure participants were fathers who had taken leave alone for thirty or more days. Contacts were made through word of mouth (snowballing) and personal relationships. Formal contacts with firms in the private sector were made in order to bring in diversity of sectors of employment. In order to achieve variation in the lived experiences of fathers, the

study aimed at a sample size of 12–20 interviews (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). The interviews lasted between one and a half and 3 hours and responses were taped and fully transcribed. Only pseudonyms identify the respondents in order to maintain confidentiality.

The sample of twenty fathers who participated in the exploratory study were living with their partner and children mainly in the city of Lisbon or in the inland town of Covilhã (Table 4.1). All couples were full-time dual-earner couples, in line with the predominant trend in Portuguese families with children, and most had one or two children (two had three children). Father's income was mostly higher than the median average reported for the country but there was some variety, with two men well below average, five close to it and thirteen above. The fathers were between age 28 and 54 and had low, average or high levels of education. All were employed full-time either in the private (eight) or public or state corporate sector (twelve), with the following professions: policeman, aircraft maintenance engineer, chief accountant, product manager, sports manager, television journalist, hairdresser, architect, management consultant, designer, computer engineer, nurse, driver, researcher, internet project manager, economist, software architect, radio professional, geographer, university professor.

The majority of fathers (16) had taken 2 months of leave: 1 month with the mother after the birth of the child, which is described as leave taken to support the mother and also, as one father put it, "leave to protect life"; and 1 month at the end of the mother's leave, when the baby was 5 or 6 months old. Only 4 fathers had taken more than 1 month of leave in a home alone manner and only one of these took exactly the same number of months (4.5) as the mother, fulfilling an objective of a fifty-fifty division of parental leave.

Interviews were coded and analysed by the researcher in charge and two researchers, using the grounded theory method (Strauss and Corbin 1998) based on a step by step inductive analysis which respects both manifest and latent contents. Three procedures which address the issues of coding and validation may be described. Interviews were first read vertically, in order to extract a summary of each father's narrative, and then horizontally, in order to derive the main emerging themes. The first procedure involved reducing the interview text to a two-page summary of each father's leave story and background; a few key experiences were extracted from each case, in order to annotate their variety and to sensitize researchers to what they mean for fathers. The second procedure involved defining the main themes for transversal analysis. Many common themes emerged from the data, some prompted directly by the interview questions (e.g. negotiation of leave; daily practices and activities), others emerging from the fathers' narratives and in connection with our theoretical research questions (e.g. masculine or feminine division of care; personal consequences of leave such as learning and bonding; understandings of gender roles). A preliminary thematic coding agenda was applied by the researchers in order to ensure inter-observer reliability. Once agreed on, the themes were used in all 20 interviews, to enable transversal scrutiny and to move on to the third procedure – the extraction of meaningful interpretations and concepts (e.g. 'supported' versus 'innovative' profiles of fathers).

Table 4.1 Interviewed Fathers, by age, education, profession, wife's profession, duration of leave alone – Portugal

Name	Age	Level of education	Profession (Sector)	Wife's profession	Leave alone in mths, child, (profile)
1 Diogo	30	secondary	Policeman (public sector)	Administrative Department Manager	1 month 1st child (innovation and deconstruction)
2 Paulo	39	higher	Aircraft Maintenance Engineer (public sector)	Civil Engineer	1 month, 2nd child) (supported)
3 Joaquim	39	higher	Chief Accountant (public sector)	Secretary	1 month, 3rd child (innovation and independence)
4 Manuel	34	higher	Internet Maintenance Manager (private sector)	Journalist	1 month, 1st child (innovation and deconstruction)
5 Francisco	33	higher	Sports manager (private non profit sector)	Journalist	1 month, 1st child (innovation and independence)
6 Raúl	37	higher	Tv Journalist (public sector)	Journalist	1 month (2nd child) (innovation and independence)
7 Leonardo	32	secondary	Hairdresser (private sector)	Hairdresser	1 month (2nd child) (innovation and independence)
8 David	35	higher	Architect (public sector)	Lawyer	2 months, 1st child (suported)
9 Rafael	28	Higher	Management Consultant (private sector)	Biologist	1 month, 1st child (innovation and independence)
10 Frederico	35	higher	Designer (private sector)	Researcher	2 months, 1st child (innovation and deconstruction)
11 Roberto	54	higher	Computer Engineer (public sector)	Judge	1 month, 3rd child (fundamental break)
12 Samuel	29	higher	Nurse (public sector)	Sales woman	1 month, 1st child (innovation and deconstruction)
13 José	31	Compulsory (9 years)	Driver (private sector)	Waitress	1 month, 2nd child (supported)
14 Júlio	54	higher	Researcher (public sector)	Researcher	1 month, 1st and 2nd child (innovation and independence)
15 Alfredo	39	higher	Internet Project Manager (private sector)	Internet project manager	4 months, 1st child (innovation and deconstruction)
16 Ricardo	43	higher	Economist (public sector)	Bank Department Manager	1 month, 1st child (fundamental break)
17 Tiago	35	higher	Software Architect (private sector)	Primary Teacher	2 months, 1st child (supported)
18 Emílio	38	higher	Radio Professional (public sector)	Social Worker	1 month, 1st child (supported)
19 Marcelino	44	higher	Geographer (public sector)	Lawyer	1 month,, 1st child (fundamental break)
20 Duarte	33	higher	University Teacher (public sector)	Secondary School Teacher	1 month, 1st child (innovation and independence)

4.6 The Lived Experiences of Fathers: Six Key Social Processes

Throughout the interviews, fathers were asked about their experience of taking leave and being at home alone. Daily life, decisions on the use of leave, the experience of time and bonding, strategies for dealing with the care and demands of a baby, other domains of life such as housework or leisure, opinions on the role of fathering and mothering, were all abundantly discussed. From fathers' descriptions of taking leave alone to care for a baby, six social processes linked to this life experience emerged. All the fathers talk about these overarching processes, enabling us to identify fundamental aspects of the experience.

4.6.1 Negotiating

The first process involves participants' experiences of *negotiating* leave, mainly with their partner and employers. The length of leave (5 or 6 months) and the amount of time taken by each parent (one or more months, and when) always require a complex decision-making process in which the couple has to weigh up different factors: the impact of leave on each partner's career, employers' openness to fathers' leave-taking, the interests of the child (e.g. age for starting daycare) and those of parents (e.g. professional self-fulfillment; parental and gender equality values; reprisals in the workplace). All fathers had been informed of the new 'sharing bonus' contained in the 2009 law, but only some knew about the individual entitlement to the complementary parental leave compensated at 25 % of previous earnings. However, they all discussed the use of sharing bonus with their partner and informed the employer as soon as possible.

Although these forerunner fathers began by 'telling' their employer, as a mother would inform that she was pregnant and going on leave, they also describe having to enter into a process of negotiation, since employers did not readily accept fathers' leave use as a natural right beyond the 2–4 weeks of paternity leave. As one father put it, contrary to what happens regarding the 'natural' inevitability of leave use by the mother, in the case of a man who is going to use parental leave the first reaction is to consider this as a choice or an option, which is often frowned upon by the employer.

> I think you have to put your foot down. I think that it's because you're a man that they say: 'this is not necessary, you're doing this because you want to, you don't really need to do this'. That's their idea of things, "look, man, you don't need to do this, but if you really think you need to… well, it's difficult to do without you here, but it's your choice". Whereas the mother, everyone accepts that the mother goes on leave, that's how it is, but a man there is the question of: 'But what do you think you're up to? There is work to do (…) you don't have to go on leave, so if you don't have to, if you have an alternative, if a person only does this because he wants to, you are doing this and you are harming the company. So, pal, see if you can help us out here and don't do this. (Alfredo, 39, computer engineer, 1 child)

In a context of negotiation, fathers tend to 'offer something in exchange', by committing themselves to being available in case of 'need'. Some factors may play in favour of the employee, such as his exceptional skills and previous commitment to the company as well as working in the public sector, having colleagues who have taken leave or having a long-term contract. Fathers employed in the private sector had more adverse reactions in the workplace than those in the public and state corporate sectors and were more often the forerunners of leave use. After noting that in his family fathers' new entitlements were received as important and natural, Manuel (aged 34, internet maintenance manager, private company, the first to ask for this type of leave in the workplace, wife a journalist), described his experience of reprisals in the workplace:

> I really wanted to be a father, not only to have a son but to care for him (…) and I didn't understand why fathers did not take leave as mothers do, why father could not stay at home and be accepted if he shared the leave. And T. was of the same opinion (…). So when the law came out, just before the baby was born, I went to social security straight away. T. and I still thought about whether she would take five and I one, or she would take four and I two, but I couldn't take two months with my job. Even one was bad enough. Well, it was bad, but it could be worse. I can't compare the work I do with working in a factory, where punishment and reprisals are much more noticeable. But I think there are ways of doing these things. There's no longer any physical whipping, but there are still psychological blows. That's more like what I went through, that psychological game. At the time, as soon as I knew, I told them – because you have to give as much notice as possible with these things – that I intended to take a month's leave and that it would be in July. The first question they asked me was why I wanted to take a whole month, wasn't it enough to take just the days of paternity leave…

Reprisals eventually led Manuel to look for another job and he moved to another firm. Nevertheless, some fathers in the private sector were able to assert their rights more easily and without reprisals which, they say, would have been unacceptable given their position and commitment to the company. When Alfredo (see above) informed management that he would be taking leave for 4 months (1 month parental leave and 3 of complementary parental leave), they complained that it would be very inconvenient because it was impossible to replace him. Alfredo, however, says he claimed his entitlement to leave as a "point of fact" and a fundamental right; nevertheless, he also felt a need to compromise, and therefore accepted to be on call to solve urgent work problems during the last 3 months of leave; he even bought some special ear phones to be able to work and have the baby on his lap at the same time.

> I'm in a position where I am really needed because I deal with many people in the company, I distribute the game (…), for better or for worse a lot of things depend on me. But I would not tolerate any obstacles because I have always been loyal, dedicated and professional here in the company, I was always very responsible so I wouldn't accept no for an answer. (…) I knew the law was on my side and I hoped and confirmed that people would react with good sense. Afterwards I had to work out the logistics of things, I had to… I worked while I was at home on leave, I wasn't able to disconnnect completely from work.

In contrast, Roberto, a computer engineer working in a bank in the corporate public sector (aged 54, public sector, married to a judge, 3 children) did not have to

take workplace constraints into account; this allowed negotiation of leave to focus more on the interests of the mother and the child.

> We were updated on the changes in legislation, so we discussed what to do. We preferred that she, my wife, took the maximum she could take and then only after that…I came on the scene. Well, because she was breastfeeding and so this was an advantage. I think we sort of assumed it would be so, our approach was quite traditional from that point of view. And then, of course, we thought it was important to put off the moment when the baby went to the crèche… Her sisters at four months were so small on the first day at the crèche. And then there was another aspect to the decision: my wife's job. It was always very difficult for her to stay away from the courts for long, the work piles up and you can't lose track… So we didn't want her to… We had to find the balance between caring for the baby at home for a bit longer without penalizing our working lives too much.

Other workplace constraints on the mother's side, in particular when women occupy precarious or unskilled jobs which they feel may be endangered if the employer has to replace them, also leads couples to consider the sharing of leave as more balanced. José (aged 31, driver, 2 children) says his employer was not very pleased:

> My wife works in a small restaurant so the boss cannot have many employees, and then things are not looking good at all, and her boss said outright it would be difficult if she took four months, so we talked it over and, you know, we thought it was best if I took care of the kid as well for a couple of months so she needn't miss so much time at work. Well, my boss wasn't all that pleased either! But too bad, we divided it between us. We took advantage of this modern stuff…

Close relatives such as parents, siblings and parents-in-law, both men and women, were strongly supportive of fathers taking leave. In fact, all the fathers reported positive attitudes from family members, while reactions from friends and work colleagues were varied. Some fathers recalled joking and strangeness from close friends and colleagues, in particular in workplaces where fathers had never taken leave before. Often, however, this led other men to think about using leave and later inquiring about the "best way to go about it".

In summary, this diversity of reactions, both positive and negative, and the need to negotiate leave at home and in the workplace, show that fathers' use of the leave bonus during this early stage of policy implementation is far from being taken for granted. In contrast to countries where the 'daddy month' has been in place for many years, these fathers are often regarded as 'exceptions' by their employers and perceive themselves as 'pioneers' who have to assert their rights and go against predominant perceptions of the fully-invested male worker who does not 'need' to use leave to care for young children. The main factors that constrain or incentivize the use of leave on a 'home alone' basis are, nevertheless, varied. Those working in the private sector usually had to face negative reactions in the workplace. Being in a position of management or responsibility was another highly constraining factor. On the other hand, three main variables emerge as factors that incentivate father's use of the new leave rights: the mother's full-time participation in the labour market and need/motivation to go back to her job (also linked to the strong acceptance, in Portuguese society, of the full-time dual earner model); the wish to keep the child at home for a slightly longer period; and a strong motivation, both on the part of the father and the mother, to share caregiving and hands-on parental involvement as from the birth of the child.

4.6.2 Doing

The second process relates to what fathers actually do while on leave, that is, their multiple *activities,* including care of a baby and other household tasks, work time or leisure time. Fathers describe what some scholars call a 'shift in time experience' (Hallman et al. 2007). They spoke of experiencing both a strong pressure from the constant and tiring demands of daylong caring for a baby and a difficult juggling, or loss, of opportunities to do other things, including resting, leisure, working or household tasks. Rather than the experience of slow time then, it was the experience of fast time and exhaustion, related to the caregiver's job, and leaving little time to rest or do other things for very long, that emerged from most of the interviews.

> It was a very demanding month … I was with him. He'd wake up, I'd give him his bottle, then he would go back to sleep a bit during the morning, then I would play with him. Then I'd make lunch, tidy up, spend part of the afternoon with him, interacting with him, playing. Then, well, he would sleep a bit more, but almost every time I thought I'd take a bit of a rest after tidying up and having done all that stuff, he would wake up. It was an almost never-ending cycle, with no rest in between, it's really very tiring looking after a baby all day. (Rafael, 28, management consultant, 1 child)

> It takes up all your time. You only manage to do something else when the baby is asleep, practically… The rest of the time, your attention is concentrated on the baby, so you can't do anything else. Patricia had already said to me: 'look, free time is little or nothing!', and in fact I confirmed this, there was very little time, for example, to tidy the house a bit, or do the dishes, make the bed, those sort of things, or take a look at something on the computer that was really important at the time. So, that idea of *relaxing*, sitting calmly on the sofa reading a book or watching TV, no. No, no, not at all. Sometimes it was even complicated to…, sometimes I only took a bath in the afternoon for example (Ricardo, 43, economist, 1 child)

Apart from caring for the baby, fathers also try to build housework, work or leisure into their daily activities. The kinds of activity vary, as they are shaped by the father's agency and efforts in trying to get other things done at the same time, by pressure to do some work while on leave and also by the availability of a third person to help out. Five fathers in positions of responsibility (chief accountant, computer engineer, internet project manager) or involved in work with difficult deadlines (researcher, university teacher) occasionally went into work with the baby for an afternoon to sort out an urgent problem or did some work from home, usually in the evenings when their partner returned or at night when the child was asleep. Some fathers made an effort to get all the housework and shopping done, but others only cared for the baby and did not worry at all about housework, relying on their partner, a daily or a family member for help. Leisure activities such as surfing the net or reading are usually mentioned as being difficult to achieve, due to the many interruptions. The five fathers who experienced time as less demanding and felt they had some moments of free time were also those who had daily support in care and household tasks : Paulo, an engineer, had his mother's support to help with childcare every afternoon and his wife did all the housework; José had daily support from his mother; David had a domestic employee who also helped care for the baby; Tiago

did no housework as his partner, a primary school teacher, came home at 2 pm and did everything; while Emílio did not have anyone to help care during the day but the baby took long naps, giving him a sense of slow time and a even a feeling of 'saturation' from being at home (his partner also did all the housework).

4.6.3 Learning

The *learning* process is also a fundamental aspect of the experience mentioned by all the fathers. Having been on paternity leave for 2–4 weeks, all the interviewees had acquired at least some basic skills, such as changing nappies, by the time they stayed alone. Most fathers therefore describe the acquisition of skills as a process which goes beyond the role of a care 'helper'. This includes learning how to be an "independent" or self-sufficient carer by taking on responsibility alone, learning the ins and outs of emotional care rather than just instrumental care such as changing nappies and feeding, and "testing oneself" as a solo carer.

> That's when we truly become parents, isn't it? When we have such a close tie to them that we know just by the kind of crying, or by his manner, what he wants … that kind of awareness is very important, I think it shows how close you are, and that's what it really means to be a father. (Rafael, 28, management consultant, 1 child)

> To all effects this was my first complete experience of being a father… during that time you understand that… there you have the real proof that your life has changed, right? And that everything will be different, your priorities change completely, your priorities, your timetable, everything. So I, during that month, I had the concrete proof that the most important thing… was that baby, it was Pedro, and also the idea of the responsibility that this implies is something which, I think, really changes you as a person, especially someone who has decided to use the shared parental leave, it was a big experience (Ricardo, 43, economist, 1 child)

The process of becoming autonomous and confident as a solo carer seems to be related to the absence of third parties, partner or other persons, who provide support and act as mediators during the day. In fact, the few fathers who were supported by their partner (coming home early) and/or another family member or domestic helper, tend to perceive the use of the leave bonus as reinforcing the basic skills acquired during paternity leave with the mother rather than providing a new and fundamental learning experience as a solo carer. However, this process may also lead to a lived experience of fatherhood which is different. José, for example, helped out very little when he was on paternity leave for 10 days after the birth of the child, but when he stayed home for a month, in spite of his mother's support, it was then he learnt how to give the bottle and change nappies as a regular routine.

> I was very awkward at first, but then I got used to it (..) and now I often think: I am a very different father this time, I've learnt and I'm not ashamed of doing things that a mother does and this is how it should be, because after all she also works (José, 31, driver, 2 children)

4.6.4 Bonding

Fathers also tell us about the social process of *bonding*. Not surprisingly, as emphasized by previous research, all the fathers consider that being on leave alone strengthens father-child bonds, since time together promotes closeness, mutual understanding, affection, sharing and involvement. However, they also describe the strengthening of other bonds, in particular of conjugal bonds, and of intergenerational bonds, usually due to the strong interest and involvement of the father's parents in their son's experience.

> During that time I spent alone with my daughter, she developed a very strong bond with me, got very close to me. Actually she got so close to me that when she woke up at night she only wanted me, she only quietened down with me. We are very good friends, we two … (Leonardo, 32, hairdresser, 2 children)

> There's no-one else there, and that creates a stronger bond … I don't know, when people say there's a stronger tie between mother and baby, I think that tie between mother and baby is transferred to the father, at least that's what I felt. (Joaquim, 39, accountant, 3 children)

> I always used to do a lot at home, but when I stayed by myself, that's when I understood the important little things that happen in day-to-day life, and I think that has helped me to appreciate the other person's perspective as well (…) because I did all those things I think my wife and I got to know each other better, and I think it actually helped our relationship quite a bit. (Manuel, 34, internet manager, 1 child)

4.6.5 Undoing Gender

Lastly, in different ways and with different meanings, fathers mention a process of *undoing or contesting gender* roles. For some this is merely a question of diverging slightly from routine gender practices in which certain care tasks and responsibilities were carried out or overseen by their partner. Rather than contesting gender, the situation is seen as a temporary undoing of gender which is beneficial for the mother's participation in the labour market and/or for the child's present and future well-being (staying at home for an extra month; having a father who has basic parenting skills). In other cases the move away from pre-conceived male and female roles is rooted in an experience of growing contestation and reflexivity. It is embedded in a process involving a deconstruction of gender differences and traditional ways of thinking about gender roles. Manuel, an internet manager in a private company, is one of the more reflexive fathers. He describes how being alone on leave made him think about the construction of gender equality (which he already valued) as an ongoing step by step process:

> I think equality (…) is not just household chores, it's not just your worries, not just the shared leave … With all due respect, and I think the new shared leave is very important… I think it's the other side, really understanding the man (…) That other side is more of an effort, isn't it? It's more of an effort. Making meals, being at home all day, that's an effort, so it's good to share that aspect, let's share that side. The other thing is – I can sleep with

> him here close beside me, feel his warmth, even though I (the man) have to wake up and go and fetch him, then it's "look, go and fetch him", "right, I'll stick with the worst part which is going to get him, and you get the best part, which is staying with him. Why don't we share it the other way round? You go there, make up the bottle, you go and fetch him and I'll give it to him in bed". That doesn't happen, but I think that's the next step, that may be the next step …

The effects of leave use on fathers' changing perceptions of gender roles may also be captured in their reflections on motherhood. The experience of solo caring leads to a questioning of mothering as an innate biological vocation and strengthens fathers' perceptions of primary caregiving as a skill which may be acquired through learning and agency. Even the fathers who are strongly supported and spend less time caring 'alone' feel that they have changed in this respect. Although they still consider the mother as the natural and competent caregiver, they were surprised to find out that a father can learn the basic skills of motherhood, not only to be able to replace her occasionally but also to be 'different' fathers.

4.6.6 Experiencing Emotions

The sixth key process which emerged was the experience of *emotions and feelings* related to caring and being alone at home with a small baby. Emotions are mostly positive, involving descriptions of pleasure, liking, happiness, satisfaction, willingness, ability, responsibility, confidence (in oneself and in the future of the child), connections, proximity, affection, awareness, friendship, challenges, testing oneself, pride, calm, empathy and mutual understanding. Negative emotions are mostly related to feelings of tiredness, panic, worrying (about getting everything done or problems at the workplace), rush and loss of time; but also, in some cases, to feelings of saturation, monotony and boredom. Positive emotions are connected not only to the overarching experience of leave but also to special moments which were part of the father's routine with the baby while on leave. Emilio, for example, recalls the proximity and pleasure he felt when he went shopping with the baby in a sling.

> (…) she often went with me in the 'sling' (…) I feel this ritual of the sling was somehow more important than spending time with her at home when she was asleep in her cot for example. We would go to the market, we would walk there and then there was this feeling of physical closeness and proximity which made us both happy… (Emilio, 38, radio journalist, 1 child)

4.7 Diversity of Experiences: Four Main Profiles

Another key result is the diversity of lived experiences. The overarching themes and processes analysed above show that the lived experience of fathers is influenced by structural and interactional contexts, in particular by workplace culture and

partners' gender and professional roles, as well as shaped by the father's agency and reflexivity. By analyzing how the key processes are experienced and combined in different ways, we can use this sample to identify four main profiles of fathers' experience of being alone on leave.

Fathers who fall into the *supported* profile are those who see themselves as more traditional fathers who have always strived to 'help' their partner at home but are more comfortable when their caring role is supervised and mediated by the mother. During leave, these fathers who see themselves as 'helpers' are strongly supported both by their partner (who may come home early and even make an effort to rush home in the lunch hour) and by a third party (a mother, a mother-in-law, a domestic employee) who is usually present during part of the day and helps with caring and housework.

> Actually, I spent a lot of time at my mother's house. I would take care of him in the morning, then take him to my mother's. We would have lunch there, spend the afternoon there, then my wife arrived, she always tried to arrive early (Paulo, 39, aircraft maintenance engineer, 2 children).

> Those first days I was clumsy, but with lessons from my wife and help from my mother (…) I managed. Now I am more used to it (…), but even so I hope it won't be necessary again. What was really important to me was that I was able to help my wife keep her job. Of course I was lucky, because I could always turn to my mum for help… (José, 31, driver, 2 children)

The five fathers in this profile describe a greater sense of responsibility, feel that they have acquired more confidence but continue to see themselves as secondary caregivers, in contrast to the mother, who is perceived as the primary and natural carer. The new entitlement is seen as an opportunity, but the period of leave is appreciated mainly from the child's point of view, for strengthening family ties and because it contributes, overall, to the positive experience of paternity. The fact that the father is alone on leave is therefore less important. In fact, these fathers would have preferred to have more time on leave with the mothers. Talking about their experience, they blurr the boundaries between being on paternity leave and being on parental leave. It is more the core components of the fathering experience, such as physical contact with the baby, spending time together, bonding and learning basic care skills such as feeding and putting to sleep, that are highlighted.

For men in the *fundamental break* profile, the period of leave alone is experienced as a key moment in family gender roles, as a fundamental break with previous highly differentiated gender roles. These are men who before going on leave alone were weak 'helper' partners in a context where female management of unpaid work was the rule. Considered as less professional or even inefficient by their partners, these men were called upon to help out but did little and were never allowed to be responsible for any particular task, even though some would have liked to take on more. The three men in this profile both took leave alone because their wives (judge, lawyer, bank department manager) felt it would be beneficial for professional reasons to go back to work earlier. In such a highly unequal gender context, fathers unexpectedly find themselves in a totally novel situation, having to cope with housework and full responsibility for a baby for the first time in a long

period of conjugal life. In some ways then, they experience the period of leave as offering a time of unusual responsibility and independence, which was appreciated. Moreover, unlike the men in the previous profile, they did not delegate the care of the child to third parties and underwent an important process of learning. The final result is double-pronged: the fathers continue to see themselves as 'helper' fathers and the mother as primary caregiver, but they feel that they have changed radically, in particular that they have become confident in the home and in the parental role.

> I have a clear idea that I reminded myself to say "right, it's time to feed, or give him the bottle, it's time to go to sleep…" (…) I may even have done the same things before – [with his other children] -, but it was always with my wife to guide me. This last time I was home alone, so I acted more responsibly (…) but I also managed to get over that initial panic, of saying whenever he cried "he's crying, what's happening?" and I said to myself, right, "this must be the nappy or it must be time to give him the bottle", so there was… a bit less panic, my reactions were a bit better organized and rational, let's say, and practical maybe, yes, more practical … (Roberto, 54, computer engineer, 3 children)

The third profile reveals fathers who before taking leave were already regularly involved in housework and childcare. Rather than 'helpers', they see themselves as 'sharers' of housework and 'involved' fathers. 'Home alone' leave is therefore tied more closely to core issues of autonomy and innovation. The period of leave brings little in the way of the new learning of basic tasks ("I already knew how to do that", "I didn't need a parachute"), but it is experienced as a final step towards becoming an independent caregiver to whom all tasks may be delegated as well as an opportunity to be creative, by building up an individualized profile of fathering. This may explain why the seven men in the *innovation and independence* profile experienced leave as a period of intense activity in which they engage in a large variety of tasks and become fully involved caregivers.

> As a couple we are quite egalitarian. It was total sharing with the baby (…), I didn't breastfeed that's all. During that month everything went well, I already knew how to do everything, even if I was slightly unsure to begin with. In fact, I would have liked to stay longer, because it's a phase in the child's development in which interaction makes a difference, it increases and becomes more gratifying every day. Being on leave alone also makes for more complicity with the child, so it gives both parents a chance to develop their special place. In my view, it doesn't take away anything from the mother but it adds to the father's role (Raul, 37, TV journalist, 2 children).

The added value of 'home alone' caring is therefore more explicit than in the previous profiles: it is a step towards full individual autonomy as a carer but it also enhances the father's specific profile as a highly involved parent and a competent promoter of work-family balance. Moreover, all these men see the strengthening of family bonds as a crucial factor. Strong father-child bonds are only possible, they say, when fathers spend a long time alone with the baby; in addition, this profile highlights the importance of creating empathy with the mother's feeling of extreme tiredness when it is she alone who is caring and doing the housework. As a result, leave in all its forms is seen as positive, but the time the father spends alone is seen as being of special importance.

Fathers in the last *innovation and deconstruction* pattern closely follow the experiences described in the previous profile, but they are more reflexive with regard to the impact of leave on gender roles. The father values becoming a fully independent caregiver and house-person but he also regards the period of leave on his own as a fertile ground for building gender equality. In fact, part of the challenge was to demonstrate to themselves and others that they were capable of expertly combining all these aspects of a 'homeparent' rather than just caring for a baby during the day. From this perspective the father sees himself as an "egalitarian" partner who is "at the heart of the family" as his wife is. Moving beyond the activities involved in the efficient promotion of work-family balance, the five men in this profile also seek to "test themselves out" by embarking on tasks regarded as more difficult, such as having meals ready on schedule, having people in to eat, or planning a heavier task load. They also become more reflexive with regard to gender relations, questioning all differences between men and women which are held to be natural and reflecting on different strategies to build up gender equality in family life. This profile not only strengthens autonomy and bonds but also enables the period of leave to be viewed as a time when parents are able to deal explicitly with "in-built" cultural norms. An additional impact underlined by these fathers is the emergence of feelings of competition between fathering and mothering, with the need for some negotiation of when and how each parent spends time with the child and how caregiving is carried out.

> I really had to "roll up my sleeves". I looked after the baby, but I also did all the housework and made a point of having supper ready on time. So the main advantage of this is that it puts men and women on a par, it's equates men's role to the role that was always the woman's. So it's a way of understanding the traditional tasks and worries that belonged to women, it's a new experience from this point of view, it really is! (Samuel, 29, nurse, 1 child).

> I became more involved in all the daily decisions, for example, giving my opinion on what we should do with the baby. This produced another point of conflict between Sally and me, or rather, something which we have to keep discussing and work out. (Frederico, 35, designer, 1 child).

Several factors seem to encourage this profile in our study: first, these are men who were previously highly involved fathers within an egalitarian conjugal division of work, a context which encourages them to deconstruct and neutralize gender in family roles (e.g. all things may be done by him or her). Secondly, these are highly educated men who emphasize the value of work-family balance rather than just their work life and personal careers. Thirdly, these are pro-active fathers who make an extra effort while on leave, in order to make sure they know how to do everything and more; this ties in with an ideal norm of individualized parenthood, where it is important not only to take everything on, but also to do everything in one's own way. In this profile therefore, in contrast to the previous profiles, we cannot say that it is 'home alone' leave that actually generates the discourse of gender deconstruction. However, the findings demonstrate that the period of leave allows these men to put their changing conceptions to the test, particularly as far as the interchangeability of fathers and mothers is concerned.

4.8 Discussion and Conclusions

Our key aim in this chapter was to explore the lived experiences of fathers on leave alone in Portuguese society and to capture the social processes that structure their experiences. A second issue was to understand to what extent they confirm or challenge a dominant model of fatherhood and 'masculine care' underscoring more conventional gender roles and parental identities. Drawing on the results of our research, it is important to highlight three main conclusions.

A first conclusion is related to the fact that the interviewed fathers perceive and describe themselves as forerunner fathers who had to assert and negotiate their rights to share initial parental leave with the mother. In a context of recent policy changes, father's leave in a 'home alone' manner is not taken for granted and calls for agency and assertiveness. Negotiation took place in both the private and public domains. At home parental negotiation was facilitated by a bonus scheme which, in case of gender sharing, allowed a) the mother to return to work earlier and b) the child to be cared for at home for an extra month, with full earnings compensation. Both these aspects, as well as a general trend valuing more involved fathering, facilitated the couple's decision-making process. In contrast, negotiation of leave in the workplace, in particular in the private sector, was sometimes difficult. Ignorance of policy changes, difficulties in replacing fully-invested workers, and perceptions of father's use of leave as a 'choice' were the main factors leading to disagreement, conflict and, in many cases, to the negotiation of a compromise (e.g. availability to work from home). In this context, it is not surprising that most fathers only used 1 month of initial parental leave.

A second conclusion is related to the social processes that structure the leave experience. From fathers' descriptions of taking leave alone to care for a baby, we were able to identify six processes linked to this life experience and which allow us to conclude that fathers not only 'negotiate' leave and 'do' care but also 'learn', 'bond', 'undo' gender and experience new 'emotions'. Analysis of these processes allows us to highlight some general trends.

Overall leave is highly valued because it contributes to child well-being, to the strengthening of father-child bonds and reduces the work penalty for full-time working mothers. However, it may also be seen to enable fathers to learn new instrumental and expressive parental skills, to foster male autonomy in care work, and to undo preconceived gender norms and practice. These three last foci of lived experiences seem to be strongly or even uniquely related to taking 'home alone' leave. It is in the context of a break with female mediation that the father's self-definition as a capable, independent or even equal caregiver (on a par with mother) emerges with some strength and puts previous gender roles in question, in particular the idea that the mother is the primary and natural caregiver. On the other hand, it is also through being alone with a baby that fathers describe a process of integration of traditionally feminine psychological traits, such as emotional literacy. Interestingly, these *leave sharing couples* developed strategies allowing them to balance mother's early return to work, father's home alone leave and breastfeeding. In fact, breastfeeding was not seen as an obstacle for gender sharing of early leave: the mothers who were still

breastfeeding either left their milk or used the 2-h work-time reduction to come home in the lunch hour and/or finish work earlier. In summary, there is a common pattern in all interviewed men which is the fathers' immersion in *early childcare* in a *home alone manner*. The combination of these two aspects somehow represents an unique fathering experience since the care of a small baby, usually taken on by mothers and seen as more difficult, clearly promotes feelings of responsibility and parental skills. More importantly, perhaps, our findings point to social experiences not of 'slow time' and 'masculine care' but rather of 'fast time' and 'parental' care, meaning that the discovery of new skills, bonds and emotions promotes fathers' self-confidence in the equal and interchangeable competences of fathers and mothers when caring for a baby. The main issue here is that this type of leave seems to challenge, in varying degrees, the notion of parental care mediation as a female prerogative.

A third conclusion underlines diversity in fathers' understandings and experiences of leave and care. From this point of view, our qualitative study reveals a process of pluralisation rather than a linear move from a dominant model of masculine care towards a gender-equal and individualized parental care model. Drawing on the social processes that structure the leave experience, we identified four different profiles of fathers and their leave experiences (supported, fundamental break, innovative and independent, innovative and deconstructive). 'Supported' fathers are those that are closest to conventional masculine forms of care identified in some previous studies: they are less fully invested in leave alone (and usually have support from a third person), they perceive themselves as secondary caregivers who rely on female guidance, they do not do household tasks and, although they value the new parental skills acquired while on leave alone (allowing them to become different, more involved fathers), they do not aspire to autonomous and individualized fathering. In this profile the use of leave alone is often seen as instrumental (e.g. the mother was not eligible or must return to work) and more driven by the mother's motivations for gender sharing of leave than the father's. At the opposite end of the spectrum, in a profile associated with critical discourses and practices, 'innovative-deconstructive' fathers see themselves as autonomous and individualized carers. They openly question existing conceptions of gender roles and take advantage of the leave experience to reflect on possible strategies to strengthen gender equality and individualization in care. They also reflect on the impact of these changes on conjugal interactions: a model of individualized equal parenting makes for changing power relations and more conflict in parenting, thereby requiring new skills in order to negotiate and work out innovative care solutions within the couple.

To conclude, it is also important to understand the possible influence of national cultural and policy context on these findings, and of three factors in particular. First, in contrast with previous studies, the leave scheme in Portugal means that all fathers were caring for a baby rather than a toddler aged 1 or over. The care of a baby between 2 and 6 months old is likely to reinforce feelings of responsibility and capability. On the other hand, the high level of earnings replacement (100 %, with no taxation) is an important push factor not only for leave sharing but also for the incorporation by fathers of the entitlement to leave on an individual basis.

Secondly, the influence of more traditional gender discourses and practices was not as overriding as might be expected. Given Portugal's track of gender inequality in unpaid work and strong family support, we expected to find a predominant pattern of fathers who delegated some of the care to other women while on leave, thereby making for a specific type of 'masculine care'. However, our results clearly point in a different direction: experiences are diverse, and the predominant profiles reveal fathers who take on new responsibilities. From a policy perspective, this means that even in a more laggard changing gender regime such as the Portuguese, recent developments in normative and policy context are promoting the acceptance of more involved fathering and enabling a substantial group of fathers to take up leave alone in diverse and innovative ways. In fact, policy changes seem to respond to fathers' new expectations of caregiving and 'different' fathering practices by providing them with a legal entitlement to do so. However, it is important to remember that our study is methodologically limited, in that it draws on a sample of twenty fathers, the majority of which are highly qualified and have permanent job contracts.

Thirdly, we cannot ignore the private-public dichotomy in Portuguese society. The existence of institutional resources (rights to leave) does not necessarily lead to the use of leave, in particular when policy changes are very recent; between stipulated rights and take-up there is a gap mediated by cultural, social and workplace factors. As a result, many fathers still have to negotiate leave with their employers in exchange for their commitment to work while on leave. In comparison with the "inevitability" of mothers' leave, fathers' leave is seen as an "option" which can imply considerable costs, particularly in the private sector. However, the organizational culture of the companies or departments where these men work and the interactional processes between workers and supervisors are often as important as the private-public dichotomy.

Findings from Portugal thus reflect a slow and complex process of change for fathers who take leave on a home alone basis. Fathers' discourses and experiences reveal the new centrality of fatherhood in the negotiation of old and new masculinities, with children and leave to care representing new and fundamental sources of identity. Nevertheless, the diversity of experiences also shows that the impact of leave is shaped by multiple factors, making for a complex process of pluralization rather than a clear-cut one-directional impact on fathers who use this type of leave. Our study therefore underlines the need to open up a new questioning: Does change and innovation in leave for fathers necessarily imply a move from 'masculine care' towards more symmetrical parenting roles or, rather, a shift towards a plurality of care models and experiences of leave?

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Chapter 5
Fathers on Leave Alone in Quebec (Canada): The Case of Innovative, Subversive and Activist Fathers!

Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay and Nadia Lazzari Dodeler

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we present first the Quebec Parental Insurance Plan implemented in 2006, as well as some statistics on its use by parents to shed some light on the context for leave uptake for Quebec fathers, as the leave program and uptake are different from Canada. We then present a brief review of the literature on the question of fatherhood in Quebec and specifically on the social changes that brought fathers to become more involved with their families by sharing family responsibilities with mothers. We turn next to the portrait of respondents with whom we conducted interviews for this research on fathers taking leave alone with their child. Then, we focus on the experience of fathers who took parental/ paternity leave, alone with the child, on their relations with the child, family relationships, as well as the emotions experienced during this period (see also Tremblay and Dodeler 2015). Following our previous work on fathers and parenting (Tremblay 2003, 2012a, b), we wanted to study parenthood as experienced by fathers and look into the situation observed since the implementation of the new paternity leave reserved for fathers. Two main issues are central to our analysis: What have fathers experienced and felt while they were alone with their child at home during parental/ paternity leave? And how does this experience affect their life, their career and the gendered division of labour within the family?

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Table 5.1 Parental leave benefit plans, Canada and Quebec

	Canada Employment Insurance	Quebec basic plan	Quebec special plan
Eligibility	600 h	$2,000 earnings	
Self-employed workers	Covered only since 2011 (6000 $ minimum earnings)	Covered since 2006	
Basic replacement rate	55 % for 50 weeks	70 % for 25 weeks	75 % for 40 weeks
		55 % for 25 weeks	
Low income replacement rate	Up to 80 %	Up to 80 %	
Maximum insurable earnings	CAN$45 900	CAN$66,000	
Waiting period	2 weeks (per couple)	None	
Duration	15 weeks maternity	18 weeks maternity	15 weeks maternity
	35 weeks parental	32 weeks parental	25 weeks parental
	No paternity leave	5 weeks paternity	3 weeks paternity

Source: Adapted and updated from "Child Care Spaces Recommendations" Report from the Ministerial Advisory Committee on the Government of Canada's Child Care Spaces Initiative, Government of Canada, January 2007

5.2 Quebec Policies for Parental Leave

As in many OECD countries, Canada has revised its policies on parental leave. In 2001 the Parental Leave Program of the federal government underwent two significant changes: one relates to the number of paid weeks that can be shared by spouses (from 10 to 35 weeks) and another to the elimination of the 2 weeks period of unpaid leave before the partner receives benefits (Marshall 2008).

Following the agreement signed with the federal government in 2005, as of 2006, Quebec has implemented its own benefit plan, namely the Quebec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP). This plan differs in several respects from the federal program. Indeed, QPIP offers fathers the possibility to take 3–5 weeks of paternity leave (3 weeks with higher wage replacement rate, or 5 with lower benefits), which is non-transferable to the mother. Parents may choose to benefit from the "basic plan" or the "special regime". The "basic plan" offers lower benefits but applies over a longer period and the "special regime" provides higher benefits over a shorter period. In addition, compensation rates for parental, paternity and maternity leave are higher than those offered by the federal government. Also, since 2006 self-employed workers have access to the benefits, a characteristic which has just been added to the federal scheme in 2011. Fathers are thus entitled to a paternity leave of 5 weeks which can be added to all or part of the 32 weeks that parents can share according to their preferences. Table 5.1 describes the two plans available to Quebec parents and compares them to the Employment Insurance Plan, which covers parental leave in Canada.

According to the Quebec Ministry of Family (Ministère de la famille et des aînés 2012) paternity leave has several objectives: to encourage fathers to take leave after

the birth of their child; to promote equality between men and women and to ensure that workplaces recognize the parental responsibilities of fathers. Along with these objectives, paternal involvement plays an important role in the policy (the ministerial language speaks for itself "*For equal rights to become de facto equality*"), with father involvement being linked to the achievement of gender equality, a major objective of the Quebec policy, also strongly supported by unions and women's groups. While taking paternity leave is not yet a totally "taken for granted" event as in Sweden, Quebec has quickly moved in this direction as 80 % of fathers now take the leave, and 75 % of them take the 5 week paternity leave, many going on to share the parental leave. When they do share, they actually take on average 13 weeks of total leave (parental and paternity).

The QPIP program was a huge success since according to ISQ (2013 cited in CGAP 2013) Quebec had 88,500 births in 2011, including 75,800 "QPIP births", that is births where benefits were paid to the parents. This represents a participation rate of 85.6 %. The difference between the number of births and the number of "QPIP births" represents people who were not eligible for coverage because they had an earned income of less than $ 2,000 (CGAP 2013a, b). Note that among the 75,800 "QPIP births", 67 % had benefits that were paid to both parents, 23 % to only the mother and 10 % to the father alone. In 2011, 77 % of fathers in the "QPIP births" took time at the birth of the child (CGAP 2013a, b). As noted above, parents can choose between the basic plan and the special plan; the choice may vary depending on whether both parents are eligible to the QPIP, if only the mother is or if only the father is (CGAP 2013a, b).

5.3 Brief Review of Research on Fatherhood in Quebec

While there has been a lot of interest on work-family measures in organizations and their take-up by fathers (Tremblay 2012a, b, 2003), there is less work on fathering, and in Quebec it tends to be concentrated in the psychology field. However, Pacaut et al (2011, p. 5) conducted a review of work on fatherhood in recent decades, noting that "if there are questions today about the place and the role of men in the family with children, it is primarily because the "traditional" model of the father is called into question, as is the case also in many developed countries." (Our translation).

During the 1970s and 1980s there was mainly research on the reconstruction of fathering, including parenting skills of fathers and there was a growing affirmation that fathers possess skills and can take care of children, even when they are very young (Dulac 1997: 136 cited in Pacaut et al. 2011, p 5.). During the 1990s, Quebec research highlights the importance of the role of fathers in children's lives both emotionally and psychologically, and also discusses fathers' commitment to their children. In the years 2000 and beyond, researchers appear to be more interested in the diversity of family backgrounds and look at fatherhood in the context of union breakup and/or immigration; they also address the issue of parenthood and homo-

sexuality (Pacaut et al. 2011, p. 6). Fatherhood as an "identity project" is also an issue; indeed, according to Pacaut et al. (2011, p. 6), "Being a father is more than a social role, it is an identity project." In this line of thought, according to Lacharité (2009, cited in Pacaut et al. (2011 p. 6), "It is not so much the realization of tasks, duties or obligations that defines the contours of fatherhood, but rather the fact that men accept (or more precisely, negotiate!) to engage themselves in the paternal role which constitutes its substance."

Dulac and Lacharité (mentioned above) were amongst the first authors on fatherhood, but they mainly looked at the issue from an identity and psychological perspective. Research on work-family articulation long centered on women and mothers, until researchers started to look at fathers in the 2000s (Tremblay 2003). In Quebec, the work on Canadian fathers by Doucet (2006) is known by researchers in the field. However, there is a strong language barrier between Canada and Quebec, so that social debates are different and it is mainly Quebec authors, feminist groups and women's committees in trade unions that animate debates on these issues of fatherhood and parenthood.

While we cannot say that in Quebec, paternity leave has come to be "taken for granted" as much as is the case in Sweden, it is surely more the case than in the rest of North America, where there is no such leave reserved for fathers. Also, the whole debate on work-family reconciliation has been extremely important in the last decades, with the Ministry of the Family being very active in supporting work-family programs. The Ministry which offers financial support to firms in order to develop such programs, has developed some web pages and published a "work-family best practice" guide, as well as a "work-family norm". This "norm" is in fact more of a "label" or recognition that firms have followed a formal process to develop work-family measures and it is supported by the Normalisation Board, which also deals with ISO workplace norms. The debate on parental/paternity leave was thus very active in Quebec and any attempt by a government to change the regulation or benefits in the context of austerity measures, brings the "parental leave coalition" back to life. Indeed, Quebec unions and women's groups formed a coalition which pushed this issue forward for some 10 years, until the new parental leave regime was adopted in 2006 (Tremblay 2012a; Doucet et al. 2009). In 2014, when the Liberal government just "hinted" at reducing QPIP benefits, there was immediately a very vocal opposition to any questioning of what is seen as an important social program and part of working parents' rights.

The objective of this new parental and paternity leave was to favor a stronger participation of fathers in leave, as well as equality between men and women more generally. The traditional obstacles to men taking leave are still present, that is some workplace opposition, the fact that men still usually earn more than women, and that there may be resistance on the part of some mothers at the idea of losing part of "their" leave. This is precisely why there was a lobby for a non-transferable paternity leave. Interestingly, workplace opposition was apparently not important in the case of the fathers who participated in our research. There was little to "negotiate" as the leave has come to be seen as a "right" for most fathers, and relatively well accepted in the work environment, although there are surely workplaces that oppose

these leaves more actively, as we observed in large law firms (Tremblay and Mascova 2013; Tremblay 2013, 2016) and also in the nursing sector (Tremblay 2014b).

We now turn to the concept of father involvement (Dubeau et al. 2007, 2009), or participation (Barnett & Baruch 1987; Brugeilles & Sebille 2009, 2013), which is important for our research as it has been taken up in policy discussions in Quebec over the last 15 years or so, not only in the context of the QPIP implementation, but also due to the fact that the Chagnon Foundation (one of the very few private foundations to finance social science research in Quebec) has made children's well-being its major objective. They finance advertisements on TV where paternal involvement is highlighted, and also have a magazine (Naître et grandir, or "Being born and growing") which supports parental involvement in general, and paternal involvement in particular.

5.4 The Concept of Father Involvement

The concept of father involvement is difficult to define and several typologies exist. Some researchers define it in relation to the time spent with the child, others are interested in the nature of the relationship with the child (activities carried out with the child and care for the child on a daily basis), the quality of the relationship with the child, but it is less often discussed in terms of responsibilities assumed by fathers (Turcotte et al. 2001).

To define the concept of paternal involvement we have adopted the definition proposed by the team ProsPères cited in Forget (2009, p. 82) "Fathers' involvement refers to participation and ongoing concern of the father, biological or not, for the physical, psychological and social development of the child." According to Forget (2009, p. 82) this definition is based on "seven dimensions: the father as provider, the responsible father, the interacting father, the caring father, the loving father, the evocative father and the citizen father." This definition focuses on the continuing role of the father, who again may not be the biological father, who also may be away from the child, and this takes into account the new realities of the family. In any case, the concept of father involvement is put forward by many groups, and in this context, the ProsPères group and Chagon Foundation being amongst the most important.

Pacaut et al. (2011 p 7) also define what being an involved father means:

"An involved father is a responsible father who is involved in the tasks and responsibilities for the child. He is also a loving father, available for the child: he offers his emotional and cognitive support, and actively participates in the physical care of the child, as well as having meaningful interactions with his child.

The material and financial contribution to the child's support and family well-being is also a sign of father involvement. The "evocative" father refers to the importance of the father's relationship with his child and the pleasure that this relationship provides, which can create what ProsPère researchers call "spontaneous responses." An involved father can finally be a "political" father, who participates in events to promote father involvement for example. (Pacaut et al. 2011, p. 7).

According to Quéniart (2002a, cited in Pacaut et al. 2011), there are three forms of paternal involvement, or types of fathers:

1. Providers and protective fathers: everything about the child relates to the mother, the father has the authority and the activities he offers to the child are usually male-type activities (sports, crafts). These fathers' work schedules are heavy and their wives are often stay-at-home moms. Their responsibility is related to the family.
2. Postmodern fathers: the relationship to the child is important, it brings satisfaction both at the personal and relational levels. Family and parenting duties are shared according to the affinities of the parents as well as their availability and not on the basis of gendered or genetic predispositions. Such fathers are most often found in the dual-earner homes.
3. Ambivalent fathers situate themselves in between the traditional paternal role and the post-modern father. These fathers are not really responsible for the child's care, but support the mother.

In her study of Portuguese fathers taking leave alone, Wall (2012) presented four profiles of fathers: the Constrained fathers, the Radical Break, the Innovative and Independent and the Innovative and Subversive fathers. The last two models are similar to some extent to the postmodern father mentioned above, while the first would be closer to the traditional model, the provider and protector, according to the previous typology.

5.5 Methodology

Building on previous work (Tremblay 2012a, b, 2010, 2003), we carried out research on the experiences of fathers who took paternity/paternal leave with their child in Quebec. The Quebec Ministry of Employment gave us access to the list of fathers who received a benefit under the QPIP in 2011 and 2012. The respondents come mainly from this list but we also used social networks, a university website and the media; we completed our list with the "snowball technique". The eligibility criteria were to have taken at least 4 weeks of paternity or parental leave, during which fathers were alone with the child, while mothers had returned to work. However, given the difficulties in recruiting respondents, we also included fathers who had taken leave with the mother. We considered these as a distinct group of fathers and in this Chapter we only include fathers who spent at least 4 weeks alone with the child.

The interviews were held mainly in our university offices in Montreal but sometimes by phone because of the geographical distance and time constraints of the fathers. As Table 5.2 shows, the fathers who took parental/ paternity leave alone with the child come from different professional groups: liberal professions (10) managers (3), white collar workers (7), blue collar workers (4) and self-employed (2). We wanted some diversity and this corresponds to the general portrait of fathers

Table 5.2 Portrait of fathers who took paternity/parental leave for at least four weeks alone with the child

Father	Age	Children	Type of leave	Man's employment situation and hours of work	Woman's employment situation and hours of work
1.	32	1 boy of 2	Paternity leave: 5 weeks Parental leave – 8 months alone	Liberal profession 28 h/w/4 days	Liberal profession 21 h/w/ 3 days
2.	33	1 boy of 7, 1 girl of 2	Other paid leave: 2 weeks: Parental leave – 6 months alone	Liberal profession 35 h/w (2 days from home)	Liberal profession 35 h/w (2 days from home)
3.	36	1 boy of 11 months	Paternity leave: 5 weeks Parental leave – 6 months alone	Manager 40/s	Liberal profession 28 h/w officially, but in fact 35
4.	35	2 girls, aged 3 and 1	Paternity leave: 6 weeks Parental leave – 5 months alone	Liberal profession 35 h/w	Liberal profession 35 h/s
5.	39	3 girls aged: 7, 6, 2	Paternity Leave: 6 weeks Parental leave – 6 months alone	Liberal profession 40 h/w	Liberal profession 40 h/w
6.	30	1 boy of 2, 1 girl of 4	Paternity Leave: 6 Parental leave – 6 months alone	Liberal profession 55 h/w	Liberal profession 35 h/w
7.	35	1 boy aged 1	Other paid leave: 2 weeks: Parental leave – 6 months alone	Liberal profession 40 to 45 h/w	Liberal profession 40 to 45 h/w
8.	25	1 boy: 14 months	Other paid leave: 2 weeks: Parental leave – 6 months alone	Employé 35 to 50 h/w	Self-employed: Hair Salon
9.	35	1 girl: 18 months	Paternity leave: 6 w Parental leave – 6 months alone	Liberal profession 35 h/w	Self-employed: Communications 40 to 50 h/w
10.	34	1 girl: 10 months	Paternity leave: 5 w Parental leave – 6 months alone	Liberal profession 40 to 50 h/w	Liberal profession 30 h/w
11.	37	2 boys aged: 5 and 18 months	Paternity Leave: 5 weeks alone	Manager 35 to 60 h/s	Liberal profession 24 h/w/3 days
12.	37	2 girls aged 10 and 6	Paternity Leave: 5 weeks Parental leave 3 months alone	Self-employed 50/w	Liberal profession 60/h/w
13.	40	1 girl 16 months	Paternity Leave: 5 weeks Parental leave 6 months alone	Manager 35 h/w	Self-employed 20 h/w

(continued)

Table 5.2 (continued)

Father	Age	Children	Type of leave	Man's employment situation and hours of work	Woman's employment situation and hours of work
14.	41	2 girls aged: 2 and 14 months	Parental leave 6 months alone	Liberal profession 35 h/w	Liberal profession 35 h/w
15.	37	3 girls: 11, 8 and 6	Parental leave – 2 months alone	Liberal profession 35 h/w	Full-time student
16.	33	1 boy aged 8 and 2 girls 4 and 2	Parental leave – 3 months alone	Blue collar worker 40 to 75 h/w	Employee 40/45 h/s
17.	34	1 boy aged 8 and 1 girl aged 2	Parental leave – 3 months alone	Employee 35 h/w	Employee 40 h/s
18.	35	1 girl 19 months	Parental leave – 3 months alone	Employee 30 h/w	Liberal profession 40 to 50 h/w
19.	33	1 boy aged 10 and 1 girl of 2	Paternity Leave: 5 weeks at the end of leave	Employee: 35 h/w, about 100 h/w in overtime a year	Liberal profession 35 h/w
20.	35	1 girl of 4 and 1 boy of 2	Paternity Leave: weeks Parental leave 6 months alone (end of the leave)	Employee 35 h/w	Employee 35 h/w
21.	41	2 boys: 12 and 14 months	Parental leave 6 months (from the 4 th to 10 th month)	Employee 40 h/w	Self-employed: hair salon 40 h/w
22.	34	1 boy of 2	Parental leave 6 months, from the 6 th month	Employee 40 h/w	Employee
23.	31	1 girl of 5 and 1 boy of 18 months	Paternity Leave: 5 w Parental leave 3 months alone	Self-employed 25 to 30 h/w	Self-employed 25 to 30 h/w
24.	34	2 boys: 4 and 15 months	Parental leave 3 months, from the 9 th month to 12th	Blue collar worker 36 h/w + 10 h overtime a week	Employee 40 h/s
25.	38	1 girl of 6 and 1 boy of 3	Paternity leave: 5 weeks Parental leave: 6 months	Blue collar worker 40 h/w + 10 h overtime a week	Employee 30 h/s
26.	31	1 boy of 4, 1 girl of 2	Paternity leave: 5 weeks Parental leave: over 4 weeks along	Blue Collar worker 36 h/w and 8–10 h overtime a week	Employee 30 h/w

taking leave, although there is no perfect representation (CGAP 2013a, b, 2011). In general, fathers in the liberal professions have partners in similar professions (8), others are self-employed (1) or full-time student (1).

Fathers are 25–41 years of age; they are married or in common law unions (25/26), and one father is separated (1/26). The number of children per household varies from one to three; nine out of 26 fathers have a child 10–24 months old; 14 out of 26 have two children, ages ranging from 1 to 12 years; in the other households there is at least one child aged between 1 and 3 years. In our interviews, we centered on leave taken for the youngest child.

As concerns the income of fathers and mothers, 14 fathers out of 26 say they have a gross annual income superior to their wives and 12 fathers say their wife's income is higher than theirs. The annual income of the fathers is within a range from 15 000 to 120 000 Canadian dollars (about 96 cents to the US dollar in 2014). Their partner's income is between $ 5,000 and $ 220 000 (three women earn between 200,000 and 220,000 dollars).

Table 5.2 presents the characteristics of fathers who took parental/paternity leave for at least 4 weeks alone with the child. Here we focus on fathers who took parental leave alone with their child, but we also met with fathers who have not taken leave alone. In general, they only took the paternity leave of 5 weeks, to help the mother immediately after birth. It is interesting to see that many fathers want to be present when they feel they can assume a greater paternal role, hence the deferral of a portion of parental leave, which they share with the mother, later on, when the child is a little older.

5.6 The Reasons for Taking Part of the Leave Alone

Many fathers took paternity leave with the mother at birth and then returned to work a few months before continuing with parental leave alone. Besides the fact that these fathers wanted to spend time with the child and to care for them, several reasons brought fathers to take leave alone and to do so when the child is already a few months old. For some fathers, breastfeeding has an impact in the sharing of the leave. As many mothers breastfeed during the first 6 months, fathers will take parental leave later on, when the nursing period is over. The quotes below show the most recurrent reasons presented by the fathers we interviewed, beyond the fact that the nursing period is often reserved for the mother. Many fathers prefer to take the leave later, considering it is easier to care for an older child.

> I wanted to be near my daughter, and it was easier for me when she was at least 9 months. Since she is 9 months old I am very able to take care of her and spend time with her. (Brian, 35 yrs, professional)

Other fathers consider it is important to create a connection with the child from an early age:

> It's tremendously important, it is as if there was really a trust, that is a whole other level of complicity, just getting to know the child 24 hours a day and then to see her reactions, more security and confidence. (Adam, 38 yrs, employee)

Many fathers also indicate they prefer to keep the child at home during the first years of live and not have to send the child to daycare, while others mention gender equality objectives, saying it is important to share leave between both parents because of the leave's impact on working life:

> My wife and I separated the leave […] it just seems that the price we both pay for this is less this way and thus more acceptable professionally. (Tom, 35 yrs, professionnal)

For some mothers it is clear that they want to share parental leave with their spouse, but others have felt the need to return to work earlier and that is when the father continues with the leave, then parenting alone. It is also in response to their own experiences with their father that some fathers want to distinguish themselves from their own father:

> I had a very traditional father, who never cried, no matter if he lost a finger, who never missed a day of work, work was important for him. I'm trying not to be like that, to show my daughter that you can have emotions and we can let go a little. (Bob, 33 yrs, employee)

Sometimes the choice of the parent who takes parental leave may be related to instrumental reasons: the amount of compensation, a good collective agreement, or the relative income of each parent.

> It's a question of finance. I won't hide the fact that my wife has a higher salary than mine and since the percentage of benefits is 75 % of your salary, it is better if the one who has the lowest salary stops working. (Jim, 33 yrs, professional)

As shown in the above quotes, the reasons for fathers taking the parental leave alone are based on different factors including the return to work of the partner, the desire to develop a connection with the child from an early age, the objective of gender equality considering the impact of the leave on a career, the loss of less income, and finally to differentiate one's behavior from that of one's own father.

5.7 Taking Paternity Leave Alone or with the Partner

Our interviews show a clear difference between the experiences of paternity leave taken with the mother and leaves taken by the father alone with the child. One father explains how he developed his independence and established his own routine: "From the time I was alone with the child, I felt I could give directions or new meaning, a little more personal orientations in education and relationship with my child. When you are second in line, you follow the pattern that has been already implemented by your spouse. She designed her routine, you follow this routine, and then when you are alone, you don't need to do things in the same way, you'll not go to the same park, you won't do the same activities."

Other fathers indicate that immediately after the child's birth, they pay more attention to the mother whereas later on in the parental leave, attention is focused on empowering the father vis-à-vis their child. In addition, during the period of parental leave, the child grows older, and fathers have to adapt, which allows them to take control and set up their own routine (care, activities, education, etc.). Some fathers, especially those with several children, expressed some difficulties when they could not be supported by their spouse during the period when they were alone at home with the children.

Fathers mentioned several differences between the two types of leave. When both parents are together, the mother often has control over everything concerning the child (health, education, etc.) and fathers are only "participants" in the routine established by the mother. If breastfeeding is seen as a benefit to the child by all fathers, it is nevertheless also considered a barrier that sometimes prevents them from getting closer to the child for a while. Fathers fill this gap by dealing with the household tasks usually performed by the mother. During this period most admit that they essentially "help" the mother. In contrast, when the father is alone with the child, he gains autonomy and accountability, he becomes the "captain of the ship" and establishes his own routine.

5.8 Fathers' Experiences Alone with the Child

For most parents, the choice to take parental/paternity leave alone with the child is related to the objective of gender equality. This objective of gender equality was important for most fathers in our research (20/26), all of which were part of dual-earner couples and who, when they were alone with the child, were involved in both the household tasks and in caring for children while the mother worked or attended university. While not all Quebec fathers share tasks equally, it is clear that this new fatherhood model has gained momentum, especially with younger generations.

Throughout the period of leave alone with the child, fathers reported experiencing strong emotions that have enabled them to acquire skills and attitudes they had not known they could master, such as: trust, adaptation, patience, stress management, letting go and so on. The language they use to talk about the time spent with the child is revealing of their emotions, feelings they had mostly never experienced until then for another person and they realize that the child is unique and now comes before their own person.

> To be close, to feel the child's belly full, I was happy to feel fulfilled, it was nice; I was happy to see his toothless smile, his plump legs, it's a great love, a sense of attachment, pride, well-being, satisfaction, the feeling of being at the right place. (Bob, 33 yrs, employee)

Thus, as pointed out by O'Brien (2009), taking paternity leave fosters practical and emotional involvement of fathers in infant care and creates a connection with the child, while supporting the mother. If at the beginning of the leave the fathers

thought that the mother had sole power to comfort and reassure the child, many of them realized that their involvement with the child changed the situation. Indeed, as indicated by Lamb (1996) the father develops his capacity to react and respond to his child and the child will then turn as spontaneously to one or the other parent.

The impact of the caring experience on the fathers interviewed is apparently very important. They feel more responsible, more adult:

> It changed my relationship with my family and the things that I allowed myself to do before, going out late for example, it's all over! Now I'm with my family and I often go out accompanied, especially on weekends. I have a responsibility to educate my children. (Alan, 38 yrs, worker)

> It makes us more accountable, we develop a better ability to respond to stress, too; you live things that are not easy the first time and the next time you say it's going to be okay, and then you learn to let go. (Andy, 35 yrs, professional)

The impact of the experience of parental leave also has effects on the couple and it is interesting to note that many fathers resent the fact that people often consider that the leave is a gift from their spouse. Indeed, the distribution of parental leave is often viewed as the mother's decision:

> Most people believe that the leave is mainly for women. When I talk with friends or colleagues, they often say to me:" your girlfriend is generous" to give you part of the leave. They don't see it as a family decision but a decision of the mother to give some of the parental leave to the father or not; is it not for us to share as we want? It's good for the five weeks of paternity, I'm really happy to have them, but parental leave for the 30 weeks after the 18 weeks of the mother, they can be shared also. (Mike, 25 yrs, employee)

With respect to the couple, most say that this experience has contributed to strengthening their relationship and increasing mutual trust.

> We both invested in the project, it helped that my girlfriend wanted help, she felt that I was really there for her and for the child, we did this together and she was not alone. Yes, it has had an impact on the strength of our relationship, our support, our relationship, and trust for one and another. (Ned, 30 yrs, employee)

The experience of engaging in parenting during leave allows fathers to understand working mothers better:

> The leave enabled me to have greater understanding, respect, greater admiration for the work she had done with our first girl and she also with the last. It was good for our relationship because the leave showed her that I fully took my responsibilities, it was good for our relationship. (Mitch, 37 yrs, independent)

Also taking leave alone allowed the fathers of this study to be recognized as taking full responsibility in parenting:

> It clearly leads me to share the housework, even if it was never an issue really. I take my place in the children's education and can say "no, I do not agree, I can take up tasks and take my place. It's not just the classic scheme where the father is responsible for discipline, but I am also present in the relationship with the children. I can really assume my responsibility as a parent at an emotional level as well, not just being the income provider. (Tom, 35 yrs, professional)

Relationship issues around breast feeding were sometimes difficult for fathers to manage:

> My wife started working part-time and regardless of the time she left, the last 45 minutes before she came home, it was always the crisis. It seemed that my daughter had a radar and knew when her mother was coming home`. It was extremely painful. When my wife came back I was crying, I felt totally helpless, incompetent, and from the time the baby accepted the bottle, then I could assume the primary need to feed and I felt better. (Brad, 40 yrs, administrator)

Fathers also want their role to be recognized and want people to see the important difference between fathers who "babysit" their child and those who really care for them:

> She taught me all the care work, it was always me who also gave the bath and then we share the kids' bedtime. It becomes very natural to care for children. We often laugh when we say that fathers who did not take leave just "babysit" when the mother has something to do, while I'm insulted if you tell me that I babysit my children…I am assuming my paternal responsibilities. (Jim, 33 yrs, professional)

It is revealing to see how the experience of parenting during leave also influenced the priorities of fathers in relation with work. Indeed, many fathers have revised their priorities and decided to change careers or return to school, or take on a new job that will allow them to continue to fulfill their parental responsibilities.

> The leave was a trigger as it reduced my interest in my specific field of work. I'm going back to school in January and going for a total career change as my leave made me realize that I did not want to do that all my life. (Joe, 35 yrs, employee)

> I do not want to be a father who is always in a hurry when I get to see my son at night and I will organize myself as much as possible so that it does not happen. So I'm going to reduce my hours, I'll take a job that is less time-consuming, I will perhaps be identified as less involved in my work, but it was coming anyway, because I have a child, and what will happen with the second, third…You can be really dedicated at work, but then when you have kids, it changes. (Ryan, 36 yrs, administrator)

Fathers mentioned that their experience with children allowed them to develop "caregiver" qualities and competencies they also use in other areas such as work:

> Yes I am more attentive to people in general and especially at work, people ask me questions and I am more inclined to answer. I see myself more as a caregiver here at work and even with my friends there are many people asking me questions and I answer them more than I used to. I used to be a little more distant from all that, I think it helped me to be a caregiver. (Mike, 25 yrs, employee)

Fathers' leave experience even had impacts on different areas of life. Informants reported that the experience of being on leave also makes it possible for them to exchange more with women about work-life issues, with full knowledge of the facts, and they find it easier to engage in discussions on issues related to work as well as those linked with the house and children:

> I see it in my discussions with women, it is important to be able to speak with the same interest of the things related to the family, the children, it is as important as work issues, it's all at the same level. (Jim, 33 yrs, professional)

5.8.1 Workplace Impact and Return to Work

For many fathers returning to work at the end of the leave has been a more or less painful experience:

> It was definitely not a relief at all but rather the opposite […] I'm not back to work with a smile; I missed her when I came back to work. (Joe, 35 yrs, employee)

In our research, a single dad experienced big difficulties in relation with his career:

> Now it's sure that after taking this leave, I was an absolute plague for my boss. They are going to relocate me somewhere else […] when the boss hates you because you took paternity leave…she is determined and she wants to win over me […] I see it like a sexual assault, even if it is not really that… (Joe, 37 yrs, administrator)

One also had a bad surprise when he returned to work as someone had been hired to replace him and this created conflicts when he returned:

> It has had an impact; if I had not taken leave, the employer would not have hired someone to replace me. The person who replaced did not take my place but is not a good person. Nobody gets along with this person and here it creates conflicts. He will push me to leave my job, I'm sure. I have not really been victimized, but it is really difficult. (Ned, 30 yrs, employee)

One father also mentioned a sense of unfairness as there are always parties for mothers when they go on maternity leave, while the departure and return of fathers is not celebrated:

> I'm in an environment where there are a lot of pregnancies and thus many departures and returns. Most of the time there are small parties for women's departure on leave and we are happy when they return. For men it is something original so there is no party…people are happy but it's not like the mother who leaves to spend time with her child,… he is the father. It's good that the company lets you take leave, it's cute even, everyone is happy but there was no party for my departure but every time it's a woman it's different. I was still given a gift but when it's a woman it is a buffet or we go to the restaurant, but nothing for men… (Jo, 39 yrs, professional)

These last quotes are revealing as they show clearly that while taking the leave per se is a right, and fathers in Quebec do not hesitate to take it, colleagues in the workplace apparently do not have the same celebratory attitude as they tend to display with female colleagues.

In terms of other workplace issues, it appears that all fathers do not completely give up work while on paternity leave. While some fathers really do cut ties with the employer during the period, others continue to spend a few hours working during the week, especially during the nap of the child, or even an entire day at the workplace for one father. In addition, some fathers took advantage of leave to do some DIY in the house although they saw very quickly that they would not have that much time to themselves. These patterns were also reported by Doucet and Merla (2007, p. 1) in research that focused on Belgian and Canadian stay-at-home fathers, in which they indicate that their sample of fathers only partially abandoned professional work to the benefit of child care; maintaining a link with the more traditional

masculine identity resources through part-time work, or DIY at home. Similarly, in another study, Magaraggia (2012) indicates that men's identities continue to be defined more in relation to professional activities than in relation to the care activities. While we had questions in our research protocol on the difficulty of negotiating leave with the employer, no father mentioned any difficulty on taking the leave per se. However, many reported small irritants related to people's attitudes in the workplace.

5.8.2 Fathers in the Public Sphere

In the public sphere too, fathers taking parental leave alone, often are reminded that they are not in their traditional gendered role. As pointed out by Doucet (2009), many public spaces where fathers can be found with their child (park, swimming pool, shopping centers, daycare, community centres and so one) are places where there are more women than men. These gendered public places sometimes make fathers uncomfortable or discourage them from returning (when there are women breastfeeding in community centres, for example). As some our interviewees mentioned:

> You know in the Community Health Centers (CLSC) workshops, there are plenty of interesting activities on work-life balance, stress management, diet, but there are just mothers! They would be good for fathers too as we have a role to play and need to be aware of that. At first it was not too bad, because the baby was sleeping but then when the baby was bigger and more agitated, I felt worse, surrounded by breastfeeding women, so we did the cardio-stroller and swimming lessons. Ha … there we were two dads at the swimming lessons… you can find them but you have to really look for them. There are not many reactions, and when there are, it is more of a surprise from other men. (Tom, 35 yrs, professional)

> I took baby swimming classes and there are not many men; the girls are surprised when you arrive, that's it, yes there I was very embarrassed. (Jim, 33 yrs, professional)

> The dynamics of father versus the mother in the home is totally different; society is for stay-at-home moms. Places for strollers, baby yoga all this is a very feminine environment. I tried to find blogs of dads at home on the internet, there are a few. I went to see if there was a kind of club, things like that, there was even an article in the Quebec child magazine that was dedicated to fathers' activities in the home, there was an inventory, there was an activity that was in Trois-Rivières, there was another in Chicoutimi, it's very marginal. It is normal since stay-at-home fathers are still marginal. In that sense, yes there is a kind of solitude, I am a stay-at-home father but finding activities for fathers with a child is difficult. (Brad, 40 yrs, administrator)

Similarly, many informants experienced media outlets in the public sphere as unsupportive of their position as primary carer. The message that some media present does not help to change stereotypes was a recurring theme. As one father mentions:

> I think we have the impression that women are better in childcare. On TV for example, women often seem to control things, they are better at doing things or laugh when their husbands have difficulties, but I think that all tasks can be learned and can become second

> nature to everyone. I think parents may be biologically different but they are equally important and equally competent. (Eliot, 32 yrs, professional)

5.9 Emergent Types of Paternal Involvement

On the basis of the typology of father involvement developed by Quéniart (2002a, cited in Pacaut et al. 2011) which we presented above, we can already point out that no father involved in our research belongs to the category of providers and protectors. This does not mean that this model no longer exists in Quebec, but it is clearly less present in the younger generation of which this sample of fathers were a part. Fathers who took paternity leave with their partner are similar to the "ambivalent" category of fathers because as we have seen in the results they have essentially a supporting role to the mother. However, many fathers who have opted for a combination of paternity and parental leave, and thus took more time than normative in the Quebec context, including some time alone with the child, show a progressive move from "ambivalent fathers" to "postmodern fathers," being more and more actively involved in parenting.

Comparing with Wall's typology (2012) that provides four profiles of paternal engagement for fathers on leave alone (constrained fathers, radical rupture, innovative and independent fathers as well as the innovative and subversive fathers), in our research no father who took leave of one month or more, alone with the child, fits the profile of the constrained father. As for the model of radical departure, when fathers arrive at the stage where they take part of the leave alone, they no longer see themselves as supporting the mother. They see their role of father as representing significant change. In fact many fathers in our study appear to be innovators and independent fathers, as the quotes above show. Indeed, taking the 5 week paternity leave with the mother, they made sure they learned a lot about housework and child care to stay alone afterwards. Some fathers had already taken one or two leaves for their other children and therefore already had all the knowledge needed to care for the baby. They often go as far as changing the routine established by the mother, and assume both domestic tasks and care.

The profile of "innovative and subversive fathers" is very evident in our research. If fathers took parental leave alone with the child, it is often in order to allow their partner to accelerate in her career or to continue her university studies. Seeking gender equality and equal roles in private and professional sphere is important for these fathers. To complete the picture, we would add the profile of "innovators and activists" to the profiles of innovative and independent or subversive fathers. Indeed, our research shows that just as mothers, fathers were able to handle all domestic tasks and caring for the child. Moreover, some fathers are somewhat annoyed about their near-invisibility in the public sphere but also resent the insufficient positive media coverage on the father's place in the home. Although this has increased over the years in Quebec, there are still strong stereotypes and these fathers would like to see them reduced and to have less gendered attitudes in public places. Thus, to the two more

modern profiles defined by Wall (2012), that is innovators and independent or subversive fathers, we would add a third profile, that of innovative fathers who are also strong activists for father's involvement and place in parenting. The Quebec fathers of this study thus fit one or the other of the following profiles: innovative and independent fathers; innovative and subversive fathers or innovative and activist fathers.

5.10 Conclusion

Quebec has been very innovative in terms of work-family interface in recent decades, as a number of policies have been adopted to increase the welfare of children and gender equality. Today more and more fathers are taking the non-transferable paternity leave of 3 or 5 weeks (80 % take the paternity leave, and 75 % take 5 weeks), and when they also take some parental leave, they take up to 13 weeks of leave on average.

From a normative point of view, the existence of the non-transferable leave and the fact that 80 % of fathers take this leave makes it easier or more legitimate for fathers to request and use other measures of work-family reconciliation and sends a strong signal to the employers, making them understand that family is important to today's fathers. The situation, here again, varies from one sector and type of organization to another (Tremblay 2012c).

As we have seen, many fathers in this study took a paternity leave of 5 weeks and a few months later, they took several months alone with the child. The first period of paternity leave is seen as a period of support for the mother, breastfeeding representing a certain barrier to the access to the child. For the majority of fathers who have opted for the combination of paternity and parental leave, when the mother returns to work and stops breastfeeding, this is the time for them to take up their full role of father and stay with the child alone.

We did not find evidence for Wall's (2012) category of constrained fathers, but of course this does not mean that they are not present in Quebec, and there are still considerable challenges for fathers who take parental leave (Tremblay et al. 2012, 2011; Tremblay 2012b, 2013, 2014a; Marshall 2008, 2009). However, with the emergence of non-transferable paternity leave and parental leave sharing, there has clearly been a movement towards more modern types of fathers, in comparison with the period before the introduction of this leave (Tremblay 2003).

While we found many innovative and independent or subversive fathers, we added the profile of the activist and innovators, as some Quebec fathers are real militants for the role of father and advocate for the recognition of a parenting role for fathers. Those who mentioned difficulties in the workplace, and more generally in the public sphere, were really very annoyed about the situation and tended to take on a militant attitude, hoping to change these realities.

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Chapter 6
Fathers on Leave Alone in Finland: Negotiations and Lived Experiences

Johanna Lammi-Taskula

6.1 Introduction

A more equal sharing of parental leave between mothers and fathers has been a recurrent aim of gender equality policy in Finland (STM 1999; Lammi-Taskula et al. 2009; STM 2014). Increasing men's activity in childcare has been understood as important for promoting the position of women in the labour market. Since 1990s, emphasis has also been put on the positive impact of leave for the emotional relationship between father and child (Rantalaiho 2003, 202–203).

Compared to the other Nordic countries (Gislason and Eydal 2011), the development of individual parental leave rights for fathers has been slow in Finland and the take-up rate of leave alone by fathers is a more recent phenomenon. While the previous generation of fathers were pioneers of caring masculinity and were often met with doubt when taking any leave, it is today normal and even expected that a father takes some weeks of paternity leave, with the mother, when a child is born. However, mothers still take the main share of parental leave and the take-up of longer leave periods by fathers is not very common. Slowly but steadily, the number of fathers taking leave from paid employment to care for a young child when the mother returns to work has indeed increased. According to the Family Barometer survey in 2014, men in their thirties are today willing to stay at home with their child for 1 or 2 months, while men in their twenties are ready to take a 6-month leave (Lainiala 2014).

Many obstacles have been mentioned for fathers' take-up of parental leave, often based on assumptions rather than facts (Lammi-Taskula 2007). The introduction of a father's quota in 2003 has encouraged more fathers to take leave. Still, fathers do

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need to negotiate both with their spouse if they want to take a longer leave period that is transferable between parents rather than an individual right. Also, a statutory right to take leave does not count out negotiations with the employer.

In this chapter, the negotiations in the family and at the workplace about the take-up of a longer leave period by the father as well as the experiences of fathers who have taken leave are analysed. While a short paternity leave may provide much needed help for the mother as well as create a good start for the father-child relationship, staying at home for some days or weeks is not likely to have an impact on the gendered division of labour at home, or to affect a father's position in the workplace (Lammi-Taskula and Salmi 2014). Longer periods of leave make it possible for the father to take full responsibility of both childcare and housework while the mother is not at home during the day. At the workplace, a longer leave period is more likely to get noticed as tasks need to be reorganized, which may also shift power relations.

6.2 Theoretical Framework and Previous Research

The theoretical framework for this study links approaches of social policy and gender studies. The preconditions and impact of fathers' longer leave periods at home alone with the child are analysed with the help of R.W. Connell's structural model of gender relations (1987, 2000). In this model, four dimensions of gender relations are specified: cultural (symbolic) ideas about women and men or femininities and masculinities; material conditions related to the division of labour; individual desires and emotions; and power relations.

These four dimensions form configurations of gender relations, such as the sharing or not sharing of parental leave between mothers and fathers. The ideas of gendered parental responsibilities represented in the leave legislation are actualised in the practical division of labour between mothers and fathers. Emotional motivations are pulling parents into gendered practices or pushing them away from such practices, and power relations are always present in negotiations about parental rights and responsibilities (Lammi-Taskula 2007).

Previous research on father's parental leave in Finland has shown that material conditions such as the labour market situation and income level of parents are strongly related to the take-up patterns of parental leave by mothers and fathers. A weaker labour market position tends to push mothers out of paid employment and into unpaid care work, while the better opportunities pull men into paid work and away from family life (Lammi-Taskula and Salmi 2014; Haataja 2005; Lammi-Taskula 2007; Salmi et al. 2009).

Family life is the most intimate life sphere, and strong emotional aspects are intertwined with the gendered conceptions and negotiations of parental responsibilities. Despite the long history of the dual-earner family model in Finland, fathers still need to reflect on their breadwinning responsibility in the construction of a "good father" identity. Similarly, mothers of young children try to make choices

related to their childcare responsibility that position them as "good mothers" (Lammi-Taskula 2007). A qualitative study (Eerola and Mykkänen 2014) analysed gendered narratives of first-time fathers in Finland and found two counter narratives to the culturally dominant narrative of the "decent father". While the "decent father" narrative accepts and encourages fathers' participation in childcare, the main responsibility is still seen as "naturally" resting with the mother. The counter narrative of "equal father" emphasizes the similarity of mothers and fathers in childcare and stay-at-home fathers who actively want to take care of their children are an essential part of this narrative.

In the context of shifting gender ideologies, narratives and socio-economic conditions, power relations between parents are under constant negotiation. In these negotiations, the rewards and costs, threats and promises of alternative actions are considered (Scott 2001, 138). In everyday family life, power relations can come about as a struggle over who is the master of the situation; who can decide who is what, who does what, and who gets what, when and how (Jonasdottir 1991, 38–39).

6.3 Leave Possibilities for Fathers in Finland

Parental leave as a welfare state institution reflects the motives and goals of policy makers to affect the choices and actions of citizens. Through national legislation on parental leave and parental benefits, possibilities as well as limitations are provided for parental practices and the division of labour between mothers and fathers in paid and unpaid work. By ensuring certain rights and benefits for parents of young children, the legislation shapes the ways people think about family life and parenthood as well as about gender; what motherhood and fatherhood "are" and how they should be like (Lammi-Taskula 2007).

In Finland, the role of men in families was first discussed in the 1960s as women's participation in the labour market was growing. A new gender ideology was shaped mainly among young academic radicals (Jallinoja 1983, 123–127). Their society called 'Association 9' was the first one to propose paternity leave in 1967 (Husu et al. 1995, 366), and it took another decade until paternity leave was introduced in 1978. At first it was 2 weeks and later 3 weeks, to be taken while the mother is also at home on maternity or parental leave.

Unlike maternity and paternity leave that are individual, gendered leave rights, parental leave is transferable i.e. it can be shared between the parents as they wish. Since 1985, fathers in Finland are entitled to take parental leave after the mother has completed her 18-week maternity leave. Parental leave is a period of 26 weeks, starting when the baby is about 3 months old and ending when the baby is about 10 months old. Parents cannot take parental leave simultaneously, so in order for the father to be on leave, the mother needs to return to the labour market or studies.

The idea of an individual father's quota was discussed at the end of the 1990s in Finland as other Nordic countries already had introduced such quotas (STM 1999).

The idea of the quota is that if the father does not take his leave period, it cannot be transferred to the mother, i.e. the family loses it. Norway was the first country in the world to introduce a 4-week father's quota in 1994. Sweden followed in 1995 and Denmark in 1999. During a 10-year period (2003–2012), there was a kind of a father's quota of parental leave called the father's month in Finland. At first it was 4 weeks long: if the father took the last 2 weeks of the transferable parental leave, he got 2 bonus weeks to be used at the end of the parental leave period. In 2007, take-up was made more flexible so that the father's month could be taken until the child is about 16 months old. In 2010, 2 more bonus weeks were added to the father's month making it 6 weeks long. In 2013, the father's month and the traditional paternity leave were replaced by a 9 week individual paternity leave of which 3 weeks can be taken simultaneously with the mother. The new paternity leave can be taken until the child is 2 years old. While the father is on paternity leave with one child, the mother may take leave with a new baby, but not with the same child.

In 1985 both fathers and mothers also got the possibility to take care leave after parental leave. Unlike paternity and parental leave that are relatively well compensated with an income-related benefit (on average 70 % of the previous income with no ceiling), care leave is covered with a low flat-rate benefit. The home care allowance (HCA) is paid until the child is 3, if the child is not in public daycare. The HCA is very popular among families in Finland, and recipients have mainly been mothers. About half of mothers use it less than twelve months (i.e. return to work before the child is 2 years old), while one in six mothers use the whole HCA period.

6.4 Take-Up of Leave by Fathers

The oldest form of leave, paternity leave, was first used primarily in well-educated families (Säntti 1990) but for two decades it has been taken irrespective of the parents' socio-economic background (Salmi et al. 2009). Taking paternity leave has thus changed from being an exceptional practice to an 'everyman's mass movement' (Lammi-Taskula 2007). In 2013, 58100 children were born in Finland and 47800 fathers took paternity leave while the mother was on maternity leave (Kela 2014). According to a survey in 2006 (Salmi et al. 2009), taking full paternity leave i.e. 3 weeks when the child is born is more common with the first child than with the second or third child. The main obstacle for paternity leave reported by mothers is the father's busy work situation.

Most fathers today think it is self-evident to take paternity leave (Salmi et al. 2009; Eerola 2014). The motives for taking paternity leave are however related to education level: while highly educated fathers want to spend time with the baby, less educated fathers feel they should help the spouse (Salmi et al. 2009).

Before the father's month was introduced in 2003, only 2–3 % of fathers (about 1500 men per year) took parental leave in Finland. These fathers had a higher education level and were more often in a white collar expert position than those who only took paternity leave (Lammi-Taskula 2003). After the introduction of the

father's month, take-up increased year after year so that in 2012 about one third of fathers (18 000 men per year) took their month. The take-up of the father's month reveals a similar pattern as the paternity leave in the first decades: well-educated men with well-educated spouses have been more likely to take this leave (Salmi et al. 2009).

Interviews with first-time fathers about paternal responsibilities (Eerola 2014) showed that a longer parental leave is an obvious decision mainly for those fathers who see their emotional presence in the child's life as an important part of their fathering.

During the first 4 years of its existence, the father's month had to be taken immediately after the parental leave period, which turned out to be the main obstacle for fathers to take it as most mothers continued on care leave after their parental leave period (Salmi et al. 2009). There are no statistics on care leave, but the share of fathers among recipients of the home care allowance has remained very low. In 2012, there were only about 1700 fathers (3,3 % of recipients) compared to 49 000 mothers who had received home care allowance after their parental leave period ended in 2010 (Kela 2013). As the home care allowance is paid as an alternative to the use of public daycare services, not all recipients of this flat-rate benefit are necessarily on leave.

According to a survey with parents of young children (Salmi et al. 2014), the take-up of care leave by fathers is related to similar socio-economic patterns as the take-up of the father's month. Leave is taken more often by fathers who have a high education level and whose spouse is also highly educated. The longest periods at home with the home care allowance are taken by mothers with low education levels. Fathers take more often care leave with the first child than with the second or third child, and older fathers take more leave than those in their twenties.

6.5 Data and Methods

To explore the negotiation processes and impact on gender relations related to the take-up of longer parental leave periods by fathers in Finland, seven thematic interviews were conducted with fathers during 2013. The interviewed men were 30–41 years of age and had one or two children. All fathers had taken a longer leave period to take care of their child. The total length of leave alone with the child varied between 2 months and 2 years (Table 6.1).

All men had a relatively high education level: five out of seven had a university degree. None of them were in traditional blue-collar jobs. Also the spouses of the interviewed fathers were highly educated. In the age group 30–39, almost half of women in Finland have a university degree while five out of seven spouses in the data have it. Among men in this age group, the proportion of university degrees is less than a third and almost half of employees are in a blue-collar position. The families in the data are thus not representative of the population in general as they have a higher than average socio-economic position.

Table 6.1 Interviewed fathers

Alias	Age	Occupation	Children (age)	Length of leave alone	Spouse's occupation
Jussi	30	Social worker, public sector	Girl 4,5	4 months	Supermarket department manager
			Boy 2,5	6 months	
Tuomo	31	Civil engineer, private sector	Girl, 3	2 months	Secretary, private sector
Joni	34	Photographer, self employed	Girl, 2	4 months	Researcher, university
Mika	35	Project manager, private sector	Boy 3,5	3 months	Senior inspector, public sector
			Boy 1,5	4 months	
Pekka	37	Journalist, public sector	Girl 7	8 months	Journalist, private sector
			Boy 2,5	8 months	
Olli	39	Marketing manager, private sector	Girl 2,5	2 years	(ex / Director, private sector)
Aki	43	Library manager, public sector	Boy 2,5	10 months	Researcher, private sector

The fathers were contacted through a snowball method i.e. personal networks were used to find them. Several attempts were made to find fathers with a lower education level and/or blue-collar position but in the end none were interviewed due to possible ethical problems (the blue-collar candidates were spouses of friends or colleagues). Further research is needed to secure a frame to sample a broader range of fathers taking leave both alone and with partners.

The interviewed fathers lived in the capital area of Finland in three different cities. The interviews lasted from 60 to 90 min and were conducted in several places: three interviews in the interviewee's home, two in his workplace, one at a café and one at the interviewer's office. The common interview guide (see Chap. 1) was used with themes ranging from emotions connected to the new-born baby to opinions about family policy in Finland. The list of themes was used as a checklist during the discussion rather than as a rigid order of questions, but most themes were still more or less covered in all interviews. The data were analysed with thematic analysis. Themes were mainly linked to the original questions of the common interview guide but sometimes also appeared in a more inductive manner.

6.6 Negotiations at Home and at Work

6.6.1 Negotiations Between Spouses

Couples often have similar educational backgrounds, but the education level of women in child-bearing age in Finland is higher than that of men. In the age group 25–29 about 40 % of women compared to 23 % of men have a university degree, and in the age group 30–35 the corresponding figures are 50 and 32 % (Statistics Finland

2014). It is thus quite likely that mothers of young children have career ambitions and expect their partners to share childcare responsibilities in order to avoid the fate of double burden i.e. taking care of most unpaid work at home after paid work at the workplace.

In a survey among parents of young children in Finland, a large majority of fathers who had taken parental leave reported an agreement with their partner about the mother not being the primary carer for their child. Also mothers whose partner had taken parental leave reported consensus between partners about shared child care responsibility. However, sharing parental leave between parents does not always mean the parents unanimously reject separate parental responsibilities. Among those who shared parental leave, one in ten fathers and more than one in four mothers reported a mutual agreement in the family about the mother being the primary carer for the child. In these families, the father's parental leave may have been a practical solution and not understood as his taking full care responsibility. Agreement about the mother's primacy can also be related to the timing and length of the father's leave period so that it is short and takes place as late as possible (Lammi-Taskula 2007).

Among the interviewed fathers, the primacy of mothercare was not a central theme in their narratives about how childcare has been arranged in the family. In some of the families, the father had more experience of young children than the mother when their first child was born. Even when the mother was more experienced and provided advice, the fathers created their own caring practices and style during leave.

> She had more previous experience of childcare and she gave me a lot of advice with the newborn baby, and it was ok for me. But when I started my leave I soon realized that there is not just one way of taking good care of children. I would say I am more relaxed with our daughter. Olli (marketing manager, 39)

It was very important for the fathers to be taken seriously as competent parents. This was not always the case for example at the hospital or at the well-baby clinic, or later in daycare. Aki was very upset about the way he was treated at the hospital after the birth of his son: he had a major role in taking care of the baby as the mother was not well, but he felt he was not trusted by the nurses.

> My spouse had <health problems> and we stayed a bit longer at the hospital after the baby was born. The nurses kept bossing me around, it was an unpleasant experience because I was doing everything I possibly could with the baby, like feeding him as the mother could not breastfeed. The staff had a kind of an old fashioned way of thinking. Aki (library manager, 43)

Ideological aspects of gender equality in relation to the division of labour in childcare was discussed in some of the families but not all of them. Equal responsibility in practice was however taken for granted by the interviewed fathers. Pekka says his spouse finds gender equality important while for him, participating in childcare was more self-evident than ideological. He *simply wanted to spend time with his children*.

> Gender equality is very important for my wife, and I had nothing against it. I want to take part in everything and absolutely do not think that some things are only the mother's responsibility and others only the father's. My wife was maybe a bit worried about my participation in childcare, whereas for me it was self evident to participate, because it is my child and I want to participate. Pekka (journalist, 37)

The principles of child care and education were usually shared by the parents. Many fathers also said their own mother was an important role model for them. Joni has adopted his parenting ideology from his mother:

> My mother thinks that a child, even a young one understands a lot. That has also been my starting point as a father, for I never ridicule or patronize my child and always treat her as an equal human being. Joni (photographer, 34)

A common motivation for the father's leave was the parents' shared interest to provide home care for the children. When parental leave ends, the child is about ten months old, and most parents felt that he or she was too young to start in daycare at that age. Tuomo took 2 months of care leave after his father's month to postpone the daycare start until the place of their choice was available. Aki, who took two periods of leave, first 6 months and later another 4 months, explains that they almost managed to fulfill their goal of 3 years' home care for their only child whom they got at quite a late age:

> Our child has not yet been in daycare, he has been in home care all the time. In August, when he will be two years nine months old, he will start in daycare. It was our goal that he would be in home care until he is three, and we have succeeded quite well, only three months short. Aki (library manager, 43)

> We wanted our child to go to family daycare, so we got a place only one kilometer from our house. My spouse returned to work two months before the daycare started and I took leave during the remaining months. Tuomo (civil engineer, 31)

The typical pattern was that the mother stayed at home during the first year, taking all of the transferable parental leave and often also some care leave. The father took 2 or 3 weeks of paternity leave when the baby was born and the mother was on maternity leave. It was often her initiative that led to the father's take-up of leave, like in Mika's story:

> I think it was during pregnancy that we started to think about leave. It was clear from the beginning that we did not want the children to start very young in daycare. How to organise it in practice, I think my wife probably asked if I wanted to take a longer leave and it felt like a good solution. I was happy to take the opportunity for a break from work and on the other hand, it is good to spend time with children when they are young. Mika (project manager, 35)

The fathers usually first took the father's month i.e. 6 weeks of parental leave with income-related benefit, and then continued on care leave with the flat-rate benefit. The fathers also combined their annual holiday with parental or care leave. As a full salary is paid during the annual holiday, this combination was not an economic burden for the family. Pekka stayed at home for 8 months with his son:

> I took two weeks of paternity leave when the baby was born and one more week later. Then, when he was about 16 months old, I stayed at home, combining annual holiday with care

> leave. We did not want to put him in daycare before he was two years old. It was okay for my wife to stay at home a year and a half, after which I took the rest. Pekka (journalist, 37)

Olli and Jussi are exceptional among the interviewed fathers in that it was their initiative rather than their spouse's to share leave and stay at home for a longer period of time. Taking leave was about rethinking priorities and enjoying the time together with the child. Jussi says that as soon as he knew he was going to be a father, it was his intention to stay at home on leave:

> With our first child it was more my initiative, I wanted to take leave and my wife did not oppose. We talked about this already during pregnancy, and when she was born, the idea was fortified that I would take all the leave possible. My wife realized she is not a stay-at-home kind of person and she was ready to return to work. Jussi (social worker, 30)

Olli started his leave much earlier than the other fathers. He and his spouse stayed at home together for half a year on his initiative, because he realized that his spouse was getting tired. They could afford this because of the high income level of both parents. As his spouse then got a new executive job, Olli continued on leave.

> She was born in spring and I had decided already during the winter that I would take all the leave possible. When she was two months old I saw that my spouse was quite tired, so I said I could also stay at home. So we both stayed at home. When the baby was five months old my spouse got a really good job offer, so I encouraged her to take the opportunity. As she started in the new job when the baby was ten months old, we moved to another city and I stayed at home. Olli (marketing manager, 39)

The mother's work situation played a central role in the negotiations between parents about how to share leave. Joni and Aki both had spouses who worked as researchers and needed to return to work because of project timetables. Joni's spouse was eager to continue working on her doctoral thesis and Aki's spouse had to return due to research funding regulations. Unlike most of the other parents, Aki explains how they split the leave period into several parts: she took the first part, and then he was at home while she returned to work, then she took some leave again and finally he stayed at home until the child started in daycare.

> We talked about it already during pregnancy. It was our intention to take turns and that's what we have done. It was decisive for us that she had academy funding, she could only stay away for one year or she would have lost the money. Aki (library manager, 43)

Mika, who was currently on leave with his second child at the time of the interview, also told how the parents split the leave, but he only took one period while his spouse took two leave periods. Annual holidays were also combined to be able to keep the child in home care:

> My wife stayed at home a bit longer than one year. I am not able to take more than four months of leave. Then my wife takes some more months of leave and then we have summer holidays before he starts in daycare. Mika (project manager, 35)

In some cases, the interviewed fathers said their spouse was not really a "homemaker type" and were thus happy to return to work while the father also wanted to stay at home with the child. Jussi explained that his spouse returned to work when the first child was 1 year old, and with the second child they decided to have the

same pattern, but she then got a new job during her leave so he started his leave when the baby was 6 months old. Joni, Mika and Pekka all told me that their spouse was quite ready to go back to the office after 1 year at home.

Even if family economy is seen as the most important obstacle for fathers' take-up of longer leave periods, the interviewed fathers did not see money as an obstacle for their leave. Olli, who had a good job with a high income before his leave, says he did not think about money at all but made choices based on his values. Joni saw his 4-month leave as so short that money was not an issue.

> Many people have told me they would have liked to stay at home longer but could not afford it. To be honest, I think that is simply crap. It is possible if you want it. It may have a price, and I don't mean just money but also career. Say three months or half a year, you can always negotiate it with the bank. We have a simple life and I don't think we are missing out on anything. Olli (marketing manager, 39)

> It was such a short time, so it did not really matter to us. Yes, the home care allowance is a small amount of money, but it was not a problem. Joni (photographer, 34)

Compared to most of the other couples in the sample, Jussi and his spouse had a lower income level; they were both earning less than the average male or female income in Finland. The leave period with the income-related benefit (about 70 % of previous income) was not a problem for the family economy, but calculations showed that they needed to freeze the payments of their mortage during his care leave while he only got the flat-rate benefit. The same would probably have been true had she been the one taking care leave.

> We used the calculator available on the Social Insurance Institution web page. The difference was not so big during the father's month, only a couple of hundred euros. During care leave it was more so we negotiated with the bank that we did not need to pay all mortgage for our house loan, and we only paid the interest. Jussi (social worker, 30)

The mothers who returned to work and handed over childcare responsibility to their spouses did not face any negative reactions from their social network, at least not according to the interviewed fathers. This is probably because most mothers had stayed at home at least one year and used all of the transferable parental leave (with the exception of Jussi's wife). Instead, the families received positive comments, especially from older women and men. Many of the fathers had friends with similar leave sharing practices, so they did not need to justify their choices.

> Some of my wife's colleagues are older generation. It has mainly been admiration, they think it is great that the father wants to stay at home. Not so much comments for our friends, as we have many friends who have the same situation. I have some male friends who have taken a longer leave than the mother, so it is nothing new. We have not needed to explain. At work we have young people in the same family situation. Mika (project manager, 35)

> Among our friends there are others who have a similar situation, it is almost like typical that also the father stays at home for some time. Some older men have said they envy me as it was not possible for them to stay at home when their children were young. Joni (photographer, 34)

6.6.2 *Negotiations at the Workplace*

Workplaces today need to compete for highly skilled workers through advantageous working conditions (den Dulk and Peper 2009). Traditionally, public sector workplaces have supported work-family life reconciliation measures, and encouraged men's take-up of leave at least in the Nordic countries (Brandth and Kvande 2002; Bygren and Duvander 2006; Haas et al. 2002).

In Finland, the short paternity leave that is taken when the child is born has become normalized and it seems to be self-evident also at private-sector workplaces. When we interviewed human resources managers about leave take-up, they told us that taking paternity leave is automatic or even desirable. Some collective agreements provide full pay during 2 or 3 weeks of paternity leave, and there are also organizational practices that encourage fathers to take their full 3-week paternity leave. Parental leave, however, is still often seen as an exceptional and private matter. Male employees are not necessarily encouraged to take longer leave periods, but if they apply for a parental or care leave they usually will be supported (Salmi et al. 2009).

The interviews with the stay-at-home fathers show that it is still easier to negotiate a longer leave period in public sector workplaces than in private sector companies. Aki used to work in the private sector when his child was born. He then changed to the public sector and finds the take-up of his latter leave period much easier:

> In the private company it was more difficult. But I was also quite sick and tired of that place so I did not mind telling them that I'll be off now. My current job is in the public sector so basically I simply notified the employer about my leave. When I was interviewed for the job I asked if I could start later after my leave and they accepted. Aki (library manager, 43)

Pekka works in a large state organization and it was no problem at all for him to take a long leave period with both of his two children. The age structure of the organization is such that many employees take leave periods all the time, so Pekka was not exceptional:

> I simply told my employer that I would be on leave, and I just notified them about the dates. There was no problem: they were very flexible and just said ok. I think it is my statutory right to take leave and they cannot say anything. I have many colleagues with young children so it is not unusual either. Pekka (journalist 37)

There are also differences between private companies in the manager's attitudes towards fathers taking leave. Tuomo took paternity leave when his child was born and the father's month when the child was about ten months old. His spouse was at home on annual holiday during the father's month and continued on care leave until the child was 2 years old. Tuomo tells me that he had no problems at the workplace when he took paternity leave and the father's month. He then changed jobs and took care leave for 2 months, and realized that his new boss was not happy about that. The boss is the main reason why Tuomo is now considering leaving his current workplace:

> The boss gave me some negative comments about the leave, and now he is also commenting about my coming later to work when I take my child to daycare. You see I want to take her there a bit later so that we can avoid the rush hour and save a lot of travel time. We have flexitime at work but not many people seem to use it. I am getting fed up with my boss's attitude and it is might be time to change jobs. Tuomo (civil engineer, 31)

Mika's boss is more understanding, but as the company is quite small, leave periods are more problematic than in a bigger organisation. Mika had to negotiate about the length of his leave and he was ready to make the necessary compromise, but he feels his current boss would have been more supportive than the one he had when he took the leave:

> I had a talk with my boss, who was new in the company, and somehow he did not want me to take a very long leave. I quite understand that as the company is quite small (25 employees) and if people are absent for a longer time they lose a relatively important input. Almost all the time someone is on maternity leave or paternity leave, and some have taken longer sick leaves as well so it has quite a big impact. I have a different boss now and he has actually taken three months of leave himself. Had he been my boss then, I might have been able to take six months instead of four. Mika (project manager, 35)

Among the interviewed fathers, Olli took the longest leave period and also experienced the biggest career change because of his leave. He worked as a manager in a multinational company when his child was born, and the idea that fathers took parental leave was a completely strange phenomenon for his superior who was not a Finn. At first Olli took some months of parental leave but wanted then to continue his leave because the mother of his child got a new job. It then became clear to him that he was expected to leave the company, which he also did.

> I had to argue with my boss and tell him that I have a legal right to take parental leave. I gave him the telephone number of my union lawyer in case he wanted to check the facts. At that point I had to consider the consequences of the leave for my career. When I told them I was going to continue on care leave after my parental leave they kind of let me know that I was not welcome back there anymore. Olli (marketing manager, 39)

6.6.3 Fathers' Experiences of Daily Life on Leave Alone

All the interviewed fathers had taken both paternity leave together with the mother when their child was a newborn, and parental or care leave i.e. staying at home alone with the child. The experience of parental leave was different from the experience of paternity leave as there was a sense of autonomy and full responsibility. All fathers said there were at least some differences in the parenting styles between the parents. Some fathers were more cautious and protective than the mother, while others were more relaxed and easy-going. Jussi sees these different styles as something inevitable and positive:

> I was able to do everything the way I wanted to do it. We have different style of doing things, which is the way it should be of course. Jussi (social worker, 30)

In narrating their experiences, the fathers described the leave period at home alone as something very different from paid employment. Even if child care can be tiring and chaotic sometimes, there was a sense of freedom that the fathers enjoyed very much. Mika enjoyed the lack of timetables during his leave:

> I could do what I want and not be so tied up in timetables. There was less stress, though of course I was sometimes busy during the day having to dress and undress and feed the children, but it was different. That was the main experience, it was quite nice. Mika (project manager, 35)

Many aspects of the everyday life at home with the child came as a surprise, usually as a positive one. Even if the fathers may have had some experience of young children before they had their first child, they did not really have an idea what it would be like to have a close emotional relationship and to spend all day with their child. Olli used to see himself as a career-oriented person, but soon after starting his leave he found a completely new side to himself. As he really enjoyed staying at home with his child, he was willing to extend his leave:

> I had no idea what it would be like, if it was going to be suffering or something nice. I soon realised that I liked it. After some months I thought I could just as well stay at home longer. Olli (marketing manager, 39)

While the sense of freedom was important for some of the fathers, some of them said having a routine made life easier. For Aki, a strict routine was a way of coping even if he did not really like timetables. Jussi, who had work experience from school, had a regular daily and weekly timetable with his first child, which he was very proud of:

> It did not take long before I had created a routine: getting up and having breakfast, then heading to the playground. Then making lunch and doing the laundry. I tried especially in the beginning to show my wife how well I was doing. I made a different kind of meal every day and kept the house very clean. We also visited my grandparents once a week and spent the whole day with them. My daughter liked to go there because she received so much attention from everyone. Jussi (social worker, 30)

> We really need a routine. I have been really bad with routines, so I had to force myself to create some, otherwise nothing works. I follow a strict daily timetable and twice a week we go to the park, we always arrive and leave at the same hour. Aki (library manager, 43)

The sharing of parental leave between mothers and fathers correlates with the sharing of daily housework (Lammi-Taskula 2007). The parent who is at home on leave is usually responsible for not only childcare but also other chores that need to be done on a daily basis. Thus, a fair amount of cooking, cleaning, dish washing and laundry is included in a typical day during parental leave.

All the interviewed fathers said they like to cook and were doing that already before their leave, whereas there were different practices related to cleaning and doing the laundry. Mika managed to leave the main responsibility of laundry to his spouse despite taking two 4-month periods of leave when he was at home alone with the children:

> I like to cook, my wife does not. Someone commented on her getting a warm meal when she returns from work and I had to point out that I used to cook the meals after work even

> when she was on leave. My wife likes other chores, she tidies up and does the laundry. There is a lot of laundry and I try to hang it but she puts them in the machine. We are both less keen on cleaning. Mika (project manager, 35)

Pekka and Joni see the daily housework tasks as part of the package for whoever is at home on leave. Thus, they said it was self-evident for them to take the main responsibility of shopping, cooking and cleaning during their leave.

> When I was on leave I took care of cleaning, shopping, cooking, all that basic work. It was natural to do that, I can't remember any quarreling about it. I did as much as I could, that was part of my job during leave. Pekka (journalist, 37)

> The one who was at home took bigger responsibility of housework. So of course I took care of that when I was on leave. Joni (photographer, 34)

Both Olli and Jussi describe the gender roles in their family as reversed not only during the leave period but in general. Jussi was doing more housework both when his spouse was on leave and when he was on leave himself, whereas Olli took more responsibility during his long leave period.

> When she was at work and I was on leave, it felt like I did everything at home. Maybe I am exaggerating but that's how I felt then. I guess the gender roles in our family were the opposite of how they usually are. Olli (marketing manager, 39)

> When she was on leave, I used to cook the meals in the evening for the next day, and did the shopping as well. There was no change when I was at home. I also mainly do the cleaning and the laundry. My wife says she does not bother to go to the store because she does not know what to buy anyway. Sometimes she suggests she could hang the laundry in order to have a moment alone. I have sometimes noticed I try too much to take care of everything. Jussi (social worker, 30)

As the leave periods of all interviewed fathers were relatively long – at least three months – they inevitably learned many new skills. On the one hand, their organizing skills improved as they juggled the various demands of everyday life at home. On the other hand, they also became more patient and learned to adapt to changes and turn-ups that are characteristic in life with young children. Jussi finds he can use these skills also at his work:

> I learned how to organize time-use and take the children's needs into account. Everything was planned, from visits to also meeting other adults in the park for example. I can use these skills at work now, we go through the week on Mondays so we know what is going to happen each day. It is now also easier to adapt to changes than before. There were sudden changes with the children when I was home, and I have them daily at work. Jussi (social worker, 30)

In addition to learning practical skills, the long leave period gave a possibility for soul-searching and pondering about life priorities for some of the fathers. Pekka explains how making sand cakes with his daughter stimulated in-depth analysis about life:

> I probably have learned to be systematic, fast and effective in many ordinary mundane tasks. But the most important learning has to do with personal growth. It was a surprise to realise how impatient I could be, I always thought I was a really cool and calm person who does not flap about anything. The little one-year-old really pushed my buttons and I had to

> manage my anger in a new way. I also began to think more about profound questions of life while sitting by the sandpit. Sandcakes are like life itself: it is not the completed cake that is important but the process of making it. Pekka (journalist, 37)

6.7 Conclusions

Reconciliation of paid employment and family responsibilities is one of the key challenges in reaching gender equality. Sharing child care responsibilities between mothers and fathers is a corner stone of this reconciliation. The possibilities for sharing the unpaid childcare work are promoted by parental leave legislation in Finland: fathers are given possibilities for paternity, parental and care leave. During the past decade, fathers have had a special "father's month" of leave that cannot be transferred to the mother.

Over this period it has become a normal practice for fathers to take some weeks of paternity leave when their child is born in order to support the mother after delivery and to get to know the new family member. During paternity leave, the father is able to participate in childcare but usually the mother bears the main responsibility. Changing the gendered division of labour at home requires that the father becomes the main carer for a longer period of time. As long as parental leave is transferable between parents and not earmarked for the father, only a small minority of fathers take it. Since the introduction of the father's quota, a positive step towards the goal of gender equality has taken place as the number of fathers taking their individual leave month (6 weeks of leave with income-related benefit) has increased every year. Today, one in three fathers use their leave quota, but not all of them are home alone with their child: the mother may take annual holiday or stay at home on unemployment benefit during the father's month.

The fathers interviewed for this study are exceptional in that they have taken more leave than most fathers in Finland. The usual pattern for participants was to take 2 to 3 weeks of paternity leave with the mother, the father's month and some care leave. The leave periods during which these fathers stayed at home and took on the main responsibility for childcare varied from 2 months to 2 years.

Sharing parental leave between mothers and fathers is in practice always negotiated between parents. In the negotiations about the take-up of leave, several aspects are intertwined. Both material preconditions as well as emotional and ideological aspects play a role in how the division of leave between mothers and fathers is organized. The mother's position in the labour market is decisive: in order for the father to take a longer leave period, his spouse needs to have a job to return to. The interviews show that the fathers who took long leave periods were aware of the fact that their spouse's career opportunities and gender equality awareness added to her willingness to return to work instead of taking the main part of the transferable parental and care leave herself.

The father's leave would however hardly take place without his own desire to stay at home and take care of his child. When parents disagree about gendered parental responsibilities, self-evident conceptions are questioned and more negotia-

tions and compromises are needed. This kind of disagreements were not reported by the interviewed fathers. The interviews show that it was relatively easy for the fathers to negotiate the sharing of childcare responsibility as the parents shared similar ideals of childcare and what is best for their child. Also, agreement by the parents about gender equality as something positive was related to the sharing of leave.

Mothers are still culturally seen as primary caretakers for young children, and often those mothers who return to work earlier than average need to deal with emotional aspects of whether or not they are fulfilling the prevailing conceptions of "good motherhood". Emotions are part of the picture also for the fathers who take long leave periods. It was very important for the interviewed fathers to be taken seriously as competent carers. To be a good father was for them not only to bring home a salary, but also to devote time to the child and make choices that are in the best interest of the child. For the fathers who had taken long leave periods, an important criterion for a "good father" seemed to be securing a longer home care for the child before he or she starts in daycare. Many of the interviewed fathers shared the concerns of child experts about daycare centers being too stressful for children under the age of 1 or 2.

Identities and values are involved in fathers' choices between work and family, but identities and values are also shaped through experience. Many of the interviewed fathers had decided to take leave with their spouse already during pregnancy. All of them had reconsidered their priorities in life during leave, and the experience of being the primary caretaker of the child influenced their way of thinking about fathering and helped them to find their own, individual way of caring. For example, the most career-oriented man in the sample ended up taking a long parental leave and realized that paid work was no longer the center of his identity. Similar identity processes took place also among the mothers: some of them realized after 1 year at home that they were not "homemakers" and that professional fulfilment was important for them.

Some of the fathers had previous experience of childcare, but many of them started their leave relying on the advice given by their spouse, and in some cases using also their own mother as a role model. The beginning of their care career was thus defined by feminine models, but they soon created their own practices and found their own parenting style that was usually different from the mothers but still based on meeting the needs of the child.

As the leave periods were relatively long, the fathers learned many new skills during their time home alone with the child, taking full responsibility for a very young child. They were often able to take advantage of these skills when they returned to work: they were more patient, more organized and more effective. This positive impact of parental leave may often remain invisible at the workplace level, be it for mothers or fathers who are returning from leave.

Negotiations with supervisors at the workplace take place after the negotiations at home have already happened, i.e. when the parents have agreed to share leave. At this point, only minor adjustments to the family plans can be made. The interviews showed that if support is lacking at the workplace, many fathers, and especially

those with an expert position, were likely to choose a more family-friendly workplace. Negotiations at work are thus reshaping the gendered family friendliness so that also male employees are allowed to be caring parents.

For the previous generation of fathers, the take-up of paternity leave while the mother was also at home was testing the limits of masculinity and modifying gender relations. It is, however, the take-up of leave by fathers alone with the child, i.e. taking full responsibility of childcare while the mother returns to work, that has a more significant transforming potential. At the moment, the transformation of gender relations is occurring mainly among middle-class parents: the father's month has been taken by highly educated men with spouses in white-collar positions. The same class-based pattern was typical when paternity leave was first introduced in the 1970s, but during the last decades the take-up of paternity leave has become mainstream among fathers from all socio-economic backgrounds. While young blue-collar fathers may also be willing to stay on a longer leave alone, the weaker labour market position of their spouses is often an obstacle. Thus, promoting gender equality at work and equal parenting at home may need to focus on both extending childcare leave rights for men and ensuring employment and career possibilities of women.

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Chapter 7
Fathers on Leave Alone in Spain: 'Hey, I Want to Be Able to Do It Like That, Too'

Gerardo Meil, Pedro Romero-Balsas, and Jesús Rogero-García

7.1 Introduction

Spain underwent the transition from the male breadwinner to the dual-earner family model somewhat later than other developed countries. Change was most intense in the period of strong economic and employment growth between 1995 and 2007, with a reversal observed as unemployment rose from early 2008. The percentage of 25- to 49-year-old women in paid employment climbed from 39 % in 1995 to 66 % in 2007, receding to 61 % in 2012. As a result of the employment crisis, while male single-earner families with children under 6 are estimated to have dropped by 22 %, female single-earner families leapt by 181 % and families with no earners by 162 %. At the same time, the number of dual-earner families dipped by 4 % (Moreno-Mínguez 2015). In the wake of the economic crisis, employment has become a scarce and highly valued resource, shaping couples' strategies for reconciling family life and careers when faced with the need to protect their sources of income.

While policies to further equality between the sexes have long been in place (the first equality plan was introduced in 1989) and have explicitly pursued the harmonisation of work and family life, that challenge has yet to be systematically and comprehensively addressed. Debates around the question have been public and sensitisation programmes have been formulated, often under the umbrella of European initiatives, although only partial measures have been adopted (Meil 2006b; Wall and Escobedo 2009)

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This chapter deals first with the ways that access to paternity leave has been gradually expanded in Spain and the type of leave available for harmonising work and family life. That is followed by a discussion of leave usage and the factors involved. The third section describes the characteristics and selection of the interviewees (fathers on leave alone). The reasons for using leave, societal reactions, fathers' own reactions to their childcaring experience and its medium- and long-terms effects are also analysed.

7.2 Men's Entitlement to Childcare Leave

In Spain, leave for childbirth and childcare have traditionally revolved around paid maternity leave, instituted in 1931, the paid nursing and the non-paid full-time or part-time parental leave, both introduced in 1970. Fathers have only had the right to a paid birth leave of 1 day (since 1931) or 2 days (since 1980) (Escobedo and Meil 2016). Initially designed for working mothers, entitlement to leave has been gradually extended to fathers, despite long-standing reforms to advance gender equality (Meil 2006a). The first measure in this respect was passed in 1980, when the right to full- or part-time parental leave was extended to both parents. Initially, men were eligible only when both spouses had paid work and when the wife refrained from taking the leave. In other words, this leave was regarded not as an individual, but rather a family entitlement (Escobedo et al. 2012).

In the wake of the first Action Plan on Equal Opportunities for Women, reforms were introduced in 1989 specifically to prevent leave-taking from adversely affecting women's careers. These reforms reinforced legal protection to guarantee the return to work and allowed men to take nursing leave and 4 weeks of maternity leave, consecutively but not simultaneously with the mother. These rights were not established as male entitlements, however. A father's eligibility was contingent upon the mother's decision to yield part of her leave, and to qualify, both parents had to have paid employment. The father was also entitled to take maternity leave in the event of the mother's death or to care for an adopted child, depending on the parents' agreement. The reforms introduced in 1999 to transpose EU directives on maternity and parental leave (92/85/EEC and 96/34/EC) aimed primarily to promote harmonisation of work and family life and reinforce legal protection against discrimination for taking parental leave. The law also sought to "enable" men to "care for their children" by extending their possibility to use maternity leave by 10 weeks, allowing fathers to take their leave consecutively or simultaneously with mothers, and acknowledging parental leave as a worker's individual rather than a family entitlement (unless both spouses work for the same employer).

The underlying philosophy was, therefore, to extend fathers' entitlement to take parental leave intended for mothers, without encouraging positive incentives (Meil 2006b). Men's involvement in childcare was not explicitly encouraged until 2007, with the creation of paternity leave under an act designed to further equality between men and women (Escobedo et al. 2012). Paternity leave acknowledges men's

entitlement to 13 days of paid leave for childbirth at their full salary, in addition to the 2 days provided for in earlier legislation, subject to having worked for at least 360 days throughout their career. This leave may be taken at the same time as or after the mother's maternity leave, although no incentives are in place for taking it after the mother returns to work. There is no established policy nor significant social debate around the need to actively encourage fathers to take parental leave to care for their children alone when the mother has paid work. That does not mean, however, that in the context of families' strategies to reconcile family and work life, the benefits offered by the law have been ignored or that no fathers have taken the leave available to care for their children while the mother works. The leave options available in Spain at this time are summarised below (Escobedo et al. 2014).

Birth leave. Two days leave, which is increased to 4, if it implies geographical mobility, paid by the employer. This leave is also granted in case of death, accident, hospitalitation, serious illness or surgical intervention of children or any other relative till the second degree.

Paternity leave. In addition to birth leave, the Social Security system pays the father's full salary for 13 days, although under some collective bargaining agreements (mostly in the public sector), the leave may be extended for 1 or 2 additional weeks (the city of Madrid grants its employees a 4-week paid leave, for instance). It may be taken at childbirth or immediately after maternity leave.

Maternity leave. As a general rule, women are compelled to take 6 weeks off after birth, while the mother may yield the rest of the 16-week entitlement (plus 2 weeks for each additional child in multiple births, or longer under some collective bargaining agreements) to the father. In the event of the mother's death, the father may take the leave and where children are adopted or taken in under foster care arrangements the parents can decide who will take the leave and for how long. The Social Security system covers the cost of this leave in full.

Nursing leave. Parents are entitled to two half-hour paid breaks per day through to the ninth month (twelfth in the public sector) after birth. Under respective collective bargaining agreements, this leave can be taken consecutively as up to 2 additional weeks (4 in the public sector) of maternity or paternity leave. Only one of the parents is eligible, irrespective if whether one or both work. The cost of this leave is covered in full by the employer.

Full-time parental leave. Either parent may take this leave until the child is 3 years old. It is wholly flexible and the number of leave periods is unlimited. Through the first year, employees are entitled to return to the same job and thereafter to a similar job. It is generally unpaid, although in 2000 seven of the 17 regions envisaged a lump sum payment under certain circumstances. By 2016, however, such support was only provided in two.

Part-time parental leave: Either parent may reduce the working day by one-eighth to one-half to care for children up to 12 years old. This leave is unpaid (although some regions provide for a lump sum payment under certain circumstances).

7.3 Parental Leave-Taking by Men

The evidence suggests that men use the range of leave in an uneven pattern. Paternity leave is used widely, with around 250 000 beneficiaries per year, or 55 % of total births, according to Social Security statistics (Ministry of Employment and Social Security 2014). However, these national data underestimate somewhat the take-up rate of paternity leave and other forms of leave, as public officials are excluded. According to a 2012 survey on parental leave-taking, 75 % of eligible fathers took paternity leave (Romero-Balsas 2012; Escobedo et al. 2014), while the men who did not were mostly either self-employed or working under short-term or no employment contracts. The leave was taken for the entire time stipulated by 97 % of beneficiaries. As a rule, paternity leave is taken immediately after childbirth and hence simultaneously with the mother's maternity leave.

Other types of leave, however, were used only by a minority of fathers. As shown in Table 7.1, around 5500 men took fully paid maternity leave per year, with the number rising up to 2010 and declining thereafter. Despite these fluctuations, the percentage of the total leave taken held steady at about 1.7 %. While this value may not initially seem very high, for it covers only 1.2 % of the total births, the fact that 53 218 fathers took the leave over the last 10 years should not be overlooked. According to the 2012 Parental Leave survey,[1] 7 % of eligible fathers took maternity leave (Meil and Romero-Balsas 2016).

Full-time parental leave were taken by very few parents, for they are not paid. While taken primarily by women, around 1 500 fathers took them yearly, accounting for 5 % of the total of such leave and 0.3 % of all births. Again, while the percentage is small, it meant that 12 645 men took this leave over the last 10 years. Moreover, the proportion of men using the leave is on the rise. According to the 2012 Parental Leave survey, 0.5 % of eligible fathers took this type of leave.

No official statistics are available on nursing or part-time (reduced working day) parental leave-taking. According to the 2012 Parental Leave survey, 8 % of fathers reported that they took nursing leave and 1.8 % that they exercised their right to reduce their working day to care for their children (Meil and Romero 2016).

The number of fathers taking some form of leave alone to care for their children while mothers returned to work is difficult to calculate with any accuracy. However, an assessment can be estimated if it is assumed that fathers are on leave alone where they use part of the mother's maternity leave (when she returns to employment) or in cases where fathers take full-time parental leave. Using records of these cases for one year, Table 7.1 shows that 4919 fathers took maternity leave and 1541 took full-time parental leave in 2013. Under these assumptions it is estimated that over the

[1] The *Survey on parental leave-taking in Spain*, is based on a national representative sample of 4 000 people between the ages of 25 and 60 interviewed by telephone between January and March 2012. The questionnaire was designed by the research group in which the authors are integrated and the survey was performed by the survey institute CAPDEA of the University of Granada. The funding was provided by the Ministry of Science and Innovation, grant number CSO2009-11328.

Table 7.1 Total number of caregivers taking leave (absolute values for women and men and percentage of the total for men)

	Maternity leave			Paternity leave	Full-time parental leave		
	Women	Men	%	Men	Women	Men	%
2005	296115	5269	1.8	–	27457	946	3.3
2008	353585	5575	1.6	279756	36300	1471	3.9
2009	334786	5726	1.7	273024	32549	1393	4.1
2010	326752	5805	1.8	275637	33239	1573	4.5
2011	318607	5798	1.8	269715	32599	1529	4.5
2012	293704	5028	1.7	245867	28163	1488	5.0
2013	283923	4919	1.7	237988	28038	1541	5.2

Note: as these data refer to people with Social Security coverage, they exclude public officials, who are protected under a separate system
Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Security, statistics yearbook, several years

last 10 years no fewer than 65,000 Spanish men took some form of leave alone to care for their children while their partners returned to work.

7.4 Factors Encouraging Men to Take Leave Alone

Since no specific studies have been found for Spain on men taking leave alone to care for their children, the starting point for this discussion is essentially the literature on childcare leave. Significant differences persist in Spain between women's and men's roles in the family. The most recent research shows that mothers devote five-fold more time than fathers to childcare (Garcia-Mainar et al. 2011), the widest gap in all of Europe. This finding calls for an urgent analysis of practices that would favour a change in men's assumption of responsibilities for the care of children. Parental leave provide a framework from which childcare formulas favouring men's more active role may emerge.

The research evidence suggests four types of factors which influence leave-taking by men and women: leave characteristics, job-related factors, the couple's beliefs about child-rearing and the institutional and family context.

Firstly, leave characteristics, i.e., eligibility and the conditions involved, are crucial to the decision to take leave. Remuneration (whether and to what extent leave is paid) is a determinant in this respect. That most fathers take paternity leave (Flaquer and Escobedo 2014; Romero-Balsas et al. 2013), during which they are paid 100 % of their salaries, stands as confirmation. Nonetheless, in a study on full-time parental leave based on data for 2006, Lapuerta (2013) found a higher take-up rate among women in Spanish regions where some manner of remuneration was in place (salary-related in most cases) than where none existed, but observed no significant differences for men. This finding suggests that remuneration is a necessary but not a sufficient requirement for leave-taking among men.

Another leave characteristic is the degree to which jobs are guaranteed, i.e., whether upon conclusion the leave-taker can return to the same or a similar (same category) position or simply to the same type of employment contract. Earlier studies have found that some employees have to accept less favourable working conditions, in particular with respect to promotion, upon return to work after a leave (Evertsson and Duvander 2011). One of the reasons identified by other authors (Romero-Balsas et al. 2013) for not taking longer parental leave was that parents anticipated such penalties. Lastly, the minimum and maximum duration and the possibility of reducing working hours are other factors to be considered. Some authors (Flaquer and Escobedo 2014) have suggested that irrespective of the type of leave, the factors favouring take-up by men are similar.

A second group of factors are related to the quality of each partner's job (Romero-Balsas 2012; Flaquer and Escobedo 2014). Earlier studies have shown that the present system of leave favours re-conciliation essentially among people better positioned on the labour market (Lapuerta et al. 2011) For that reason, it is anticipated that the present Spanish context, characterised by high unemployment (around 25 %), deteriorating working conditions and high job uncertainty (García and Ruesga 2014; Alonso and Fernández Rodríguez 2013), discourages leave-taking. From a microeconomic perspective, while the equation is not simple, the couple's job situation is a determinant: men would be expected to act according to cost/benefit logic to maximise their position on the labour market (in terms of salary and stability). Firstly, as discussed above in connection with paternity leave, men are more likely to take it when their partner is employed (Escot et al. 2012, 2014). Where couples decide that one of their members should take a leave, that decision is informed, economically speaking (Becker 1991), by the consequences for both in terms of economic resources and job protection.

Lastly, couples' beliefs about "good child-raising", i.e., about who should perform childcare and how, are determinants for adopting minority strategies, such as fathers' assuming the responsibility alone. According to one philosophy, childcare is more ideally provided by the father or the mother than by other agents such as grandparents or nursery schools. Other couples, in contrast, prioritise employment and adopt a more pragmatic approach to child-rearing, in which the importance of the agents involved is based on their utility measured as their ability to accommodate the parents' working hours (Romero-Balsas et al. 2013). These ideas are also related to social norms on the roles of the sexes traditionally associated with women and men in family-based societies such as Spain's (Moreno Mínguez 2007).

Finally, the institutional context or the degree of development of public and private childcare services and the participation of other family members is a determinant for understanding how men and women negotiate child-rearing and therefore leave-taking. In Spain, along with the aforementioned policy designed to favour parental leave, the institutionalisation of children between the ages of 0 and 6 years old in child care settings has grown substantially of late: the enrolment rate of 3-year-olds rose from 38.4 % in 1991 to over 90 % beginning in 2000, while the rate for children under 3 climbed from 3.3 % in 1991 to 35.3 % in 2013 (MEC 2016). Moreover, the data indicate that grandparents' involvement in childcare has risen

significantly (Meil and Rogero-García 2015): while in 1993, 15 % of grandfathers and 14 % of grandmothers 65 years of age or older reported that they were caring for their grandchildren at the time of the survey, in 2010 the percentages were 37 and 33 %, respectively. At the same time, the proportion of grandparents claiming to care for their grandchildren daily rose from 11 % of the total over 65 in 2006 to 17 % in 2010.

7.5 The Leave-Taking Experience and Its Effects on Men

Prior studies concluded that the present childcare leave scheme reinforces the differences between the sexes because it fosters leave-taking primarily by women (Castro García and Pazos Morán 2012; Lapuerta et al. 2011). Several studies on Spain found that fathers taking leave exhibited greater involvement in other domestic and childcare tasks than non-leave-takers (Fernández-Cornejo et al. 2016). In particular, Haas and Hwang (2008) and Meil (2013) observed that the longer the leave, the greater the time subsequently spent caring for children. This type of leave may, then, contribute to a more equitable distribution of such tasks between the two partners. Nonetheless, the existence of a causal relationship between leave-taking and greater involvement in childcare is difficult to determine, for the fathers who take such leave tend to be more involved *a priori*, or at least more aware of the desirability of participating in raising their children (Meil 2013; Tanaka and Waldfogel 2007). At the same time, other studies suggest that while men who take leave appear to participate more fully in domestic chores, they do not necessarily spend more time caring for their children than others. Indications of this trend were identified by Romero-Balsas (2015) for Spain, Hosking et al. (2010) for Australia and Versantvoort (2010) for The Netherlands.

No studies have been found on the effects of leave-taking on father-child bonding in Spain. Like their counterparts in other countries, Spanish men might be expected to stress that one of the effects of caring for their children alone is closer bonding to their children (Haas and Hwang 2008; Seward et al. 2006).

7.6 Methodology

In keeping with general criteria, a qualitative strategy was adopted to analyse "fathers on leave alone". Ten fathers who took one of the aforementioned leave alone for at least 8 weeks while their partners worked were interviewed and their discourse was analysed. The research aimed to ascertain their reasons for taking leave and their every-day experiences of leave. The fathers were recruited for the sample with the aid of human resource managers after an extensive campaign in private companies and public institutions. The main difficulty encountered, given the minority status of the population, was to attract respondents, a process that

involved unsuccessfully contacting a substantial number of potential subjects. The respondents' main characteristics were as follows:

- working in: public sector (6), private sector (4)
- profession: rural police officers (2), electro-mechanical technician (1), lab technician (1), clerical worker (1), primary schoolteacher (1), janitor (1), consultant (2), nurse (1)
- type of leave: full-time parental leave (3), part-time parental leave (2), maternity leave (3), nursing leave (2)
- duration: maternity leave, usually the 10-week maximum; nursing leave, 4-weeks maximum in conjunction with a few weeks of maternity leave; full-time parental leave, around 3 months; and part-time parental leave, either 6 months or 3 years
- number of children: 1 (4); 2 (6)
- age of youngest child (at the time of the interview): average: 2.5 years (min: 1; max: 7).
- respondent age (at the time of the interview): average: 39.3 (min: 32. max: 50).
- educational background: primary school (0); secondary school (5), university (5)
- couple's relative educational background: same educational level (5), woman's level higher (1); man's level higher (4).
- place of residence: small town (5), large town (1), large city (4)

The Spanish version of the interview guide for the Fathers on Leave Alone project was used. All interviews were conducted by telephone, a medium whose suitability for in-depth interviews was endorsed by earlier studies (Muntanyola Saura and Romero Balsas 2013). Audio recordings were made of all interviews. The field work was conducted in May 2013 and February 2014.

Interviewee discourse was analysed using grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 2009). In a first phase, based on the objectives pursued, codes and code families were created. In a second, the items addressed and relevant to the analysis were coded using Atlas.ti software.

7.7 Reasons for Taking Leave Alone

As discussed above, taking leave alone is a decision infrequently adopted by men. Fathers opting to do so consequently provided elaborate reasons for their choice. While those reasons varied, most were related to their partners' job situation and the type of leave and child-rearing models involved. Firstly, all fathers were wage-earners whose jobs were not endangered by leave-taking. The assurance of being able to return to work was instrumental in the decision, along with the type of leave taken, findings consistent with other quantitative studies on leave-taking in Spain (Lapuerta et al. 2011; Romero-Balsas 2012). The reasoning put forward by Gerard was illustrative in this respect.

> (My wife) said 'why don't you apply for a cut-back in working hours?' so I looked into it. I wanted to apply for a full-time parental leave, no? But with the crisis and all, the (company) clerical staff told me not to apply for a full-time parental leave, because I risked losing my position; I could be side-lined, so then I opted for cutting back on my hours. (Gerard, laboratory technician, 35)

The reasons given by respondents, however, referred less to men's employment circumstances than to women's. That situation is consistent with more intense leave-taking among men whose partners have paid work (Escot et al. 2012, 2014). Several other motivations for taking leave alone can be identified in this context.

(1) Men took leave when their partners ran their own business, with or without employees, that could not be left unattended without jeopardising the future viability of the firm and hence the family's financial future. This was reported by Ander, for instance, a rural police officer, whose wife runs a company with eight employees, and Daniel, a clerical worker in a medium-sized company, whose wife is a self-employed veterinarian. These men opted to use part of the maternity leave and the nursing leave on the implicit assumption that none of the time allowed by the legislation for remunerated leave to care for the couple's baby should be left untaken.
(2) Men took leave alone to protect their wives' jobs where couples felt that the woman's leave-taking would lead to her dismissal. Manuel, a rural police officer, used part of the maternity leave and the nursing leave to ensure that his partner, a temporary public official whose employment contract is renewable yearly, would be hired.
(3) Men took leave alone when they earned less than their wives and preferred not to outsource baby's childcare, either on principle or for financial reasons. Pedro, a mechanic in a large company whose wife is an executive, took a 50-% reduction in working hours for 3 years because

> both my parents work… my wife is from Valencia and her parents live there… and we decided that instead of spending the money to have someone come in to take care of the babies, it would be better to have them take it out of my salary. So I care for them, I take them here and there and get to enjoy my children (Pedro, mechanic, 37).

Juan, a high school janitor whose wife is a schoolteacher, was in the same position. He took a full-time, unpaid parental leave for 18 months for each of his children because they had no family living close enough, and did not want to impose on them, but primarily for affective reasons:

> To enjoy my fatherhood, something that's so often talked about and so unfairly treated, and I really wanted to; and besides, it was our own choice that we took freely: no-one pressured us into it. (Juan, janitor, 50).

Not all fathers alleged primarily work-related or economic reasons, however. Others claimed that the main motivation was to become more involved in fatherhood than the 2 weeks of paternity leave allowed. Their reasoning tended to be simple and uncomplicated, focusing on the idea of "enjoyment" and "feeling like it", as in the case of Pedro (mechanic, 37) and David (married to a schoolteacher), who said:

> (It was) essentially to spend time with my son and because I wanted to enjoy that stage of his life… and because we were in a position to. (David, schoolteacher, 35).

In other words, taking leave alone is associated with the feasibility of doing so and the idea that fatherhood and childcare are pleasurable. Only one respondent gave more elaborate reasons, which revolved around the leave, childcare and bonding with children. Carlos claimed that:

> (It was) a personal issue, I wanted to be a more hands-on father and bond with my daughter from the very beginning and, well, it was also a political decision: I'm a member of pro-feminist groups… and I believe you should practise what you preach. (Carlos, consultant, 49).

While fathers' desire to be with their babies was present in all cases, that desire was more explicit and accorded greater weight where leave was unpaid than when it was remunerated. For fathers taking part of the maternity or nursing leave, the discourse revolved around instrumental reasons in particular, probably because mothers only yield part of their maternity or nursing leave where they are unable to satisfactorily harmonise family and work life. As taking unpaid leave entails forfeiting part of the couple's income and counters social expectations, its use calls for a more detailed justification. The underlying logic seems to suggest that the first 16 weeks of maternity leave are socially viewed as the time that direct parental care is needed. That is, in this period, care should be provided by the mother, but where that is not possible, her leave should not be forfeited, but taken by the father. Beyond the duration of maternity leave, the solution for infant childcare does not appear to be socially defined. Hence the use of full- or part-time parental leave is just one more re-conciliation resource that fathers use only when highly motivated to do so.

7.8 Reactions in the Social and Work Communities

The reactions of respondents' family and friends was largely acceptance and support for the decision to take leave alone, with one exception – criticism from an informant'smother- Daniel reported: "my mother was more critical… 'What's this now? My son, who should be the breadwinner, has to stay home doing the housecleaning while his wife is out working instead of caring for their daughter?" (Daniel, clerical worker, 44).

Consequently, the respondents did not feel the need to explain or justify their decision to their family or close friends. However, the reactions were less uniform at the workplace. Respondents provided much more extensive, detailed and nuanced accounts of the workplace reactions and their own response to them.

The most common workplace reaction was surprise, According to Ander "… they'd never seen anything like it before and they were mostly surprised" (Ander, police officer, 35). Others described neutral reactions, and some respondents acknowledged the existence of depreciative comments from their co-workers. On occasion these comments called for explanations, such as for Pedro (mechanic, 37),

some of whose co-workers were unaware of the possibility of taking leave alone; while on others they were chauvinistic, as for Gerard (laboratory technician, 35) or Carlos, a partial transcription of whose interview follows.

> Well there were a few slightly adverse remarks, such as … well, like 'but aren't children brought up by their mothers?', that sort of thing; not everyone, but let's say that the most common reaction was … (surprise) and then some minority reactions of displeasure or dislike, but unfavourable or not very favourable, no, not as a whole; most people were just surprised. (Carlos, consultant, 49).

That surprise was the most common reaction at the workplace is consistent with the fact that respondents had to rationalise their leave-taking. This response mirrors the novelty and break with normative social behaviour expected of working fathers. The surprise generated led to a need to justify the decision, which then entailed invoking the financial or work-related situations referred to earlier, as illustrated by Pedro.

> All I felt was… especially …the first day, I mean the first day I started to work that way … and… a couple of people approached me in the factory… I felt a little, I don't know, ashamed. Oh, I really don't know how to explain it really. I don't know what I could say… but anyway… when like people ask 'why did you take it?'… I said, look, because we're better off economically this way… and then you could see how people… 'oh, OK, that's great, of course, man, that's like whatever'… and then I… well I just took it like something normal… (Pedro, mechanic, 37).

The reason why co-workers expressed surprise may be because leave are generally thought of as a resource designed especially for women (Castro García and Pazos Morán 2012; Lapuerta et al. 2011). As discussed below, however, in connection with indifference, the workplace reaction did not always call for justifying the choice.

Even though most of the respondents noted that the reaction at their workplace was surprise, a minority claimed the contrary. They explained that lack of surprise on the grounds that they had pioneered other decisions, not only related to leave or the sharing of childcare tasks. Their decision was therefore accepted at the workplace as consistent with their role as father and worker. David, for instance, replied as follows.

> Well when I first announced it, they weren't surprised because they know me and they expected as much; they really were not surprised when I took the leave. (David, schoolteacher, 35).

Some fathers noted that their social circles even expressed admiration for their being on leave alone. A decision that placed involvement with their children over the possible detriment to their career expectations could give rise to admiration in inner circles, as Daniel noted.

> I felt good, I felt good because in the end… it was more admiration, and some of my most sensitive friends, like I said before, told me as much. (Daniel, clerical worker, 44).

The final reaction observed was that of indifference, which may be the result of work colleagues attributing scant importance to the decision, or to its "normalisa-

tion". It might also be due to individualisation, by virtue of which judgment is not passed on personal actions, regarded to form part of each person's private life. The normalisation of such leave was also observed to be attendant upon the existence of precedents, as shown by the replies of the rural police officers interviewed. Taking leave alone could, then, be related to the materialisation of workers' rights, as noted by Ander.

> Well, I don't think so. I mean, what I got from everyone was that it was normal, no? I mean, my experience is that it was normal. 'Hey: you on maternity leave?' 'Well yeah', but it's something that, well, I think we've gotten used to pretty much, and at work too, where everyone thought it was completely normal. (Ander, police officer, 35).

In work environments where legal protection is higher, such as in the public as compared to the private sector, acceptance was observed to be more neutral. In the private sector, however, employers were found to be more prone to attempt to alter respondents' initial plans. Such suggestions called for a good deal of security on the part of the respondent and the reassertion of his intention to take a leave alone. That reluctance is a sign of the duality in leave-taking depending on working conditions (García and Ruesga 2014; Alonso and Fernández Rodríguez 2013), as described by Israel.

> Yes, I seem to recall that they said… Well, they mentioned taking it part-time so I could work a little and get more out of my day, but… That didn't solve my problem. (Israel, consultant, 43).

7.9 Fathers on Leave Alone: Experience

Fathers' experience of taking leave alone is varied and complex. Two main types of experience can nonetheless be identified among respondents: dependent and independent caregivers. The former are fathers who feel unsure of themselves and express a need for continuous close support from their partners. These fathers would not have taken on the responsibility of sole caregiving if they had not been forced into it by their partner's job circumstances. They would have preferred to take their leave at the same time as their partner and adopt a merely supportive role. After assuming main care provider responsibilities, they reported feeling variably stressed, insecure and overwhelmed, such as exemplified by Daniel.

> Well (I was) under enormous stress and kept calling my wife whenever I could to make her nervous as well: 'when will you be home? Are you coming for dinner? Are you going to have time? Are you going to be late?' etc. And not doing anything except waiting for the baby's next move… No, I couldn't relax even for a minute. I have to admit that I was over-anxious the whole time. (Daniel, clerical worker, 44).

On the other extreme, other fathers wanted to be the primary caregivers for their children during their leave. This approach afforded them the opportunity to take full charge as caregivers, a role in which they felt satisfied, sure of themselves, experienced and useful. They found the experience to be a rewarding personal achieve-

ment. Although similar behaviour has been observed in Portugal (Wall 2014), in Spain such independent caregiving could not be, nor was it construed, in most cases as a deconstruction of gender roles, but rather as a new dimension of the father's individual personality.

"Independent caregivers" regarded the mother's participation more as interference than as support. Shared caregiving can ultimately be said to be viewed as a competition to prove who does the better job, although it is primarily the mother who passes judgment on the quality of the father's care. As a result, fathers felt most free, unobserved and unjudged while acting as the sole caregiver, when they found their own space in which they could play the role of father caregiver most fully. David, explained the situation as follows.

> More rewarding now than shared (…). At first I felt a little like you don't know what to do or you're a little quote-unquote useless, like I don't know how to change a diaper, and like she did it all, well more naturally. You know? The baby cries, the mother picks him up and he calms down. The father picks him up and it's harder, because you don't know what to do or you feel useless. (…) When she was around it was harder, but now, since I'm alone, I have to get it right no matter what. If the baby cries I have to calm him down. So then when things go well, it's double the satisfaction for me, because I did it alone, with no help. So in self-esteem, I've come out on the winning end, I feel better now that at first. (…) I never imagined I could feel, not jealous, yes, but no, but I would have wanted to say just then 'Hey, I want to be able to do it like that, too' (laughter), but I don't know how. (David, schoolteacher, 35)

When alone, fathers have to perform each and every task involved in caregiving, and in particular the most pressing ones, such as changing diapers, clothing and feeding the baby. Unlike fathers who provide care at the same time as the mother, these fathers cannot shrug off the tasks they find less pleasant or satisfactory. Consequently, fathers who care alone tend to exhibit a full understanding of the many tasks and difficulties involved. Their detailed accounts of the activities undertaken every day denoted a high degree of involvement and were indicative of how effective caregiving alone can be for "socialising" men into that role.

The activities perceived as enjoyable tended to be affective in nature: the child derived pleasure from them and the father's impression was that their emotional bond was strengthened. Two activities that typically fall under this category are strolling and bathing. The latter appears to be particularly pleasurable, especially in the baby's first few months. Here the enjoyment is intensified by the idea that the activity is intimate, creating not only emotional but physical bonding as well.

> Bathing especially, because at first I would get into the bathtub and we would put him in with me; it was a wonderful, gentle moment, the actual washing too, and singing to him, the songs that we sang to him a lot. (David, schoolteacher, 35).

As the children grow older, bonding is based less on physical activities (bathing, fondling) than on sharing games or other significant activities, such as nursery school outings or festivities.

The incidents that caused concern and, to a degree, displeasure, were what were perceived as problems that might affect the baby's development: feeding, sleep,

health. Anxiety and stress arose essentially when the child's welfare was uncertain.

> After having tried to nurse for months, they were under tremendous stress because the baby wasn't gaining any weight or didn't sleep well. It wasn't so much the task itself as the stress involved, seeing that the baby gained weight. (Carlos, consultant, 49).

Caregiving is sometimes viewed as stressful because of the many tasks involved, which cannot be postponed to allow the father to get enough rest. Here caregiving is seen as an unending series of activities and time as a commodity too scant to enable the father to enjoy what he is doing.

> I couldn't say exactly… there's nothing especially difficult. But you do get tired sometimes, I mean especially at first, when the baby needs to be fed every four hours or so. Those first few months are the hardest, the lack of sleep… and if the baby eats well, great, if he doesn't, you worry. I mean, it's more a question… and then during the day you think you're going to have time to do much more and then you don't have time for anything. (laughter) It's true that babies sleep a lot and all, but when you have to do the laundry and, like you have to do the housecleaning. And you get just about enough time to do a couple of things and wham! He wakes up again: the bottle, the whatever, the dirty diaper… and when you've got the baby back to sleep and all, there's another chore waiting, so actually… (Carlos, consultant, 49).

Leave-taking alone is a platform for initiation in caregiving. With that initiation, fathers assume tasks as their own specific responsibility. Significantly, respondents preferred to continue to be involved after their leave came to an end. In other words, the tasks performed while they were the sole caregiver became routine and endured after they returned to work. Such "routinisation" is supported by studies showing that leave-taking intensifies men's participation in childcare (Meil 2013; Fernández-Cornejo et al. 2016; Haas and Hwang 2008). The precedent principle applies here: something done from the outset continues to be done, with any necessary adaptations. Israel expressed it as follows.

> Yes, that's it, unquestionably… it's like a… pattern that you fall into from the start and then keep up. I mean, the things you did with them from the get-go you continue to do now, and if before the morning routine was to get up, make breakfast, whatever… well I still do that because the girls… get used to it and they take it better. I mean, it's a pattern we got into from the beginning and we've just kept up. (Israel, consultant, 43).

All the respondents acknowledged that they perceived that they had bonded more closely with their children by spending time with them, a which was consistent with the findings of earlier surveys (Haas and Hwang 2008; Seward et al. 2006). Some fathers even pointed out that being on leave alone helped them create a bond which in men, contrary to women, does not come naturally. Leave-taking was, then, construed as a substitute for the mother's alleged biological advantages for bonding with children. This transcription from Daniel's response is representative.

> Yes, yes, no question. Mothers come with that as standard equipment, they have an immortal bond. No? They have a human being in their body, that they bring into the world, and we don't have anything like that, we can't… Then, excepting the obvious differences, for me when I felt that, I thought: this is new. (…) We can't have that with our kids...., but we bond day by day and for me the leave was… well a stroke of luck because now I have bonds with

> my daughter almost… well light years away from what her mother has, but much closer than my father had with me. (Daniel, clerical worker, 44).

Significant differences were found between the ex-ante reasons for taking leave and the advantages reported by fathers after the fact. The justification for taking a leave, essentially based on an economic rationale, contrasted with the advantages fathers expressed a posteriori in terms of bonding with their children and becoming "socialised" into caregiving. Consequently, while Becker's (1991) economic rationality would support men's rationale for applying for leave, the theory would not suffice to explain the results. While several fathers failed to mention bonding with their children as one of the reasons for leave-taking, they all found that it was one of the advantages of having done so. "Socialisation" into caregiving and the associated extension of equality in the distribution of these activities proved to be effective. The socialising effect was, then, observed to be more effective among fathers who used the leave for instrumental than among those who did so for affective reasons.

7.10 Conclusions

Although later than in other countries, the dual-earner family model has become the standard in Spain. In line with this change in work-family arrangements, policies have been developed policies to harmonise work and family life which have provided only partial solutions to the problem. Against this societal backdrop, Spanish men's entitlement to childcare leave has been gradually enhanced culminating in 2007, with the introduction of a specific 2-week long paternity leave. While reforms have been justified on the grounds of gender equality, conciliation and the need for men to become more involved in childcare, the idea that fostering the use of caregiving alone as an ideal way of "socialising" men into that involvement has not been addressed in any of the successive legislative reforms. Leave-taking for this purpose is neither encouraged nor hindered. However, a significant number of fathers have taken one or several leave periods alone as part of couples' strategy to harmonise working and family life. It is estimated that over the last 10 years no fewer than 65 000 Spanish men have taken leave to care for their children alone (generally for over 1 month) while their partners return to work.

The reasons given by the respondents in this study for taking leave alone had to do with the partners' social and job situations, the type of leave and the preferred child-raising model. While fathers claimed that they wanted to be near their newborn babies, that desire was not the main motivation for leave-taking. The necessary condition for applying for such leave was, above all, that the father did not fear losing his job in the process. Furthermore, when paid (maternity or nursing) leave was involved, the main reason invoked was that the mother was unable to take advantage of the benefit, reinforced by the belief that it should not be "wasted" and the implicit assumption that during the legal duration of the leave (16 or 18 weeks), babies should be cared for by at least one of their parents. The reasons given for the moth-

er's inability to take the leave were either because she ran her own business that she could not leave unattended, or because she would risk losing her job if she took the leave. In cases of unpaid leave, economic considerations also played a substantial role, but affective reasons and the child-rearing model preferred for children ranked highly in the decision.

With a few exceptions, social and family circles accepted and supported these decisions, and expected no explanation. The workplace reaction was more varied, ranging from surprise to indifference, with an occasional attempt at dissuasion. Contrary to the situation in social and family circles, the workplace atmosphere made fathers feel that they had to justify their decision more frequently, although none of the respondents reported adverse consequences for their careers. While a few sarcastic comments were reported, respondents, who haled from very diverse work environments, found no open hostility to their decision nor any significant interference, in particular where precedents were in place.

During their leave, fathers reported devoting their time to caring for their babies, viewing the various tasks involved as their own responsibility. They assessed the experience in a positive light, although the level of stress reported varied. We have found two different profiles of fathers: *independent* and *dependent* caregivers. The latter express the need of help from other caregivers and they would prefer to have a complementary role in child care rather than having the main responsibilities while they were alone. By contrast, independent caregivers are able to develop their role of fathers fully when they were alone with they child, since they felt free and unjudged by the partner. In both cases, the main advantages of the experience were that caregiving created bonds that fathers wanted to maintain and develop over time, in addition to the pleasure derived from some of the activities themselves. Respondents deemed that the leave had allowed them to devote time to caregiving, which materialised in specific routines to which they have continued to adhere over time. The inference is that leave so taken contributed to "socialising" men into childcare. The reasons for taking a leave, essentially based on economic factors, contrasted with the advantages fathers expressed a posteriori in terms of bonding with their children and their own "socialisation" into caregiving. The latter experience and its influence on equality in the distribution of these activities may have proved to be particularly effective, among fathers who provided care alone.

The conclusion that may be drawn is that the social barriers preventing men from taking parental leave alone appear to have been worn down over time in Spain, leaving room for more development of their use in the future. The result would be men's greater "socialisation" into childcare, which in turn would contribute to greater equality between the sexes.

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Chapter 8
Fathers on Leave Alone in Sweden: Toward More Equal Parenthood?

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8.1 Introduction

There is a longstanding political consensus in Sweden favouring equality between men and women. This is defined as men and women having the same opportunities, rights and responsibilities in all important areas of social life, including employment and parenting (Government Offices of Sweden 2009). One important political reform designed to support this goal is fathers' right to paid parental leave (Lundqvist 2011). Sweden was the first country to offer fathers paid leave and subsequent reforms such as non-transferable months were designed to encourage fathers to take a larger share of leave (Duvander and Johansson 2012). The expected long-term effects of shared leave include equalizing the distribution of paid and unpaid work and improving women's labour market opportunities (Riksdag Propositions 1993/1994 and 2000/2001).

This chapter's goal is to explore the meaning parental leave has for men who take a substantial amount of leave "home alone." Since in Sweden parental leave is considered an important policy instrument for gender equality, we pay particular attention to the extent to which the long leaves of the fathers interviewed seemed to promote the development of egalitarian parenting practices and the dual-earner/dual-carer model.

Three stages of fathers' leave experience are examined:

(1) fathers' decision-making about leave length and timing, including motivations and factors impacting leave-taking;

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(2) fathers' experiences on leave, including relationships with children, participation in childcare, housework and paid work;
(3) fathers' perceptions of leave consequences, including paid work, identities as caregivers and relationships with partners.

8.2 Parental Leave Development

Sweden is distinctive in terms of its long commitment to equal parenthood and programs like parental leave designed to meet that goal (Duvander and Ferrarini 2013). In 1974, Parliament replaced maternity leave benefits with a parental leave program allowing fathers time off with pay after childbirth. The new program consisted of 6 months job-protected leave to share between parents as they saw fit. Leave was compensated at 90 % up to a high income ceiling, which almost no parent reached.

Swedish fathers' right to leave has been uncontested and strengthened since then. A Liberal-Conservative government first reserved 1 month of non-transferable leave for fathers in 1995; this was extended to 2 months in 2002 by a Social Democratic government. Both reforms were effective in increasing men's leave use (Duvander and Johansson 2012).

An important incentive to use leave is compensation at a generous level. The benefit length has increased to 16 months; 13 months at 78 % of previous income and 3 months at a low flat rate. Each parent has 2 non-transferable months paid at the higher level and is entitled to half of the remaining leave (but can transfer it to the other). Over time more parents have reached the income ceiling; in 2010, one-fifth of men and less than one tenth of women had incomes above the ceiling (Försäkringskassan 2012). However, most employees receive extra compensation through collective agreements (Duvander et al. 2014). Dividing leave equally yields a financial "gender equality bonus," instituted in 2008. However, the bonus has not yet affected leave division (Duvander and Johansson 2012).

Another aspect of leave policy that may impact men's leave use is flexibility. Fathers can take leave full-time, part-time, even an hour a day. Unpaid leave can also be taken during the child's first 18 months, and is commonly used by both parents to lengthen leave. Parental leave can be taken anytime until the child turns 8 years old (for those born by 2013) or, for those born after 2013, until the child turns 12 (although only 96 days can be used after children turn 4). While the law allows leave-taking three times a year, most employers permit more. Since 2012, 1 month's leave (but not the 2 reserved months) can be used simultaneously by parents, facilitating transition from mother care to solo father care.

The parental leave benefit is complemented by a pregnancy benefit, paid leave for sick children, parents' right to reduced work hours and guaranteed, subsidized public preschool for children from age 1 (Duvander et al. 2014).

Today, fathers' leave has become the norm; almost nine of ten take parental leave (Försäkringskassan 2011). Some fathers use leave later in children's lives but since

the introduction of the first reserved month, over three-quarters use leave before children turn 2 (Duvander and Johansson 2012). However, fathers tend to take leave in more blocks than mothers (Duvander 2013). While the length of leave varies greatly, just 11 % of fathers used at least 40 % of benefit days (Försäkringskassan 2011). A common pattern is that the mother is at home the first 13 months and then the father for 3,5 months before the child starts preschool. Some of this leave is typically unpaid (Duvander and Viklund 2014). While it is not common for parents to take leave together, it is possible for one parent to be on leave while the other uses vacation days.

8.3 Theoretical Background

In all Nordic countries, but especially in Sweden, fathers' right to parental leave has been regarded as a prerequisite for gender equality in society. Accordingly, fathers have the same rights as mothers to leave and policymakers aim to increase fathers' leave use by various reforms. Perhaps most importantly, cultural norms support fathers' use of leave (Haas and Rostgaard 2011).

Compared to other societies, Sweden stands out as having more gender egalitarian policies (see for example Gornick and Meyers 2008) and the goal of gender equality is taken for granted. Nevertheless, when scrutinized closely, researchers have noted that there are other policy directions present as well, such as a focus on individual choice, which sometimes conflicts with the pursuit of gender equality (Ferrarini and Duvander 2010). The persistence of an uneven division of leave and childcare responsibility, as well as inequality in the labour market (see Försäkringskassan 2013) suggests that a gender perspective is necessary for an analysis of fathers' experiences of leave in Sweden.

The gender perspective assumes that gender is a social construction and an important aspect of social structure, whereby institutionalized social practices categorize people into males and females and establish systems of inequality around those differences (Ridgeway and Correll 2000). A fundamental component of a gendered society is a division of labour, with women regarded as more suited for childcare and men for breadwinning. Mothers' greater childcare responsibility includes more time caring for and supervising children and taking more responsibility for children's welfare – keeping in mind details and planning related to childrearing (Doucet 2009). Men's breadwinning activities have provided them with more economic resources and power in the family (Polatnick 1983).

When gender-egalitarian social policy targets fathers' attitudes and behavior, change in the gender order seems possible. According to Ahlberg et al. (2008: 11), in Sweden "the room for maneuver on the part of individuals has increased concurrently with a reduction in the compulsive power of norms." While Swedish policy assumes both men and women benefit from reconstruction of the gendered order (Klinth 2013), one can question whether policy challenges men's greater privileges

and power in society (Bekkengen 2002). The focus has been on men's rights and what they may gain by greater childcare involvement, rather than on demanding that they take an equal share of responsibility (Almqvist et al. 2011; Klinth 2013).

Men's experiences of parental leave are closely linked to gender practices and multiple, interrelated levels of social structure are at play. First, the institutional level and policy context set the framework under which men negotiate integration of employment with family life. Secondly, the cultural level, including norms and values concerning fatherhood and gender equality, consciously or unconsciously sets the boundaries for what is possible. Third, negotiations at the workplace level to a large degree determine fathers' participation in family life. Fourth, at the family level fathers and mothers negotiate amount and timing of leave and the domestic division of labour. Lastly, at the individual level, fathers' personal identities as employees and caregivers are socially constructed and impact their leave experiences.

8.4 Methods

To find 14 participants, we sent over 100 private messages to Thalberg's contacts on Facebook and about 50 e-mails to her friends and colleagues, asking whether they knew fathers who might be interested in discussing recent parental leave. Flyers were also posted at 15 preschools and child health centers around Stockholm. All but one informant were found through Thalberg's network. No respondents were personal acquaintances; they were all two or three "links" from her; for example, a friend's friend's neighbour. Five interviewed fathers were still on leave, which yielded detail-rich descriptions of fresh experiences.

There was large variation in age, number of children, educational level, type of work, and leave length (see Table 8.1). In some respects, the sample is similar to Swedish fathers in general, for example, regarding age, number of children and educational level. However, these fathers differed from the general population of Swedish fathers due to their concentration in the Stockholm area, where there is more white-collar work and economic advantage than elsewhere. They may be seen as privileged within the Swedish context and thus find it easier to strive for gender equality. This is also a group accustomed to being perceived as successful, which may shape how they describe their experiences and present themselves as caregiving fathers. All lived with their children and partners and had stable labour-market situations, with 5 of 14 employed in the public sector (a higher proportion than in the population at large). Only one was foreign-born (although Sweden is much more culturally diverse), married to a Swedish-born mother. Almost all respondents were white-collar workers, despite efforts to recruit others. Only one was clearly in a blue-collar job (carpenter). This sample of fathers is therefore biased toward the middle class. Perceptions of fatherhood and attitudes toward leave-taking in Sweden vary by class and ethnicity (Almqvist et al. 2011; Klinth 2013; Plantin 2007).

Table 8.1 Respondents' background and leave use

ANDERS (age 37). Network and information services coordinator in private sector with secondary education. Two children, ages 1 and 4. Partner took 9 months; he was taking leave for 12 months at 75 % time (9 months full-time equivalent). Had been on leave 5 months so far. His share of leave will be 50 % (36 % so far).
CARLOS (age 42, foreign-born). Technical production manager in private sector with a college degree. One child, age 18 months. Partner took 9.5 months. Then he took 1 month at 50 % and an additional 8 months full-time in one block (8.5 months full-time equivalent altogether). His share of leave was 47 %.
CHRISTIAN (age 37). Carpenter in private sector with secondary education. One child, 9 months. Partner was home for 8 months; he had been home full-time for 1.5 months and was scheduled to be home 6.25 more (8 months altogether). He and his partner took simultaneous leave for 1 week. His share will be 50 % (16 % so far).
FELIX (age 32). Construction site manager in private sector with secondary education. Two children, ages 1 and 4. Partner was home for 8 months; he had been home full-time for 1 month and planned 1.5 months more (2.5 months altogether). His share of leave will be 17 % (8 % so far).
FILIP (age 32). District store manager in private sector with secondary education. One child, age 2. After partner took 10 months, he took 2 months leave full-time in two blocks. His share of leave was 17 %.
KRISTOFFER (age 37). Special needs assistant in public sector with secondary education. Two children, ages 3 and 6. Partner was home for 12 months. He took 5.5 months altogether, 4.5 months full-time home alone and 1 month simultaneously with partner. His share of leave was 31 %.
MARTIN (age 37). Public administrative official with a doctorate. Three children, ages 1, 5 and 8. Partner was home 12 months, then he took 1 month simultaneously with partner and then 8 months alone. His share of leave was 43 %.
MATS (age 40). Group leader for emergency services in public sector with a college degree. Two children, ages 2 and 4. After partner was home for 9 months, he was home 6.5 months full-time in one block. His share of leave was 42 %.
MATTHIAS (age 33). Telecommunications advisor in private sector with secondary education. One child, 13 months. Partner was home for 8 months. He had been home full-time for 4 months, and planned to be home 4 months more (8 months altogether). His share of leave will be 50 % (33 % so far)
NILS (age 40). Researcher in the public sector with a doctorate. Two children, ages 3 and 6. After partner was home 9 months, he took 2 months part-time and 5.5 months full-time in one block (6.5 months full-time equivalent altogether). His share of leave was 42 %.
NOEL (age 37). Creative director in a private electrical accessories company with some college courses. One child, 11 months. Partner took 7 months and he took 2 months of leave simultaneously with his partner (who was on sick leave part of the time). He had been on leave alone 50 % time for 2 months and planned an additional 5 months (in two blocks). His share of leave will be 44 % (12 % so far).
PATRIK (age 32). Production manager in private sector with secondary education. Two children, ages 3 and 4. After partner was home 18 months, he took leave full-time in one block for 9 months. His share of leave was 33 %.
ROBERT (age 30). Construction consultant in private sector with a college degree. One child, age 2. After partner was home 9.5 months, he took 8.5 months full-time in one block. His share of leave was 47 %.
URBAN (age 41). Software programmer in public sector with elementary education. Two children, ages 1 and 4. After partner was home 10 months, he took 8 months full-time leave in one block. His share of leave was 44 %.

Our sample was markedly different from Swedish fathers in general in the amount of leave taken or scheduled. Leave length varied from 2 to 9 months, averaging 6.86, considerably longer than average. However, only three had taken or were scheduled to take half of the leave. Seven had taken or planned to take over 40 % and four took one-third or less (see Appendix). All fathers were mainly home alone; however, four had short overlaps with partners.

The interviews were conducted by Thalberg, using a slightly revised version of the interview guide from the *Fathers on Leave alone* study (Chap. 1). Questions focused on leave experiences with the youngest child, although earlier experiences were discussed. We did not add questions about gender equality orientations, to see whether this would be brought up in different contexts. Of 14 interviews, eight took place at participants' workplaces, five at their homes and one at Thalberg's office. The interviews took about an hour and participants received €20 in compensation.

Following Magnusson (2008), we view these interviews as data and discourse. They provided information about fathers' decisions to take parental leave, experiences while on leave and potential impact of leave-taking on domestic work and identities as fathers. In terms of discourse, we learned about the social construction of these men as fathers on parental leave from how they talked about these topics. What they neglected is also important. Since fathers produced their own narratives, we anticipate that accounts would be crafted for an outsider (the interviewer). Consequently, we expected to hear accounts shaped to conform to the Swedish values of gender equality, downplaying experiences or views contradicting equality norms.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns related to our research topic (Braun and Clarke 2006). First, all authors read transcripts for initial ideas. Then two authors re-read and coded transcripts, noticing topics related to the general purpose of the study and specific research objectives. Next, similar codes were grouped together by basic themes and subthemes, capturing what seemed to be the most important findings. At several stages, the authors discussed themes and subthemes, as well as how these might be interconnected.

It was sometimes difficult to separate out whether fathers' experiences and outcomes were direct results of being home alone or just from becoming fathers. This is related to the fact that parental leave is today an unquestioned part of the idea of fatherhood in Sweden.

8.5 Results

8.5.1 Leave-Taking Decision-Making

Fathers described it as *taken for granted* that they would take leave. Relatively little discussion between partners had occurred. They used phrases such as "It was obvious." Christian (carpenter, 37) reported: "We didn't talk so much about it really. But

it just felt so natural that we each took half." Filip (district store manager, 32) said, "Clearly we took for granted that I would be at home." This result agrees with recent Swedish research (Alsarve and Boye 2012; Nordberg 2007; Roman 2014) and reflects the cultural discourse promoting shared parenting.

Gender equality was sometimes taken for granted as a reason why they shared leave, especially when fathers took more leave. Matthias (telecommunication advisor, 33) stated: "It was self-evident for us to share equally. We share everything and that is how we were both brought up, we both come from gender equal families." Previous studies found that Swedish fathers with more egalitarian attitudes take more leave (Duvander 2014; Haas 1992; Haas et al. 2002),

Some fathers claimed they were *more interested in equal sharing than their partners*. For example, Noel's (creative director, 37) partner wanted to stay at home for about a year but he thought that would be too long, if he was to share. In the end she stayed home 7 months. Some fathers reported that *partners convinced them to share more leave*. Mats (group leader, 40) said: "She definitely would not have accepted me being home only a short time....Probably I would have been home a shorter time with the children and thought a little more about the economic consequences if … my partner, hadn't pushed sharing, saying, "Hey, it is only once in life." In previous research, mothers' willingness to share leave increased fathers' leave (Haas 1992; Haas et al. 2002) but mothers sometimes claim physical recuperation and breastfeeding as reasons for a larger share of leave (Alsarve and Boye 2012; Roman 2014). In this study, the overall impression was that mothers supported fathers' longer leaves and mothers' preferences to take longer leave were rarely mentioned. However, it was also not questioned that mothers took the first and major chunk of leave.

Child-related reasons as a motivation were commonly mentioned, often as an individual experience not to be missed (found also by Almqvist et al. 2011; Klinth 2013). Felix (construction site manager, 32) reported: "I wanted to be at home with my children…to get to know them when they are small."

No father reported negative comments from family members about taking leave but *mothers and fathers as role models* were mentioned. Felix said: "My mother raised me alone…so she was obliged to work very hard and it influenced me in taking parental leave and reducing work hours." Robert (construction consultant, 30) told us his divorced father had taken leave and had been very active in his upbringing: "He was a role model for me." *Friends* also influenced the decision to take leave. Experiences are exchanged between men in similar situations, in a normative way. Kristoffer (special needs assistant, 37) recounted: "…among my acquaintances ….it is clear that you should take pappa leave. It is politically correct in some way."

Even if fathers' leave was taken for granted among respondents, multiple constraints, pressures and negotiations were reported. The major institutional constraint was the *timing of the preschool start*, which affected leave length and division. Robert took an extra month because preschool was not available earlier. Matthias indicated: "We knew he would start daycare when he was about 18 months so we just split the leave in two."

A frequently mentioned barrier to fathers' leave use is *economics* (Riksförsäkringsverket 2000; 2003). There is a curvilinear relationship between fathers' leave length and income, with medium to medium-high earners taking more leave (Duvander and Viklund 2014; Sundström and Duvander 2002), probably caused by both economic and workplace constraints. Swedish couples also claim to take *economics into account* in negotiating the division of leave (Almqvist 2008; Försäkringskassan 2013; Hobson et al. 2014). Although our respondents indicated economics was a factor, they did not mention that economic constraints played a crucial role. Mats reported preventing economics from being a barrier: "We wanted to be able to be home about the same amount… It is a big economic change, since I earn more." His family moved to cheaper housing when expecting their second child, and one contributing factor to this decision was that they could afford for him to take about half the leave, as he did with their first child.

Prior research has suggested that fathers receiving extra compensation from the employer take longer leave (Hobson et al. 2006). Filip mentioned that the compensation available from his employer was an incentive, while others said this was welcome but not a factor in their decision-making.

Fathers' leave has been limited by *workplace factors*, such as managers' and co-workers' reactions, leave use among colleagues and the workplace's sex ratio (Bygren and Duvander 2006; Elvin-Nowak 2005; Haas et al. 2002; Hobson et al. 2014; Näsman 1997). Yet our sample did not claim the workplace to be a significant barrier. These fathers did not request leave; they *announced their plans* to go on leave.

All five fathers working in the *public sector* described taking leave as no problem; it was common and taken for granted at their workplaces. Previous research has found fathers are more likely to take leave in the public sector; private-sector employers tend to be less supportive of fathers' leave-taking (Amilon 2009; Haas 1992; Haas and Hwang 2009). In this study, *private employers' responses to fathers' leave-taking were mixed*. Fathers in the private sector tended to report that there was also a workplace norm for fathers' leave-taking, but *long leaves were exceptional*.

Fathers in the male-dominated building industry and those working in foreign-owned companies reported the most opposition, particularly from co-workers. Christian said: "There are of course many people in our branch, especially older ones, who think that it is strange that a person should be at home half a year. "What will you do at home?" they ask. There is a little bit of a macho culture among the guys…" Patrik (production manager, 32) , who earlier worked in a foreign-owned company, recounted: "They don't understand the concept of parental leave, it is 'Bah! How can that work?'"

Fathers in private-sector professional positions sometimes made concessions. Felix, having taken half the leave with his first child, reported that he postponed leave a month and took much shorter leave for the second child because of work demands. Matthias reported challenges in finding an appropriate time to take leave because of project work. One strategy to adapt to work demands was to take part-time leave for at least part of the period. However, some fathers in the private sector

indicated their workplaces were supportive of long leaves. Anders (coordinator, 37) reported: "...It's not something strange at this workplace. There is never any talk at all if employees want to be at home….We want of course to be the type of workplace which facilitates people taking parental leave."

Fathers reported that *partners' work situations* affected the division and timing of leave. Anders' partner's new job led to his taking leave sooner than planned: "This fall she will work in a new classroom with new children and she wanted to be there from the beginning." The partner's work situation was also used in negotiations with the father's employer. Carlos (technical production manager, 42) argued, "My partner earns twice as much as I earn. … We lose money every month she is at home and I work. So if I lay it out like that, some colleagues are a little more understanding…. She has an important job, earns a lot of money, okay." Mothers' employment orientation and income have previously been found to increase fathers' leave (Duvander and Viklund 2014; Haas 1992; Sundström and Duvander 2002).

In summary, forces influencing fathers' leave decision-making operate at all levels of social structure.

At the institutional and cultural levels, progressive parental leave policy and the cultural discourse of involved fatherhood seem to have promoted a strong sense of entitlement amongst fathers to substantial parental leave. The entitlement was however not always to half the leave.

At the workplace level, reactions to fathers' leave were mixed. Taking parental leave is highly supported in most workplaces. More vocal opposition came in private companies, especially in traditional male branches, where the gendered "norm of limited caregiving" sometimes prevails (Votinius 2008). Yet fathers who received negative reactions at work still felt a strong sense of leave entitlement and some challenged the status quo by taking long leaves even in the private sector. Nevertheless, fathers sometimes made concessions, taking less leave than desired, postponing leave or taking leave part-time.

At the family level, economic barriers played little role in decision-making. Keeping in mind that our sample had seemingly economically stable situations, one interpretation is that when fathers are strongly motivated to take leave, economic sacrifices can be made. In addition, mothers' career commitment pressured men to take longer leaves. It is often argued that men's leave-taking is a prerequisite for women's improved economic opportunities (e.g., through sharing of childcare), but in line with the idea that gender relations are reciprocal, this study suggests that mothers' improved labour market positions may be a prerequisite for men's longer leaves. Fathers reported little discussion with partners about leave-taking, saying they were "in synch" with each other, sharing the same attitudes and understanding each other's work situation. Absence of discussion may however for other couples lead to fathers taking less leave.

At the individual level, gender equality was mainly an unspoken taken-for-granted goal in the decision-making process. Our sample seems to have incorporated equality norms common in the larger Swedish society into their belief systems. Nevertheless, only one father mentioned awareness of how shared parental leave connected with gender-equality goals in society.

8.5.2 Fathers' Leave Experience

Fathers' stories predominantly described positive experiences with leave, involving nontraditional caregiving and stepping away from paid employment. Some fathers wished leave hadn't ended so quickly, but most were content with the length.

When asked what was most positive about leave, most mentioned the opportunity to get to *know their children and follow their development*, a finding similar to other studies (Almqvist et al. 2011; Chronholm 2004; Haas 1992; Nordberg 2007). Christian (carpenter, 37) recounted:

> The most positive thing I think is connecting in another way with the child….. When you work, then you feel that you come home in the evening and have an hour to try to catch up and hear what has happened during the day and you have perhaps not seen what progress she has made during the day. Right now I am the one who is at home and get to inform my wife with text messages and pictures, 'Look what she has done here,' and I think that is really cool.

Fathers often described leave as a *relaxing, worry-free, simple existence*. Nordberg (2007:320) also found that fathers saw leave as an oasis, "a chance to distance oneself from the norm for the high achieving full-time employed man," similar to earlier findings (Björnberg 1998; Chronholm 2004). In our study, Anders (coordinator, 37) stated:

> My experience with both leave opportunities was that it was like a 'bubble'… we managed by ourselves… and only lived in the present." Urban (software programmer, 41) , still on leave, indicated that: "It has been extremely nice to be on leave …such an unbelievably worry-free existence…the biggest worry I have had is what to make for dinner…It has been a quiet existence…one feels secure.

Several aspects of being home alone emerged as challenging, although these challenges were not present during the whole leave. The majority talked about difficulties withdrawing from work. It was common to *remain involved with work on a voluntary basis*, seemingly due to job commitment. Felix (construction site manager, 32) admitted: "I have a need for control, so I like them having to call me up for me to solve their problems." Carlos (technical production manager, 42), who kept his work phone on said: "It is clear that you need to keep in contact, you cannot just disappear and then come back after 8 months after being completely away."

Some fathers, however, seemed *forced to do some paid work*. Noel (creative director, 37) related: "I worked 32.5 h overtime during the first 3 weeks; there were special circumstances, there was a big annual exhibition…and that is holy [laughs]." Robert (construction consultant, 30) reported pressure to work at the beginning, but stepped away: "We had really set this date long in advance and I stepped down in stages from the job ….. Even if I thought I had arranged things properly, there are still some questions left."

For some, *being away from work was more of a psychological adjustment*. Filip (district store manager, 32) said: "It feels unfamiliar not to work.… to all of a sudden not need to bother about all that. Someone else must take care of it…." Noel admitted: "I have really missed …being able to sit deeply in concentration and work

on something." Others mentioned they *deliberately did not keep contact with work* while on leave. When asked by his supervisor if he was willing to come in and keep in touch with email, Urban said no and reported: "I didn't check job e-mail. I had my work telephone, but I had it turned off."

Only a few fathers reported *challenges involved in everyday childrearing*. These related to typical issues involving infants, including eating, sleeping, crying, illness and managing activities. Matthias (telecommunication advisor, 33) said: "So he doesn't sleep and doesn't eat…Then you get more or less depressed….'What am I doing wrong, did I buy the wrong food, or did I prepare the food wrong, why did he eat when [my partner] was at home but not with me?'" Felix reported that it was hardest when both children were sick simultaneously: "I have a shorter temper and yell more than I ought to." Kristoffer (special needs assistant, 37) said: "He screamed the whole time, … when he was happy, …when he was sad, …when he was angry. So I walked around with earplugs. And then he was very wild, he crawled around, pulling things down everywhere." To cope and prevent injury, Kristoffer put his son in a bicycle helmet.

Few opportunities to socialize with adults was an issue and some worked hard to maintain social ties. Lack of male social networks was also found by Almqvist et al. (2011) for fathers on leave. Nils (researcher, 40) said: "I felt a little jealous of the mamma groups…for our first child I participated in my partner's mamma group, so that was really nice….[T]hey were really open and accepting, and they were a lot of fun….. You are perhaps more alone as a pappa than as a mamma. It is still rare to see fathers with strollers in a group." Some fathers *developed strategies to reduce isolation*. Noel and a close friend (both taking leave part-time) planned ahead to be home the same days. However, another theme was *mixed feelings about socializing*. Anders (coordinator, 37), home on leave part-time: "I feel stressed when I am expected… to always be so social with other parents during parental leave. And I don't feel the need myself…[But] now that our child has become a little older I think that I perhaps ought to go to open preschool for her sake, just for socializing…" The only father who had contact with a "pappa group" was dissatisfied with the experience. Filip said: "I didn't feel like we had the same goals. I was more about how to get her to develop in the best way …and [for others] it was more like, '…if he gets bumps on his bottom you should do this'…I am not interested in that…. There was no relationship, it wasn't developing into anything…."

The fathers in this study were home alone for almost all of their leave while partners worked or studied. All fathers generally *managed childcare alone*. None reported hiring help with childcare. A few reported visiting their parents for a respite. Matthias reported his dad visited "now and then," mainly to see his grandchild, while Filip rejected his mother's offer to help.

All fathers *took on the duties of the primary parent* while they were home alone. Christian, now on leave said: "…the one who is at home [on leave] has the primary responsibility the whole time, even when the other is home …." Past studies have also found that fathers on leave take on both practical and emotional carework, thereby becoming more involved in the father role and competent at domestic work (Almqvist et al. 2011; Chronholm 2004; Elvin-Nowak 2005; Haas 1992; Nordberg

2007). Nevertheless, some fathers indicated that it took *time to get used to childcare duties*. Mats (group leader, 40) said: " I felt really like an underdog in the beginning…Then it changed, I became the one who was at home and says, 'He does this now', and the mother says, 'Oh, he didn't do that when I was at home.'" Noel reported: "[At first] I couldn't get him to sleep…And now it isn't a problem, it took only being home 3 days before I had a whole different approach."

Establishing their own routines was part of becoming the primary parent. Matthias reported: "I got tips and advice [from my partner]…But of course the child changes weekly, so certain advice she gave me didn't work any longer…. I must of course try to find my own solutions." Going out of the house with children figured prominently in fathers' descriptions of what they did while on leave. Noel stated: "I started to get anxious only sitting at home. So I was super careful to plan the days and meet other friends on leave and go out and do errands."

Even if they were the primary parent during the day, some fathers admitted that *they did not do the full range of childcare tasks* and they *did not always take equal responsibility*. Noel (still on leave part-time) said: "But we have had a certain division, we have always had one, … that is a little gender-role typical. She takes care of all the children's clothes and such (laughs)." Kristoffer recounted that even when he was home on leave: "[my partner] has always had a type of overall perspective. She thinks about the future, and sees several steps ahead while I am very much here and now, and everything which is far off is like an invisible cloud which I cannot really handle." This included appointments, knowing where things are and what to bring when going out. Earlier surveys show that even when fathers have taken long leaves some areas remain predominantly mothers' tasks, such as responsibility for clothes and contact with preschool (Almqvist and Duvander 2014; Försäkringskassan 2013).

Like childcare, it was taken for granted that as the one at home the *father would do more and take more responsibility for housework* than his partner. Some fathers mentioned that *partners were still involved in household work*, much as the fathers themselves had been when they were working. Urban reported: "When I was on parental leave…I fixed the food and cleaned and such. …then naturally one helps out when one comes home [from work]. Both my wife and I have done that. But the one who has been home has done a great deal." Almqvist et al.'s (2011) research, which included a more representative sample of parents, found that some mothers claimed that fathers did not do sufficient housework while on leave and had lower standards, while some fathers claimed they were not always trusted. This was not evident in our interviews.

The fathers who planned to get other things done during leave quickly discovered that *taking care of a small child is full-time*. Patrik (production manager, 32) described this discovery: "I remember that it went extremely fast.…much more intensive work than what I had expected…[A]t work you can say, 'I will figure this out', and you think about it for 15 min and go get a cup of coffee or something. But that doesn't work when you have two children [laughs]. It is … 12 h full focus! And then, poof, and so goes the next day and so went 9 months and it felt like 4 weeks. But it was also extremely fun. I had not one boring moment."

In summary, our research suggests leave-taking was experienced as fulfilling but also as hard work and sometimes fathers had ambivalent feelings about the period at home.

The caregiving experience and closer contact with their children was expressed as something very positive. The extended period of time alone with children was seen as very important for development of strong bonds with their children. They all saw it as obvious that they were as capable of caregiving tasks as mothers, which aligns with the idea of gender-neutral parenthood underlying Swedish family policy. The division of tasks that remained in some families was not portrayed as based on gender, even if it could be interpreted that way.

Fathers reported little hesitation in taking on challenges of daily childrearing and often recounted learning and adapting to intensive parenting. The most formidable challenge fathers encountered was difficulty disconnecting from work. There was variation in the workplace demands placed on fathers, sometimes related to leave length. Most fathers did some work, often because they felt they should, reflecting a strong work commitment complementing their desire to be primary caregivers. They showed little awareness that their devotion to work might be influenced by traditional workplace expectations for male employees. Some fathers, however, actively resisted organizational efforts to involve them in work while on leave.

At the family level, these men reported little discussion over what they would do while home alone; in most cases it seemed obvious to them and partners that they would take over the full range of activities and responsibilities and that they would also put their own stamp on routines and childcare practices. Few couples also agreed in advance that the parent at home should focus on childcare, not housework. Nevertheless, fathers still recounted some activities as gender-divided between partners. It should be kept in mind that we do not have the mothers' accounts of the division of tasks.

At the individual level, leave was portrayed as enjoyable (if sometimes challenging) – even a comfortable respite from everyday life. However, these fathers' efforts to become primary caregivers were portrayed as personal projects and solitary activities. Some only occasionally interacted with other fathers and isolation during leave was a recurring theme. It is thus noteworthy that even in a context where the cultural discourse presents parenthood as gender-neutral, mothers and fathers on leave are likely to experience different situations.

8.5.3 Impact of Leave

Interviews explored whether fathers believed that leave had influenced areas of life related to various dimensions of gender equality. Most discussed changes involving employment, domestic labour and relationships with partners. It was not always clear if these consequences were different than those associated with the transition to fatherhood.

Fathers' orientation toward employment seems to have changed and it was commonly expressed that *work was now less important* than actively participating in family life, also reported by Nordberg (2007). Felix (construction site manager, 32) said: "Things have a completely different meaning. The job is now just a necessary evil instead of my life's calling." In one important respect, men's participation in paid employment did not change due to long leaves. All fathers who had completed leaves *returned to full-time work* and those still on leave planned to do so. An earlier study found that men who took at least 2 months of leave worked fewer hours, mainly through reducing earlier overtime (Duvander and Jans 2009).

Despite working full-time afterward, several fathers mentioned making *structural adjustments to help work become more compatible with family life*. Some changes were major. Mats (group leader, 40) gave up a managerial position he was promoted to before his leave, upon realizing how much time the position took. "I remember when I made that decision, I told them no, I intend to concentrate on my children, and it was so heavenly nice when it was said, when they understood that I was serious…." Other job changes were less dramatic, but designed to increase men's flexibility to participate in childcare. Matthias (telecommunications advisor, 33) reported: "I think like this, 'If I travel to that meeting, how will it work out at home?' You have to think like that when you become a parent, you have a responsibility…." Nils (researcher, 40) stated: "I work from home one day a week to be able to pick up and drop off [at preschool] that day." Carlos (technical production manager, 42) leaves work early to pick up his child from preschool, "It doesn't matter if I am sitting in a meeting with a super-important person, no, sorry."

Fathers also reported that they experienced *negative consequences* of leave-taking on their careers. While on leave, Carlos's boss hired another person as technical manager, a position he thought would be his. Robert said he lost clients when on leave and had to build his base back up again. Noel (creative director, 37) said the kind of company he works at changes quickly "…. I can't be half-time and at the same time be the creative director…such a person must be present. If you want to have a career perhaps you shouldn't follow my example" (laughs). For some, their changed attitudes meant that *career damage did not matter*. Nils said: "…if I hadn't had children and had I only prioritized my career …I perhaps would have gotten somewhere else….. Who knows, I feel very good about this, I feel that I grew as a person because I took [leave]."

Another theme from the interviews was that fathers felt that there were positive consequences of their leave-taking for their workplaces. Some claimed leave had made them *more efficient when back at work.* A few mentioned that *leave-taking increased company recruitment*. Patrik (production manager, 32) stated: "It became an opportunity to circulate people and recruit new ones." A few discussed how being on leave *affected their management style, enhancing other men's opportunities to be at home*. Filip (district store manager, 32) reported: "I emphasize [to my employees]… 'Stay home, we will manage, we will survive. We won't go under just because you are at home, this will be super important for you.'"

Fathers' leave-taking may also have had impact on partners' careers. Mothers who completed leave returned to full-time work and those still on leave seemed likely to return to full-time work. It was not clear if this was a cause or consequence of fathers' extended leaves but contrasts sharply with national statistics indicating that part-time work among mothers is common (SCB 2014). Swedish mothers' early return to full-time work increases their contributions to family income and breadwinning and also enhances the chances that couples will share childcare after leave is over (Thomas and Hildingsson 2009).

Fathers' changing relationship to employment appeared to be associated with their growing absorption in the caregiving father role. Parental leave made fathers feel very *close to their children.* Anders (coordinator, 37) stated: "I don't believe that my relationship to my child…would have been like this if I hadn't had the opportunity to be at home so much." Some fathers *connected the close relationship with their ability to be active and caring parents.* Patrik said: "I learned a lot about the children. If I hadn't been on leave I believe I would probably not have understood them at all …. When something goes wrong I understand … what happened and how to handle it." Other studies have found that fathers taking a more equal share of leave are more likely to report participating in childcare afterwards (Försäkringskassan 2013; Haas and Hwang 2008).

When asked, most fathers mentioned *gender differences in parents' participation in childcare.* Though modest, these differences reflected mothers providing more emotional caregiving and taking more overall responsibility. Martin (public administrative official, 37) thinks he is better than his wife at "being present" with the children, while he is less likely than his wife to be confided in by the children and says his wife feels she needs to run around and do things. Robert said he is out at the sandbox a lot, puts the boy to bed, gets up in the night – "practical things," while his partner takes care of clothes and has more overall responsibility. These gendered activities were also reported for the leave period, but more clearly elaborated upon when describing after leave. The reported gender differences in activities were not presented as a problem or as a limit to fathers' engagement.

Some fathers suggested that they did as much or more housework than their partners. Prior studies found that fathers taking longer leave engaged in more daily housework and took on more responsibility for this than before (Almqvist and Duvander 2014; Chronholm 2004;). Felix stated: " I clean more…. As soon as either of us sees something needs to be washed, we just wash it, but we try to share that as much as possible also. On the weekends, she prepares more meals than I do. But I am the one who picks up and straightens constantly." Others suggested that housework was not shared equally, although they were very involved. Filip reported: "She doesn't trust me so much when it comes to laundry, mostly because I mix different colors together…. Food preparation she is really much better at, I fix food sometimes, but she knows that there are only about five dishes that I know. Then I usually take care of everything else, the vacuuming and such. That I think is fun…."

When asked how leave-taking affected relationships with partners, several fathers said the *common experience brought them closer together*. For most, this was through increased understanding of each other's situation. Patrik explained: "[There is] more understanding about the workload…. She has told me a thousand times before, but you don't really understand it before you have done it yourself…." Other fathers attributed the strengthening of their relationship to partners' becoming *proud of them* for managing the work while on leave or because it freed them up for employment. Carlos said his partner "…told me that she feels extremely happy and lucky to be with me, and proud of me.… [S]he has told others, 'My guy stayed home almost all of last year so I could work.'"

Finally, fathers were asked their opinions on parental leave policy. Earlier surveys have indicated opposition to reforms setting aside non-transferable leave for fathers and at the time of the first non-transferable month the issue was heavily debated (SOU 2005). All fathers in our sample, however, were positive towards earmarking 2 months to fathers. They saw Sweden's policy as luxurious and generous, compared to arrangements elsewhere. Kristoffer (special needs assistant, 37) said: "The length I think is really good….unbelievably generous if one compares with other countries." Fathers also thought that non-transferable leave should probably be extended. Matthias stated "You need more time than 3 months to get into the pappa role." Some fathers mentioned that further earmarking could be difficult economically for some families and they could understand why people want choice. Robert stated: "I think that it is good if people get to choose what they want to do with the time themselves. At the same time, it can be a little push in the back sometimes, if men were obligated to share more of it."

Some fathers expressed mild criticisms of the system. Filip complained about the low income ceiling. Carlos thought the government did not allocate enough resources to resolve disputes with employers over parental leave. Matthias and Noel both thought parents should be able to take more leave simultaneously. This is often argued to be needed during a transition period between the solo care of the two parents. Anders mentioned that it was problematic when a person works for more than one employer during the qualification period. Noel felt that the reporting system was too complicated for people taking leave part-time.

In summary, interviews support the idea that fathers being home has consequences at all levels of social structure, and that these can be related to gender equality. Swedish parental leave policy, offering fathers two non-transferable months, was highly regarded by the interviewed fathers. Although the general population may be hesitant to reserve additional months for fathers, our respondents were in favor. They felt such pressure would encourage fathers to take longer leaves – which based on their experience – is important for men to become active fathers.

These fathers' accounts of being home on leave alone reinforces the Swedish cultural discourse promoting "child-oriented masculinity," whereby "real men" embrace and have no real difficulty becoming capable, caring parents. The respondents seem likely to share their positive experiences, encouraging others to take longer leaves. This may gradually close the gap between the principle and practice of active fatherhood.

At the workplace level, fathers expressed both change and continuity with a traditional male norm. While all fathers returned to full-time employment, some had difficulties getting back into former jobs and claimed to have sacrificed career progression by being home. On the other hand, some fathers successfully challenged norms about the work commitment of loyal male employees, by changing to more family-friendly jobs or reorganizing work hours to facilitate availability for childcare. Some claimed leave-taking had positive outcomes for their workplaces; perhaps men's desire to combine father involvement with jobs they care about may lead to change in workplaces.

At the family level, fathers' reports indicated engagement but not fully realized gender equality or gender-neutral parenthood. Fathers remained active in childcare and housework after leave, although all did not describe sharing all duties equally with mothers. Even when they saw themselves as capable of being primary caregivers, they reported a division of tasks based on gender, without mentioning this as a problem. Fathers reported enhanced closeness with partners from taking leave, but did not mention equality as a goal in these relationships. Gender equality was expressed as an abstract and taken-for-granted goal, not really of concern for their own situation.

Developing closer bonds and reprioritizing values were also commonly discussed consequences of taking leave; paid employment was no longer the most important thing in life. This change in orientation could contribute to the spread of shared caregiving and breadwinning responsibility in Sweden.

8.6 Conclusion

Sweden provides a unique context to explore fathers' experiences home alone on parental leave because it is a society that strongly embraces gender equality as a political goal and champions a new norm of masculinity calling for active caregiving. Our interviews with Stockholm fathers in a privileged situation to choose long leaves explored three stages: the decision-making process surrounding leave, experiences on leave and (for those who had completed leave) perceptions of the leave's impact on fathers' employment, caregiving and relations with partners, as well as opinions concerning leave policy. We applied a theoretical framework that regards men's experiences of parental leave as closely linked to gender practices and influenced by multiple, interrelated levels of social structure.

Progressive parental leave policy and the cultural discourse of involved fatherhood seem to have promoted a strong sense of entitlement amongst fathers to substantial parental leave, so that it was taken for granted that they would take long leave. This entitlement was however not always to half the leave, and mixed reactions at the workplace sometimes led fathers to make concessions in terms of leave

use. Within the family, economic barriers to fathers' long leave were not reported and fathers reported little discussion with partners about leave. The desired preschool start date and mothers' interest in returning to work often influenced fathers' choices.

In line with cultural expectations for fathers, these men emphasized that leave-taking was experienced as personally fulfilling, valuing close contact with their children and finding childcare to be a desirable task. Leave was regarded as a "bubble," a welcome respite from employment. They faced the same challenges mothers have on leave and expressed ambivalent feelings about being at home, such as social isolation. They came to see themselves as capable of caregiving as mothers and as the "primary parent,"creating their own routines and practices. However, mothers often appeared to still be involved in some aspects of childrearing suggesting that equal parenting practices were not common. Moreover, fathers did not express concern over inequality in parenting; nor did they remark upon how difficulties separating from work might be related to traditional workplace expectations for male employees.

The experience of leave appeared to make these fathers strong supporters of reforms offering fathers more non-transferable months. They felt this would encourage fathers to take longer leaves which, based on their experience, is important for men to become active fathers. Those men who had completed leave expressed both continuity and change with a traditional male norm for employment. While all returned to full-time work, some had sacrificed career progression, a development they didn't regret because now they prioritized family over work. Some had changed to more family-friendly jobs or reorganized their workday to be more available for childcare. At the family level, fathers' reports indicated close relationships with children and active engagement in childcare but not fully realized gender-neutral parenthood, without considering this as a problem. Fathers reported enhanced closeness with partners, since they felt they understood each other's situation better, but did not mention equality as a goal in these relationships.

The main conclusion from these interviews is that it is possible for fathers in Sweden to feel like, and act like, primary caregivers. Even if traditional expectations and cultural norms for motherhood and fatherhood can be difficult to change, these fathers' experiences suggest that there is a change in the norm of fatherhood where caregiving is becoming more central. Perhaps gender relations are also shifting to be more concerned with sharing tasks, although this seems to be a more inconsistent and incomplete development. The main focus of change seems to revolve around the positive experience of being with the child, something that was expressed as having major consequences for future prioritizing of family over work among the interviewed men.

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Chapter 9
Fathers on Leave Alone in Iceland: Normal Paternal Behaviour?

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9.1 Introduction

The possibilities for Icelandic fathers to stay at home with their very young children changed dramatically at the turn of the century when they received a fairly long period of non-transferable parental leave. This took place as part of a radical transformation of the laws on parental leave. The consensus surrounding this change was remarkable as was the extent to which the fathers made use of their rights. Even though Iceland, as well as most of the western world, has seen substantial changes in gender relations in past decades, these changes mainly related to the situation of women which made inroad to traditional male areas. There have been few attempts to influence the situation of men so that they made inroad to traditional female areas such as child care. In fact there seems to have been a fairly broad consensus that men were not interested in partaking there or lacked the ability. Experience from Iceland and some of the other Nordic countries seems to indicate that the relatively little participation of men in the care for their own children may be more due to lack of real social possibilities than lack of interest or abilities. Still, even though statistics show an increase in the participation of fathers, we need many more studies of the situation of fathers that are active in taking care of very young children. In this study I focus on the experience of Icelandic fathers who have made extensive use of their rights and been at home alone with their child or children.

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9.2 Policy Context

The year 2000 saw a radical change in opportunities for Icelandic fathers to make use of parental leave. The then sitting centre-right government presented a bill to the Icelandic parliament, Alþingi, which proposed a complete revolution of the existing system. The leave was extended in steps from 6 months to 9 and parents had 18 months to make use of their rights. Economic compensation was changed from a low flat rate benefit to 80 % of wages and the compensation to those with little or no connection to the labour market was raised considerably. The prior 6 months long parental leave had in principle been dividable between parents but in reality only between 0.2 and 0.4 % of fathers used any part of it each year. Now the leave was divided between parents, 3 months for each parent on a strict non-transferable basis, and 3 that they could divide as they liked. The system was flexible, leave can be taken on a part-time basis and parents can be at home together for a period or the whole time and both receive full economic compensation. A new Parental Leave Fund was established to monitor the system and it received its income mainly from an insurance levy paid by all employers. Alþingi proved to be enthusiastic about the project and the bill was passed unanimously without any changes (Eydal and Gíslason 2008).

Of course all this did not happen without context. Many political and social actors had criticised the parental leave system, pointing out for example that parental leave in Iceland was the shortest of the Nordic countries, economic compensation was far too low and the fact that only mothers used it was not in accordance with the gender equality project. The labour unions, women's organizations and (left-wing) political parties pressed for changes in the 1990s. Opinion polls had also revealed that Icelandic men wanted to reduce their working hours and spend more time with their families and they were ready to make use of parental leave as long as it did not infringe on the possibilities of mothers (Gíslason 2007).

The consensus in Alþingi was mirrored in Icelandic society. Opinion polls showed strong support for the changed system (Eydal and Gíslason 2008) and as a matter of fact this support has increased over the years. In 2003, 85.4 % of respondents stated that they were positive or very positive to fathers using 3–6 months parental leave. In a similar poll in 2012, 88.6 % were positive or very positive (Eydal and Gíslason 2014). Table 9.1 shows the development of use of the parental leave.

As Table 9.1 shows the great majority of Icelandic fathers use their right to parental leave, 82.4 % the first year and around 90 % after that before the cuts in economic compensation begin to take their toll. On average they use the time allotted to them, the time that only they can use (the figures refer to working days). As mentioned above the extension of the leave came in steps. In 2001 the fathers got their first month and used on average 39 days. The second month came in 2002 and that year fathers used on average 62 days and when the third month came in 2003 the average use rose to 97 days and has been around 100 days since. Mothers, on the other hand use on average their 3 months and the 3 sharable, averaging around

Table 9.1 Development of the use of parental leave in Iceland 2001–2012

Year of birth	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009	2010	2011	2013
Mothers (n)	4054	4167	4302	4555	4965	4817	4406	4197
Applications from fathers as % of applications from mothers	82.4 %	86.6 %	88.2 %	88.5 %	85.8 %	83.5 %	80.3 %	79.9 %
Average number of days used by fathers	39	97	99	101	98	92	86	87
Average number of days used by mothers	186	183	184	181	178	179	179	181
Fathers using more than their basic rights	14.5 %	16.1 %	19.5 %	21.2 %	20.1 %	17.1 %	14.7 %	15.0 %
Mothers using more than their basic rights	94.2 %	90.9 %	89.7 %	93.1 %	92.9 %	95.3 %	95.5 %	96.1 %
Fathers using less than their basic rights	5.1 %	14.2 %	19.5 %	16.4 %	19.3 %	30.0 %	39.7 %	36.5 %
Mothers using less than their basic rights	0.9 %	1.0 %	0.1 %	1.5 %	1.0 %	0.8 %	1.1 %	0.8 %

Sources: Fæðingarorlofssjóður (2010) and Fæðingarorlofssjóður (n.d.)

180 days. This confirms experience from other countries, a sharable time becomes a time for the mother (Duvander and Lammi-Taskula 2011).

However, averages can hide a great deal. As Table 9.1 shows the share of fathers not making use of all their time increased as their days increased. When they had only 1 month 5.1 % of those who used some parental leave did not make full use of their time. This rose to 10.1 % when the second month was added and to 14.2 % when the third month was in place. Since then it was between 16 % and 20 % before the cuts in economic compensation.

The other side of the coin is that a substantial number of fathers use some (or all) of the sharable time. The first year 14.5 % of fathers used more than their time. This figure rose slowly and was around 20 % before the cuts. As far as I know only one study has so far looked at couples where the father has taken longer leave than the mother (Gíslason 2005). This was a qualitative study of nine couples and among them the labour market situation of the mother was the deciding factor regarding the unusual sharing of the parental leave. The mothers mostly worked independently as lawyers, architects or writers or were placed very high in the hierarchy where they were employed. The mothers felt that they could not leave the labour market completely for long and this seemed to open up spaces for negotiations and the fathers

stepped in. But it should also be added that all the mothers had experienced being frowned upon by their immediate surroundings and being told, directly or indirectly that this was not something a "good mother" does.

One of the reasons for the extensive use of the leave by Icelandic fathers is probably the general social support which extended into the ranks of individual employers. Opinion polls have shown that even though employers are the social group most negative to fathers being on parental leave, 73.7 % were positive in 2003 and 81 % in 2012 (Eydal and Gíslason 2008, 2014). Similarly a quantitative survey in 2006 among parents showed that 89.1 % of fathers had met very positive, positive or neutral reactions from their superiors when announcing their intention to take paternal leave. To be sure, more fathers (10.9 %) than mothers (4.8 %) had experienced negative or very negative reactions (Jónsdóttir 2007) but it still seems like employers attitudes should not be a major hindrance for a father that wants to make use of his right to leave.

Originally there was no ceiling on economic compensation while on leave. Parents received 80 % of salary regardless of how high it was. Social pressure led to the introduction of a very high ceiling in 2004. It was so high that it only affected 2.6 % of fathers and 0.4 % of mothers (Fæðingarorlofssjóður 2010). In 2008 the Icelandic financial system collapsed and the following years saw a number of cuts in the welfare budget. Among the measures was a lowering of the ceiling on economic compensation during parental leave. This was done three times which meant that in 2010 the ceiling affected 45.7 % of fathers and 19 % of mothers (Fæðingarorlofssjóður 2010). This led to a fall in the usage by fathers but there are indications that they are spreading the leave over a longer period and take shorter spans.

In a world-wide perspective Iceland can be regarded as a fairly gender equal welfare society. The labour market participation of women is very high (78.5 %), political representation fairly good (40 % in the Icelandic parliament and 44 % in the municipalities) and opinion polls show strong support for the idea of gender equality. For 7 consecutive years Iceland has occupied first place in the yearly international survey on gender equality by the World Economic Forum (World Economic Forum 2015). Other research has also revealed that changes have been taking place in the domestic sphere both as regards housework and child care, with men increasing the hours they put in and these aspects of life being subjected to negotiations rather than being automatically resigned to the woman (Arnalds et al. 2013; Gíslason 2009; Stefánsson and Þórsdóttir 2010).

One study in particular illustrates this, namely the one by Arnalds et al. (2013). Three times parents who had their first child in a particular year have been asked to fill in a diary to show their participation in the labour market, their division of domestic labour and childcare for 1 year before the child was born and every month until it is 3 years old. This was done for children born in 1997, 2003 and 2009, the first cohort being born 3 years before the new law on parental leave, the second was the first to have the full benefit of the changes and the third was born after the serious cuts in economic compensation. The results all point in the same direction. After the change mothers return earlier to the labour market, they are closer to

having reached their pre-birth working hours when the child is 3 and, last but not least, there has been a marked increase in the sharing of child care not only during parental leave but for the 3 years after birth for which the diary was held. When the children born in 1997 were 3 years old 36 % were cared for evenly by their fathers and mothers, for children born 2003 and 2009 the figures were 49 % and 59 % respectively. This is in line with results from other countries, showing that fathers that are active from the beginning continue to shoulder a greater share of child care than those who have not been very active while the child was very young (Kitterød 2013; Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel 2007; Rege and Solli 2010; Tanaka and Waldfogel 2007). While not claiming that this is solely due to the impact of the new parental leave a comparison of parents where the fathers took parental leave and those where he did not show much more involvement from those fathers that used parental leave (Arnalds et al. 2013).

The main hindrance for the effectiveness of the divided parental leave in Iceland in the striving for gender equality is the so-called 'care gap', the period from the end of the parental leave and to a place in kindergarten. There is a shortage of kindergarten places and children are usually between 18 and 24 months old when they are admitted. This is a period where parents have to seek individual solutions (Farstad 2012). Research shows a variety of strategies but private child minders is the most usual. The main problem there is that they are much more expensive than kindergartens and for those in low-paid jobs it doesn't always pay to return to the labour market if a private child minder is necessary. And whether or not that is the explanation we also see in this research that mothers more often than fathers adjust their labour market participation to bridge this gap. Either they do not return to the labour market or they do so on a part-time basis (Jónsdóttir 2007; Ingólfsdóttir 2013).

9.3 Participants

The ten fathers that were interviewed for this study were found by advertising on Facebook and by word of mouth (see Table 9.2). The aim was to find fathers who showed some diversity in education and work, particularly to get fathers from both the private and public labour markets. As it turned out there are two fathers with student exam, two craftsmen and six with a university degree. Six of them work in the private sector. All except one had taken 3 or more months of parental leave. All their partners except one, have university degrees and all except two work in the public sector. The interviews were all held in my office at the University of Iceland.

The interviews lasted between 40 to 90 min. They were taped and then fully transcribed and analysed, themes identified and compared using the methods described in textbooks on qualitative methods (Kvale and Brinkman 2009; Hennink et al. 2010; Silverman 2013). Naturally, a number of themes came from the questions themselves but other emerged directly from the narratives such as the importance of the will of the mothers and the importance of the care gap.

Table 9.2 Characteristics of the participating fathers and their partners

Father	Age	Children	Leave with youngest child	Education/ employment	Partner
1	31	3 boys, 8 months, 3 and 13 years (the oldest is not his biological son)	2 weeks summer vacation + 3 months parental leave	Student exam, works for a computer store as a purchaser and teacher, 45 h/w	32, MA (humanities), elementary school teacher 40 h/w
2	35	1 girl (1) together, she has 3 from an earlier relationship, living with them	1 month summer vacation + 3 months parental leave	Printer, service adviser, 45 h/w	37, elementary school teacher, 40 h/w
3	31	2 boys, 1 and 5, the older is not his biological son	3 months parental leave, the first with the mother	Student exam, system administrator, 40 h/w	30, university exam (business), sales manager, 40 h/w
4	34	2 girls, 2 and 5	1 month parental leave	University exam (humanities), manager, 45 h/w	33, social worker, public servant. 40 h/w
5	37	2 girls 3 and 6	6 months parental leave	Engineer, program developer, 40 h/w	43, MA (social), public servant
6	40	2 boys (13 and 3) and one girl (11)	2 weeks company paid leave + 7 months parental leave	MA (physical science), research and development, 45 h/w	41, PhD (social), public servant
7	29	1 boy, 15 months	1 month parental leave + 4 months parental leave	Physician, 65 h/w	29, Physician, phd student
8	40	Boy (3), girl (6)	1.5 months summer vacation + 3 months parental leave	MA (social), director with a small research institute, 50 h/w	43, social worker, 50 %
9	35	2 boys (4 and 8) and one girl (11)	2 weeks parental leave + 3 months parental leave	BA computer science, programmer, 40 h/w	35, artist and shop assistant
10	38	1 boy (3)	3 weeks parental leave + 2.5 months parental leave	Carpenter, 50 h/w	BA (language), advertising planner

9.4 Main Themes and Findings

9.4.1 General

None of the fathers that I interviewed seemed to experience what he had done as something out of the ordinary. Most of them came to the interview because their partners had asked them to do it. The women were proud of their husbands; the

husbands seemed not to really understand what all the fuss was about. Their general views were that they had wanted to do this, circumstances favoured the division they had settled on and they had no misgivings, were pretty confident that they could handle this. None seemed to think that this was "un-manly" or that he was engaged in some form of gender subversion though none had experienced anything similar as a child. These were just "different times". Many were genuinely surprised when I asked them if they had experienced this as something incompatible with a masculine role: "No it never occurred to me that what I was doing was something unmanly. Why on earth should that be?" [9]

The experience of one family [3] illustrates the general trend. The couple has one child together and the woman has one from an earlier relationship that lives with them. Both work on the private market. Their son was almost 1 year old when I interviewed the father. The first month after birth both parents were on leave. After that the father returned to work and the mother was on leave for 7 months. For 5 of those months she also worked 20 % and by doing that she managed to stretch the leave. When she returned to full-time work the father took over on a full-time basis for the 2 months he had left of his leave. Asked about the reasons, he began by stating that they had wanted the child to have as much time with the mother as possible and that breastfeeding should be for at least 6 months and then added: "It was also that I wanted to have some time with them together and then just with him."

When I interviewed him the child had recently begun with a child minder (a male, which is highly unusual) and they were all very pleased with that person even though the couple looks forward to getting a place in kindergarten for their son. When I asked if it had not been an option to stretch the leave period even more to a similar reduction in compensation he said that financially that had not been possible.

And these were the general reasons behind fathers being home alone for a relatively long period. The whole family is at home together for the first couple of weeks or even longer. This is the period when they are all getting to know each other in their new roles and a period where the mother needs rest so that is the main role of the father, keeping family and friends at bay and making sure that the mother is not overburdened by domestic chores. Then the fathers return to the labour market and return to the domestic life after 6–8 months to cover as much as possible of the period until a place in kindergarten becomes available.

It was natural in all cases that the mother should be at home for at least 6 months both because of breastfeeding and because the parents deemed that important to ensure a good bonding between mother and child. After that period there was increased room for negotiations and individual solutions. But these were always with one goal in mind, namely to delay as much as possible the time when the child would have to be put into other peoples care. What was mainly to be avoided was to use private child minders. Some were uncomfortable with the thought that there was only one grown person taking care of up to five infants while others were more concerned with the costs. The labour market situation of the mother played a role (when was it necessary for her to return to work) but all the fathers added that they had wanted to do this in order to better bond with the child. In some cases that

aspect had also been explicitly stated by the mothers when they were urging the fathers to make use of their leave in this fashion or supporting their wish to do so.

There were cases where this had not been planned from the beginning but changed circumstances made it an option or even necessary. In one case [7] both the parents are young doctors. They had planned for her to take a fairly long leave, 10–11 months "because she felt that it was important that he didn't have to go to a child minder or to kindergarten too early." The plan was that the father would take 1 month immediately after birth (which he did) and then take the remaining 2 months during the summer while she was still on leave. However, a job opportunity arose after 7 months and she applied and got it. Then he stepped in and was on leave for 4 months. He added:

> But I think that I had voiced this possibility early on or stated that I had nothing against being home alone… So when we were first discussing this we talked about whether she should take six and then I would take over and be at home for three… and I stated that I was game for anything but… I think that she just didn´t originally want to miss anything you know… and we could afford her being at home for so long so she thought it better that we should be at home together. [7]

This is in line with other qualitative studies on young parents in Iceland. The mothers are the ones who lay the ground rules in this area and the fathers go along (Gíslason 2005; Ingólfsdóttir 2013). Not that the fathers do not have opinions or that the division of the leave is not discussed, but in the great majority of cases it seems that the mothers state what they want to do themselves and what they want the fathers to do and that becomes their shared decision. If something changes with the situation of the mother then that can change what has been decided and the fathers do not seem reluctant to go home.

It appeared from the interviews that most of these mothers were interested in having the fathers at home for a period of time so that they could better bond with their children. In one case the father had not intended to take any parental leave but his wife insisted that he did:

> She pushed very hard that I should take leave and I am really very grateful for that period… but financially it could have ended in a disaster but it worked out, it always does in the end.
>
> Q. Why did your wife insist that you took leave?
>
> A. It was about the bonding, bonding with the child. She felt that it was important if I somehow hadn't developed contact before we had to let the child to a child minder or kindergarten. [4]

In a similar vein the fathers were not at all sure if this experience had had any positive effects on their relationship with the mothers but were all pretty sure that if they had not been ready to take their share that would have affected the relationship in a very negative way:

> It would have created conflicts if I had demanded or refused to do this or something like that but that was never any… not that I was forced into this you know… it was just natural but if I had been… probably would have created pressure on her if I had… been dissatisfied… but then of course she wouldn't be with me in the first place if I was some kind of a male chauvinist. [6]

Still, in all the cases the fathers were doing something that was completely different from what their own fathers had done. Usually their fathers had been traditional men of their generation, hard-working and not much at home. Though they had helped with the domestic chores "help" is the defining word. They were very much in lieu with what was seen as masculine in their days. On the other hand the fathers in this study were now doing what society as a whole encouraged them to do. They have the legal support, the general discourse is supportive, friends and relatives are supportive and their partners both want and expect them to do this. It really should not be all that difficult.

9.4.2 Employers, Co-Workers, Friends and Relatives

None of the men had experienced any negative reactions at their workplace due to their long leave, neither when they told their superiors about their plans, nor when they returned to work. It did not matter whether they were working for a private company or in the public realm, all reported similar reactions, good wishes and that of course they should take their leave as they wanted to. None of them expected anything else, they knew that this was their right and of course it would be acknowledged. Why on earth not? In most cases their workplace had already experienced something similar. In one case the father had only been working with the company for a month when he told his superiors about his intentions to take 3 months parental leave. "And they just congratulated me and I got all the support I could have wished for." [3] His wife had a similar experience. Four months pregnant she applied for a new job, told about her pregnancy at the interview and that she would take 6–7 months parental leave. That was no problem and she got the job.

The attitude among their colleagues, friends and relatives were similar. Except for a few among the grandparents no one saw what the fathers were doing as something strange or were worried that they would not be able to handle it. There were voices of envy but no derogatory remarks or jokes that were experienced as offensive. One father had taken 3 months parental leave following his partners 6 months:

> I never experienced that this was something out of the ordinary. My friends and relatives were all with me in this, thought it was natural and fine. At least when they talk to me, I don't know what they say elsewhere (laughs). It's just… this seems to be the view, at least with this generation, that this is natural and maybe some think that it is… yes it is more that people talk about this as a privilege… you know, to be able to do this and maybe some envy connected to that, but I have never experienced any adversity or that this was something I should not do. [1]

As was pointed out in the introduction there has been a remarkable political and social consensus around the system of parental leave in Iceland so it is really not that surprising that even fathers who have taken longer leave than the average or have taken it mainly alone home do not experience any negativity. Still, it is interesting to see the support and encouragement that fathers who are breaking (relatively) new ground seem to receive from their social surroundings. Perhaps not all that

surprising in the light of the general development in Iceland towards the dissolving of traditional gender roles.

9.4.3 Instructions from Partners

Even though both partners had agreed on how to share the leave, the majority of the fathers experienced that their partners instructed them on what to do in the daily routine or phoned to make sure they were doing the right things at the right moments. This was mainly in the beginning of their leave. The men, however, did not seem to mind all that much. For one thing the mothers had been at home with the babies for some months, knew and had helped establish the daily routines. It was simply natural that they briefed the fathers about the children's eating and sleeping habits. But even when the "interference" was more than this the men realized that this was not really a lack of trust in their abilities to care for the baby but just a natural wish by the mothers to stay in touch with the children and their daily progress.

One of the men explained:

> She was in constant touch, you name it, how she had slept and eaten and all that… you know… how to approach this and that and things that you get from your wife when she has been at home with the child for nine or ten months… there are not all that many tricks but I got my formula from the wife, how to best approach this and that. [4]

> No she wasn't worried or anything like that but they still… they, of course have this… that they have this maternal instinct that they know best and of course often they do know a whole lot better, you know so… in the beginning they want to look over your shoulder. [8]

None of the men themselves had experienced any major doubts about their abilities to handle the task regardless of whether they had any prior experience of handling an infant or not. For one thing they had been at home with mother and the child for between 2 and 4 weeks following the birth. They had also been with the child during evenings, nights and weekends. They had participated in changing diapers, bathing and feeding the child and putting it to sleep. There was nothing really new about all this. What was new was that there was no one around to ask or confer with. But they were all certain that this was something they could easily handle though some admitted to a slight knot in their stomach the first day.

9.4.4 Enjoyable and Difficult Moments

Asked about if they recalled any particularly enjoyable moments not many could name something specific. They enjoyed a daily routine that was so much different from what they were used to in their working life and they enjoyed taking care of the child. This was particularly for the first few weeks that they were home alone. Some (but not all) said that towards the end of the period, life had become tedious

and they were ready to start working again. Some mentioned that their partners had expressed similar views. But there were two general enjoyable parts that popped up. One was the joy of being the first to see or experience the child doing something new, experiencing the progress first. The first step, the first word, were moments that stood out. Some also mentioned that these moments also stood out for the parent that was not there to see it. The mothers felt as if they had been let down or cheated upon by not being there when this happened the first time.

> She took her first steps while with me, that stands out. And she said her first word while I was with her… her mother wasn't all that pleased that she had not been there (laughs), this stands out. [2]

> I get to experience what he is doing for the first time, I am with him, just the little things you know, nothing big but taken together it is just so positive to have been there to experience this period in his life. [1]

The second part was the experience that the child trusted them, sought their company no less than its mother if both were present or even preferred the fathers. In one case the couple had three children and the father had been at home with the youngest for 7 months.

> He was very much a 'daddy's boy' and… his mother began a very conscientious campaign to regain her position when she got that chance and has worked continuously on that ever since. Successfully and I haven't interfered in any way… but this is now much more even. If he starts crying it's not just running to mom, it is more even and some days he just wants his mom and other days he just wants his dad so… this is different than with the other children. [6]

9.4.5 Negative Experiences

When asked about negative experience there was some diversity in the answers. Some had experienced social isolation and went on about how much easier it seemed to be for mothers to break out of the isolation. To begin with, the mothers had sometimes bonded with other expecting women in pre-natal courses and sometimes had formed a group on Facebook that they used to discuss their experience as well as planning outings and social gatherings. Then there are organized "mother-mornings" in some of the churches in Reykjavík (Iceland's capital) and even though fathers are officially welcome only one had given it a try and he did not enjoy the experience. And finally there are simply more women than men at home during daytime. But the isolation was on the whole not a major issue and in some cases brought about enjoyable new experience:

> Well obviously you experience isolation when you are at home and all others are working… I met with a lot of people that I usually would not meet. I very often took him to see all his grandparents and aunts and cousins and so on, people that I usually would not visit without a specific reason. You just went when you knew that someone was at home. So this of course is one indication of isolation that you start looking for new company… even though that company was also very enjoyable. [7]

Those whose children had trouble sleeping at night of course mentioned that weeks or even months without one night of uninterrupted sleep were a very difficult and negative experience. But this was very rare and generally there was nothing really negative about the whole thing.

9.4.6 What were They Doing?

A recurrent theme in general discussions on parental leave in Europe is that the fathers are not really doing what they are supposed to be doing while on leave. They are moose hunting, playing golf, or repairing the house depending on what country you are in. Usually this is just phantasy, studies reveal no such trend though doubtlessly examples can be found. Some of the fathers that I interviewed had worked part-time during their parental leave but so had some of the mothers. Usually this was in order to be able to extend the leave period so that they either worked while the child slept during the day or in the evening when the partner was at home. But generally the fathers just did what mothers and housewives have done, they took care of the child or children and they did the domestic chores. One of the fathers [10] described it thus:

> When I was at home with her I took completely care of the home, I did the laundry, cleaned up, vacuumed and scrubbed and dusted and tried to have the home nice looking when she came home.

9.4.7 Domestic Chores

As for the general division of labour within the household all of the men claimed an equal division though in the one case where the mother was working part-time she naturally did more than he. In general the division had not been explicitly discussed or decided upon. It was more a case of day-to-day division based on working hours, which one could pick up the children from kindergarten and sometimes schools, which one had taken the car to work and could therefore shop and so on.

The men stated that usually there was little or no argument about who should do what but they also said that they knew that their partners would not stand for any show of chauvinism or laziness on the home front. It was a given from the beginning of the relationship that the division of house tasks should be equal and the men had no trouble accepting that. In fact they regarded it as natural. Still, I am pretty sure that if the women would want to shoulder the lion's share of the domestic labour in most (but not all) cases that too would be accepted. Women call the shots in this area in most cases. However, there were some traditional divisions, the men took care of the traditionally male chores. They repaired in the house, mowed the lawn and washed and repaired the car.

The general view among the fathers seemed to be that there is no naturally gendered division of domestic labour, these things just have to be done and it is only fair that they should be shared. Similarly, that when only one in a couple is in the labour market then it is only fair that the other should shoulder domestic work. Similar views were also present in a yet unpublished qualitative study of couples where the man had been unemployed for at least 3 months while his partner was working full-time. I interviewed ten couples separately and with one exception they all agreed that the man had greatly increased his share of the domestic labour, in most cases just taking completely over. And, in the same way as in this study, the operating word was "fair". It was generally agreed that the total hours in paid and unpaid labour should be close to equal in couples, anything else was simply "unfair".

The protective element towards their partner also often popped up. The fathers tried to make sure that their partner got enough sleep and was able to meet with her friends, pursue hobbies and so on.

9.4.8 Learning from the Experience

The majority of the fathers worked more than full-time, if full-time is defined as 40 h a week. The average working week for Icelandic men is 44 h and for men between 25 and 54 years old it is almost 48 h a week. So these men were pretty average in that realm. All the mothers except one were working full-time. Whether it can be called learning or something else two of the men mentioned that they were changing their jobs (within their firm) to reduce their working hours in order to be more with their families.

> I want to be more at home, to participate more in the shopping and cooking and other things in my home. [2]

Another said that neither he nor his wife were interested in working more than the prescribed 40 h a week even though that was a possibility in both workplaces. "We just decided to stay out of that." [3]

9.4.9 What the Leave Should Look Like

All of the men brought up the same problem regarding the parental leave and child care namely the care gap. And whatever their opinion on how parental leave should look like, they all stated that some system of (public) child care should be available when that period was over. The period of having to rely on assistance from friends and close relatives to care for the child was seen as highly stressful and in fact unacceptable. The system of private child minders to cover this period was by most seen as unsatisfactory, much too expensive and many also felt that it was too much of a lottery to hand your child over to a person you knew little about and who worked alone.

They were mostly satisfied with the parental leave system as it is. No one wanted to abolish the non-transferable periods so the family could "freely" choose how it was divided. On the other hand they hadn't really given this much thought, the system was as it was and you just deal with it on that basis. When asked directly if the division of the leave should be left to individual families most were of the opinion that it was good to have some division.

> I think it is good to have some division, some basic division… just as an encouragement to share things equally. [7]

9.5 Conclusions

For the last decades Iceland has been experiencing an increased dissolution of traditional gender roles as indeed most of the western world has. The social situation of women has greatly changed with increased participation on the labour market, a (slowly) diminishing gender pay gap and increased number of women in seats of power. All of this is a general development in the West. What is perhaps more unusual are efforts from the public authorities to influence the traditional roles of men in the home and particularly regarding child care.

Even though the changes in masculinity roles in Iceland had begun much earlier they really took off with the changed law on parental leave in 2000. Here was a law that not only gave fathers the possibilities to take parental leave and care for their infants, it expected them to do so, they could not write the period over to the mother. Judging by official statistics and the studies that have been carried out so far, fathers embraced the possibilities and their usage of the leave is initiating or supporting other changes such as the more equal division of household tasks and the labour market participation of men and women.

This pattern is mirrored in the study presented here. The fathers that been alone with their children for an extensive period of time did not experience what they had done as something all that special. And in reality nothing in their social surroundings gave them reason to think otherwise. Telling their superiors about their intentions they were congratulated and told that naturally they should take the leave as they had intended. Co-workers, friends and relatives echoed this view. They themselves were willing to shoulder the task, having no or little misgivings about their abilities to take care of their children and certainly not experiencing what they were doing as something "un-manly" or not in accordance with some pre-given ideas about masculinities. In fact they found that idea laughable.

In conclusion, the evidence of this study seems to indicate that a lot can be achieved to subvert traditional gender roles by laws that are gender sensitive and take it as a given that both genders can perform well in roles and tasks that traditionally belong to the other gender.

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Chapter 10
Fathers Taking Leave Alone in the UK – A Gift Exchange Between Mother and Father?

Margaret O'Brien and Katherine Twamley

10.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to examine the experiences of fathers taking leave alone in Britain, a relative late-comer amongst affluent countries to paid leave for fathers. British fathers were only given a legal right to take a 2 week paid paternity leave after the birth of a child in 2003, several decades after European neighbours (HM Employment Act 2002). Subsequently the possibility of taking more extended leave alone, partially paid, became possible through the introduction of Additional Paternity Leave (APL) in 2011. In this chapter we explore the phenomenon of fathers taking leave alone in Britain through insights from a small qualitative pilot study conducted with five couples where the fathers were taking APL.[1] This study is one of the first to examine fathers' experiences on leave alone in the UK (Cornish 2013). Unlike projects reported in other chapters of this book, the project aimed to explore the *couple* context within which fathers take leave. This focus is particularly relevant in the UK setting where fathers' access to leave, beyond the 2 week post-birth paternity leave, is through a transfer from mother to father. In the chapter we focus on the findings concerning fathers' motivations, experiences and perceived consequences for work and family life. We suggest that the maternalist design of

[1] *Twamley, K. Equality at home?: Exploring the experiences of couples where the father has taken additional paternity leave in the UK, Funded by the British Academy. Ref SG132666.*

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UK leave is an important policy context for couple negotiation and fathers' experiences of leave alone.

10.2 The British Leave System for Fathers: Policy Context

Leave provision for British fathers occupies a midway position between the generosity of Nordic Europe and its near absence in the United States. Over the last 40 years 'involved' fatherhood has become more embedded in the cultural, political and public discourses of the British fatherhood regime (Gregory and Milner 2008) although formal institutional support for involved fatherhood is rather weak. In terms of leave, the statutory provision is short or minimalist with low/no income replacement (O'Brien 2009).

The beginnings of the 'new father' rhetoric were observed in the 1980s, supported by first wave discoveries of male nurturance (e.g. Lamb 1976; McKee and O'Brien 1982), and now these views have become mainstream (Collier and Sheldon 2008; Gregory and Milner 2011). More recently, in response to the rise in dual earning families, the importance of female employment 'activation', and the political imperative of being 'modern and contemporary', political parties, left and right, rhetorically promote policies for a modern working family where parents share the care of children and fathers are engaged. The evidence showing an increase in British fathers' care time and reduction in paid work time suggests that a dichotomy between 'good provider' and 'active carer' is an inaccurate depiction of British fatherhood (Koslowski and Williams 2007; Smith Koslowski 2011) and that both practices are embedded in contemporary fathering. Indeed qualitative studies of fatherhood in Britain are most likely to portray diversity: commitment to the labour market can occur alongside expressive caring practices (Brannen et al. 2004) in a 'pick and mix' style (Yarwood 2011).

However, despite a political rhetoric of 'shared parenting' successive governments have adopted designs based on maternal transfer, which are known not to encourage paternal uptake (Moss and Deven 2006). There has been caution in restructuring or reforming parental leave architecture based on a post-war maternalist template of long, low paid maternity leave. The legacy of a long mother-centred leave has been resilient and to some extent has hindered design innovation in the UK. The government which introduced paternity leave in 2003 at the same time extended maternity leave even further from 9 to 12 months (HM 2002).

By the beginning of 2015, the statutory leave available for British fathers was: (1) *Paternity Leave* an individual entitlement, 2 weeks in duration after birth at a flat-rate payment of £138.18 (€160) a week, or 90 % of average weekly earnings if that is less (HM Government 2015); (2) *Parental Leave* initiated in 1999 as part of the EU Parental Leave Directive, an individual entitlement, 18 weeks, unpaid, up to the child's fifth birthday, with a maximum of 4 weeks leave to be taken in any one calendar year; (3) *Additional Paternity Leave*, introduced in 2010 (and implemented in April 2011), an option for mothers to transfer part of the 52 weeks maternity leave

entitlement to the father/ partner from 20 weeks after the birth or adoption of a child. Fathers taking APL can have access to the maternity pay entitlement relabelled Additional Statutory Paternity Pay (ASPP), which by 20 weeks is flat rate and available only until 39 weeks as week 40–52 statutory maternity leave is unpaid (O'Brien et al. 2014). (4) *Shared Parental Leave* a new provision since April 2015 with a similar maternal transfer design as APL but enabling the transfer to occur from 2 weeks rather than 20 weeks after birth (4 weeks for manual workers), and offering more flexibility in use than APL .

The Additional Paternity Leave legislation provided the national policy setting for the fathers in this study who were interviewed during 2013 and 2014. Their leave from employment was not an individual entitlement or right but instead a provision mediated at their partner's discretion and her formal eligibility .[2] In addition, fathers accessing APL were also subject to the national eligibility criteria, relevant for paternity leave too, that: they are the biological father of the child or the mother's husband, partner or civil partner; they expect to have responsibility for the child's upbringing; they have worked continuously for their employer for 26 weeks ending with the fifteenth week before the baby is due and remain employed at the time of the child's birth.

In addition APL fathers needed to give 8 weeks' notification of their wish to take APL to employers. The conditionality of continuous and secure employment assumes a degree of permanency and clearly excludes the growing number of British fathers working in precarious employment situations such as 'zero-hour' and temporary contracts (ONS 2015). Notably all but one of the fathers and partners of the current study are in professional secure occupations.

10.3 What Is Known About British Fathers Taking Leave Alone?

Although government ministers acclaimed both APL and SPL legislation as innovations to enhance fathers' engagement in the first year of children's lives - 'This [APL] enables fathers to play a bigger part in bringing up their children' (Guardian 2010) - backstage civil servant predictions were less optimistic. The formal regulatory impact assessment was that uptake would be low - 4–8 % of eligible fathers (HM 2010). Subsequent estimates of APL uptake were even lower. Data released by

[2] All women employees are eligible for 26 weeks 'Ordinary Maternity Leave' (OML) plus a further 26 weeks of 'Additional Maternity Leave' (AML). Women employees who have worked for their employer continuously for 26 weeks, up to the fifteenth week before the week the baby is due, and who meet a minimum earnings test, are eligible for 'Statutory Maternity Pay' (SMP) consisting of six weeks' payment at 90 % of average gross weekly earnings, with no ceiling, plus 33 weeks of flat-rate payment at £138.18 (O'Brien et al. 2014).

the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills[3] report less than 1 % in 2011–2012, and around 1.4 % of eligible men between 2012 and 2013. These figures are based on an estimation of the numbers of employers who claim back statutory payments for fathers taking APL as there is no formal recording of leave uptake by fathers or mothers in the UK, unlike in other European countries (Moss 2014). Not all employers claim back statutory pay, however, and if fathers take leave after 9 months they are not entitled to any statutory pay, so these estimates are likely an underestimation, though nonetheless indicative of the low take-up.

Studies profiling the characteristics or experiences of fathers taking APL are rare in the UK. Formally they must meet the eligibility criteria as outlined above. A survey of UK doctors found that while a majority took paternity leave, only 3 % reported taking APL (Gordon and Szram 2013). Similarly national evidence shows that by the end of the decade over 90 % of fathers take some time off work after childbirth (Chanfreau et al. 2011). Those taking paternity leave were most likely to take the statutory 2 weeks (50 %), but 34 % took less than 2 weeks, and 16 % took more than 2 weeks. The odds of taking paternity leave were significantly higher for men working in the public sector and other workplaces where there were family-friendly arrangements. As shown in other countries, local workplace norms can facilitate or hinder fathers taking statutory paternity leave or any leave after childbirth (Haas et al. 2002). Where there were no family-friendly arrangements available, the take-up of time off work following the birth was lowest (only 88 % of fathers took time off compared with 93 % taking time off where there were between one or two family-friendly arrangements available). In a UK qualitative study of fathers' experience of working flexibly, Gatrell et al. (2014) show how British fathers can feel marginalized from the possibilities of flexible work if line managers focus only on their economic provider roles. Similarly UK doctors who did not take up APL reported concerns about impact on career progression and workplace reasons but the fathers also mentioned impracticalities of the law, and poor awareness (Gordon and Szram 2013).

10.4 Theoretical and Methodological Framework

The overall aim of the study was to explore the intersections of intimacy, gender and equality, through research with couples where both partners take leave alone in the first year after the birth of a child. The study drew on the proposition that intimacy is a mediating factor in couples' gender roles, based on research with couples which found that women were willing to ignore instances of inequality if they felt 'loved' (Jamieson 2012; Twamley 2012) and other research which has shown that intimacy and intimate relationships shape a couple's ability to co-parent (Cowan and Cowan 2000). In line with the overall aim of this book, we will focus in this chapter on

[3] http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm140403/text/140403w0001.htm

fathers' motivations and experiences of taking leave – with data from mothers supplementing fathers' data where relevant.

The main theoretical framework informing the analysis presented here is that cultural constructions of gender shape parents' behaviour and ability to parent differently. In the UK there are highly gendered models of appropriate care, despite shared parenting rhetoric. In this paper we examine how parents understand their particular division of leave in relation to these models of parenting. Undertaking this chapter has also led us to examine how policy shapes behaviour, and we have therefore examined the ways in which the current policy framing and context has influenced participants' motivations and experiences of fathers' leave taken alone.

10.4.1 Methods and Sample

The full study used multiple data collection methods with both members of the couple in an effort to unpack how the intimate relationship acts as a mediating factor in parents' gender roles and parenting practices during leave. Drawing on data from both members of the couple also elucidates the negotiations and tensions between mother and father in resolving their parenting roles (see Pahl 1989; McKay and Doucet 2010). Participants were interviewed first with their partner present and then separately; each participant kept a reflective diary for a week during the father's APL[4]; and each father and one mother[5] was observed for a half day during their leave. The couple interviews explored the collective constructed story of APL, while the separate interviews allowed a more in-depth focus on each individual's experience. Participants were broadly asked to discuss their pregnancy, birth, early leave-taking experiences, motivation to take APL, and their overall experiences in the first year since the birth of their child. Research diaries were requested from the participants to elicit issues that are potentially more difficult to discuss in person, such as disagreements between spouses and emotional responses, as well as for eliciting activities that the participants may see as insignificant, taken for granted, or which they are likely to forget, for instance regular and mundane activities of care (Gabb 2008). The observations had two functions: firstly, to build trust and rapport between the parents and the researcher, and secondly, to observe practices of care and the relationship between the parents and their children.

All the interviews, diaries and fieldnotes were fully transcribed and analysed using the NVivo computer programme, version ten (QSR International 2012). The analysis broadly followed the methods of constructivist grounded theory, as outlined by Charmaz (2006). In this chapter we draw primarily on the interview material and observations.

[4] One participant (Kylie) never submitted a diary. All names are pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality.

[5] Only one woman was observed on leave as all the other couples were recruited after the men had started their leave, by which time the women had returned to work.

The couples were recruited in a variety of ways: Three women responded to a post on a UK parent forum called 'Mumsnet'; one father was contacted via a local fathers' group in London; and one father was contacted via his online blog (where he was discussing his experiences of APL). Anonymity and confidentiality were assured to each participant (pseudonyms are used throughout this paper) and informed consent was sought before commencing data collection.

Table 10.1 shows the characteristics of the couples included in the study. They are all white, first-time parents, in their 30s or above, and have a university education. Couple income levels vary quite substantially across the sample, however, in all couples the man and woman earn similar amounts or the woman earns more. Three couples are from the UK, one couple were from mainland Europe, and one from Australia.

In terms of their leave-taking patterns, in three couples the woman took more leave than the man, in one couple they shared equally the leave, and in the remaining couple they shared the official leave period equally, but then the father took an extra 3 months of leave without pay on top of his APL. APL is only available to the father from 5 months (20 weeks) after the birth until the child turns 1 year, thus in terms of timing and sequencing generally mothers were the main carer of the child during the first 5–6 months, once fathers returned to employment after the initial 2 week paternity leave. However, one father, Simon, started leave at 4 months when his wife returned to work. He used a combination of annual leave and parental leave until his APL started. The fathers received statutory pay if they started their leave before 9 months. None received enhanced benefits from work during APL.

10.5 Findings

10.5.1 Motivations and Decisions to Take Leave

The participants cited multiple motivations to use APL, but primarily they reported that sharing leave was 'fairer', since both parents could share the 'joy' of parenting, the difficulties of full-time care, and the expectant career penalty of extended leave. Here Simon speaks about how it came about that he took APL, in his couple interview:

> […] I think it was the woman taking a year out of her career is like quite, it has other effects other than just not being paid for a year, and how like three months is far less bad. But I think we agreed that between us – three months, if you take three months off it's not quite as bad and that therefore, seeing as we do the same job, I could take three months off and we'd be back in the same boat and that would be fine. **Simon**, **Lawyer, 35** (3 months leave)

For Simon, parity in repercussions and responsibilities of childcare were the most important factors in deciding to take leave. They chose to both take 3 months after reading the book '*Shattered*' (Asher 2012) which cited research that 3 months of leave has a negligible impact on a career. APL is only available from 20 weeks, so

Table 10.1 Characteristics of study parents

Name	Nationality	Age	Education	Employment sector/ occupation	Home ownership	Salary	Leave taken (months)	Interviews undertaken at	Observation undertaken at
Kylie	Australian	34	BA	Finance	Rent home	£61-100,000	6	10 months (CI) 12 months (II)	
Jason	Australian	34	Post Deg	Charity	Rent home	£31-40,000	6+3	10 months (CI) 12 months (II)	11 months
Peter	Danish	31	BA	Sales assistant	Own home	<£20,000	6	11 months (CI) 12 months (II)	11 months
Anka	Czech	31	Post Deg	Admin	Own home	£20-30,000	6	11 months (CI) 12 months (II)	
Dora	British	33	Post Deg	Lawyer	Own home	£61-100,000	4	5 months (CI) 8 months (II)	
Simon	British	35	Post Deg	Lawyer	Own home	£61-100,000	3	5 months (CI) 8 months (II)	7 months
Charlotte	British	33	Post Deg	Charity	Own home	£41-60,000	8	3 months (CI) 9 months (II)	7 months
Arthur	British	47	Post DIP	Library	Own home	£20-30,000	4	10 months (II)	9 months
Evie	British	31	Post Deg	NationalHealth Service NHS	Rent	£31-40,000	9	10 months (CI) 13 months (II)	
John	British	33	PhD	University	Rent	£41-60,000	3	13 months (II)	11 months

Simon took annual leave and unpaid parental leave until the baby was 20 weeks, when he started APL.

Jason, Arthur and Peter, placed more emphasis on the 'fairness' of both parents having a leave period to develop a bond with the baby. These men were highly engaged in a discourse of 'involved' fatherhood. For example, when Jason and Kylie were asked how it is they came to be taking APL, Jason responds:

> I think I mean before even considering having children, we had always, without agreeing anything, thought that we'd share the [maternity] leave. Probably one for just to be equitable between the two of us, and where we were, we just make it work, whether it was financially supported by the government or not. But I also always wanted to be a stay-at-home dad at some stage. **Jason, Charity worker, 34** (9 months leave)

While Kylie puts a slightly different emphasis in her narrative about their motivations to use APL, she agrees that Jason is more 'naturally' a better fit as a carer, since he enjoys children so much. Jason also reports that Kylie is the more ambitious one in the couple. In addition to 6 months of APL, Jason took 3 months of unpaid leave from work and reduced his working hours to 3 days a week after he returned to work. As he mentions above, he would ultimately like to be a full-time stay-at-home Dad, if their finances allow it. No other father expressed such a desire. Arthur, for example, who also placed an emphasis on leave as a valuable experience to share time with his child, felt that taking leave alone for a period of time would ensure that he was an equal parent with his wife.

The timing of the interview, however, is important in interpreting participants' motivations to take leave. In his first interview with his wife Evie, John initially said that APL was fairer because both parents would share the responsibility and difficulties of full-time care. John and Evie reported a difficult transition to parenting as their daughter was hospitalized for the first 2 weeks of her life. At the time of the interviews they were moving home to another city and both changing jobs, which created further stresses in their lives and they felt made their experiences of leave more difficult. Upon reflection, however, John (and Evie) in his later individual interview and observation recalled that their initial motivations had been to share the 'special time' with their daughter that is afforded by an extended leave period. Their particularly stressful leave periods had coloured their view of leave so that it became more about sharing the 'burden' of care. All in all, however, fathers described taking APL, in one way or another, as 'fair' and more 'equal', which was, for different reasons, an important aspect of their relationships with their wives or partners.

10.5.2 Financial and Work Considerations in the Decision to Take Leave

The time when men are able to take APL they can receive either a small stipend (£138.18 weekly), or no remuneration at all (depending on what weeks are taken). While on average men in the UK tend to earn more than women (World Economic Forum 2014) and therefore a man taking leave is usually more costly to the couple

in forgone income, couples in this study earned similar salaries or the woman earned more. All participants reported that this facilitated their ability to take up APL. Anka and Peter, for example stated:

> Anka: And also I think the financial factor was also quite important in our situation, because I know that many families probably couldn't afford dad staying at home because sometimes men still earn much more than women. […] That's really not sustainable for the family, so in our situation, we are very similar incomes. It didn't really matter if it was my income that dropped or his.
> Peter: Because it would've dropped anyway. There's no difference.
> **Anka**, **Administrator, 31** (6 months leave) and **Peter**, **Sales Assistant, 31** (6 months leave)

For Simon and Dora, the fact that they have similar jobs and earn the same amount was pivotal in their decision to use APL and in the overall narrative of their relationship and parenting. They explain that this 'fact' of equality means that there are no 'obvious answers' as to who should do what in terms of care and housework. Simon says:

> Because we had this fairly special position of us both having similar jobs and similar incomes, that it's not entirely clear who should do the laundry, who should make dinner. Or who should organize for the carpenters to come and quote for the stairs. **Simon**, **Lawyer, 35** (3 months leave)

They frequently referred to their work parity throughout their interviews. This explicit and repeated reference to similar earnings was unusual amongst the couples, who generally drew on a notion of 'fairness' as a part of an intimate partnership, rather than based on similar earnings/work responsibilities. Even so, it is significant (even in a small sample) that in none of the couples the man earned more than the woman, and perhaps points to the worth afforded a woman's career based on her earnings, as well as the overall 'cost' of men taking leave.

Where the woman earned more than the man – in the cases of Charlotte and Arthur and Kylie and Jason – the couples were adamant that this had *not* been the basis of their decision to use APL, but had merely facilitated the affordability of leave-taking. The adamancy apparent in their accounts, appeared to stem from an uncomfortable assumption that the men may be judged to have been 'forced' to take leave by a more domineering and higher earning wife. For example, Kylie said

> So I'm quite conscious with our friends not to position it as the financial aspect of the next phase – because I wouldn't want people to think that he was some kind of, of being, I don't know, doing it because he wasn't earning as much money. And that, so that was kind of lumped on him or anything else. **Kylie, Finance, 34** (6 months leave, partner took 9 months)

In contrast, when asked how she feels about people reacting to her working full-time and/or returning 'early' to work after the birth of her child, Kylie said she had no problems with people seeing her in this way. Kylie's account should be situated in the normative pattern for the majority (89 %) of UK mothers taking 39 of the 52 weeks of leave offered (Chanfreau et al. 2011). It appears then that so-called 'masculine' traits in a woman – such as ambition and career-orientation – were acceptable, but more 'feminine' traits in a man – such as caring and home oriented – were perceived as less acceptable, at least to couples in this study.

10.5.3 Additional Paternity Leave Policy and Context

The study also revealed how gendered norms and the particular policy constraints (which are in turn shaped by gendered norms) shape couples' negotiations around leave. Specifically, men's uptake of APL is constructed in the couple narratives as his individual choice, rather than a negotiated couple decision. In couple interviews, women report presenting APL as an option to their partners, for which some noted a corresponding gratitude for the offer:

> Anka: I wanted to give my husband a chance to experience how it is to stay at home with a little baby. **Anka, Administrator, 31** (6 months leave, partner took 6 months)
> Interviewer: You mentioned that you thought Dora felt a little bit conflicted -- did you ever feel a bit conflicted about her going back to work and you…?
> Simon: Not really, I felt quite fortunate that she was wanting to go back to work and willing to let me take time off. **Simon**, **Lawyer, 35** (3 months leave)

In response to this 'offer' of leave, the men refer to the aforementioned 'fairness' of accepting to take leave to share the career penalty and/or the care responsibility of a new baby. Women reiterate statements such as *'I left it up to him'* and *'it was completely his decision'*, possibly in a bid to show his willingness in taking leave and perhaps to preserve notions of 'masculinity'. Women also reported that they would have been content to take the full leave if he had not accepted to take APL, since they did not like the idea of their child being in daycare before the age of 9 months or 1 year (depending on the couple). The exception is Dora and Simon where Dora reported intending to employ a nanny if her husband did not take up APL.

The policy context – as a transfer of maternity leave from the mother to the father when she returns to work – clearly contributes to this narrative, since the leave is constructed as 'properly' hers, albeit with the possibility of transferral. The result is that women report 'gratitude' and pride in their partners for taking leave and spoke of him as a kind of role model to his peers which they hoped would 'normalize' the practice. For example, Anka said:

> I actually felt quite proud [unclear 00:11:55] when we decided. I remember sometimes my friends […] on Facebook, for example. I saw one photo that "Oh like men think that maternity leave is [a holiday]…" […] and there were lots of comments like "yeah, men don't know when they come home and they expect everything to be ready, clean and baby's fed and sleep. It's not so easy." I could then write like "Yeah my husband actually knows something about that." […] And there was like a discussion that every man should try it and see so they then understand that it's not as easy as they think. It's not a holiday. **Anka, Administrator, 31** (6 months leave, husband took 6 months)

Implicit in this account is a clear inequality in public perceptions of leave-taking by men and women: In this context where it is so rare for men to take leave alone, women were never, nor are in general, 'commended' for taking leave, nor for looking after their child. The pride and gratitude reported by women in their partners makes sense within the context perhaps, but also serves to reinforce the 'naturalness' of women taking primary responsibility for young children, even as these couples were trying to challenge gendered parenting norms.

This relational exchange between the couple around leave, is akin to Hochschild's writings on the 'gift economy' of couples. Hochschild (2003) explains that in a two working household, a man may feel that his small contribution to taking care of the house is actually much more than either the average man does, or than what his father did. He therefore sees his household work as an 'extra' contribution and so a 'gift' to his wife, and feels he can legitimately expect gratitude from his wife. Concordance in the understanding of 'gifting' is important to maintain a relationship since, as Hochschild says, 'the sense of a genuine giving and receiving is a part of love' (2003:105). The couples in this study appear to be configuring APL as a *gift exchange*: the woman 'gives' her husband the opportunity to take APL, and he 'gifts' her father involvement by taking it.

This understanding of gifting leave does not counteract gendered parenting roles, but rather reinforces them. It emanates both from the structure of the leave as 'transferable' from the mother to her partner, and from the broader context where men taking leave is unusual. However, as Hochschild argues, 'changes in the broader culture also shift the many tiny mental baselines that undergird a person's sense of a gift' (Hochschild 2003:104). And this was evident in the couples' narratives. So they both formulated the leave as a gift exchange, and challenged their own constructions of this gift exchange. For example, after being asked whether she and her husband John would consider taking APL again if they had another child, Evie said 'it's completely up to John to decide', to which John responded that he would be happy to take APL again. This discussion was returned to in the individual interview with Evie:

> Interviewer: How would you have felt if he didn't want to (take APL again)?
> Evie: I think that would have been quite challenging. I'd have found that quite tricky because .. I guess – yeah, I don't know. I think I would have respected that more with him having done it, than if he was just like "no I'm not doing that", without discussion or without having had the experience. But at the same time, if it's something that I would be doing – I guess it would depend on his reasons actually. If it was just that actually it's not very fun [laughs] and I don't want to do it, so you can just do it, I don't think I'd find that very fair – coming back to fairness again. [laughs] But I don't know – I can't really think of a good reason why I would, when I would maybe be more accepting. **Evie, Health therapist, 31** (9 months leave, partner took 3 months)

So we can see that Evie constructed the leave transfer as '*up to John'* in the couple interview, but in the individual interview struggled to find a valid reason for him not accepting his leave - 'her gift'. She said, "I wanted him to take it because he wanted to but I would have found it very difficult if he hadn't wanted to."

10.5.4 Fathers' Experiences of APL

Tiring and Hard Work

Observations of fathers on leave demonstrate the routine and repetitive nature of life with a new baby, whatever the sex of the carer. The most time and effort was spent on feeding and encouraging babies to sleep, with fathers entering into long and detailed conversations about the various whims and particularities of their babies,

along with how they attempted to arrange some order on the day, while also following their child's lead. For example, the following is an extract from an observation with Jason:

> Jason says his daily dilemma is whether he should let [son] sleep or wake him for an activity? He knows [son] will enjoy the activity, but then he needs his sleep too and maybe he will be unhappy if woken up. (This conversation went on for several minutes.) **Jason, Charity worker, 34** (9 months leave)

Another father, John, expressed multiple difficulties with his young baby, who refused to sleep in her cot during the day and in fact would only sleep while carried in the sling as he walked. Indeed, on the day of the observation session, John spent almost the entire period with his daughter in his arms. Upon arrival he was already putting on the sling to leave the house as it was approaching his daughter's nap time. After walking around almost 2 hours while the baby slept in the sling, he stopped for lunch in a café when she woke, played in the playground with her, and then walked for another 2 hours while she sang and eventually fell asleep again. John never actually had any 'down time' during this observation period and from his reports very little during his leave alone with his daughter, since for every nap he was walking around, and while the baby was awake she demanded attention. John described feeling severe fatigue while on leave, feelings of frustration and, particularly at the beginning of his leave, of incapability. Another mother also described how her husband had become unexpectedly sensitive while on leave, not allowing any discussions on his care practices which she felt was down to his feelings of incompetency.

Fathers were also observed shopping for groceries, washing laundry, baking and cleaning. Nonetheless, the couples reported some disagreements over the amount of housework fathers did while on leave. In general, women felt that men accomplished less than they had while they were on leave – such as cleaning the house or shopping for groceries. In most cases this was resolved, either by the men increasing their housework load, or by the women reducing their expectations (in response to arguments from their husbands that there is less available time when the babies are above 6 months old). In one case, with Peter and Anka, these disagreements were never really resolved. This impasse appeared to be because Peter's main motivation to take leave was to build a stronger relationship with his son, and potentially his association with housecleaning as less 'masculine' than involved fathering. He repeatedly joked *'I am a good father but I am not a good househusband!'* In this case, APL appeared to lead to more co-parenting, but not necessarily more equality overall in the division of household labour.

In addition to housework, fathers were observed participating in a range of caring activities with the baby, at home (for example, reading and playing) and outside the household, (including, swimming classes, musical groups, parent and baby rhyme time events and local playground visits). Fathers enjoyed these activities, but also expressed boredom at times and described the leave period as more difficult than anticipated, with far less 'personal' time than they had hoped. All fathers reported feeling 'ready' to return to work once their leave came to an end, except for Jason who extended his leave by an extra 3 months by requesting unpaid leave from his workplace. He also dropped down to part-time hours once he returned to work.

Isolating Experience

Participants' experiences of leave were strongly influenced by the unusualness of APL in the UK context. Fathers reported having few or no friends with whom to share their leave experience, and frequently contrasted their experiences with that of their wives/partners, who broadly speaking had a far wider and closer circle of friends while on leave.[6] This context led some men to express feelings of isolation, as Peter reflected during an observation session:

> Peter chats while the TV is on. Says he feels lonely sometimes as there are no other men. He's approached men at 'Rhyme Time',[7] none were on APL. Also tried to form a Dads' group with other men from work, none of whom took APL. Says he was first in his company. **Peter, Sales assistant, 31** (6 months leave)

None of the men ever met any other man on APL during their leave period. Typically they were the only man present with a baby in public places during observations. When other men with babies were observed, for example at a parent and baby session, participants had normally already approached them to find they either worked from home 1 day a week or part-time / evenings, in order to bring the child to that particular event.

There were, of course, plenty of mothers on leave. Previous research conducted in the US (Rochlen et al. 2010) with 88 stay-at-home fathers found that 40 % of the participants reported experience of role-related stigma, with 70 % attributing that to stay-at-home mothers, and a large number experiencing stigma in playground settings. Fathers in this study reported some mixed reactions but in general a positive response from mothers at 'parent and baby' groups, but as Jason says,

> what you don't get is the "let's go for a coffee, let's go and have lunch", as much. They're happy to talk to you, and that sort of thing, which is lovely, but it's that sort of next step in the friendship or whatever it might be doesn't come . come as easy..' **Jason, Charity worker, 34** (9 months leave)

While Jason felt excluded due to his sex, other men reported self-excluding themselves from potential female friendships: Arthur reported not wanting to hang out with other mothers on leave, as he felt it would be 'too complicated' with the potential sexual undertones created by such an intimacy. In order to avoid isolation, he was making efforts to meet other men while on leave, but even in this early period of leave (he was interviewed at 3 weeks into his leave) he was beginning to feel lonely. Parent and baby groups, while giving less intimate interactions than the women reported having while on leave, did serve to help men on leave in 'getting out of the house' and in creating some adult interaction in their days.

The decision to take a leave which so few fathers take up, also had the consequence of isolating participants from their peers. Peter, for example, wrote the following in his diary:

> I even lost one of my friends during my time on APL. He thought I was leeching on benefits. I told him I'm just taking the remainders of my wife's Maternity Pay. But he's very conventional and thinks a woman should take care of the kids rather than men. I told him

[6] Only Anka reported experiencing similar levels of isolation to the male participants; Anka is a relatively recent migrant to the UK and said she had few friends in London.

[7] Parent and baby playgroup.

> I think he's a traditionalist, he got offended and didn't want to be my friend anymore. I don't know. Feels silly that someone cannot be friends with you because you want to spend time with your son. **Peter, Sales assistant, 31** (6 months leave)

This was the most extreme example of a hostile reaction. Others reported that friends or family appeared to react defensively on hearing about the couple's decision to take APL, for example by listing the reasons why that would not have been possible for them, or mothers saying that they would not have liked their husband to 'steal' her leave in that way. McKay and Doucet (2010) reported similar findings in Canada amongst couples discussing the take-up of gender-neutral parental leave. Their participants also understood the leave as properly the mothers and men reported avoiding leave so as not to 'take away' their partner's opportunity to take it. The transferral policy in the UK is likely to compound the notion of the leave as the woman's, and may in part explain the very low take-up.

However, some couples reported a broadly positive response from peers – Charlotte and Arthur, for example, said that they knew of other couples who had taken APL and that their peers were very supportive and some planned to do the same in the future. Arthur's best friend is also a full-time stay-at-home Dad. Some couples reported that colleagues or friends were surprised at their decision to use APL (often because they had never heard of it) but were at the same time very supportive and positive. Whatever the reactions though, either positive or negative, actors in their social networks had a tendency to 'other' the couple, which some enjoyed and others less so. This 'othering' process, was not described as a necessarily inferiorising process (c.f. Jensen 2011), but as being positioned as different or apart from the majority.

10.5.5 Perceived Consequences of Taking Leave

A Closer Bond and a More Competent Father

The fathers and mothers reported fathers' increased confidence and competence in taking care of their baby, and a strengthened bond between father and child as the primary consequence of APL. Simon, for example, enthusiastically described how having the sole responsibility of care during APL had been 'really beneficial' for his relationship with his son:

> Interviewer: So having taken more responsibility – in what way does it affect your relationship with [son]?
>
> Simon: Well just because I know, like, I can just read him really well. Like I knew he was doing a poo earlier on, I saw half an hour ago he was getting quite tired and it's just you know what he's up to and what he's thinking, or how he's feeling. And also the way he responds to me when, I like, come home from work, he's generally quite happy. So we have this like – I don't know, quite a strong bond, which I don't think would have happened in quite the same way if . I hadn't have been off with him. Just you know, trying to keep him from being grumpy before bed time, things like that. **Simon, Lawyer, 35** (3 months leave)

Likewise, Jason reflected:

> Now he and I have really got that bond (that son and mother developed). More so now, I feel like he's my little buddy and we're a little team and just spend our days together and do stuff together. It's kind of like almost like you're best mates. But I didn't have that beforehand because we weren't spending that much time together. **Jason**, **Charity worker, 34** (9 months leave)

Kylie, Jason's wife, also discussed her observations of Jason's increased confidence. Initially, she remarks, he could not take any advice from her as he considered it a criticism of his parenting. Now, he listens to her, but states his own opinion. This gaining of independence or emergence of co-parenting was a common theme across the accounts. John's wife Evie, remarked 'there was a point I think not very long into John starting paternity leave where he just stopped asking me [laughs] "what should I do?" She went on to describe that before APL, although John had been very actively involved in taking care of their daughter, she had always felt that she was positioned as the 'expert', but after his APL both reported that John was far more independent in taking care of their daughter.

Consequences for Career

Despite the rarity of taking leave alone in the UK, none of the fathers reported a negative reaction from their workplace. Even though in all cases the men were the first in their workplace to take APL, they did not in general anticipate or experience any problems, which they attributed to other (male) employees' previous use of flexible working. For example, Arthur said:

> Interviewer: Okay, yeah at the last interview you hadn't actually told your work that you wanted to go on APL. So I was just wondering how that went?
>
> Arthur: Yeah, it went well. […] [My line manager] was like initially 'oh no, how am I going to cope with just me?' But yeah, he had a chat with his line manager and it was absolutely fine. I think, as I said to you, he was familiar with the whole -- he has three children himself, he took a year out himself, before APL was an option. […] But really I wasn't too worried because I know [my workplace] is the sort of place where I think they have an attitude towards -- there are policies in place about this, it's not -- I think if I'd been in the private sector it might have been -- there might have been less kind of an attitude of -- I don't know. **Arthur, Librarian, 47** (3 months leave)

Previous research suggests that fathers in the public sector, in larger firms and in female-dominated workplaces, are more likely than those in private firms, smaller firms or male-dominated workplaces to take leave (Bygren and Duvander 2006; Chanfreau et al. 2011). Two of the fathers work in the public sector (a university and a library) and one in a female dominated charity. Simon works in a Swedish company which he argued was more 'used to' the idea of men taking extended leave. Only Peter worked in a large private retail store which had, as far as he was aware, little experience of men taking leave, but nonetheless he reported no adverse reaction.

When asked about any longer term impact on their careers, fathers reported that it was too early to tell, but they felt that the time they had taken (on average about 5 months for this group of fathers) was unlikely to have a major impact, or that the

impact was unlikely to be more than their wife was experiencing. Having a partner who earns a similar amount, or more, is also more likely to take the pressure off fathers as breadwinners. Either way, Simon, Arthur and Jason all reported that they had been looking forward to taking time out from their jobs, and that in fact this was part of their motivation to take APL. For Simon, a lawyer, this was a means to do something different for a while and to take up other interests (such as in home decoration). For Arthur and Jason, a librarian and a charity worker respectively, taking leave alone was an opportunity to distance themselves from work that they were not enjoying. Peter did not mention this motivation, but also appeared to have a low attachment to his current work. From this group of fathers John, a university Lecturer, was really the only father who appeared to enjoy his work. Thus, it may be that fathers who are less attached to their work are more likely to take leave and/or are less concerned about the potential impacts of leave on their work. These findings reflect those of Gatrell and colleagues (2015) who conducted a large qualitative study with fathers in the UK. They observed a tendency amongst some men to prioritise the care of their children over paid work, forgoing opportunities for promotion so as to facilitate this orientation.

10.6 Conclusions

This chapter has presented findings from a study of fathers taking leave alone in a normative context of active fatherhood set against weak formal institutional support. In Britain individual entitlements to paid paternity leave are still minimal in duration and lacking in generosity in terms of income replacement. Britain's 52 weeks is one of the longest maternity leaves in Europe with the first 6 weeks comparatively well paid and the remaining time to 39 weeks paid at low income replacement levels. Similarly, an 18 week parental leave provision through the EU Directive, whilst available as an individual entitlement to both fathers and mothers, is unpaid and not culturally promoted at a national level. In this societal context fathers of the current study were only able to take extended leave with their baby through a recent flexibility, titled Additional Paternity Leave, introduced to allow mothers to transfer maternity leave to partners.

In the chapter we have concentrated on the study fathers' motivations to take APL, their experiences and the perceived consequences for work and family life. The couple centred design of the study, with its theoretical focus on the intersections of intimacy, gender and equality, has illuminated how private and public gendered positions are negotiated in this ambiguous societal context. Notions of 'fairness' within couples strongly shaped their narrations around leave, whether this was fairness of access to leave or access to more time in employment (through men taking on part of her leave). Nonetheless, interview accounts portray how, despite men's lack of formal individual entitlement, they tended to be positioned as the decision makers in taking leave – '*it's his choice*'. In turn, women's structural agency, both in terms of economic status as higher earners and as holders of the

policy entitlement, was often underplayed. Drawing on Hochschild's (2003) writings on the 'gift economy' of couples, we suggest that couple negotiations around APL can be conceptualised as a form of *gift exchange*. However, the nature of the gift and the power differentials of donator and recipient are imbued with tension. Women portrayed leave as an 'opportunity' to their partners, but disclosed privately their concerns that their 'offer' may not be taken up and ambivalence about their gratitude when he did. Although a norm of caring fatherhood is endorsed in British culture, so too is an expectation of work commitment, reinforced by rather weak institutional support when men become parents and comparatively high levels of paternal working hours (Connolly et al. 2013). In this context, the gift of time to care, even with job protection, carries gendered and economic risks to men, with a potential to challenge continuing aspects of masculine identity and status. The *gratitude* displayed by mothers in the relational gift exchange, may be part of a deferential tactic by a more subordinate status carrier to position men as the deciders and more powerful (Bell and Newby 1976; Backett 1982). The pattern of gratitude display being more evident in the couple interviews than in the individual interviews supports this hypothesis and resonates with Fox's (2009) study of first-time couples becoming parents in Canada. Fox argues that the gratitude and praise given by women to men when he performs care, is a form of "care" that she gives to him, and creates further inequalities as the mother takes extra care of the father in exchange for him taking some care of the child.

In terms of the observational data and reports from fathers themselves, there was evidence of increased competency and independence in the care of babies and for men's growing connection to infant life, described also by mothers about the fathers. These British findings, albeit from a small case study, support the emerging body of international research about the experiences and impact of being a father on leave alone (e.g. Brandth and Kvande 2002; Wall 2014). Future research will need to extend sampling strategies to represent a wider range of British fathers in the workplace to explore the generalizability of our findings. More research is also needed to see how sustainable these parenting practices are and to examine the impact of future life events, particularly a second child, especially since not all of the fathers stated a wish to take a period of leave alone with a second child. As far as the broader policy context is concerned, clearly greater shared caring of young children by British parents will be better realised when leave policy design moves beyond a maternal template and offers fathers, as well as mothers, individual non-transferable well-paid entitlements to care.

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Chapter 11
Fathers on Leave Alone in France: Does Part-Time Parental Leave for Men Move Towards an Egalitarian Model?

Danielle Boyer

11.1 Introduction

This chapter will focus on fathers receiving the partial rate "Complément de libre choix d'activité" (CLCA) child-rearing benefit, paid by the Family Branch of the Social Security. The allowance, a lump sum, is intended to offset the drop in salary when a mother or a father chooses part-time employment as part of a parental leave scheme (see Box 11.1). These fathers partially meet the criteria of the book's focus on father's leave alone: although they are only on part-time parental leave, they spend this time alone with their child, usually one whole day per week and most of the time until the child is reached the age of 3 years while their partners, in the majority of cases work full-time.

Research into the fathers' case is interesting on several levels: they benefit from a measure traditionally granted to women – 96.3 % of the beneficiaries are female- and, by choosing not to work full-time (which is the accepted norm, especially for men) these fathers have already renounced certain gender-based professional aspirations (Bauer 2008; Bloss 2001). Besides during part-time parental leave they spend – in theory – more one-on-one time with their child,[1] although as a general rule it is rare for French fathers to take on parental duties single-handed (Lesnard 2003; Bustreel 2005; Boyer and Nicolas 2013).

We can therefore imagine that this minority group embodies – more so than for other fathers – models and representations of fathering skills and an equal division of parental duties. Having made a formal decision to balance their family and profes-

[1] The CLCA can be paid out until the child is 3 years of age; this is a relatively long period compared to the situation of other fathers studied in the publication.

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Box 11.1: Part-Time Parental Leave and Partial Rate Child Rearing Benefit in France

Part-time parental leave is covered by French labour law, offering the parents of young children the right to temporarily reduce their professional activity until the third birthday of their youngest child. In order to benefit, the parent must be an employee, must have at least one child under the age of 3, and must have been working for their employer for at least a year at the time of the child's birth.

People on parental leave are not paid. Rather the French social protection system offers fathers and mothers a family benefit, the *Complément de libre choix d'activité* (ClCA), which is allocated provided that certain previous employment conditions are met. The partial rate CLCA is available for parents with children below the age of 3 who are working part-time. Its aim is to compensate, in part, for their decreased income.

For a first child, the partial rate CLCA can be received for 6 months, or until the child turns 3 years of age from the second child onwards.

The amount of partial rate CLCA is paid on flat rate basis and depends on the hours worked. At he time the survey was carried out, the value of the partial rate CLCA varied from:

- €247.98 to €430.40 per month if the parent works below 50 % (of full-time hours)
- €143.05 to €325.47 per month if the parent works between 50 % and 80 % of full-time.

Since 2004, a larger financial incentive to opt for the partial-rate CLCA encourages part-time work. As a result, partial-rate CLCA take-up has increased remarkably. Until 2003, the number of beneficiaries of partial-rate was stable – at around 134,000 recipients – just over 26 % of all recipients. From the end of 2003 to the end of 2010, the proportion of beneficiaries receiving the partial rate grew considerably, by 60 %, reaching 45 % in 2013.

Uptake of this benefit by men is still rare, with fathers making up only 3.7 % of the recipients.

There is a more frequent uptake by men of the partial-rate CLCA (71 % compared to 45 % for the mothers). In addition, 27 % of these fathers, compared to 1 % of the mothers, receive the allowance at the same time as their partners).

As part of a bill aiming at equality between men and woman, a reform of the CLCA was introduced on January 2015. Its objective was in particular to ensure a fairer division of the time mothers and fathers spend with their child (ren).

Breakdown of mothers and fathers receiving the CLCA different rates

	Fathers		Mothers	
	Staff	(%)	Staff	(%)
Clca full-time	55515	29	283,569	55
Clca part-time	13,354	71	227085	45
Ensemble	18869	100	496455	100

Source: Observatoire national de la petite enfance (ONPE) 2012; **Field**: mothers and fathers receiving CLCA – France

sional lives, these individuals can provide insight into how they manage to do this on a daily basis. What are their experiences and what conjugal and parental ideals are these based on? During parental leave, has the division of household tasks and parental duties evolved? Has the way they see their fathering skills changed? Which aspects of behaviour do gender norms continue to exercise their influence? Finally, are we witnessing new types of attitudes to work and to commitment to family life?

11.2 Method and Sample

The research data was drawn from two data sources (see Box 11.2). The first source being the management file of the "Caisse Nationale d'Allocations Familiales" (the national family benefits fund).[2] This file includes individual data on fathers receiving the CLCA. In particular, it provides information on the number of fathers receiving the partial rate CLCA, their employment status, how long they receive the benefit for, their conjugal and family status and their socio-economic category – their income level in particular. The second data source is a qualitative survey carried out between December 2011 and April 2012 using semi-structured face-to-face interviews in the participants' homes.[3]

Box 11.2: Methodology
The study is based on an analysis of the data concerning CLCA beneficiaries recorded by the CNAF, which is an exhaustive national file covering all beneficiaries. This analysis was conducted through face-to-face semi-structured interviews carried out from December 2011 to April 2012 with 25 fathers who receive the partial-rate CLCA, in their own homes, and from October 2013 to April 2014 with 25 mothers who also receive the partial-rate CLCA. These recipients all live with a partner and, given the conditions of this benefit, all have at least one child under the age of 3. They receive the 80 % partial-rate CLCA, i.e. they work 80 % of full-time hours (35 h per week in France). They have 1 day per week off work, usually Wednesday, which is a non-school day in France, in order to take care of their child (ren), for a duration which can start once the child is born and paternity leave has ended, up until the child reaches the age of 3. The interviews lasted between 40 min and 3 hours. In two cases, both partners were on part-time parental leave. In one of these cases, the father and mother were interviewed separately. In the other, at the couple's request, the interview was carried out with both partners at the same time. Although these beneficiaries did not meet the exact requirements of our sample (with only the father or mother on parental leave), we still included them in the sample because the father in question spent his parental leave alone (by this we mean without his partner) with the children.

[2] The Family Division of the Social Security system.

[3] Except for four interviews which were conducted in cafés.

A sample of 25 fathers, who were receiving partial-rate CLCA, as part of a parental leave and working 80 % of full-time hours, were interviewed (Table 11.1). The decision to use such a finely targeted population was justified by its representativeness. Indeed, this is the most common situation among the fathers receiving the part-time CLCA : this category accounts for 86 % of the male beneficiaries of the

Table 11.1 Sample characteristics

First Name	Job	Age	Job of partner	Number of children	How long the beneficiary had been receiving the CLCA at the time of the enquiry (expressed in months)
Fabien C	Engineer in the automotive industry, part-time 80 %	34	IT engineer full-time	2	24
Francois T	Oil company executive, partner part-time 80%	42	Accountant at the SNCF (national public transport company) full-time	2	18
Didier S	Economist at a private heath insurance company part-time 80 %	32	National radio executive full-time	1	3
Etienne Z	Municipal employee, part-time 80 %	40	Municipal employee, full-time	2	26
Aurélien E	Special needs teacher part-time 80 %	31	Special needs teacher full-time	2	7
Vincent I	Accountant at a travel agency, part-time 80 %	50	Sales executive full-time	4	11
Arnaud H	Skilled worker at the *Imprimerie Nationale*, part-time 80 %	37	Head of sales, full-time	2	22
Rémi O	Bus driver region transport service part-time 80 %	45	Nurse in an Hospital full-time	2	8
Thomas M	Municipal employee part-time 80 %	41	Municipal employee part-time 80 %	2	6
Guillaume U	Gardener for the local authority part-time 80 %	44	Regional employee full-time	2	9
Jérome R	Maintenance technician for Air France part-time 80 %	49	Military full-time	3	27
Florient L	Employee in the insurance sector part-time 80 %	39	Employee in a publishing house full-time	2	6
Pierre N	Car industry researcher, part-time 80 %	37	Secondary school teacher full-time	2	18
Martin P	Healthcare assistant, part-time 80 %	55	Special needs teacher full-time	3	15
Valentin B	Municipal employee part-time 80 %	38	Waitress full-time	3	12
Nicolas K	Secondary school teacher	35	University lecturer full-time	3	24
Frédéric Z	Accountant in private sector part-time 80 %	37	Government employee full-time	1	3
Stéphane Q	Regional executive part-time 80 %	39	Executive in the SNCF full-time	2	15
Antoine D	Family counsellor part-time 80 %	35	Social worker full-time	2	15
Laurent G	Printing technician part-time 80 %	34	Head of sales full-time	1	1
Olivier W	Servant part-time 80 %	36	Notary clerk full-time	2	10
Bruno V	Skilled labourer half-time	54	Skilled worker in a clothing factory half-time	2	6
Sébastien L	Engineering manager for a local authority	46	Project manager in the voluntary sector part-time 80 %	2	12
Alexandre J	Postman part-time 80 %	50	Manager in the banking sector Full-time	3	5
Bertrand F	Council employee	33	Archivist	2	19

(continued)

Table 11.1 (continued)

employee in the insurance sector part-time 80 %	39	Employee in a publishing house full-time	2	6
car industry researcher, part-time 80 %	37	secondary school teacher full-time	2	18
healthcare assistant, part-time 80 %	55	**11.1 special needs teacher,** full-time	3	15
municipal employee part-time 80 %	38	information officer full-time	2	12
secondary school teacher	35	university lecturer full-time	3	24
government employee part-time 80 %	37	artist full-time	1	3
job centre employee part-time 80 %	39	employee in the voluntary sector full-time	2	15
youth counsellor part-time 80 %	35	social worker full-time	2	15
school teacher part-time 80 %	34	school teacher full-time	1	1
senior civil servant part-time 80 %	36	notary clerk full-time	2	10
skilled labourer half-time	54	skilled worker in a clothing factory half-time	2	6
engineering manager for a local authority	46	project manager in the voluntary sector part-time 80 %	2	12
postman part-time 80 %	50	Manager in the banking sector Full-time	3	5

part-time rate. For another, in order to produce a sample population that in theory subscribes to values of equality within the couple about parental duties and domestic tasks, we wanted to select fathers who chose to be on parental leave. With reference to the work of Jennifer Bué (2002) which differentiates between "elective" and "imposed" part-time work, it seemed to us that among the men receiving the partial-rate CLCA, those working 80 % of full-time hours were less likely to have had their reduced working hours imposed on them. We would therefore be looking at "elective" part-time work.

In 23 of the 25 cases, fathers were the sole recipients with their partner working full-time. In the two other cases, both partners received the partial-rate CLCA. In all of the cases, since the end of their paternity leave[4] (approximately 2 weeks after the birth of a child) and the end of the maternity leave of their partner (approximately 6 weeks after the birth of a child), fathers spent at least one day alone (i.e. without their partner being present) with their last child less than 3 years old, equivalent to at least one working day per week, while their partners were at work. At the time of the survey, they had been in this situation for 3–77 month, receiving about 325 euros a month (Box 11.2). In all of the cases therefore, fathers are on parental leave with the receipt of child-rearing benefit (CLCA) linked to parental leave.

Additionally, between September 2013 and June 2014, we interviewed 25 mothers in the same situation (on parental leave, working 80 % of full-time hours, receiving reduce rate CLCA). What these women said was not analysed as such, but it did provide a "mirror" analysis of the two sets of answers and allowed us to accurately pinpoint the specific nature of practices and the position taken by the fathers. It also revealed the norms, to which men and women adhere, comply or contest.

The interviews concerned the organization of the day of parental leave and focused on the reasons for working part-time, including: conjugal and professional arrangements; daily life at work and at home; any difficulties encountered by fathers with their paternal, masculine role; the division of housework and parenting duties before and during the parental leave; and how this division was justified. An initial analysis reviewed the practices described above and the justifications given for the ways in which parenting duties and household tasks are allocated. A second analysis throws light on the question of norms and their associated representations. Some of these representations are openly referred to; some are presented as obvious facts. Others are more subtle and difficult to voice but nonetheless see the parents resorting to gender-based behaviour when parenting, ranging from explicit to complex.

11.3 Applying for Part-Time Parental Leave

Even though they represent the majority of male beneficiaries (70 %) the men studied are exceptional because they are part of the small group of fathers (1 in 100) who take parental leave and the 3.7 % of CLCA beneficiaries who are men. The professional setup they adopt when their child is born (reduced working hours, opting for a job compatible with family time, non-ascendant career paths) (Boyer 2013) brings their professional behaviour closer to that of women than men.[5]

[4] In France, the paternity leave and maternity leave are distinct from the parental leave.

[5] For example, after giving birth, 22 % of women reduce their working hours, compared to 6 % of men. (Pailhé, Solaz, 2006)

11.3.1 Breaking Away from the Masculine Stereotype

These men are also exceptional because of their reasons for choosing part-time employment. Indeed, research into part-time work among french men show that, not only is this type of working-time organisation rarely resorted to and when it is, it is rarely because the man wants to achieve a work-life balance. Over two thirds of men working part-time do so not out of choice but out of professional necessity, almost one third are looking for more work and only 7 % opt for this for family reasons (Pax 2013). However, in our sample, all the men interviewed stated that they chose to work part-time. None of them work in "partial jobs" offered by the employer, but rather in "jobs with reduced hours", as chosen by the employee (Bué 2002). For the men interviewed, these jobs offer 1 non-working day per week, most often on Wednesday,[6] the day when French children do not attend school, often referred to as known as "Mums' Day" in France.[7]

The subjects interviewed would appear to have detached themselves from the working world. Mr. C, for example, railed against the "omnipresence" of work: "I'm an engineer and engineers, managerial staff and part-time work, they just don't go together! Whether you are a man or a woman, you are supposed to be present and put in your hours. But I don't agree with this – if the work is done, there is no point in staying on any longer" (Fabien C, 34, engineer in the automotive industry, 34, partner IT engineer). Others, like Mr T. admit to the relatively low importance they give to work "Quite frankly I worry very little about work" (Francois T, Oil company executive, 42, accountant at the SNCF). They also admit to a sense of frustration because they have suffered setbacks in their careers. "So, I do it so as to keep a certain psychological balance (…)" (Didier S, economist at a private heath insurance company, 32, partner national radio executive). It is their partner, who for the most part, has kept up an investment in a full-time professional occupation. Generally speaking, the situation is a life choice for the fathers of this study that takes shape and pushes working life into the background. "Personally, I find it healthier than spending all of my time at work" (Alexandre J, postman, 50, partner manager in the banking sector).

Their professional situation is often the result of careful career management. Men who at the start of their career found themselves in business sectors not geared towards work-life balance often changed position or department, without changing employers, in order to be able to work part-time: "I mean that if you want to work 80 % you have to try to find a job that fits in with that because not all jobs can become part-time" (Guillaume, 44, gardener for the local authority, partner regional civil servant). This is also the case for Mr H, who moved from a

[6] Only two fathers had a different set-up : Friday off for one, and a variable day for the other.

[7] Due to the large number of female employees who take Wednesday off in order to take care of their child (ren).

department labelled "masculine" to another one, mostly composed of women: "When I was in operations it was not possible because phone calls and requests came in every day. If you are not there it's very difficult to catch up, it'll take you an hour to do what might have taken 5 min the previous day, so it would have been more difficult… Whereas now my role is less "front office" and this makes it easier to manage my time. (…) That's why I changed: I was looking for a more administrative department. (…) Where I am now it is mostly women, about 70 % women. The department I was in before was mostly men. Now I am in purchasing, essentially administration." (Arnaud H, skilled worker at the Imprimerie Nationale, 37, partner head of sales).

More globally, the way informants justify themselves would suggest that these men are starting to break away from masculine stereotypes. The fathers interviewed explained that their own "first family" background helped them get used to young children – and the logistics that looking after them involves – in a "*natural*" and uncontrived manner. Mr. S mentioned that his father had brought him up and then he in turn looked after his own brother.

> When I was young… I must have been three, my parents split up and then my father looked after me (…) And because I was 13 years older than my brother – I was 13 when he was born – I looked after him when I was 14–15 years old. I looked after him quite a lot, I would go and pick him up at the day centre, and I would give him his bottle*"* (Didier S, économist at a private heath insurance company, 32, partner manager in national radio,).

Family environment is considered to be a determining factor when it comes to their involvement as fathers. "I don't mind holding a new-born baby because, well, I always had children around me" (Aurélien E, special needs teacher, 31, partner special needs teacher). The skills traditionally associated with gender are mentioned but subsequently dropped in the course of the conversation. For example, in answer to one of our questions on the sharing of parental tasks in a couple, Mr E. took a non-traditional position relating to gender-based social relations: "There are no strict demarcation lines (…) for male status (laughs), it's a pseudo male status, etc." (Laurent G, printing technician, 34, partner, head of sales). In the same way, this man shared his egalitarian vision of male-female relations: "I think that if we reconsidered our respective positions, if we tried to think out of the box sometimes, this would make relations more flexible and relaxed" (Etienne Z, municipal employee, 40, partner municipal employee).

11.3.2 Implementating Egalitarian Values

When we asked about how domestic and parenting tasks were allocated, the fathers met automatically described their relationships as being egalitarian. From fathers' accounts, their participation does not seem to be confined to Wednesdays but

generalises to the rest of the week. For example one such father stated: "I do everything and she does everything" (Antoine D, family counsellor, 35, partner social worker). From the interviews, we get the impression that the men's contribution to doing domestic and parental tasks comes naturally.

It goes without saying", "it is normal" or "it is natural" is often heard.

> For me it is something that I don't make a big deal of, but it's all part of it… it's natural, again, normal to spend time tidying up or washing clothes or taking care of the cooking etc., doing the shopping etc. (Rémi O, bus driver, 45, partner hospital worker).

Very little mention is made of parents taking on specific tasks. It seems to come down to opportunity or habits more than any conjugal agreement. Likewise, Mr S. describes being responsible for the shopping because he has the opportunity to get it done during the week, rather than linked to a principle:

> The shopping… well it's rather… it's true… on Wednesday I usually do some shopping, it's convenient, the children like going for an outing and it's a way of filling the day, so yes it is often me who does it during the week (…) it wasn't really a formal decision though. (Olivier S, secondary school teacher, 36, partner notary clerk).

Couples state that their current system of household and parenting tasks has followed on from their egalitarian organisation prior to parental leave. For these men, reducing their work hours (all the fathers we met[8] had worked full-time before receiving the CLCA) has not resulted in any change in their habits. The examples given mostly concern household tasks and few mention parenting duties. Mr J says:

> It was like this before. Working part-time has allowed us to stabilise our system but it didn't determine the division of labour. It was already like this. (…) I think that it's mostly resulted in having more time to do things. We don't have to wait till Saturday to do the shopping, so that's something (Alexandre J, postman, 50, partner executive position in the banking sector).

The established organisation is presented as being sorted out on a day-to-day basis, ad hoc without prior discussion: "depending on the priorities and our availability and energy we both try to do our bit… We do what we can with this arrangement which is a bit… demanding" (laughter)" (Vincent I, accountant in a travel agency, 50, partner sales manager). Here, availability appears to be the determining factor in the division of labour "things happen 'naturally' depending on our availability" (Bertrand F, Council employee, 39, partner archivist, 2 children). "For the cooking, the cleaning, everything… we split things up depending on who is available" (Laurent G, printing technician, 34, partner head of sales).

[8] Excluding one, who had already started working part-time in order to reduce his workload and help ease organization.

Table 11.2 2011 annual professional income per partner, in families where the father was receiving the reduced-rate CLCA in December 2013

Comparison of partners' incomes before receiving the reduced-rate CLCA	Beneficiary father
Equal	10
Less	55
More	34
Unknown	1
Total	100

Source: ONPE, 2012
Field: Reduced-rate CLCA beneficiary fathers, in December 2013 with positive professional income in 2011, with a child born in 2012 and with a partner who also had a positive professional income in 2011
Note: where the difference between the two partners' incomes does not exceed 5 %, we have considered their incomes to be equal
The average of the annual professional income of the fathers is 21.000 euros

11.3.3 A Conjugal and Pragmatic Arbitration

The practical aspect of the conjugal arrangement is presented as a decisive factor when making their choice. The comparison of the couples'respective workloads and whether or not they could be reduced, their respective salaries, their career development prospects, their position or grade in the company structure, or their employers' willingness to accept parental leave were all taken into consideration. The conclusion was that the father was the better contender for parental leave, but under different circumstances, it could have been the mother: "Well, Madam could not do it, so I got stuck with it!" (Jérome R, maintenance technician for Air France, 49, partner military). A study conducted on the reference population of our sample showed that in the year preceding the birth of the child making them eligible for partial rate CLCA, fathers on the partial rate tend to earn less than their partners (Table 11.2), contrary to the average salary distribution in dual-income households.[9] Fifty-five per cent of fathers receiving the partial rate earned less than their partners before receiving the CLCA. The fathers point out the financial dimension of the conjugal agreement about the fact that CLCA sometimes compensates the loss of income due to part-time activities and does for saving money on childcare costs.

An other reason expressed, is their "Privileged"working conditions comparing to the French men as a general rule. From the start of the interview, professional obsta-

[9] We were unable to calculate the gap in income of the group of people entitled to payment. For this reason we chose to use INSEE data on a sample population of men and women from 20 to 59 living together. In 2011, among dual-income couples women contributed up to 40 % of the shared income (Morin 2014).

cles were frequently mentioned as being the greatest barrier to taking parental leave for the majority of the men, excepted for them :

> The greatest obstacles do not come from the family or within the couple, they come from the professional side, that's quite clear for me. I have a friend who works for a smaller company, I am sure that he would have liked to do it but it would have been impossible. In any case I think that mentally he would have been prepared to do it." (Arnaud H, skilled worker at the Imprimerie Nationale, 37, partner head of sales).

Although they are entitled to take parental leave and by law the employer cannot refuse this (see Box 11.1), they consider the fact that their employer did not oppose their right to parental leave to be a "privilege": "I know that where I work we are privileged. My boss said, "Go for it! You have nothing to lose" (Etienne Z, municipal employee, 40, partner municipal employee). This "privilege" in certain cases can explained by existing gender equality employee agreements or specific workplace charters,[10] by the fact that it is a traditionally female area of activity or one where career prospects are not subject to hierarchical approval.

Most of them point out that they were "lucky" not to have met these kinds of professional obstacles and to have got the go-ahead to work part-time very easily after a first request: "it went through very easily, no difficulties with my work. I made a request and it was accepted" (Francois T, Oil company executive, 42, accountant at the SNCF). Even when we ask the question again: "You didn't have any problems?" they re-affirm: "No I didn't… no problems with the hierarchy, no discrimination or anything like that. No, it wasn't a problem" (Jérome, maintenance technician for Air France, 49, partner military).

11.4 A Day at Home Alone Taking Care of a Child

11.4.1 An Ideal Condition for Early Childhood Socialisation

For fathers we met, the child appears to be at the centre of the decision.[11] Time off work is dedicated to the child "it's a day for him" (Arnaud H, skilled worker at the *Imprimerie Nationale*, 37, partner head of sales). Family values and in particular the idea that the child does better within the family unit are presented as the main reasons behind the decision to work part-time. Most of the fathers questioned point out that their goal is to give priority to the quality of life of their children. "Objective number one – his life, for him to stay at home as much as possible" (Frédéric A, accountant in private sector, 37, partner government employee). The importance placed on parental care during the first years to provide for the child's well-being, development and balance is often mentioned. "Initially it was to avoid putting him

[10] This allows them, for example, to be paid at more than 80 %.

[11] Only 3 of the fathers questioned point out that their decision is not primarily linked to the child and develop arguments around extra professional activities or tiredness due to work).

in full-time daycare and so for us to take care of him" (Thomas, municipal officer, 41, partner municipal officer).

Nevertheless, aiming to socialise the child outside of the family is always mentioned too. Parental leave is never seen as the exclusive form of childcare: "A child has to meet people, other than their family" (Aurélien H, special needs teacher, partner is a regional civil servant). In the majority of study cases, the day of parental leave is Wednesday, a day without school in France. The father's day for childcare is always arranged with a daycare centre or with a child-minder. For most of the families we met, the child was in non-family care 4 days a week.[12] In this co-education model, the family is presented as the natural and irreplaceable custodian of family values: "The values I want to transmit are the importance of family" (Rémi O, bus driver, 45, partner hospital worker). Family life is organised around the child, with the couple taking a backseat. The parents' life as a couple is rarely mentioned by the fathers and outings as a couple, when they happen, include the children. Conjugal time is merged with parenting time "Actually we always talked about what we wanted for our family, if one day we had children, when we had children we wanted to free up time for them… if we go out it is with them…" (Thomas M, municipal officer, 41, parner municipal officer).

This investment in family time is not presented as a temporary break in their family and professional life, but more as a commitment towards their child that they wish to honour and pursue. They all plan to remain on parental leave for the maximum time available to them, i.e. until the last child is 3 years old. They consider extending this arrangement at least until the child starts pre-primary school or some time primary school (until the last child is 6 years old). Many state their satisfaction with their active involvement in parental duties and the personal interaction and emotional closeness with the child that this entails. Mr N. proudly describes his close bonds with his children and likes to point out the special relationship he has with his sons: "The bond we can create when they are little, I mean for me, when they wake up at night it's just that it's Dad they call for… take that anyway you like…" (Pierre N, car industry researcher, 37, partner secondary school teacher).

The prospect of having to end the parental leave is described as being personnally painful." It is something we'll have to think about…" (Florient L, employee in the insurance sector, 39, partner employee in a publishing house)

11.4.2 Interiorization of Daily Domestic Life – Over-Identification with the Feminine Role

Contrary to their feminine counterparts, fathers rarely complain that their day off for parental leave adds to their parental responsibilities or results in an unfair division of household tasks as far as they are concerned. Most of them are happy with their current organisation. Only two of them state that because they are at home more

[12] For 4 of the fathers we met, the paternal parental leave day is supplemented by maternal parental leave day (another day of the week) and 3 days of extra-family care (chilminder, crèches).

often than their partners, the latter is not very involved, even insufficiently involved in domestic matters up to the point of ignoring them: "I do practically everything in the house, and because I am there a little more than she is … to be honest, my wife does very little … she leaves it up to me" (Martin P, healthcare assistant, 55, partner special needs teacher). Here we can see the importance that the daily routine takes on and its gradual impact on the sustainability of the system. Mr K. describes this very well when he mentions an annoying habit of his partner – not warning him about schedule changes which then upsets the balance of the family organisation and, what is more, shows a lack of consideration for his work at home:

> Because I'm at home… well you see there have been times when I didn't know what time she was coming back… whether I should go and pick up the children or not…Because I'm at home she thinks I'm available… She doesn't understand why everything hasn't been done… Working at home is tough …a lot of things to be done … (Nicolas K, secondary school teacher, 35, partner University Lecturer).

Parental leave can also lead to other forms of interiorisation of certain aspects of daily domestic life. One such example is over-identifying with the "fair sex" and its tendency to set high standards for oneself (Chatot 2014). This is the case when Mr F. talks about his decision to take sole responsibility for cleaning the kitchen. Far from seeing this as an unequal division of labour, he seems to have claimed his territory and does not wish to share it. This man has been affected by "irresistible household integration" (Kaufmann 1992), which usually leads women to raise their standards, more than men tend to, in order to reach the traditional ideal of the home: he has acquired a "female"compulsion. "Well in terms of the division of labour… I do the kitchen, the cleaning in general is 50/50, but I do all the kitchen cleaning. It's MY kitchen." (Bertrand F, Council employee, 34, partner archivist).

11.4.3 Psychologically Taxing

The way the fathers describe the day alternates between "it goes by very fast" and "we have to find things to fill the time". One day seems to run into another and it's just the routine, nothing extraordinary:

> I try to get her to eat her lunch which is not so easy… to dress her… I tidy the house, I clean, depending on the day. Depending on the weather we'll go for an outing… in winter we didn't do it much but now we'll start going out till it's time to come back for food. He sleeps a lot, I'm lucky… he sleeps until 4 pm, we even have to wake him up… the rest of the afternoon, depending on the weather, we either go out or stay at home and play together… there is TV as well… he's 2 now and has discovered TV and he watches the cartoons for an hour and a half. He is very focused and keen on them. (Martin P, Healthcare assistant, 55, partner special needs teacher).

The tiring or even exhausting nature of the days is often pointed out, for example by Mr D when talking about the attention required for looking after children: "taking care of a child, oh, it is tiring… yes, the days are exhausting". Attempts to accomplish other tasks and chores, both personal and professional are difficult or unsuccessful, and frequently mentioned in the interviews:

> I put her in her little play area; I play with her a bit. Well, how to describe it? I set her up with a game… then I don't know, it lasts 10 minutes, a quarter of an hour. And then I try to cook or tidy up, do some washing up, I don't know – there always is something to do… Then in the meantime, if you leave her alone for more than a quarter of an hour she calls out so you have to go and see… you have to play with her a bit, and then go again… it's exhausting. I think that's what's difficult… Sometimes I try to look at my e-mails, or job offers, the news, little things… things which take less than a quarter of an hour (Sébastien L local authority manager, 46, partner manager in the private sector, 2 children).

The fathers often stress the fact that they feel isolated. The phrases "stuck in the house", or "afraid of losing social skills", or even "it's impossible to do anything else" are uttered by most of them, even several times during the interview. The lack of contact with the outside world during their childcare experience is often brought up.

But it is especially the burden of the responsibility they take which is more frequently expressed by the men than by their female counterparts. Mr C expresses his anxiety at the prospect of having to deal with potential difficulties, especially because during his day at home, his wife has a tendency to stay longer at work.

> Well because of how little time she spends here. It's simple, she leaves at 8 am and comes back at 7.30–8 pm. I can't delegate tasks and recently I was looking after the two of them in the morning and two in the evening… There was no one I could call on for help if ever… It was very problematic. (Didier S, economist at a private heath insurance company, 32, partner national radio executive)

11.4.4 "Spontaneous" Paternal Contributions

They have also plenty to say about how they join in with games and play with their children. This is frequently mentioned, and often as being specific to the father. For example, Mr B mentions his "typically" paternal skill of "knowing how to play":

I think that, even though it might seem quite a caricature, my wife is very involved with organising things… she is less involved in play… I'm more present when it comes to playing; I spend more time playing games with them (Valentin B, municipal employee, 38, partner waitress).

Although they suggest that their play activities with the children have a regular schedule, always at the same time and integrated into a set timetable (usually between the nap and the afternoon snack), these activities are presented as being unplanned, not very organised, and spontaneous: "I'm more about the here-and-now, yes. More about having fun together" (Sébastien L, local engeneering executive engineering, 46, partner project manager in the voluntary sector). Some fathers even describe themselves as a "playmate", without placing any educational or early-learning emphasis on the activities. This is the case for Mr C., who describes having fun with, and alongside, his 2 sons: "besides, they are boys (…) so it's something we can really share. We play with the remote controlled car, building games, Lego, things that I enjoyed as a kid and so it's something we have in common" (Fabien C, 34, engineer in the automotive industry, 34, partner IT engineer).

Besides, while the mothers express often from the beginning of the interview their personal desire to take care of the child, and tell the unilateral character of the decision "I've imposed, that's all" the fathers rarely mention their desire and present their decision as being inseparable of the agreement of their spouses. For some of them, the request comes even from her "it is her, it is my wife who thought of it, in fact it's my wife who asked me for it" (Aurélien E, special need teacher, 31, partner special need teacher).

Here we have glimpses of how the internalisation of the importance given to the actions of the mother and the comparative lack of importance of the father playing any educational role relies on representations of gendered roles. The mothers are seen as professionals, with abilities similar to those of early-year childcare professionals: "when the professional (woman) plays with a child, she is not actually playing but she is allowing the child to play and to experiment through its own actions" (Ulman 2014).

11.5 Compromising with Prescriptive Influences

Even when the husband is on parental leave at home, partners, who have undoubtedly internalised higher expectations in terms of tidiness and cleanliness, but also ideas on childcare, leave little room for manoeuvre. They anticipate and plan ahead.

11.5.1 Contributing According to Availability

More often than not it is the wives who run the family organisation, preparing the children's clothes in the morning, writing shopping lists, and taking sole responsibility for certain tasks, such as bathing the children, as the following interview extract illustrates (Box 11.3).

Mr V is on part-time parental leave, as is his wife. The time they spend with their child is equal, one at the start of the week and the other at the end, which one assumes would be conducive to an equal division. Despite not fitting the survey protocol, Mr and Mrs V were interviewed together, a pre-requisite they set because "in any case, we'll say the same things." Mrs V replied first to most of the questions, with her husband sometimes adding to what she said. Despite agreeing on the idea that they "share everything", their accounts not only reveal that this sharing process is not in fact taking place, but above all that the reality fits with a socially gendered vision of duties, although this does not lead them to question whether they are an equal couple. Their behaviour is less about seeking equality than it is about seeking to share. Comparing Mrs V's first sentence, "we've always done that: shared", with Mr V's last sentence about his participation, "clearing the table, that's all', reveals how the egalitarian model constantly referred to by Mrs V is not in fact reflected in the practice described by Mr V. The extract also shows that, for this couple, the

Box 11.3: Extract of Interview with Mr and Mrs V, Both Skilled Workers, Two Children

Mrs. V: we've always done that: shared
Mr. V: for the older child, even though she has a nanny, we've always done that
Mrs. V: always
Interviewer: have you always been a very equal couple?
Mrs. V: oh yes
Interviewer: so you do the same chores? You share everything?
Mr. V: um… no, I don't share everything
Interviewer: yes
Mr. V: when it comes to bath time… or doing her nostrils every day, I do do it… but…
Mrs. V: *(knowingly to the interviewer):* he's less comfortable with it
Mr. V: that's it, I'm less comfortable with it… and for baths, I wouldn't bathe her
Interviewer: oh really, why?
Mr. V: for a start I bathed her right in the bath tub, well, and then there's the little seat… but it's true that I'm not comfortable with it
Mrs. V: but he does help, because to rinse you do always need…
Interviewer: and apart from the bath?
Mr. V: no
Mrs. V: No because he takes her to the doctor if I can't… no, I can't think of what else… because when I'm not here you do take care of it… No apart from that, there's just the bath thing
(…..)
Interviewer: and household tasks?
Mrs. V: oh well I have my work cut out… sometimes, there's laundry to gather up and to put into the machine
Mr. V: putting a load of washing on, hanging it out to dry
Interviewer: ah right, so you do…?
Mr. V: I do do it, but…
Mrs. V: but he won't do it of his own accord, he needs to be told… if I tell him…
Mr. V: I'm never the one who does the household tasks… cleaning, pfff
Mrs. V: apart from sweeping
Mr. V: could sweep, yes, um taking the edge off it, just getting started. But I do do the washing up
Mrs. V: we've got the dishwasher now
Mr. V: clearing the table, that's all

egalitarian model has to do with "also doing things" or "doing things together'". This arrangement with the prescriptive influences weighing on men and women shows the success of an ideal which transcends the obstacles of equality: sharing. This moral value allows everyone to contribute according to their availability, to accept that their availability is limited, and to gain more satisfaction (Chatot 2014).

11.5.2 Making Up for the Mother's Lack of Availability

The notion that fathers are by nature naturally less well versed in the art of parenting is said to influence the decision as to which parent will eventually stay at home. Choosing the father is seen as a solution that will provide him with hands-on experience and will also establish his status as a father. This latter point is confirmed by the following statement by Mr A:

> The question of who would look after Thimoté… came up … one or two days a week, and … and I think the solution my wife C. and I came up with was because… OK, like it's going to be you because she's the mother and obviously she has a stronger bond with Thimoté… She thought it would be better if I took a 80 % part-time to look after him during the week (Laurent G, printing technician, 34, partner, head of sales).

The importance of the biological aspect when building a parental bond is also mentioned. The fact that women are already engaged in motherhood during pregnancy, gives them "a feel" for their own capabilities, with their ability to give birth serving as an type of endorsement of their ability to become mothers. Mr C talks of his need to take time to discover fatherhood, which seems to him less natural than motherhood:

> For men, it's spending time with the children that allows you to understand it, I think, I say this often but you're not born a father, you become a dad through outside influences, unlike mothers, who carry the baby and who… we become fathers when we hold our child for the first time and start to live with our child… so we become dads and discover our child's wants and needs, spending time with him or her ((Fabien C, 34, engineer in the automotive industry, 34, partner IT engineer).

Maternal exclusivity is also seen through the way things are organised, even if it is suggested that this organisation takes place on a day-by-day basis, depending on the partners' availabilities. Despite the increased time the fathers spend at home, it is the mother's availability, which determines how tasks are divided up. The tasks that the fathers take on are often contained within their day of parental leave. "It's Wednesday for me, it takes some of the load off Martine (wife) for shopping…" (Jérome R, maintenance technician for Air France, 49, partner military). This quotation also shows that time invested is considered a way of "taking the load off" the mother. The following quotation shows that for this other father, the division of labour (in this case washing clothes) has more to do with occasional, one-off forays into tasks otherwise alloted to women:

> Washing the clothes… um… 70 % Catherine (wife), 30 % me; so basically on Wednesdays if I notice there's a load of nappies to wash, or clothes that need doing, then yes. I did a load of washing this morning as well, to lend a hand, I do washing but generally Catherine does it (Pierre N, car industry researcher, 37, partner secondary school teacher).

Using a joking tone, and underlining his wife's "typically" feminine ability to wake up in the morning, this other father mentions that his role is just a stand-in one:

> It starts, the day starts at 7 o'clock. Usually in the morning it's Dominique (wife) who gives her the bottle… that's because she's better at waking up than me (laughter) I take a little while to surface… she (the child) starts crying straight away, so if we don't want her to wake her sister up, we need to get on it straight away. Apart from when she travels with work, then I do it… so that's clear (Sébastien L, Regional Engineering Executive, 46, partner project manager in the voluntary sector).

Like most of the fathers in the study, he goes on to say that he dresses his children every morning, but rarely chooses their clothes, in order to meet his wife's wishes. These gendered principles for allocating this task reveal how strong gendered cultural norms are. In this instance the justification of pleasing the mother is given: "yeah yeah, well often it's also Dominique who chooses them (the clothes), because she likes giving them little things".

11.5.3 Showing His Commitment to Employment

Even though the fathers of this study seem different to other men in that they work part-time and therefore adhere less than most men to the social pressure to "be present" at work, they do still place importance on the role that work plays in their lives. They underline the intellectual aspect of the organisational side of their work, or consider their workload to be that of a full-time job, as does Mr H:

> The most interesting thing is that working 80 % of the time is starting not to mean doing 80 % of the workload. Because I clearly don't have a decreased workload. My boss's approach is that I can organise my time how I like, but I have the same workload as the others. (Arnaud H, skilled worker at the Imprimerie Nationale, 37, partner head of sales).

One of the fathers interviewed jokes about stopping work: "Well I wouldn't mind giving up work all together… But my wife doesn't earn enough for me to do that [laughter]" (Alexandre J, postman, 50, partner manager in the banking sector). Other than that, all the statements underline the almost inseparable link between masculine identity and professional work. All the fathers interviewed said that they could not imagine giving up work entirely. Some of them because they could not imagine spending all of their time parenting: "Give up work entirely? No… Spend all my time parenting? No." (Aurélien E, special needs teacher, 48, partner regional manager,). Others because they feel an innate need to work "you need to go to work" (Guillaume U, gardener for the local authority, 44, partner regional civil servant). Others still point out that it would have too big an impact on their professional career:

> Give up work completely? I don't know, it would change a lot. If I left the system for two years, I think it'd be a huge shock to return to work after. It must be hard to get used to it again… It's probably something you could do if you work on a till. Right now I have a very good job and position, and I really wouldn't want to lose it. We don't want to take too many risks.. (Fabien C, 34, engineer in the automotive industry, 34, partner IT engineer)

They all have career objectives in mind and believe that they will need to return to full-time work in order to achieve them: "I'm planning to change departments… I'll go back to working full-time because changing jobs while you're part-time isn't really possible" (Economist at an centre, wife national radio station manager, one child). They mention what they believe to be the norm in terms of commitment to work, and count themselves amongst those employees less invested in their work: "In any case, I think someone who thinks about spending more time with their children… isn't completely immersed in their work" (Fabien C, 34, engineer in the automotive industry, 34, partner IT engineer).

The fathers' reduced working hours seem to them to deviate from the norm, and are a little "borderline" in terms of what employers would accept:

> Working even fewer hours? No, that's not possible. I'm already working as few hours as is professionally acceptable, I don't think I could reduce my hours further… Yet I do get in early in the morning, and I leave at 5 pm, I work long hours, but I can't see myself leaving my desk at 4 pm. There are certain limits… That would be a provocation – I wouldn't do that! [laughter]" (Arnaud H, skilled worker at the Imprimerie Nationale, 37, partner head of sales).

11.5.4 Normative Expectations Attached to Fatherhood

Most of the fathers say that their parental leave experience lead to a re-examination of norms concerning a man's place and his involvement with work and family. However, the "interiorised model of the parental bond" (Neyrand 2000) based on the premise of maternal exclusivity makes it difficult for fathers to legitimise their position. Instead there is a degree of compromise as shown from the following account of a "reality check" about masculine transgression.

> Sometimes I do think to myself that my role isn't "masculine", so to speak, when I need to do washing, or it's bath time… changing nappies and all that… It is something I think to myself occasionally… but there isn't… I tell myself no, that's nonsense, that's got nothing to do with it, it's not a role specific to men or women, it's a role specific to parents, that's all" (Valentin B, municipal employee, 38, partner Waitress)

At work, in line with the behaviour of other fathers at work, who tend to play down, or even hide, the level of their parental involvement (Gregory and Milner 2004), the men we interviewed said they did not say much about it at work.

> My colleagues? No, I don't think they know… They do know that if they want to have a meeting on Wednesday, we're never there for example. So in the end you'll say to them

> "stop planning meetings on Wednesdays: I don't work Wednesdays"… But beyond that, people don't necessarily know (Rémi O, bus driver, 45, partner hospital worker).

They talk about having authorised flexibility at work, like having time off in lieu or flexi-time, which allows them to pass off their hours as being unrelated to parenting: "For work, it kind of "goes unnoticed". I'm independent in my position, and with time off in lieu and all that, it goes unnoticed…" (Martin P, healthcare assistant, 55, partner special needs teacher). These men don't justify the way they have chosen to organise their time with "finding a work-life balance", rather they try to make their choice invisible. For them, 1 day per week is the most appropriate set-up in the eyes of their colleagues and employer: "One day away from work is the most readily accepted, even if it works out the same in the end, and the hours worked are exactly the same… But you do need to bear any sensitivities in mind…" (Pierre N, car industry researcher, 37, partner secondary school teacher).

So, even if they present their type of involvement as "normal" or as going against the usual masculine models: "Not all men are the same, I don't watch football, I'd rather watch a cartoon with my daughter than a football match for example, so I don't mind at all, really not at all" (Rémi O, bus driver, 45, partner hospital worker), they are aware of their difference, or feel separate when they speak about their unusual situations from the start of the interview: "I'm part of that group of men", and point out their participation in traditionally masculine activities. It's like that of this father for whom it is crucial to be seen as more than just someone who participates in household and parental tasks: "Well I have to tell you that I do a lot of things on the side; charity work" (Thomas, municipal officer, 41, partner municipal officer), and this other father feels the need to point out that the time he gains by working a day less per week is spent not only looking after children, but also doing at home: "it's true that having an extra day free per week is fantastic… but there are other motivations too – it has become a vocation for me" (Fabien C, 34, engineer in the automotive industry, 34, partner IT engineer).

11.6 Conclusion

This study of French fathers taking part-time parental leave shows the complex manner in which they display commitment to family life and negotiate the surrounding culture of normative masculinity. The experience of parental leave being confined to 1 day a week, seems to offer a new model of French fatherhood summarized in the following words : "I think it's good to have a mix of work and time for the children" (Pierre N, car industry researcher, 37, partner secondary school teacher). It gives fathers the possibility to spend time with their child(ren), to establish strong emotional bonds, to share domestic and parental responsibility with their partners and to maintain a professional activity.

However, it seems difficult for couples to establish a system of equal male/female participation and some contradictions appear. The decision-making process behind the division of tasks is still strongly driven by traditional gender and familial norms, in particular, an assumption of mother-child primacy. This cultural norm creates in fathers a sense of not being fully "legitimate" when it comes to nurturing and bringing up their own children and a "learner" or stand-in status with regard to their spouse. Contradictions were also found in the workplace where some kept a low profile about parenting responsibilibiities and in public areas, such as play areas and parks, where they experienced an outsider status. This study suggests that couples with prescriptive influences more than clash with normative masculine and feminine attributes. Part-time parental leave would allow a reasonable deviation from fathers' prescriptive models.

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Chapter 12
Fathers on Leave Alone in Switzerland: Agents of Social Change?

Isabel Valarino

12.1 Introduction

Switzerland has a delayed and limited welfare state, which differs greatly from its continental European neighbors (Castles and Obinger 2008). This is especially true in the field of family policies for parents' leave entitlements. While a federal maternity insurance of 3.5 months was adopted only a decade ago, to this day there is no statutory right to parental or paternity leaves. Employed fathers are currently not considered as caregivers by the Swiss state. According to a recent comparison of 35 industrialized countries (Moss 2014), this is an exceptional situation; men usually have access to parental leave and sometimes to paternity leave too.

This context affects parents' lives dramatically. Longitudinal and representative data for Switzerland show that transition to parenthood is a crucial event that shapes men's and women's lives in gendered ways (Giudici and Gauthier 2009; Levy et al. 2006; Widmer et al. 2003). Even couples who intend to share paid and unpaid work equally do not manage to put into action these intentions once the first child is born (Bühlmann et al. 2009; Le Goff et al. 2009). In 2013, among couples with at least one child under the age of 6, 29.3 % had a male breadwinner model and 49.3 % had a modified version of this model, where the father worked full-time and the mother worked part-time (FSO 2013a).

Theoretically, these inequalities are understood as resulting from social processes taking place at different societal levels: the institutional, interactional, and individual levels (Risman 1998, 2004, 2011). On each of the levels of this "gender structure," social mechanisms tend to operate a differentiation between fathers and mothers, and organize unequal relations on the basis of these presumed differences.

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This research focuses on how some fathers adapt to the institutional context and manage to find individual paths to leave uptake. For this purpose, 13 pioneer men who had taken at least 1 month of leave from wage work—in whatever form or setting—in order to care alone for their child were interviewed.

The study analyzes the implications of leave uptake for the social construction of parenthood. Thus research in other countries has shown that leave uptake has the potential to reduce the specialization of roles in the transition to parenthood, and to prompt father involvement (e.g., Haas and Hwang 2008; Rehel 2014; Wall 2014). In this study we explore how leave uptake is experienced in the Swiss context, and its implications for fatherhood and gender equality.

12.2 The Swiss Leave Policy Context

Switzerland only introduced a federal maternity insurance at the beginning of the 21st century. While the principle was accepted by the electorate in 1945, 60 years of political negotiations were needed before a law was implemented in 2005 (FCWI 2001, 2011; Valarino 2014a). Employed and self-employed women are now entitled to a 14-week maternity insurance, paid at 80 % of the salary. Two additional weeks can be taken without pay, although many employers compensate them (Valarino 2014b).

The slow development of leave policies in Switzerland—and of the Swiss welfare state in general—is mainly due to its political institutions (Armingeon 2001; Obinger et al. 2005). Switzerland is a federal state and has a direct democracy, which means that a broad consensus must exist among the electorate and cantons for a law to be introduced. Furthermore, Switzerland is not part of the European Union, which implies it must not conform to EU directives, notably the one on parental leave (European Union 2010). As regards political forces, the right wing has been historically strong in Parliament, and is currently against implementing statutory paid parental or paternity leaves (FCWI 2014; Obinger 1998). Attitudinal factors are also important: the liberal ideology is strong in Switzerland, and there is a reluctance in the population regarding state regulation of what is considered as the "private sphere" (Armingeon 2001; Pfau-Effinger 2008). Finally, gendered representations of parenthood are still widespread; mothers are considered the main and legitimate caregivers for a child (Bühlmann et al. 2009; Levy et al. 2002).

Within this context, and as a consequence of the late adoption of a federal maternity insurance, there exists no statutory parental or paternity leave in Switzerland. Employed fathers may be granted short paid paternity leave by their employers through company regulations or collective labor agreements. These leaves are usually 1 or 2 days long, and comparable to leave granted in the cases of marriage or house moving. More rarely employers grant 1 or 2 weeks and up to 1 month of leave. The possibility to take an unpaid parental leave sometimes also exists. However, these company-based entitlements only concern a minority of workers in Switzerland. A recent government report estimated that in 2009, 27 % of individuals

submitted to collective labour agreements (only half of the employed population) had access to a paternity and/or a parental leave entitlement (FSIO 2013). Among work organisations, public administrations are clearly more generous (Canning Wacker and Dalla Palma 2005; SECO and FSIO 2012).

Since the adoption of a minimal leave scheme for mothers, a window of opportunity for parental and paternity leave supporters has opened. From 2006 to 2013, no less than 25 parliamentary proposals were submitted, yet without success to this day. While this indicates an increasing political concern about fathers' access to a statutory leave and involvement in childcare, leave proposals do not systematically take into account gender equality objectives (Lanfranconi and Valarino 2014; Valarino 2014a).

12.3 Theoretical Framework on Fatherhood

This study draws on Risman's (1998, 2004, 2011) conceptualisation of gender as a social structure. Gender relations and parenthood are understood as being shaped by mechanisms taking place at the institutional, interactional, and individual societal levels. These social mechanisms tend to operate a differentiation between men and women—and between fathers and mothers—and to organize unequal relations on the basis of these presumed differences. At the institutional level, social policies, laws and organizational rules often distribute resources and opportunities in gendered ways. The Swiss leave scheme illustrates well how the state attributes childcare responsibility to mothers only. At the interactional level, individuals' parenting practices can be understood as situated conducts conforming to gendered expectations of behavior (West and Zimmerman 1987). For instance, in the work environment men may face the assumption that fatherhood is only about financial provision for the family (e.g., Burnett et al. 2012; Hojgaard 1997). Finally, at the individual level, socialisation mechanisms and circulating discourses influence individuals' gender identities and their conceptions of motherhood and fatherhood (e.g., Lupton and Barclay 1997).

Of particular relevance for this study is the way fatherhood is constructed in relation with motherhood; i.e., interviewees' representations of fathers' and mothers' roles as well as their practices and involvement in childcare with respect to their partners' (Nentwich 2008). This construction is seen as the object of negotiations taking place in the couple as well as in the workplace and as being shaped by institutional and cultural factors (Levy et al. 2002; Lupton and Barclay 1997).

Following Risman's (1998, 2004, 2011) conceptualization, the three levels of the gender structure are interconnected. While they usually reinforce each other to maintain gender differences and inequalities, changes taking place at one level of the gender structure can potentially challenge gender relations on the other levels. Change toward more gender equality is defined as any social mechanism that, for example, reduces differentiation between fathers' and mothers' conception of the self, reduces gendered expectations within social interactions, or reduces the

specialization of tasks and roles between parents that usually takes place at the transition to parenthood. The study explores the ways in which men's leave uptake in a home alone manner may trigger social change on these different levels.

12.4 Past Research on Men's Use of Leave Policies

In countries with decades of experience with leave policies, empirical studies have been conducted on men's use of leave, and on the effects for parenthood and gender relations. Scholars find that fathers' leave uptake—from 2 weeks or more—has positive effects on their subsequent involvement in childcare (for Sweden, see Haas and Hwang 2008; for a comparison of four OECD countries, see Huerta et al. 2013; for the US, see Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel 2007; Pleck 1993; for the UK, see Tanaka and Waldfogel 2007). The existence and use of such leaves at the institutional level therefore decreases the gendered division of childcare work at the interactional level. To a certain extent, it also modifies fathers' identities at the individual level (for Norway, see Brandth and Kvande 2002; for Canada and US, see Rehel 2014; for Portugal, see Wall 2014).

Research on leave policies in Switzerland focused mainly on the political process that led to maternity insurance implementation (see Aebi et al. 1994; Dafflon 2003; Leimgruber 2010; Studer 1997) and on the current status of leave policies in parliament (Häusermann and Kübler 2010; Lanfranconi and Valarino 2014). Understandably, in the absence of statutory federal parental and paternity leaves, men's experiences of leave have barely been analyzed in the Swiss context. In a qualitative research on men's use of company-based leave entitlements, Brandalesi (2010) analyzed the experience of four fathers who had taken short paternity leaves of 1 or 2 weeks. She observed that paternity leave uptake was not perceived by fathers as a transgression of gender norms, but more so as an opportunity to establish a relationship with the child. Furthermore, the division of childcare work remained gendered among parents.

More recently a mixed-methods case study was conducted on paternity leave implementation in a public company (Valarino 2014a; Valarino and Gauthier 2015). It revealed that the 1-month leave had limited gender equality effects on fatherhood representations and practices. On the one hand, it enabled fathers to participate in family life, learn to perform childcare activities and to appropriate their fatherhood identity. On the other hand, the majority of fathers mainly had a secondary and temporary role with the child, while mothers were the central parent. Interestingly, five of the 22 fathers interviewed used paternity leave to care for their child alone on a part-time basis. In these cases, the gendered division of work during the leave was more concretely challenged than for those who had taken the leave in the co-presence of the mother. The present study follows up on these results and develops this topic in more depth.

12.5 Presentation of Data and Methods

12.5.1 Data Collection

The data was collected in the frame of two different research projects. Five interviews stem from the above-mentioned case study conducted in 2012 on paternity leave in a public sector company (Valarino 2014a). Interviews addressed fathers' leave negotiation at work, their leave experience and their fathering practices. A pilot interview conducted in 2011 for this research is also included in the sample. In addition, seven new interviews were conducted in 2014 for the present study. Participants were found by snowball sampling technique, by activating professional and personal networks.

The call for participation invited men who had been on leave for a minimum period of 1 month to care alone for their child or children aged below 3 years old, in order to share their leave experience and their current work and family life organization. Since there existed no statutory leave for men in Switzerland and therefore no clear definition of "being on leave", an encompassing approach was adopted. Not only fathers who had taken a "paternity" or "parental leave" designated as such by their employer, but also those who had taken vacation or who had used other means, were invited to participate in the study. Interviews lasted between 1 h30 and 2 h30 and took place at participants' homes, workplaces or in cafés. They were recorded, transcribed and anonymized; i.e., names, companies, and cities were replaced with pseudonyms.

12.5.2 Methodology of Analysis

Thematic analysis, "a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 79), was used to analyze interview transcriptions. The present study focuses mainly on the "semantic" or "explicit" level of the data (for a distinction with the "latent" or "interpretive" level, see Braun and Clarke 2006), describing how respondents make sense of their decision to take a leave in order to care alone for their child, how they experienced the leave and how they perceive it may have impacted their fathering practices, couple relationship and work life. However, the themes identified are also contextualized within the broader structural context that shapes individuals' experiences.

Methodologically, themes were identified through the coding process of the interviews, performed with computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. Throughout the analysis, portions of each transcription were coded, labeled and organized hierarchically in order to achieve a stable coding grid and to make sense of interviewees' experiences. In addition to analyzing these codes, individual summaries for each respondent were outlined, in order not to lose sight of how leaves fit into specific life trajectories.

12.5.3 Sample Characteristics

As a consequence of the Swiss policy context and considering the recruitment process adopted, the respondents differ from the population in several aspects. For instance, almost half of them are cohabiting (see Table 12.1). This is a much higher proportion than the percentage of births out of wedlock; 21 % in 2013 (FSO 2013b). Due to conservative views on the family and institutional barriers, marriage is the predominant union type that accompanies the transition to parenthood in Switzerland (Le Goff and Ryser 2010). About half of the respondents are first-time fathers (7 out of 13) and three were expecting a second child at the moment of the interview. Three couples have two children, two have three children and one has five children. Children living in the households are aged between 10 months and 13 years old. Respondents are aged between 27 and 44 years old.

Another key distinction of the sample is the couple's division of paid work. While the predominant family models in Switzerland are clearly gendered (FSO 2013a), half of couples in the sample are dual part-time earners. In 2013, this model concerned only 6.2 % of the population. Also an indication of the sample's specificity is the fact that it mainly counts highly educated individuals among respondents (9 out of 13 interviewees hold a tertiary degree education), and their partners (11 out of 13). However, because couples have adopted different combinations of working hours and do not have equally financially rewarding jobs, there is a large diversity as regards household incomes. Most fathers (11 out of 13) and their partners (7 out of 13) are working in the public sector. This is partly due to the fact that the case study interviews were conducted in a public sector company.

Finally, it should be noted that there is an over representation of French-speaking individuals in the sample, which is due to the snowball sampling technique. Only three out of the 13 interviewees live in the German-speaking part of Switzerland, which actually represents over 60 % of the residing population (Lüdi and Werlen 2005). While there exist cultural differences between these regions (Bühler 1998, 2001; Bühler and Meier Kruker 2002), they are probably not decisive in this explorative study, as interviewees were pioneers in both contexts.

12.6 Findings

12.6.1 Four Types of Leave Uptake

Four main types of leave uptake situations were identified: *unpaid parental leave*; *paid paternity leave*; *career break*; and *unemployment insurance* (see Table 12.1). Leave modalities diverge significantly from one another. The leave length ranges from 4 weeks to 5 years, taken at a full-time or part-time rate. The degree of institutionalization goes from company entitlements with job protection and pay to temporary dropout of the labor market. And the amount of time spent caring alone

Table 12.1 Sample characteristics and leave uptake modalities

Name[a]	Civil status	Age	Children	Occupation	Education degree	Working hours	Current family model	House-hold income[c]	Leave type	Leave duration and rate	Time alone with child per week[d]	Age of child at leave
Ben	Married	36	1	Researcher	Tertiary	Full-time	Modified male breadwinner	Low	**Unpaid parental leave**	6 months full-time	2–3.5 days	6 months
Cedric	Cohabiting	37	2	Scientific collaborator	Tertiary	80%	Modified female breadwinner	High		6 months full-time	5 days until 3 pm	5 months
Michel	Cohabiting	34	1 (P)	Researcher	Tertiary	Full-time	Modified male breadwinner	Average		6 months part-time	5 half days (afternoons)	6 months
Sam	Cohabiting	34	1	Scientific collaborator	Tertiary	80%	Dual part-time earner	Average		7 weeks full-time	4 days	4 months
Daniel	Married	27	1	Technician in civil engineering	Secondary	Full-time	Modified male breadwinner	Average	**Paid paternity leave**	1 month full-time	3.5 days	6 months
Jules	Cohabiting	35	1 (P)	Social worker	Tertiary	60%	Dual part-time earner	Low		3 months part-time	2–3 days	6 months
Martin	Married	44	1	Policeman	Secondary	80%	Dual part-time earner	High		7 months part-time	1–1.5 days	5 months
Oscar	Cohabiting	36	1 (+2)[b] (P)	Cook	Secondary	Full-time	Modified male breadwinner	Low		3 months part-time	1–2 days	2 months
Paul	Married	42	1	Technician in civil engineering	Secondary	80%	Dual part-time earner	High		3 months part-time	1 day	7 months

(continued)

Table 12.1 (continued)

Name[a]	Civil status	Age	Children	Occupation	Education degree	Working hours	Current family model	House-hold income[c]	Leave type	Leave duration and rate	Time alone with child per week[d]	Age of child at leave
Greg	Cohabi-ting	44	3	Archivist	Tertiary	40 %	Dual part-time earner	Low	**Career break**	5 years full-time	3–4 days	12 months & 2,5 years
Ralf	Married	37	2	Project manager	Tertiary	60 %	Dual part-time earner	Average		1 year full-time	3.5 days	10 months
Guy	Married	36	5	Engineer	Tertiary	60 %	Dual part-time earner	Low	**Unemploy-ment insurance**	3 months full-time	2.5–3 days	3 months
Tim	Married	37	2	Medical advisor	Tertiary	Full-time	Modified male breadwinner	High		9 months full-time	3 half days (afternoons)	3 and 6 years

Notes: [a]All names are pseudonyms. [b]Oscar has one child of his own with his partner and two from his partner's first union. (*P*) indicates partner's pregnancy. [c]Income categories were defined according to the average monthly income of households in Switzerland with at least one child (FSO 2008). [d]Out of 5 working days. N.B. all partners (except Cedric's) were working part-time during interviewees' leave, which explains why none of the fathers cared 5 full days for the child, even when they were full-time on leave

for the child varies significantly: from almost full-time responsibility to 1 day per week only. It is important to note that fathers never cared alone full-time for their child—even when their leave was taken full-time—because all partners (except one) were working or studying at a part-time rate during men's leave and were therefore also present at home during the week.

12.6.2 Unpaid Parental Leave

Four interviewees used the unpaid leave granted by their public sector employer for 1,5–6 months. Ben, Cedric and Sam took their leave full-time while their partners were working at a part-time rate (2 to 4 days per week). Michel took his leave part-time and cared for his son on afternoons. As the leave was unpaid, the couples considered the financial consequences. They could count on average or high incomes, and the income gap between partners was small at the moment of leave uptake. Respondents took the leave when the child was between 4 and 6 months old.

Their motivation for taking a leave is related to their reflexive approach to fatherhood and gender relations. Sam and Michel report that their parents had an egalitarian family model and that their fathers were very involved in childcare. For Cedric and Ben, it is their educational trajectory and occupational activity that led them to embrace gender equality values. Further reasons were given for taking an unpaid leave, such as concerns about daycare solutions. Ben and his partner Agathe wanted to extend the period of parental care ("She's too young to be in strangers' arms" said Ben), and Cedric and Clara were afraid of not finding an available place in due time. Partners' resources—their education, income and/or career prospects—also played an important role in respondents' decisions. Cedric's leave coincided with a career opportunity Clara seized. Sam's partner Selma got pregnant shortly after starting a new job, therefore they decided she would limit her time off work to the minimum.

The four respondents are forerunners in their work place: few or even none of their male colleagues had taken a similar leave before them. With the exception of Cedric, interviewees received their direct supervisors' support and did not face any obstacles. Ben and Michel report some uncertainty regarding the administrative procedure and the extension of their fixed-term working contracts. In the context of some difficult work relationships, Cedric was subject to harsh criticism ("They even told me ′It's a form of betrayal of the lab′"). Reactions were overall positive and supportive among friends and family, reflecting to a certain extent shared values about gender equality. However, Ben's family members were surprised and expressed concerns about his abilities to care alone for his child, revealing gendered representations of parenthood.

12.6.3 Paid Paternity Leave

Daniel, Jules, Martin, Oscar and Paul work for the same local public administration. They took some of the paternity leave they were entitled to—21 paid days to take within the child's first year—in a home alone manner. Daniel took his leave full-time when his son was 6 months old. The others took leave part-time: they used leave days punctually over several months. In the cases of Jules, Martin and Paul, paternity leave was a transition tool before the official start of their part-time work. During leave, interviewees' partners were working at a rate between 50 and 80 %. No financial considerations influenced men's leave uptake decision; the leave was fully compensated.

The motives of interviewees for leave uptake are a desire to involve in the daily care of the newborn child and to develop a close relationship with him or her. Daniel explains his decision as a reaction to his own father, who disappeared from his life when he was very young: "It's clear I'm not going to reproduce what I experienced". Other respondents considered the leave as a childcare solution, a "safety valve" as Jules put it.

Overall, the use of paternity leave was well received by their supervisors and colleagues, especially when respondents had independent functions and could anticipate their workload. There was one exception: Oscar experienced strong disapproval from his supervisor, who had to hire an auxiliary cook to replace him once a week during his leave. Respondents report positive, but also surprised reactions and sometimes envy from friends and family. They considered themselves privileged in comparison with private sector employees.

12.6.4 Career Break

Two interviewees in the sample took a career break: Ralf took a year off when his first child was 10 months old and Greg stayed 5 years at home when his two elder children were 1 and 2,5 years old (a third child was born after 3 years of leave). During their leave, interviewees' partners were the sole breadwinners. They worked between 70 and 80 % and were at home with the family 1 or 1,5 days per week. As they had tertiary education degrees, they could count on average incomes. However, Greg and Sally experienced financial hardship as they had two children already.

The circumstances of Ralf's and Greg's leave uptake differ greatly. It was chosen for Ralf: he resigned from his job and decided to "try the experience of staying at home" and "not follow the standard model." It was by accident for Greg: he had a severe accident that kept him in the hospital and then at home for over 6 months. Sally increased her participation in paid work and at some point the couple decided to keep this setup for the long term.

In contrast with the previous two leave types, men on career break seem to face more social pressure. Ralf reports that in his work environment, resigning from his job to be a stay-at-home dad was viewed as "incomprehensible, just weird!".

Greg's family members, who hold traditional family values, thought that "something was wrong with [him]." Respondents were sensitive to these reactions, but they were also comforted in their decision by friends with similar alternative family models.

12.6.5 Unemployment Insurance

This leave type is similar to a career break, but it implies receiving unemployment benefits. Guy had just finished his studies in engineering when he became a father and he was registered at the unemployment insurance office until his child was 6 months old. He cared for his child alone for 3 months when his wife Jenny, a university student, returned to classes. Tim took a 9-month leave between two jobs while his wife was working full-time. His children were 3 and 6 years old and they were attending daycare and nursery at a part-time rate. Tim received unemployment benefits at some point during his leave. However, he revealed this information with reluctance and only towards the end of the interview, which suggests he may have feared being stigmatized and/or accused of abusing the social security system.

Tim and Guy both had the desire to be involved fathers. Tim grew up in a gender egalitarian family and was also inspired by the German (his country of origin) parental leave system: "I knew that in Switzerland there are only these limited days of paternity leave, so you have to take it somehow in a private setting, between two jobs, ideally." Tim also mentions that he wanted to support his wife's career and that the timing was appropriate for him, as he wished to reorient his career from research to industry. In the case of Guy, the leave experience was a coincidence due to the fact that he was just starting to look for a job at that time: "Honestly, the first three months, I wasn't in a hurry to find a job."

Respondents report positive and supportive reactions to their leave experience from their family and friends. Leave uptake was actually subsumed by their job search. For Tim, his leave "was never really a subject" he discussed with his former colleagues, as they mainly interpreted it as a period to prepare his next career move.

12.7 Leave Experience

While fathers faced substantial differences in their leave uptake situations, many had similar experiences as regards the activities they performed and the difficulties they encountered.

12.7.1 Intensive Care Work

The majority of respondents were responsible for a child below the age of 1 year during their leave. All reported doing intensive care work from morning on, which involved changing, dressing, feeding and playing with the baby. Martin and Sam

were also in charge of feeding the child at night, in order to let their partners sleep. Being the main care provider required "a constant attention" for Cedric and was "even more demanding than being at work" according to Oscar. Fathers' daily routines were paced by the child's eating and sleeping schedule, as well as by very frequent walks outdoors.

> I woke up in the morning, had breakfast, I knew more or less his schedule of naps, at night etc. so I woke up on purpose before […] to make sure to be ready. And when he was awake, I fed him, and then we were mostly outside… (Daniel, technician in civil engineering, 27)

There were differences among fathers as regards the amount of intensive care performed, depending on the length and rate of the leave and the time alone spent with the child. However, all respondents emphasized that caring alone for their child involved much more responsibility and attention than in the co-presence of their partner.

> Everything rests on your shoulders. When you're alone, you cannot rely on someone, on the mother, if you have a problem. You really have to take 100 % responsibility for the child. You cannot forget anything. (Cedric, scientific collaborator, 37)

12.7.2 Social Childcare Time

For many respondents, leave uptake also had a social dimension. For instance, Ben and Ralf paid visits to their parents or parents in law with their child. Sam, Ralf, Paul and Michel organized joint activities with friends and their children during their leave.

> With a friend who also has children, but a bit older, we looked after them together on Wednesday afternoons. We tried to be several [friends]. People started showing up from 5 pm, but we met around 2 or 3 pm. […] My conception of having children and caring for them is not necessarily being alone with them. (Michel, researcher, 34)

Contrary to Michel, Ralf and Sam mainly met with female friends and report having missed male friends during their leave. In the case of Guy, Martin and Sam, as their child was still breastfed, they visited their partner at work or over lunch. Finally, Ben, Ralf and Sam report that toward the end of their leave they brought their child punctually to the daycare structure she or he would soon join for the adaptation process.

12.7.3 Household Tasks

The majority of respondents understood their leave duties as going beyond childcare activities and encompassing household tasks such as cleaning, cooking and shopping. However, there are substantial differences as to the degree they tried and

succeeded in doing these tasks. Respondents who took a paid paternity leave contributed less than others, as many were only home alone 1 day per week.

There are further exceptions, such as Ben who reports that during his leave it was Agathe who prepared in advance the child's food and their own, which was a source of tension. Finally, Sam explains that he did not manage to do cleaning chores when he was with his daughter.

> We cleaned and did the laundry while we were together at home. It was enough, just being with Philis. (Sam, scientific collaborator, 34)

12.7.4 Personal Time and Work-Related Activities

Most fathers report they barely found time for themselves during their leave experience. Ben, Sam and Tim managed to have some leisure time, for instance reading, jogging or playing music. Depending on their leave situation, some respondents also dedicated some time to work-related activities. This was the case of respondents on unemployment insurance, who were required to submit job applications, do interviews and attend continuing education classes. Greg and Ralf who were on career break also did some job searching when they decided to re-enter the labor market.

As regards fathers on parental or paternity leave, they do not report having worked during their leave or been pressured to do so by their employer. This can be explained for men on unpaid parental leave by the fact that they had anticipated in advance all aspects of their (fairly long) absence. The fact that they were not receiving any salary during this time also probably played a role. Among paid paternity leave recipients, almost all were on part-time leave, which meant they were present at work every week. And although some pressure was noted by Martin who recalled having been asked by his hierarchy to accommodate work demands if the need would arise, this did not happen during his leave.

> Once or twice they tried to remind me that I'm a policeman first and foremost. (Martin, policeman, 44)

12.7.5 Feelings and Main Difficulties Experienced

The leave was a very positive experience for all interviewees, which they described with superlatives such as "wonderful" (Oscar), "fabulous" (Guy), "magical" and "almost transcendental" (Ben). Fathers appreciated being able to follow closely the child's development, learning to care for him or her, and adapting to his or her rhythm with no time pressure.

> It was great having…being able to match the child's pace during his first months of life. It's something fabulous. Because, you don't sleep well at night, you have a lot of things to learn… gestures you don't know, and being able to sleep in the afternoon and things like that. (Guy, engineer, 36)

On the other hand, experiencing children's "slow time" and doing intensive care work was for some respondents also source of frustration at the beginning of the leave, as they were unable to do the activities they had planned. Greg and Ralf report that a period of adaptation and acceptance of their new full-time activity was necessary.

> You have a lot of fantasies, in the sense that at the beginning you think "Ah that's good, I'm at home, I take care of the children, I can do lots of things I couldn't before… for me." And then you realize. After a month and a half, you understand that you're at home for the kids, so that the household works, and there's not much time left for you. (Greg, archivist, 44)

Therefore the leave experience inspired a wide range of feelings among respondents and the main difficulties reported were understanding the child's needs and responding adequately to comfort him or her.

> You go through all emotions, from amazement and love to despair. (Ben, researcher, 36)

Several interviewees experienced a form of isolation during the leave: they felt like the male exception in a female-dominated environment. As Greg puts it, he was "like a white fly" at the playground. Especially fathers on a career break or on parental leave were frequently reminded of their gender role transgression. Sam realized he was not on an equal footing with his partner in the eyes of the midwife who assisted them. Ralf reports that his presence during the playgroups he attended with his son created feelings of awkwardness and discomfort among the women he encountered.

> I had the impression that women, including young ones, almost felt attacked in their domain, or invaded. They didn't really know how to deal with a man who stays at home… [laugh] (Ralf, project manager, 37)

Guy felt that being a male care provider made him especially accountable for his parenting competences in public spaces. This created feelings of anxiety, for example when he went grocery shopping, as he feared he would be evaluated by others on his abilities to manage his child's cries. However, these feelings disappeared rapidly as he gained experience and confidence.

12.8 Leave Impact: Parenthood and Gender Equality

Leave uptake had implications on five dimensions, including respondents' fathering practices, their relationship with their partner and division of work, their parenthood representations, their relationship to work, as well as a societal impact.

12.8.1 Impact on Fathering Practices

As the previous section showed, the leave experience enabled respondents to acquire and develop their parenting competences—to know how the child "works" (Sam)—and therefore to feel confident as fathers. This implied notably to know the child's

eating and sleeping habits, to understand the reasons for his or her cries and to find a way to comfort him or her. For instance, Ben reports severe difficulties putting his daughter Elodie to sleep at the beginning of his leave. His narrative about his discovery of a personal solution—playing her cumbia music—shows the important role played by the leave in appropriating his fathering role.

> One day I was already feeling desperate about the cries when she should take her nap. […] And before starting the ritual of heating things, I was holding her in my arms, I held her almost all the time in my arms, and I put on Mexican music, cumbia. […] So she finished eating, she started yawning, and I thought "Oh no, she's going to start screaming again, I can't take it anymore…" [laugh] And then I rocked her like that, with the rhythm of the music, and all of a sudden I realized she was falling asleep! [laugh] […] And for the second nap, I did the same […] And it worked! (Ben, researcher, 36)

The majority of interviewees express that their leave experience impacted their relationship with their child. As Greg puts it: "When you're always, always there, you become the reference person." They were able to develop a close, affectionate and intimate relationship, independently from the mother. Jules suggests that the leave experience was the time during which his attachment to his child grew, with long-term consequences as he decided to reduce his working percentage to 60 %.

> I think it's a bit like drugs… [laugh] You think it's recreational at the beginning and after a while you realize you need it […] I wouldn't see myself going back, it would cost me something if for X or Y reason I had to change my life structure. (Jules, social worker, 35)

In particular, some fathers emphasize the importance of remaining involved in the long term (beyond the leave period) in order to maintain the close relationship established. Ben is concerned that since his return to work his relationship with his daughter changed. From the points of view of Paul, Guy and Ralf, it is part-time work that really makes a difference for their father-child relationship. Finally, some fathers (Daniel, Jules, Paul and Tim) consider that the leave did not play a primary role in the father-child relation. They argue they would have found other ways to bond if they had not taken a leave, as being an involved father was a strong desire.

12.8.2 Impact on Gender Relations and Division of Work

Some interviewees report that their leave experience increased their recognition of the value of family work and thereby triggered more empathy for their partner. However, the leave experience did not necessarily prompt an egalitarian division of family work in the long term among all interviewees. Some interviewees, such as Paul, are explicit about this.

> Well changing diapers, she mostly does it; I do it only on Fridays. And for feeding, she also makes the decisions […] She's in charge of all this and I follow. (Paul, technician in civil engineering, 42)

In cases where the labour market participation of the couple is gendered, such as Daniel, Oscar and Tim, it is implicit that more time and responsibility is taken by

the mother than the father for childcare. In six cases—Greg, Guy, Jules, Michel, Ralf and Sam—the narratives about the couple's weekly family organization, together with the actual working hours of both partners, suggest that they have adopted a gender equal division of paid and unpaid work.

These interviewees often highlight the challenges of gender equal parenting practices. Michel's anecdote illustrates how habits formed early after the transition to parenthood may work as a blueprint for the couple's medium to long-term parenting. While Louise was on maternity leave and before Michel's parental leave started, the couple noted that Louise was becoming progressively better than him at calming their son's long lasting cries before sleep. Although Michel was already tired from his workday and although it was hard for the parents to see Lucien cry longer, they decided not to opt for the easy solution and that Michel had to improve his soothing skills with him.

> At some point we figured with Louise "If it continues like that… you won't be able to put him to sleep anymore…" And so we forced ourselves… But fortunately [Louise] was there; she really helped me go through with it. He cried for longer for some time, until I had found tricks that worked better with Lucien. But I didn't just abandon this area. It's really something we won after a long battle at that time. (Michel, researcher, 34)

A high degree of reflexivity and will is needed by *both* parents to fight gendered parenting practices. Guy and Jules also noted the crucial role of their partners, who trust them in their caring abilities and enable them to take solo responsibility for their child.

12.8.3 Impact on Parenthood Representations

The leave experience played a part in deconstructing respondents' gendered representations of parenthood. To some extent, they realized that parenting abilities are acquired and not innate; that they depend on the time spent and the experience accumulated by each parent with the child, as the following citation suggests.

> She [partner] also had to from one day to the other all of a sudden take care of a child alone. There aren't necessarily reasons for her to be more qualified than me for that. […] She also had to learn, just as I had to learn. (Jules, 35, social worker)

While such a gender-neutral approach of parenthood is shared by several other respondents (e.g., Ben, Greg, Guy and Sam), the majority of fathers believe nonetheless that there exist differences. Some respondents draw on the physiological dimension of motherhood—pregnancy and breastfeeding—to explain differences in parenting style or parent–child relationships. Paul and Martin refer to the "maternal instinct" of their partners and Tim to her "intrinsic sensitivity" to children's needs. Cedric distinguishes between parenting *competences*, which according to him need to be acquired by both parents, with the parent–child *relationship*, which he thinks is stronger for mothers, as the following citation suggests.

> The fact that she saw him coming out of her body, and that I saw that from the outside… I think it does create a difference in the relationship with the child. (Cedric, scientific collaborator, 37)

Differences in parenting style are also noted by Greg, who expresses that while he, as a man, can be the main care provider for his children, he interacts with them differently from his partner. They both tend to engage in typically masculine or feminine activities with them. Finally, further typically masculine typed roles are reported by Martin, Michel and Paul who see their role as fathers—in addition to being present, caring and affectionate—in terms of being play and sports mates for their child.

12.8.4 Impact on Career Perspectives and Relation to Work

The majority of respondents report that their leave experience did not have direct negative consequences on their career perspectives. However, in Cedric and Oscar's cases, it created difficult relationships with their supervisors. Ralf considers that his career break probably had some impact on his salary and that "one year of leave makes the re-entry into work life a bit more difficult." The case of Tim is interesting, as he reports that his 9-month leave—which he had indicated on his CV—was assessed positively during a job interview. In contrast, Greg considers that his 5-year career break had irreversible consequences.

> It totally ruined my career. Well "ruined," not ruined, but I had to abandon archeology. When you're away five years it's… It's an environment where working at 40% doesn't exist, it's impossible. (Greg, archivist, 44)

For many interviewed fathers, the transition to parenthood modified the importance they attribute to their work life (e.g., Michel, Oscar, Ben, Cedric, Guy and Greg). The notion of work-life balance has become central and guides their career decisions. Oscar, who works as a cook, was used to family unfriendly working hours; he applied for a job with office hours when he decided to have a child. Ben and Michel report that they will search for a part-time job for their next position—"It's my only horizon," as Michel puts it. Other respondents were already sensitive to work-life balance prior to parenthood (Guy, Jules, Sam, Ralf and Tim). Jules had for example re-oriented his career from the bank industry to social work because he disliked the working conditions in his field. Sam was working part-time too, in order to have space for his hobbies.

The characteristics of the sample suggest there is an association between taking a period of leave alone and working at a part-time rate. Eight respondents reduced their working percentage within the first year of life of their first child or were already working part-time before. In two cases, there was a clear relation between the leave experience and the subsequent decision to work at a part-time rate. Martin reports that paternity leave convinced him to ask for a reduction of his working hours; he had used his leave days as a test period for part-time work. Ralf reports

that it was during his 1-year career break that he decided to work at a low part-time rate, as this citation shows.

> The most important result of this year is that after spending one year with my child, that's when the strong desire came to not work much more than 60 %. I could no longer imagine spending all my time [laugh] without this person. (Ralf, project manager, 37)

Part-time workers report that being an involved father is tied with career costs, which they are nonetheless ready to accept. In his job search, Guy noticed that asking for a part-time position was considered as a lack of motivation, reliability and efficiency by managers. Jules was also struck by the clear difference in people's perception of working at 80 % or 60 %, which was viewed suspiciously.

> When I said I'd finally work 60 %, the reaction was opposite, like "But, is it enough? But…" Suddenly, it's funny like one day per week it's admirable, and two days per week it's like… "But are you really serious about your job?" (Jules, social worker, 35)

Beyond the negative perceptions interviewees faced in their work environments, many of them consider that part-time work concretely prevents them from accessing higher positions. For instance, Greg who currently works 40 % believes his partner's career has priority over his. Guy and Jules, who both work at 60 %, emphasize that their focus is currently on their family life, and that their career ambitions are on hold.

12.8.5 Societal Impact of Men's Leave Uptake

Finally, leave uptake has also implications on the societal level, as many interviewees perceive themselves as pioneers and aim to advance fathers' leave and father involvement in family life. Firstly, among paid paternity leave recipients, the existence of company-based rights had a legitimizing effect of men's use and access to leave. They considered paternity leave as a new social benefit they were entitled to. For instance, even if Oscar's supervisor criticized his leave pattern, he was determined to use it according to his family needs. Jules also noted that with paternity leave implementation, a change in representations was initiated in the work place, as this citation suggests.

> As soon as I announced to my colleagues that we were expecting a second child, it's clear that just as when a woman announces it, everybody thinks "maternity leave," they also think "paternity leave." (Jules, social worker, 35)

These respondents were generally critical of the Swiss leave scheme and considered that all employed fathers should be granted the same rights as them. A similar view was shared by the majority of interviewees, who considered Swiss family policies as being too limited in comparison with other countries. As Greg puts it: "Here we're a bit in pre-history." Respondents considered the state should invest more in family policies and that men should be granted a statutory leave in the form of social insurance.

Secondly, among other respondents and leave situations, several examples of practices that aimed to challenge gendered social norms of parenthood were identified. For example, by adopting a female breadwinner family model, Greg and Sally were aware of their norm transgression, but nevertheless stuck to their decision: "We told each other ′Let's not give a damn about what other people think, let's continue like this!′" Tim decided to make his involvement in family life visible in the labor market sphere, by indicating in his CV his leave uptake. Cedric was the first male employee to take an unpaid leave in his company. With his case, he helped in the creation of a new regulation that entitles employees who take a leave to benefit from an extension of their fixed-term work contract. Cedric and his partner were proud of this achievement:

> We were happy to advance the "cause" […] So we didn't do it only for personal reasons; there was also an activist side to it. (Cedric, scientific collaborator, 37)

Michel's anecdote also illustrates the activist meaning of leave uptake. During the procedure of the extension of his fixed-term contract, he realized he was being granted an "extraordinary derogation," instead of a contract "prolongation." Michel considered that symbolically, this labeling did not fully recognize fatherhood and leave uptake as a normal practice, but instead stigmatized it. He would have liked to contest it, but his supervisors did not support him in this administrative battle.

> I wanted the title to be like that. I was ready to go far in order for it to be recognized this way, because words are important… Otherwise people always get the impression you are granted extra time that is not allowed for others. (Michel, researcher, 34)

Finally, fathers who work part-time also contribute to making fatherhood more visible in the work environment and thereby resist gendered expectations. For example, Guy reports that in his daily professional interactions, he must often remind people that he is not available on a full-time basis.

> In work life there's the idea that men should always be available 100 %, every day. Trying to make them understand that you don't work every day, and that you can't instantly respond to requests - that's something I often have to repeat. It's not obvious, and depending with whom you work, people don't understand. (Guy, engineer, 36)

12.9 Discussion and Conclusion

The study shows that in the Swiss context of a poorly developed and gendered leave scheme, there are four different paths to leave uptake and being "on leave" covers different situations. Interviewees on *unpaid parental leave* and on *paid paternity leave* benefitted from company-based entitlements. This reflects the role played by work organizations in shaping fathering practices and granting work-life balance opportunities (Pleck 1993), especially in welfare regimes with liberal traits such as Switzerland. However, the preference for social partner solutions instead of state solutions results in significant inequalities among employees and in limited social benefits (Lanfranconi and Valarino 2014; Mach and Trampusch 2011). Indeed the

scope and generosity of these leaves is limited: parental leave is not financially compensated and paid paternity leave does not exceed 1 month. Interviewees who took a *career break* and who used *unemployment insurance* illustrate even less institutionalized forms of leave. Career breaks are private leave solutions, which entail great financial investment from households and insecurity regarding men's labor market reintegration. Fathers using unemployment insurance as a substitute for a paid parental insurance can be viewed as agentic individuals who through their subversive action contest a state which denies them leave rights. However this leave situation comes with non-negligible consequences, such as job search requirements and uncertainties for planning childcare arrangements and career moves, and possibly also entails stigmatization.

Research shows that leave entitlements that are universal, individual, non-transferable, and with high earnings compensation increase men's uptake rates (Haas 2003; Haas and Rostgaard 2011; Moss 2008; O'Brien 2009). Except for paid paternity leave, which guarantees job security and salary payment, leave comes at a price in Switzerland. Therefore leave uptake by fathers (and even more so in a "home alone" manner) is a rare phenomenon. The study sample suggests that men willing and able to pay the price of leave uptake have an atypical profile. In contrast with national trends (FSO 2013a; Levy et al. 2002), they are more likely to work part-time and to share with their partners the consequences of parenthood. Also, many respondents were at some point in their life—in their family or country of origin, their education or employment spheres—socialized to gender equality values, and to men's leave uptake. Finally—and importantly—the majority of respondents and their partners are highly qualified and can count on educational and material resources. It is therefore noteworthy, when putting into perspective the results of the study, that sampled interviewees were especially prone to adopt gender equal values and parenting practices. Considering the lack of survey data on leave uptake by men in Switzerland, we do not know whether the sample is representative of the larger population of pioneer fathers taking leave in a home alone manner and whether results are generalizable. A limitation and possible bias of the study lies in its recruitment process, which reached mainly professionals and individuals with a higher education. Future research should aim to integrate fathers from the working class, who may also experience leave alone situations, for example after job loss and while being on unemployment insurance.

The first aim of the study was to explore fathers' leave experiences. The analysis suggests leave uptake was overall a very positive but also challenging experience. Interviewees perceived the leave as rewarding as it strengthened the father-child relation as well as the couple relation. It helped respondents appropriate their fathering role. As they did intensive care work, and learned to understand and respond adequately to their child's needs, they became more confident in their fathering competences. Being on leave alone was also a challenging and demanding experience. Especially fathers on career break and on unpaid parental leave felt isolated in what they considered a female-dominated environment. Interviewees' leave uptake situation also determined whether they had to engage in work-related activities. Fathers on career break and unemployment insurance were bound to do some job

searching, while respondents on unpaid parental or paid paternity leave did not report working during their leave. Company-based entitlements, which provide job security, seem therefore more favorable to fathers than less institutionalized leaves.

The second aim of the research was to analyze the implications of respondents' leave experience for fatherhood and gender equality. Findings reveal a mixed picture regarding fathers' practices and representations. On the one hand, and in line with results of a previous study (Valarino 2014a), it is clear that taking leave alone prompted fathers to take on full childcare responsibility during this time, and therefore challenged the idea of fathers as secondary parents assisting the mother. On the other hand, substantial differences in the weekly solo care time spent were observed among interviewees. Because some fathers took leave part-time and because—in accordance with the Swiss normative model—almost all partners were employed part-time when they returned to work, fathers never cared alone on a full-time basis during their leave.

Furthermore, looking at the long term implications of leave uptake on gender relations, the study shows that only about half of the respondents have adopted an equal family organization, while in the other households the partner is the main responsible for family life. Interviewees with the most intensive leave experiences in weekly solo childcare time and length of leave (Greg, Guy, Jules, Michel, Ralf and Sam), are those who were subsequently the most gender equal. Leave uptake is associated with more father involvement, but the research design does not enable to make causal interpretations, as selection effects cannot be controlled for. It is nonetheless noteworthy that two fathers in the sample perceived that their leave experience had led them to opt for part-time work.

Overall, these findings support studies showing that leave duration matters for men's childcare involvement (e.g., Haas and Hwang 2008; Huerta et al. 2013; Rehel 2014). It also speaks for Brandth and Kvande's (2013) critical assessment of leave entitlements taken in a part-time manner, as they argue it prevents men from spending "slow-time" with their child. It seems however that the path to leave uptake is not determinant: the most gender equal fathers took different leave types. This suggests that being an involved father in Switzerland implies seizing opportunities according to individual situations and available resources. Partner support and shared values in the couple are also of chief importance for achieving gender equality.

Gendered parenthood identities were also only partially challenged. The leave experience contributed to the belief that parenting skills are learned and can be performed equally by men and women, but most fathers were convinced of a stronger mother-child relationship, on the basis of essentialized biological differences. Gendered representations of parenthood were therefore not fully challenged, as the gender binary was not questioned (Nentwich 2008).

Significant implications of the leave experience and more generally of the transition to parenthood on men's identities as workers were observed. All respondents reported a distanced relationship to work and were concerned with finding work-life balance. Many respondents questioned what Acker (1990) described as the ideal male worker norm; i.e., a disembodied individual, fully available for work, and free

of family obligations. Therefore leave uptake was often combined with part-time work as a long-term solution for being involved fathers—a decision which however entailed non-negligible career consequences.

Finally, the study uncovers implications of fathers' leave uptake on the societal level. Fathers on leave alone can be viewed as agents of social change. On playgrounds and in supermarkets, they play a part in "undoing gender" and transgressing gendered norms of parenthood (Deutsch 2007). Within companies, with their leave uptake and their part-time work, respondents make fatherhood more visible in organizational life and challenge the meaning of masculinity (Burnett et al. 2012; Hojgaard 1997). The leave experience can even take an activist dimension; with the aim to advance gender equality and the social recognition of fatherhood. This dimension is probably linked to the Swiss context, as men are currently not recognized as caregivers by the state. However, similar cases were found in Quebec, where men's leave entitlements are more developed (Tremblay 2014). Altogether, fathers' small-scale transgressive actions can be seen as challenging the institutional level of the gender structure, as conceptualized by Risman (1998, 2004, 2011).

To conclude, this explorative qualitative study on men taking leave alone sheds light on the different types of leave situations that exist in the Swiss context. It shows that in the absence of statutory leave policies for fathers, leave uptake has a high price, which only few are willing and able to pay. The study gives insights in the leave experiences of these pioneer fathers, highlighting the positive experience it represents as well as its challenges. It also analyzes the implications of leave uptake for fatherhood and gender equality, revealing a mixed picture among respondents. While it is clear that leave uptake was not equally transformative for all interviewees, findings suggest it also has a societal impact. Men on leave alone in Switzerland can be viewed as agents of social change contributing to the redefinition of the cultural meaning of fatherhood.

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Chapter 13
Fathers on Leave Alone in Japan: The Lived Experiences of the Pioneers

Hideki Nakazato

13.1 Introduction

When the statutory parental leave scheme for the child's first year was implemented in Japan in 1992, it was designed to be gender neutral in the sense that both mothers and fathers were entitled to take leave. Despite this, and despite the subsequent amendments that were, at least in part, aimed at increasing fathers' take-up of the parental leave to which they were entitled, during 2012–2013 only 2.03 % of all male employees whose spouses gave birth in the previous year have actually done so. While this level of take-up is much lower than that in most European countries, it has increased fourfold from 0.5 % in 2005 and the proportion of fathers who took leave for 1 month or longer has also increased.

During the past decade, there have been some important changes in the parental leave scheme. Under the new scheme working parents are entitled to take leave and receive benefits even if their spouses are not working or are on leave. Furthermore, they get 2 bonus months of leave after their child becomes a year old if both parents take leave. Besides these changes, according to the Act on the Advancement of Measures to Support Raising Next-Generation Children (2003), employers were obliged to establish action plans to support balancing work and raising children.

The increasing, but very low level of fathers' take-up of parental leave in Japan raises two questions. Have policy changes contributed to this gradual increase? What prevents the majority of fathers in Japan from taking parental leave despite these policy changes?

In this chapter, using interviews with fathers who took parental leave on their own in the changing policy environment of Japanese society, the author examines

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how recent improvements in policies affect fathers' negotiation processes in both their workplace and their family through a range of themes, including the factors which enable fathers to take leave alone and fathers' lived experiences of taking leave alone. It explores how these experiences affect both fathers' work and family life in a country where this phenomenon is very rare.

13.2 Leave Policies in Japan

Before the introduction of the gender-neutral parental leave scheme in 1992 the only statutory leave scheme related to birth and care of children was only unpaid maternity leave for 6 weeks before, and 8 weeks after birth. In the initial parental leave scheme, although both parents had the right to ask for a year's leave that included 8 weeks of post-natal maternity leave, employers were allowed, based on the collective agreement with their employees, to reject the request for leave by an employee whose partner was on leave or not working, unless it was during the 8 weeks immediately after the birth (the maternity leave period). Leave could be taken for a continuous period only, which meant fathers could not take leave when their partner returned to work after her parental leave if they (the fathers) had been on leave during the first 8 weeks.

Benefit payments by the statutory employment insurance were introduced in 1995 at 25 % of an employee's average earnings before leave. Since the implementation of the statutory parental leave scheme, the period of basic leave entitlement after birth for a parent has been 12 months including maternity leave (8 weeks). However, frequent amendments were subsequently made in terms of benefit payment, conditions for special extension and eligibility, especially in relation to the other parent's employment status.

The leave policies during the period when the participants of this study were on leave were as follows: from 2005 (when Toru's wife gave birth to their first child) to March 2007, the eligibility criteria for parental leave were the same as those in place when the leave was implemented in 1992, when employers were allowed to reject the request for leave by an employee whose partner was on leave or not working unless it was during the 8 weeks after birth (the maternity leave period).

Benefit payment for maternity leave was 60 % of previous earnings, and that for parental leave was 40 %. Parental leave benefit was an individual entitlement covered by employment insurance. Therefore, if an employer allowed an employee to take leave, the benefit was paid to the employee even if the other parent was on leave and was receiving benefit at the same time.

Leave and payment could be extended until a child was 18 months when (1) the child needed care for a period of 2 weeks or more because of injury, sickness, etc.; or (2) admission to a childcare centre has been requested but denied for the time being.

Parental leave only applied to an individual employed on a fixed-term contract when they met all the following conditions: (1) they had been employed by the same employer for a continuous period of at least 1 year; (2) they were likely to be remain employed after the day on which their child reached 1 year of age, and (3) it was not obvious that they would finish the contract without an extension within 1 year after the child's first birthday.

In April 2007, the amount of the benefit was increased to two-thirds of previous earnings for maternity leave and to 50 % for parental leave. Three years later, in April 2010, parental leave became an individual entitlement. From that date fathers could take leave regardless of the mother's situation. There was also a change in the number of leave periods permitted. From this time onwards, fathers could take a second period of parental leave even when they had taken parental leave during the first 8 weeks after birth.

A sharing bonus was also introduced. Under this scheme, leave could be extended until the child was 14 months old if both parents took leave, even though each parent was entitled to only 12 months after birth, including the maternity leave period. The objective of these changes was to increase fathers' leave-taking when the majority of mothers were at home or on leave until the child's first birthday. A newly introduced exemption from social insurance contributions increased compensation for the income loss during leave.

Although all fathers in this study had taken leave earlier, in April 2014, the benefit was increased to 67 % for the first 6 months for each parent, which could be an incentive for fathers to take leave after the mother had taken leave for 6 months.

What characterises Japanese leave policies during the period under study, especially the period after 2010, is the fact that the benefit payment became an *individual right* independent of a partner's employment status. The special extension to 18 months (subject to the conditions such as the non-availability of a childcare place) also needs attention as it enabled mothers to remain on leave until a childcare place became available, which could be a disincentive to fathers' taking leave. As Fig. 13.1 shows, there is an increase, with fluctuations, in the proportion of eligible fathers who took parental leave from the late 1990s to 2013 but the rate is still very low.

If we look at the duration of the leave by gender (Fig. 13.2) we see there is a big gap between fathers and mothers. Among the tiny proportion of fathers who took parental leave at all, very few (only one-quarter of 1.89 %, which is approximately 0.4 %), took 1 month or more. Mothers took obligatory maternity leave for 8 weeks after birth before they took the parental leave, which skews the contribution to the care of children by gender even more.

It should be also noted that around 70 % of women who gave birth between 2005 and 2009 did not have a job at the time of the first birthday of their first child and another 17 % took parental leave in addition to maternity leave, even though there has been steady increase in mothers who return to work after parental leave (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research 2011).

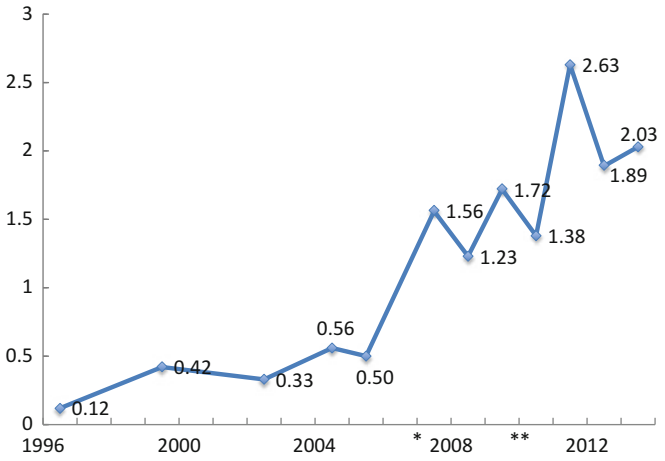

Fig. 13.1 Trends in the proportion of fathers taking parental leave (*2007: benefit = 50 %, **2010: Entitlement as an individual; divisible into 2 periods, 2 month's bonus after child's first birthday when both parents take leave. Source: Ministry HLW 2014. Note: The result for 2011 is the national average excluding data for Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima Prefectures)

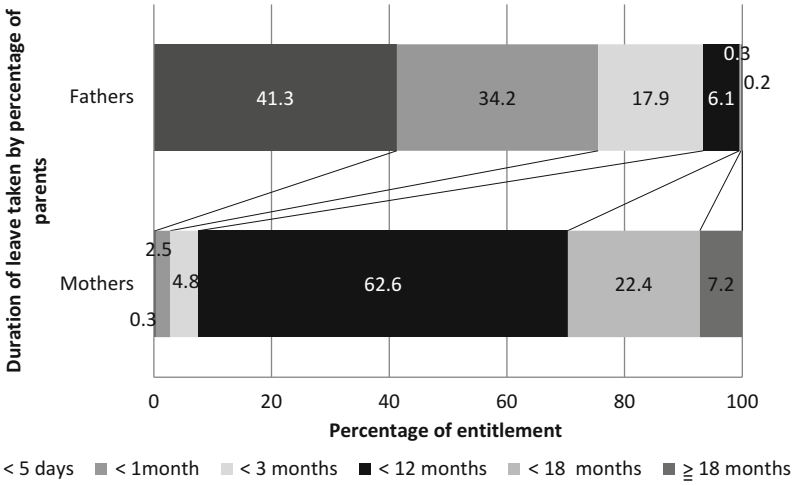

Fig. 13.2 Leave period taken by fathers and mothers (2012) (Source: Ministry HLW (2013) Office Survey Table 18(1) & 18(2) (Recategorised). Note: Diagonal lines connect the borders of the same sets of categories between fathers and mothers)

13.3 Previous Research and Theoretical Approach

13.3.1 Why Fathers Do Not Take Parental Leave in Japan

Most empirical studies on fathers' leave-taking in Japan focus on the reasons why fathers do not use parental leave. According to a large-scale national sample survey of 38,554 babies born in 2010, 2 % of fathers had taken, were on, or would take parental leave (Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare 2012). Approximately 40 % of fathers who did not take parental leave said either that there was no provision for parental leave at their place of work, or did not know whether there was or not. Among fathers who knew about their leave entitlements and yet did not take leave, the reason that the largest proportion (49.0 %) chose is that the atmosphere and the situation at the workplace discourages fathers from taking leave. Twenty per cent chose the reason 'My wife is on leave' and 14.5 % chose 'economic reasons'. It is important that the most frequent response was based on their lack of knowledge about their leave entitlement as most fathers are entitled to take leave if they are employed as permanent full-time workers (Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare 2012).

Similar reasons were also found in other studies (Matsuda 2012; Morita 2008; Sato and Takeishi 2004). Economic reasons are specifically related to anxiety about the impact on household income. This is explained by the large gender pay gap between fathers and mothers and insufficient leave benefit (Matsuda 2012). The workplace factors that discourage fathers from taking leave have been divided into three categories (Morita 2008; Sato and Takeishi 2004): (1) the atmosphere at workplace that discourages fathers from taking leave, (2) the men's anxiety about increasing the workload of their colleagues, (3) their anxiety about its impact on their own career.

The statement 'My wife is on leave' is not the same kind of reason as the others listed above. Mother's taking leave does not necessarily prevent fathers from doing so. This reason reflects a gendered view of childcare. The perception that childcare is the role of mothers is the reason that many fathers chose in another study (Morita 2008).

13.3.2 Why Fathers Take Parental Leave in Japan

Although there are fewer studies that focus on fathers who take parental leave, because of the scarcity of such fathers in Japan, some give us a valuable insight into fathers' experience of taking leave and the factors that enable them to do so (Fujino-Kakinami 2006; Morita 2011; Takeishi 2011). According to these studies, these enabling and encouraging factors are

- expecting less economic damage because their wife is in most cases, working full-time (Fujino-Kakinami 2006).
- the father's intention to support the mother's return to work (Fujino-Kakinami 2006).
- efforts made at the workplace to cover the father's absence, such as providing a replacement and offering a telecommuting option (Fujino-Kakinami 2006).
- information has been provided at the workplace on job and family (Morita 2011).
- the manager's encouraging attitude (Morita 2011).
- the father's and his partner's positive attitude towards sharing housework and childcare because of dual earning (Fujino-Kakinami 2006).

According to Takeishi's (2011) study, which used a survey and interviews about workplaces where some male employees took parental leave, personal factors had more impact on their decision to take leave than environmental factors in the workplace, such as the provisions of replacement employees and the workload level. These factors include a strong desire in the male employees to take leave, their understanding its value, earlier discussions they had had with their wives about leave-taking, and their preparation for the loss of household income. However, in the interviews, the fathers who took parental leave also show the importance of having an understanding atmosphere in the workplace, such as needing to do little overtime, managers' understanding of this leave entitlement, cooperative attitudes among other workers, a clear range of job roles and necessary knowledge and skills, and an announcement of support for parental leave by the whole company.

Other findings derived from studies on fathers who have taken parental leave include its effects on themselves, their family relations and their workplace (Fujino-Kakinami 2006; Morita 2011). According to these studies, the fathers expressed positive views on their experience during the leave. They recognised the hardship of working mothers, experienced changes in their view on work and life, and gender roles, and developed an effective work style (to avoid overtime so they could be more involved in the care of their child and housework) within a limited time. Some of them developed social connections outside the workplace.

The studies examined here seem to have focused on the most common experiences of fathers who take parental leave. Looking at studies in countries where a relatively large proportion of fathers take parental leave suggests, however, that there is a diversity of experiences.

13.3.3 Theoretical Framework and International Context

As well as the interest that these studies on Japanese fathers have generated in this research, the present study follows the theoretical framework described in the introduction of this book. It draws on different approaches including family and parenting studies, gender studies and social policy, which are not a prominent focus in Japanese scholarship. In particular, comparisons will be drawn with Wall's (2014)

Portuguese study and her emergent profile typology. The four profiles range from 'supported (helpers)' who are strongly supported both by a partner and a third party, to 'innovation and deconstruction'; those who, before taking leave, were already regularly involved in housework and childcare, then became fully involved caregivers, and reflect the impact of leave on gender roles. The study revealed the diversity of fathers' experiences of taking leave alone. In Portugal as in Japan, the proportion of fathers who took parental leave was very low but rapidly increased after the implementation of a new leave policy. It is valuable to discern whether there may be a similar variation among Japanese fathers who took parental leave alone.

13.4 Methods

13.4.1 Research Questions

Based on findings from Japanese research and the common goals of the Fathers on Leave Alone Project, I set up a number of research questions.

The first major research question was what characterises the fathers' motivations and decisions to take parental leave in Japan, a country where this practice is very rare. This includes asking how the fathers were able to

- overcome the fear of income reduction
- negotiate the common perception that the care of the children (or at least taking parental leave) is the mothers' role
- cope with the fear of negative reaction from their workplaces
- deal with the anxiety about imposing increased workloads on their colleagues?

The second major research question was an attempt to obtain their reflections on taking leave and the lived experience of fathers who took leave alone. The third question was whether fathers' leave take-up contributed to the couples seeking equal career opportunities.

Sampling Criteria

Following the sampling criteria for the Father on Leave Alone Project, this study recruited fathers who took parental leave alone for at least 1 month with a child who was under 3 years old. As anticipated from the statistics showing the scarcity of Japanese fathers who took parental leave for more than a month, finding fathers who also met the project's sampling criteria was difficult. Two were recruited through acquaintances. Snowball sampling was also adopted. I asked participants and my other acquaintances to introduce me to someone who appeared to meet the criteria. Although I was given contacts for more than ten fathers who took parental leave, closer investigation revealed that in actuality some of them took leave for shorter

periods or had done so with their partner. From February to September 2014, six fathers who met the criteria agreed to be interviewed, although another father who also met the criteria was reluctant to participate due to possible negative consequences at his workplace.

Considering the limitation of time for the interviews, which were to be conducted by one researcher, I tried various pathways to reach participants to avoid collecting data only on fathers with similar profile. Table 13.1 describes the profiles of the interviewees and their partners at the time of leave. All the fathers are university graduates, but the mothers educational level varied from that of high school graduate to holders of a master's degree. The fathers are employed in a large multinational corporation, a small IT company, the public sector, a university and a pharmacy. All have two children, but five of them took parental leave for one child only. They were in their 30s or early 40s at the time of the interview. When they took parental leave, four of them were 35 years of age or older and two were in their late twenties.

In order to visually compare careers and leave take-up patterns between partners and across couples, I have created a chart with different horizontal lines representing work situations and leave take-up for each of the partners (Fig. 13.3).

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews with the six fathers were conducted according to the guidelines of the Fathers on Leave Alone Project at the researcher's office (a single-occupied room) or a café. The interviews lasted 2 to 3 hours and were taped. Notes were also taken over the course of the interviews.

Core questions included:

- interviewee and family profile (including occupations, working hours, commuting hours, duration of marriage, age of family members.)
- timing and duration of leave for fathers and mothers
- process of deciding to take leave
- reactions to and comments about taking leave alone
- fathering and mothering during the first days/weeks after birth
- fathering during leave alone (good or bad things, major difficulties, negative or positive feelings over the day)
- impact of leave take-up on different domains of life (relationship with the partner and children, work)
- going back to work and organising childcare after leave
- balancing work and family life today
- perception of differences between fathers and mothers

Table 13.1 Profiles of the interviewees and their partners

Participant	Natsuo	Ikuya	Toru	Osamu (1st leave)	Osamu (2nd leave)	Masaki	Hiroshi
Child to care for	1st	1st	1st	1st	2nd	2nd	1st
Father's age at the child's birth	35	36	27	35	39	40	29
Father's work (all full-time permanent positions)	Marketing staff at a large multinational company	Administrator at a university	City administrator	Engineer in a large foreign multinational company (deemed working hour system)	Engineer in a large foreign multinational company (deemed working hour system)	Employee in a small IT company. (deemed working hour system)	Pharmacist in a small pharmacy
Father's education	University	University	University	University	University	University	University
Child's age when leave started (months)	6	2	15	12	7	8	1
Leave started in	Aug 2007	Sep 2010	Jan 2007	Jan 2010	Jan 2014	Dec 2013	Mar 2007
Leave period (months)	8	8	4	3	3	6	10
Leave alone period (months)	5	7	4	3	3	1	10

(continued)

Table 13.1 (continued)

Participant	Natsuo	Ikuya	Toru	Osamu (1st leave)	Osamu (2nd leave)	Masaki	Hiroshi
Benefit payment (% of salary)	50	80	0 (leave started after child reached 1 year)	50	50	50 (approximately 65 % including exemption from insurance fees)	40
Benefit source	Statutory employment insurance	50 % by employer + 30 % employment insurance		Employment insurance only	Employment insurance only		Employment insurance only
Mother's age at the child's birth	37	33	27	33	38	39	29
Mother's last work before the birth	Fixed-term employee at a large multinational company	Fixed-term employee at a university	Childcare worker	Permanent employee at a large foreign multinational company	Manager at a large foreign multinational company	Permanent employee at a large software company.	Surgeon at a university hospital
Mother's education	Postgraduate	University	Junior college	MBA	MBA	High school	University

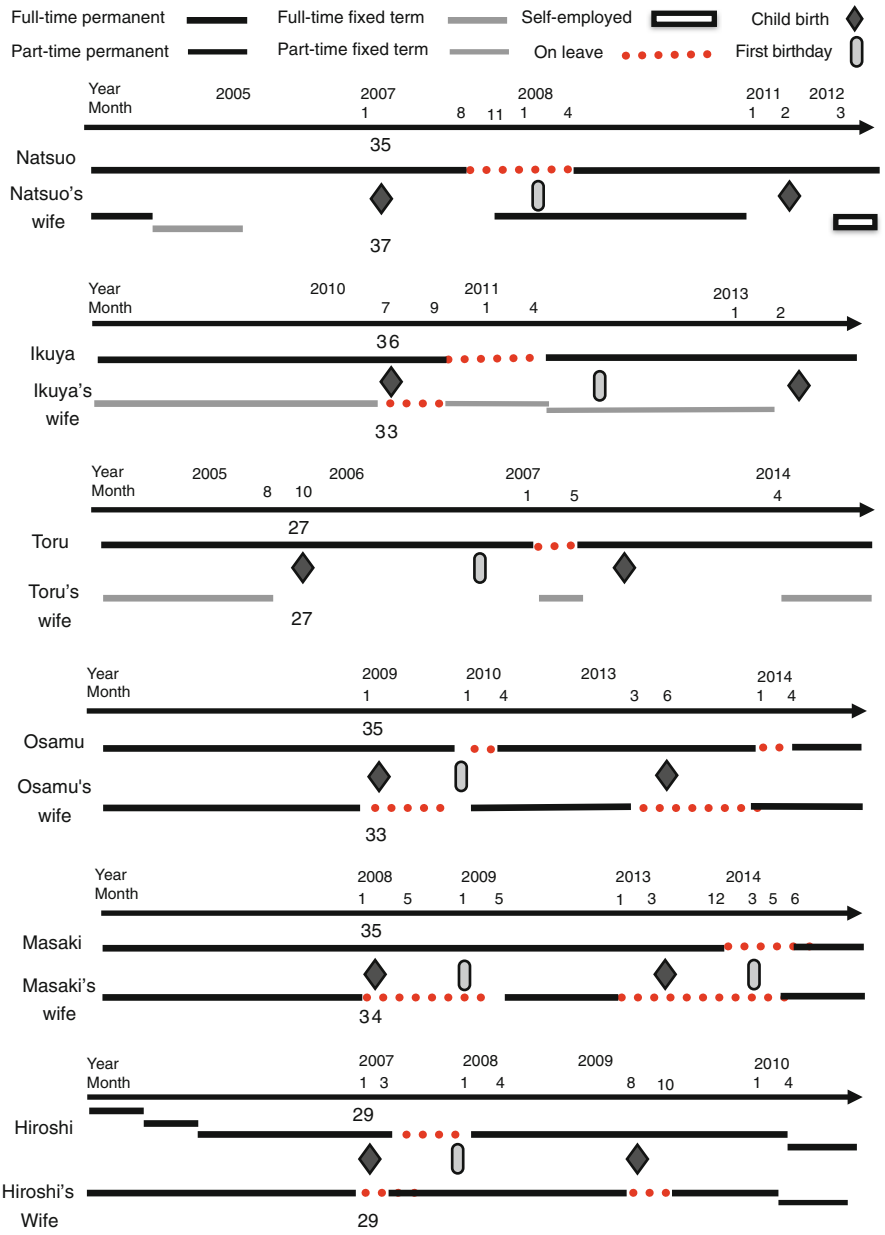

Fig. 13.3 Characteristics and leave take-up patterns of the participants and their wives (Notes: *Stepped lines* denote "job changes". *Blanks* between *lines* denote "unemployed". *Numbers* near the *symbols* for the child birth denote the ages of the father and mother at the birth)

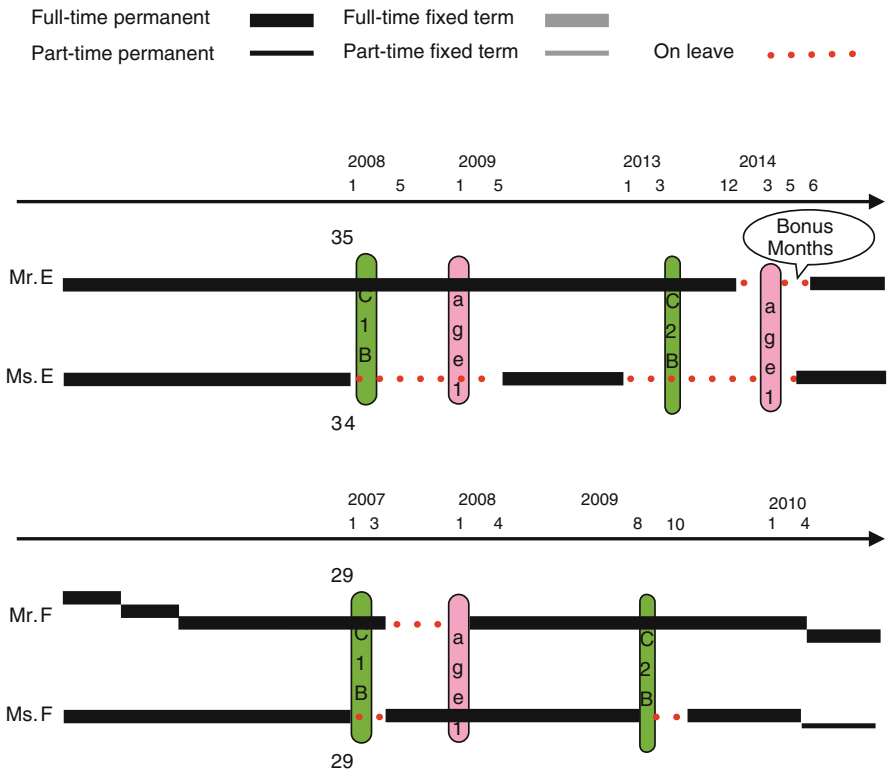

Fig. 13.3 (continued)

Coding and Analysis

The parts of the interviews related to the research questions were transcribed. The transcribed responses were coded with the assistance of NVivo, a qualitative analysis software program. Coding methods were partly deductive and partly inductive. We first set up nodes based on the research questions and core questions. Within each predefined node, we created sub-nodes that represent the different types of responses. For example, we set up a node on negative feeling and a sub-node on isolation beforehand, and added sub-nodes such as bored or irritated in the category of negative feelings inductively after reading the transcript.

13.5 Reasons for Taking Leave

We start by examining the motivations and reasons given by fathers taking parental leave in Japan. All the fathers interviewed were able to clearly explain why they took parental leave. In the previous detailed studies mentioned above, fathers took

parental leave to support their wife's return to work after her leave or decision to stop working in order to care for their child (Fujino-Kakinami 2006). However, for the participants of the current study, their wife's work situation was not necessarily the reason for taking leave. One group of fathers took leave because of their wife's need to return to work (Ikuya, Osamu, Hiroshi), and another group of fathers took leave for other reasons (Natsuo, Toru, Masaki).

13.5.1 Taking Leave to Support the Mother's Return to Work

Three of the participants (Ikuya, Osamu, Hiroshi) explained that they started to consider the possibility of taking leave in order to enable their wife's early return to work. Although two of them had wives who worked as full-time and permanent employees, Ikuya's wife was in a fixed-term position that was going to be terminated before her child's first birthday so she was not entitled to parental leave. This made for a different situation:

> The possible options were to quit the job and become a stay-at-home mum, or to return to work after the two-month maternity leave by putting our child in daycare. The first option was not acceptable as she did not want to quit and her employer asked her to return after two months if possible.… So we took the other option and checked whether there was a daycare place or a pre-school for a child of two months old, but we couldn't find one. There was little information about baby sitters, either. Then we came up with the idea the fathers can take parental leave, can't they? I started looking for the leave provision at my workplace and found it. (Ikuya)

The other two fathers also started searching for information about their entitlements when they decided to take leave because their wife needed to return to work before the child was able to go to daycare.

13.5.2 Taking Leave for Other Reasons

The three other fathers took leave for several different reasons, including the child's best interest and the fact that they wanted to spend time with the child.

Natsuo's wife was not working when they had their first child in 2007 (even though she was expecting to go back to work), and he wanted to take leave because he had learned from a book that the time a parent spends with a child is important. 'It sounded interesting to take leave as none of my other male colleagues had done so' (Natsuo). Under the statutory leave system at that point employers were able to limit the leave taken by employees whose partner was on leave or not working. However, the company Natsuo worked for provided leave entitlements beyond the statutory system, which enabled him to take leave even though his wife was not working. Although he started leave when his wife was at home, Natsuo took leave alone for 5 months as she started searching for jobs and found one after Natsuo started his leave.

Toru wanted to take leave and asked his wife to find a job (a condition for him to take leave) because he knew fathers could do this and thought 'Why shouldn't I, even if other fathers don't?' Masaki did not take leave for his first child. At the time his second child was born in 2010 he was not satisfied with his situation at the workplace and was considering whether he should continue working there. His wife suggested he took leave instead of quitting. He agreed but asked his wife to continue her leave. So he was on leave with his wife for 5 months and then on leave alone for a month when his wife returned to work and his child started daycare. Because of the amendment of the statutory leave system in 2010, he was entitled to leave even if his wife continued her leave.

13.6 Coping with Common Obstacles

Existing evidence suggests that there is a range of common obstacles hindering Japanese fathers' leave-taking, including financial obstacles and those relating to the workplace or to cultural factors (Matsuda 2012; Morita 2008; Sato and Takeishi 2004). In this section we examine how our sample of fathers negotiated these constraints.

13.6.1 Reduction of Income

The first question we should ask is how these fathers coped with the income reduction that resulted from their taking leave. In two cases (Osamu and Hiroshi), their wife was working full-time with an income comparable to their husband's, and they did not have to worry much about the economic impact of the father's taking leave. In other cases, the mothers did not necessarily earn the same amount as their husbands, or they were on leave or not working at the time. Except in the case of Toru, long dual-earner careers before the birth of the first child seem to have helped them reduce economic damage. Natsuo, Ikuya and Masaki had their first child when they were in their mid-thirties:

> Well, we had been a dual-earner couple until the birth of the child, and we expected my wife would start working again. Otherwise, we would be worried about the loss of income. (Natsuo)

Toru is the only participant who received no leave benefit payment, and his wife was not working at the birth of their first child. However, he calculated the savings they would have to make and also considered the income of his wife, who would be working part-time while he was on leave, so he saved the necessary amount before his leave started.

13.6.2 Getting Information About Leave Entitlement

As we already know from previous research, lack of knowledge about their own entitlements is a major reason for fathers not to take parental leave. How did the fathers in the current study learn about their entitlements? Three fathers who decided to take leave to support their wife's return to work started searching for information about parental leave in books or on the internet and intranets.

Among the other fathers, two (Natsuo and Toru) were interested in the role of fathers in the care of young children and decided to take leave spontaneously and therefore started searching for detailed information about leave entitlements. Even when his second child was born, Masaki did not know it was possible for fathers to take parental leave, but about 6 months later he read an internet article about the new entitlement for fathers to take leave even when their wife was at home to take care of their child, and he talked about it with his wife. This situation might have led her to suggest to Masaki that he should take leave when she saw he was dissatisfied with his work.

13.6.3 Moving on from Perceptions of Mothers as Primary Carers

Although three fathers were urged by their wives' needs to find someone to take care of their children, taking leave would not have been an option if both or either of the parents had believed that childcare was the mothers' role alone or that it was impossible for fathers to take over the role of primary carer. Moreover, the other three volunteered to take leave. How were they able to avoid the gendered perception of their roles?

The participants were not confident about taking care of their child. Some of the mothers were more or less worried about their husband's care role. What all couples had in common, however, was that they had been sharing housework before the birth of the child. Ikuya and Osamu would cook regularly. In the other four cases, although wives had taken the main role in cooking, the fathers were taking at least some part regularly or had experiences of regular housework, such as cooking on weekends, helping with food preparation or cooking regularly before marriage. According to the National Survey on the Family 2008 (Nishioka et al. 2012) only 20 % of married women whose youngest child was under 1 year old had husbands who cooked once or more per week, so cooking could have been an obstacle to fathers' taking leave in most families. It is possible to assume that the fathers interviewed had an advantage over average Japanese fathers in that they could manage housework alone.

It should also be noted that, from the fathers' point of view, none of the wives were traditional homemakers. According to the participants, their wives did not worry about their husband taking leave.

Q: What was your wife's reaction?
Natsuo: Nothing special, I mean, she said, like, 'OK'.
Q: No surprise?
Natsuo: Well, No.
Q: No pleasure? No opposition?
Natsuo: That's right.
Q: Did she know that fathers could take parental leave?
Natsuo: Yes, yes, maybe she did. She likes gender studies and feminism.

Hiroshi's wife worried about his stress from taking care of their child alone, but did not stick to traditional gender roles:

> She thinks we should do what we can do. She is working [as a medical doctor] at the place where they had to do things regardless of their gender, so she did not think 'Men should do this, women should do that'. (Hiroshi)

Although the fathers were not very confident about their role as a primary caregiver, their housework experiences and their own and their wives' attitudes that were relatively free from traditional gender role stereotypes seem to have helped them take leave alone.

13.6.4 Fear of Negative Workplace Attitudes

According to existing studies (Morita 2008; Sato and Takeishi 2004), apart from the lack of knowledge about their entitlement, emotional barriers such as a discouraging atmosphere at work is the largest reason why fathers do not take parental leave. The role of managers in encouraging or hindering parental leave uptake has been shown to be a crucial factor and this was explored in this study.

For three fathers (Natsuo, Ikuya, Toru), managers were supportive from the time they first raised the issue, although Natsuo's manager told him later that he originally thought he was joking. Although their occupations varied from that of sales staff at a multinational corporation to a university administrator and a public sector employee, they all referred to their manager' personality as a factor in their responses to the request to take leave.

The other three fathers did not get approval for their requests immediately and needed further explanations or negotiations. In two cases, it was only a matter of information that was needed. Masaki's manager did not know that both parents may take leave at the same time, but after Masaki explained the position and sent him some information about the changes implemented that year to the scheme, the manager said it was OK if the law provided for it. There was an atmosphere conducive to allowing long leave because the company employed many international staff who wanted to take leave to visit their home country and many female employees who liked travelling overseas. When Osamu told his manager about his plan to take leave, he reported that the manager *held his head in his hands* as the timing was not convenient for the company, which was undergoing restructuring. Apparently the

manager had no idea about the legal entitlement for fathers to take parental leave and asked for time to consider. After a month of information seeking, he reported back that he now understood that employers were legally unable to reject requests by fathers for parental leave and offered to suspend Osamu's post for 3 months until he returned.

Hiroshi was in a more difficult situation. His manager was surprised when Hiroshi told him about his plan and intimated that he could not guarantee that Hiroshi would be able to return to his job if a replacement had been employed on a permanent basis.

In summary, while three workplaces facilitated leave-taking by fathers, the other three presented more constraining environments. In the case of Hiroshi, there was even a threat of job loss and fear it would have a negative impact on his career. However, in the area where he lived, his qualification as a pharmacist virtually guaranteed that he would be able to find a replacement job. Moreover, in the case of this couple the high income of Hiroshi's wife helped his decision. What the six fathers did have in common was that they had all made strategic preparations before asking for parental leave from their managers. It appears that the informants had much more knowledge about their formal leave entitlements than their managers.

13.6.5 Impact on Colleagues' Workload

Anxiety about imposing additional workloads upon their colleagues is also known to be an obstacle to fathers taking leave. Having replacement employees would reduce this anxiety. Was this the case with the fathers in our study? Among six fathers, however, only two (Natsuo and Hiroshi) had the comfort of knowing there would be a replacement for them at work during their leave. How did the other fathers cope with the anxiety about the impact on their colleagues' workloads?

For the cases where leave period was relatively short (Toru and Osamu), the fathers were able to suspend most of their tasks until they returned, although they asked their colleagues to take on part of their tasks. For those who took longer leave without replacement, collective support at the workplace helped. Masaki emphasised that the ongoing transition of work styles, in which employees work more as a team and nobody is given tasks that can be done only by themselves, made it easier to hand over their tasks to their colleagues. Ikuya worried about the inconvenience he would cause but he knew his colleagues (including the junior ones) would compensate for his absence and his manager assured him that she would be able to handle it.

Although having a replacement employee decreases the father's sense of guilt, it can increase the risk of losing his position to return, although it is illegal for the company to dismiss or transfer an employee who has taken leave. Hiroshi accepted his manager's suggestion about recruiting and employing a permanent replacement, which meant there was the possibility that he would lose the position to which he hoped to return.

13.7 Lived Experience of Fathers Who Took Leave Alone and Its Effects

So far, we have explored the processes through which fathers obtained their leave alone status. In this section the lived experience of their leave and its effects on their later work and personal lives will be examined, with a particular focus on common and diverse features.

13.7.1 Housework and Care During Leave

Five of six fathers can be described as fully involved caregivers during some part of the leave alone periods and did all kinds of care and housework except for breastfeeding. None of the fathers received regular support from their own parents. Masaki had a somewhat different experience from the other five. His son would normally go to a childcare centre during the period when he took leave alone. However, despite that, Masaki actually had to care for his son alone all day as the child fell sick for a week during the period.

Ikuya describe his typical day, going for a walk holding his daughter in the morning and the afternoon, feeding her milk and cooking, as follows:

Ikuya: It was the hot season in August and September. I would go for a walk holding my baby early in the morning. That was after my wife left home and I would feed her milk or we would go out together when my wife was away at work. After coming back I got her to sleep or fed her in an air-conditioned room. Then I would go for a walk again when it got cooler in the late afternoon. For breakfast I just ate some bread, and had some leftovers or quick meal for lunch. For dinner, I would cook one or two dishes before my wife came home as long as I had the time. While my wife breastfed our daughter and put her to bed, I would prepare the meals for the next day. I took picture of these and put them on the blog or tweeted them.

Q: What was the proportion of the share of cooking?

Ikuya: Well, fifty-fifty; actually, I did 60 to 70 %. My wife would cook after she came home. Shopping at a supermarket on her way back was her role, and sometimes she cooked quickly or she told me to cook what she bought. We share our recipes, which expanded our cooking repertoire.

Toru also did all things necessary to care for a small child including cooking most of the meals:

Q: Were you preparing the baby food at that time?

Toru: Yes, I cooked it soft, cut into small pieces and so on.

Q: Was it a different experience to do all these things including preparing meals for very young children while you were on leave, even though you had cooked before?

Toru: Yes, but I myself said I wanted to do it. I felt I would do my best if it is for a limited time and there would be only be a relatively short experience. A fifteen-month-old boy cannot eat by himself, so I had to feed him, while I was eating or doing something else.

The case where the mother was working the longest hours was Osamu's. He spent nearly 12 h per day alone with his child immediately after the mother returned to work. He would struggle to do housework while dealing with a child crying almost all day.

Although Masaki felt as if he was just on holiday during the first week of his leave together with his wife, he changed his attitude after his wife asked him what he was on leave for. They agreed that cooking was his role even during the period of leave which they spend together and had a hard time thinking about preparing a variety of different meals every day.

13.7.2 Emotional Experiences

In this section fathers' accounts of their mental and emotional experiences will be examined. Although an existing study emphasises fathers' positive evaluation of their leave experiences (Fujino-Kakinami 2006), many of the fathers in the current study talk about the difficulties they experienced, and four of the five fathers who took leave for the first child did not do so for their second child. Natsuo reflects that parents should not take care of their child on their own without help from their partner.

Most fathers experienced isolation or feeling impatient waiting for their wife's return home, even though in most cases their wife did not work overtime and in some cases they worked reduced hours. This isolation seems to be partly related to the difficulties for fathers to find another man in a similar situation, given the small proportion of fathers who take parental leave in Japan:

> I couldn't make a 'mother friend', and didn't have courage to get into mums' circles. All I was able to do was to talk to my child. I realised how isolated a stay-at-home mum would be. I attended a couple of events for children, but there were only mothers there. Well, I felt very hesitant about going to those kinds of events. They would look at me wondering what I was doing, so I could not go very often. (Toru)

13.7.3 Busy and Bored

Fathers on leave alone experienced feeling busy or bored, or on occasions, both. One father contrasted his leave alone experience with the experience of taking leave with his wife:

Q: Do you remember what your life was like?

Natsuo: While I was on leave alone? Well, you know, it was monotonous.… When I was on leave with my wife I thought there was too much time and

> there was no need to take leave together. Too many hands. After getting leave on my own, I had no time, only an hour or so, for instance, to surf on the internet. I think I was irritated. When I put my son down, he would start crying, so when I tried to get him to nap, I would hold him on the sofa and fall asleep with him. I was bored, yes, bored.

Another father recalled how busy he had been when his child was sick:

> The hardest time was when my child was sick. I had to do all the housework alone, but since I had to keep an eye on my child, I had to be in the living room except when he was sleeping, during which time I put the laundry in and out for drying and cooked quickly. I felt I was extremely short of time, and had to do things on my own. (Masaki)

13.7.4 Feelings of Responsibility for a 'Fragile Infant'

Some of the fathers described their fear resulting from the heavy responsibility of caring for a child:

> The hardest thing was that she wouldn't accept bottled milk when I started caring for her alone. She would accept the bottle from my wife, and loved to be breastfed when my wife came back from work, so I felt a sense of failure and was at a loss as to what to do. But then she suddenly started to drink when I slightly changed the way I held the bottle.… I had been wondering if she was going to lose weight, or whether she just didn't want to be fed by a man's hands until I found a right way to make it feel right. I really felt anxious when it wasn't going well at first. (Ikuya)

> The largest difference [from the period before my leave] was that there was a strong pressure that there was no one to take care of her if I didn't do it. She was so small that I was afraid that at the worst, she might even die if I failed in some way. So for quite some time I continually experienced a vague feeling of anxiety. (Osamu)

13.7.5 Positive Feelings

The fathers' experiences were not always of hardship, although in this sample reports of difficulties and stress predominated. In their accounts fathers also recalled pleasant experiences; in particular, walking around with their child and watching the child learning to do what he/she had not been able to do – to observe the growth and development of their child:

> After my first daughter got used to the situation [with her mother working], I was happy with the life on leave, to be honest. When I work, it was hectic every day and full of stress, but I was away from it, if only temporarily, so I spent a very pleasant time in that sense.… Going out for a walk after lunch, that was almost impossible when I'm working. (Osamu)

13.7.6 Strategies for Coping with Negative Feelings and Stress

There is one case with much less description of isolation or stress than others. It seems that Hiroshi did not experience these emotions because of his very exceptional resources. He had a male friend who had already started taking care of a child while he worked at home as a programmer and his wife was working as a full-time surgeon. His parents sometimes visited to see their only grandchild. In addition, he started to use a crèche (3–4 h for 2 days/week) from the middle of his leave period. He attributed his relatively lower level of stress partly to the fact he had kept cats from the time before the birth of the child. He was able to continue talking to someone other than the baby. This helped him to become accustomed to a living thing with a will of its own, which was sometimes difficult to control, before the birth of his child.

It should be also noted that three of other fathers used blogs or social networking services to share their experience with other people and that seems to have compensated for their lack of communication with adults face to face.

13.7.7 Effects of Taking Leave on Their Own

What effects did taking leave on their own have on fathers? From the family point of view, all the fathers said they understood how hard it must be to be stay-at-home mum, and they came to think of childcare and housework as their own responsibilities:

> What I thought recently is that parental leave is not so much for the child, but more for the partner. There are bigger effects for the partner: sharing the difficulties and the feelings related to them. I found that there are a lot of things you cannot know about until you actually do them. I hadn't recognised how hard it would be to prepare every meal before I took on that role. There is endless housework for 356 days a year, which produces nothing. That is very painful. By learning about it by experience, I was able to become more considerate to my partner, and came to support her spontaneously after my leave ended. (Masaki)

The way housework and childcare was divided up after the fathers returned to work varied across the participants and it seems to depend on agreement between the partner, taking account of the balance of priorities in their occupational careers. The fathers whose wives were career oriented, such as Natsuo, Osamu and Hiroshi seemed to share housework and childcare almost equally with their wives. Nevertheless, even fathers whose wives worked part-time or were not working continued to share housework to some degree; for example, cooking regularly on weekends even after they returned to work.

In terms of the relationship with his children, only one father sees a clear difference between the child for whom he took leave and the child for whom he did not. Toru sees the elder child as more attached to him while the second child is more attached to his wife. He reflected: 'It might be just a coincidence, or the time we

spent together during leave might have built mutual trust. It was an important experience'. Even though other fathers did not mention clear differences in their relationships with their children, they describe having a closer relationship with their children overall compared with other fathers.

In addition to the effects on their family relationships, the experience of taking parental leave on their own also affected the fathers' work. Three fathers said that they learned to work efficiently and to utilise fragmented pieces of time, and two of them changed their way of working so they did not have to work overtime. Three fathers have taken on the role of picking up their children at the childcare centre, which is more of a mothers' role in Japan, as it requires leaving their workplace without doing overtime.

Other effects on the fathers' work include a deeper understanding of co-workers and clients and a new appointment to an important position. Toru was assigned to the section in charge of early childhood education and care. Although it was hard for Hiroshi to catch up on the up-to-date professional information he had missed during his 10-month leave, he came to understand the situation of clients (mothers) who are taking care of sick children.

In addition to the effects the experience had on the fathers themselves, three noticed effects on their workplace. Natsuo as a manager made his section overtime-free, and another two noticed colleagues made changes in their working hours.

13.8 Does Fathers' Leave-Taking Contribute to Equal Career Opportunities Between Couples?

Here I will address the last major research question: whether fathers' take-up of leave promotes equal career opportunities between partners. Figure 13.3 clearly illustrates there is both continuity and breaks in the occupational careers of all the couples who participated in the study.

As we saw earlier, in three cases (Ikuya, Osamu, Hiroshi), fathers took leave prompted by the necessities relating to their wife's work situation. In other cases, the fathers took leave for other reasons such as their interest in the care of the child or the necessity to take a break from work. However, these differences do not seem to have affected the equality of career opportunities between the partners. In two cases, Osamu's wife and Masaki's wife had continued working in the same company at the time of the interview, and the reasons why the fathers took leave differed. Osamu explained his intention to support his wife's career:

Q: Whose idea was your taking leave? What did you and your wife discuss?

Osamu: Well, it was mine, I think. She would have been on leave for 1 year, and when I heard her plan to return to work afterward, I thought I should support her and take leave if I was to consider her career.

Osamu was the only one of all the fathers in the current study who took parental leave twice. On the contrary, the aim of Masaki's taking leave was not to support his wife's career. However, both resulted in the continuity of the mothers' work, even though the mothers took longer leave than the fathers in both cases.

The other four mothers either changed their employers or had quit their jobs by the time of the interviews. This does not necessarily mean that they prioritised their husbands' careers over their own. In the cases of Ikuya and Hiroshi, where the fathers took leave to help the mothers continue their jobs, it is clear that father' taking leave promotes the continuity of the mothers' career as she had only a short leave period (8 weeks in both cases). However, this short period might have made the mothers decide to take a break from work after the birth of their second child. Hiroshi's wife continued working at the same university hospital even after she gave birth to her second child, but then moved to work at another hospital where she could reduce her working hours. She thought it would be too hard for her to continue working full-time at the university hospital, and wanted to move to the city where her parents lived and where she had more friends. Hiroshi looked for a new job there, and found one in which he was allowed more flexibility, and then he quit his job at the pharmacy. It could be said that he decided to change his job to help establish an environment conducive to finding a better balance between work and life for both himself and his wife.

In two cases (Natsuo and Toru) the mothers were not working when the fathers decided to take leave. What impacts did the fathers taking leave have on the career opportunity of the mothers in these cases? Although from Fig. 13.3 Natsuo's wife does not appear to have continued her career, she has been working with relatively short breaks and has now established her own firm as a self-employed professional. She was not working at the birth of first child because she had to quit her job when her husband was transferred overseas. However, she found another job 10 months after the birth of her first child. By taking leave Natsuo definitely helped her in her search for jobs.

Toru's wife quit her job as a childcare worker, but started working on a 4-month contract when their first child was 15 months old, as Toru wanted to take parental leave and his wife needed to be working. She planned to return to work as a childcare worker when the younger child enter preschool, but taking him to and picking him up from preschool made it difficult and she had to wait until he entered primary school and she start working part-time as a childcare worker. Although Toru's taking leave did not promote his wife's continuous career, that experience and his commitment to housework and childcare seem to have made it easier for his wife to work when her children were still young.

Figure 13.3 depicts inequality in the continuation of career by gender. However, given the strong gender stereotype that the mother is the primary carer and the resulting low labour force participation of mothers with small children (see Sect. 13.2) in Japan, it is likely that the taking leave of the fathers in this study helped their partners continue their career or return to work with a relatively short break. In-depth interviews revealed that most participants are very concerned about their partners' career.

13.9 Discussion and Conclusion

A major focus of this chapter has been an exploration of the factors that enable or encourage Japanese fathers to take parental leave as in the Japanese context this phenomenon is very rare.

Moreover, the sampling criteria for this study were strict in that the participants had to be fathers who had taken leave for a month or more and done so on their own. Given these tough criteria, it was expected that the fathers would have needed to take leave so their wives could return to work. However, we found that half of the fathers interviewed did not face such imperatives, but took leave on their own for other reasons including the child's best interest, their wish to spend time with the child, and their need to take a break from work.

As for the factors that lead to taking leave, those described in existing studies (Fujino-Kakinami 2006; Morita 2011; Takeishi 2011), such as reduced economic stress because the parents were dual earners, the presence of supportive managers and colleagues, and a strong desire to do so in the fathers themselves, were found in this study. However, it was also found that these conditions were not always met. What all fathers had in common was a flexible attitude to gender roles and respect for the career of their partner. The mothers' attitudes to gender roles and fathers' taking leave also helped them take a decision that is uncommon in Japan. Moreover, the recent policy change appears to have increased the possibility for fathers to take leave in Japan.

The lived experiences of the fathers were also examined closely. They became significant carers and did a larger share of housework during the period they were on leave on their own. Most of the fathers describe their difficult experiences in considerable detail, confessing to feeling isolated, busy and bored during leave. However, they also recalled some pleasant experiences, which were described as something that would have been impossible to have when they were working. Although they were sharing the housework and were committed to the care of the child even before their leave, their experience of leave alone seems to have had a great impact on their perceptions of childcare and housework, which they came to think of as their own responsibility. This change in perception affects both their family relationships and work, and some of them actually changed their work style.

If we take a closer look at the data, we can understand that equal career opportunities between couples should be examined in the context of a life course perspective. Although taking leave on their own by fathers might not necessarily appear to contribute to the continuation of their partner's employment, it seems to have expanded their career opportunities as most of them kept working with relatively short breaks, at least by the standards of Japanese mothers. The evidence shows that most of the fathers kept working for the same employer regardless of the births of their children, and only one father took leave twice.

Despite the policy changes aiming at promoting fathers' leave take-up, mixed conditions in Japanese society seem to have weakened the incentive for fathers take

parental leave. These conditions include the early use of crèche, the generous entitlement to leave and an atmosphere conducive to using it; especially for mothers, together with a persistently prevailing life-course option for women to quit their job after childbirth and the difficulties for fathers to establish support networks. Nevertheless, by taking parental leave, even if it was only for one child, the fathers in this study seem to have expanded the career opportunity for the mothers through the fathers' greater involvement in childcare and housework compared with average fathers in Japan.

Referring to the four profiles of fathers in Portugal described by Wall (2014), in our study Masaki might be categorised as having the supported profile that represents fathers strongly supported by their partner or by a third party during the early part of the leave period. However, he started taking responsibility for all the housework and childcare after the mother returned to work, especially when his child got sick for a week during the period and he was on leave alone. In this sense, he should be described as the fundamental break profile in which fathers were weak helpers before the leave, but changed their attitude. The other five fathers were doing various kinds of the housework and care even before they took leave and took over most of the mother's roles. This small representation of the supported profile might be partly because of the small number of participants, but it is also likely that this is because of the small proportion of Japanese fathers who took this long parental leave on their own.

Difficulties in finding fathers who met the criteria also give some insights into the situation in Japan. Many of those to whom I was introduced and who were described as 'a father who took parental leave' did not meet the criteria, because they took it while their partner was on leave or not working. I found many interviews of fathers who took parental leave on the internet. However, closer examination shows that either mothers were also at home, or there is no explanation of his wife's situation. The policy change that enabled fathers to take leave while the mother was at home might not increase the number of fathers who are fully responsible for the care of a child unless a leave alone period follows.

Given the tiny proportion of fathers (fewer than 0.5%) who took leave for a month or more, those who did so alone can be described as real pioneers. In many cases, taking leave seems to be a special event for fathers who are interested in becoming involved in the care of their child.

What we found from the interviews with six fathers on leave on their own is that, in Japan, they are still *exceptional fathers* with very special resources (including psychological ones such as a frontier spirit and an orientation towards gender equality, and practical ones such as the necessity of supporting their partner in continuing in full-time employment with a decent income).

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Chapter 14
Discussion and Conclusions

Karin Wall and Margaret O'Brien

14.1 The Complex and Plural Nature of Change

There have been profound changes in leave policies and in the position of men in families and gender relations in the eleven countries examined in this book. However, change is surprisingly recent, even in countries with a long commitment to gender equality. Throughout most of the post-war 20th Century, entitlement to leave was only for mothers, seen as the primary and natural caregivers even when they took up full-time jobs (Kamerman and Moss 2009). For example, Swedish mothers' right to transfer maternity leave to fathers was granted in 1974, but entitlement to individual non-transferable leave was only introduced in the mid-1990s (1995), while access to leave for English fathers, beyond the 2-week paid paternity leave, is still today only possible through a transfer from mother to father (Baird and O'Brien 2015; Eydal et al. 2015). Overall, then, we might say that there has been some caution, in all developed countries, in promoting fast and radical reforms in parental leave architecture based on paid maternity leave.

Much of the explanation for cautious and drawn-out reform lies with historical and institutional pathways. As life course and sociological perspectives have pointed out, major institutions such as the family, the labour market and the welfare system strongly shape the fabric and pace of transformation by providing opportunities for both regularities and discontinuities. Institutional path dependency creates specific contingencies for welfare reform, social and biographical change and individual agency.

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An important example of institutional path dependency is the male breadwinner model and the continued frictions between gender, family and the employment system in different welfare regimes. As much of the literature points out, the unravelling of the male breadwinner/female carer model towards more egalitarian models of work-family articulation has been a complex and slow process (Crompton et al. 2007). There is no doubt that the growth in the labour force participation of women and the national policy responses to support dual earner families, especially leave policies and early childhood services, have been associated with changes in attitudes and behaviours. Societal expectations and the new practices of fathers underline the growing involvement of men in caring for a new-born child and in unpaid work in general (O'Brien 2009). And individual entitlement to parental leave for fathers clearly provides a framework encouraging men's assumption of full responsibility for the care of children. However, the contributors to this book show that changes are occurring in different ways and at different rates both between countries and also within countries and within institutions, influenced by a plurality of factors. Policy, normative (gender and family cultural models), lifecourse and workplace variables are highlighted as the main shaping factors of fathers' use and experiences of leave and solo caring.

At the policy level, the continuity and coherence of policy measures over many years and the specific nature of leave entitlements for fathers may be seen to influence the pathways and experiences of fathers' leave alone. The contributions to this book show that policies take time to be incorporated into attitudes, decision-making and behaviour. In policy contexts where the individual, fully-compensated and non-transferable so-called "daddy months" have been in place for some time (e.g. Norway, Sweden, Iceland, Finland and Canada to a lesser extent), research findings show that father's use of leave alone for 2 or 3 months tends to be more "taken-for-granted", a "normal" decision both in families and in the workplace. Families, colleagues, friends and employers tend to not question or wrangle over father's use of leave for the period allotted to them. However, when leave use goes beyond the stipulated leave period, fathers in these countries may also face work penalties or find themselves negotiating some availability to work in exchange for longer leave (cf. Chapters on Sweden, Finland, Canada). In other words, even in countries with longstanding policies in the field of gender neutral leave there continues to be a gap between the social acceptance of some full-time leave for fathers (e.g. an unequal model of leave sharing) and the idea of a gender equitable model of leave sharing.

In contrast, in contexts where similar policy measures were introduced more recently, with a gradual recognition of men's individual entitlement to full-time parental leave (e.g. Portugal, Spain), the first "forerunner" fathers to take up leave in a home alone manner have had to assert their rights, to deal with some employers' initial "surprise" and, in many cases, to negotiate their use of leave by committing to some availability to work or by accepting to be absent for less time than initially planned. In spite of new attitudes to fathers' involvement in the care of a baby, normative change takes time, especially in respect of fathers' capacity and right to primary full-time caregiving, on a par with the mother. In fact, the reaction of some employers, when legal entitlement is first introduced, is to consider men's take-up

of full-time leave, beyond the usual period of paternity leave immediately after the birth of the child, as a personal "option" rather than a taken-for-granted individual entitlement to work-family balance. Acceptance tends to be faster and more neutral in public and female-dominated workplaces and legal protection provides an important framework for negotiation in more adverse work environments.

Finally, in a third set of countries, where statutory, well-paid, non-transferable rights to full-time parental leave do not exist (e.g. Switzerland, UK, France) and where cultural and labour market contexts tend to favour the long-hour male breadwinner model (e.g. Japan), the very rare fathers trying to share part of the leave find it even harder. It is not only the initial barriers to leave that have to be overcome but also the censorial attitudes and the social isolation associated with a practice that is not endorsed explicitly or, in some instances, legally by society. Rather than mere forerunners, these fathers are described in this book as "pioneer" figures with a "frontier spirit". Leave can come at a heavy price, both personally (isolation) and socially (social stigma, severe work penalties, having to "play down" parental involvement) and is therefore easier to take up for fathers who are highly qualified, can rely on significant educational and financial resources, whose wives invest in their jobs/career, or that have work environments that for some reason (e.g. generous company-based entitlements) provide more openings for fathers' work-family balance.

The variations in fathers' parental leave entitlements and arrangements add to the complexity of policy impact on fathers' experiences of leave alone. In the studies reported in this book (with the exception of France) fathers took at least thirty days of full-time leave in a 'home alone' manner when the mother returns to work. Even with this criterion, however, there is some diversity in respect of the nature and use of leave across and within the different national contexts. For example, the duration and the type of leave entitlement seem to impact on the experiences and nature of father's involvement. Being on leave for 1 month full-time when the mother returns to work may be a different experience from taking leave for 2 or more months or the same number of months as the mother; and having an individual non-transferable right to parental leave is different from being on leave through a maternal transfer of leave. Although a systematic comparison between fathers who took less and those who took many months of leave is not carried out in this book, several contributions suggest that taking a longer period of leave, beyond 1 or 2 months, impacts strongly both on the experience of leave (e.g. identifying, rather than just sympathizing, with mothers who take long stay-at-home periods of leave) and the negotiation of parental roles (e.g. more confidence and assertiveness with regard to equal and individualized parenting routines, cf. chapters on Norway, Quebec, Portugal). On the other hand, when leave design is based on maternal transfer of leave and there is weak formal institutional support, leave can be experienced as a "gift" offered by the mother (cf. Chapter on UK), thereby underlining an implicit understanding of parental leave as a maternal entitlement and the naturalness of women taking paramount responsibility for the care of young children.

The normative context, especially in respect of gender roles in work and family, thus interacts with the policy environment in shaping the perceptions and experi-

ences of fathers on leave alone (cf. Chap. 1). Gender may be defined as "the division of people into two differentiated groups, 'men' and 'women', and the organization of the major aspects of society along these binaries" (Davis et al. 2006: 55). Gender cultural models related to work-family balance have shifted over the last few decades and become more pluralized (Aboim 2010; Pfau-Effinger 2004) but attachment to the male-breadwinner/female-carer model has not disappeared and still represents a minority pattern even in countries with the most egalitarian policies (Wall 2007). Sustained across many contemporary normative and institutional contexts, it influences workplace support and barriers, as mentioned above, as well as mothers' and fathers' perceptions of gender roles in the care of young children. Change is uneven. The take-up of parental leave is gendered in all the countries examined in this book, but less so in the countries where policies and debate have focused strongly on gender equality in parental roles. Interestingly, in countries where policy changes have occurred over the last decade, advocacy and public debate on gender norms, and not just legal protection, have also had an important impact: for example, activism and societal debate on gender equality in Quebec seem to have allowed for an easier and more rapid acceptance of fathers' take-up of leave alone since 2006 compared to the Portuguese case, where father's individual non-transferable rights were introduced in 2009 in the absence of an intense societal debate.

Contributions in this book also point to diversity and unevenness in change across families and life paths. Some fathers still perceive themselves as the main economic provider or feel that they are expected to be more highly invested and successful in their career and in salary advancement, even in families and contexts where the full-time dual-earner model is predominant. These fathers usually seek to be involved in full-time parental leave as secondary caregivers, who are more "dependent" on female mediation and support despite taking on full-time caring responsibilities, a profile which emerges in several of the qualitative studies in this book, alongside the more independent or egalitarian profiles of fathers on leave alone. In other cases, it is the perceptions of men and women's skills, preferences and vocation to care as different that underlie the narrative of more dependent solo caregiving. Many of the reported interviews show that these are issues under debate within couples. Biological differences, especially breastfeeding, and a belief in mothers' caregiving by instinct, as opposed to fathers' caregiving by acquirement of skills, often raise doubts and questionings, also making for possible hesitations and unevenness in fathers' agency in negotiating parental roles.

As studies in this book and others have shown, couples who are more oriented to gender equality in work and family at the outset tend to be more receptive to gender neutral leave and equal parenting. Expectations of parity and "fairness" in conjugality and parenthood opens the way for decision-making and fathers' take-up of leave as well as reducing qualms and scruples about a weakening of female mediation and possible power conflicts between the parents. In national contexts where legal entitlement is not explicit or is based on maternal transfer, these egalitarian-oriented couples or fathers are also those who are more likely to decide to overcome legal and financial barriers in order to implement the sharing of parental leave (cf. UK,

Switzerland, Japan, France). Men who are more weakly invested in or demoralized in relation to their jobs may also be motivated to take up full-time responsibility for childcare, even if compensation is low, and to privilege the strengthening of father-child bonds in relation to work (cf. Switzerland).

On the other hand, when there is explicit legal support for fathers' leave, there is a wide range of motivations that drive fathers to share parental leave, thereby making for more potential diversity in terms of pathways into solo caring. Beyond the strengthening of co-parenting and father-child relationships, the qualitative studies in this book highlight the following motivations: concerns related to the mother's work/career or allowing her to return to work earlier or to take up a job; the awareness of babyhood (first year of life) as a crucial and unique life-stage for father involvement that cannot be postponed; the need or wish to ensure the care of the child at home for a few more months (e.g. no crèche immediately available, parental care considered as better for a small child and to be prolonged in case of institutional support). Previous life transitions and events also emerge as drivers: fathers who had positive care experiences during paternity leave, after the birth of another child, or during earlier life stages (e.g. caring for a younger sibling) often reveal strong motivations to experience leave as a time of opportunity. In contrast, highly invested professional men taking leave at a life stage when their career is not yet consolidated tend to reveal less confidence in sharing parental leave on an equal basis. Fathering may therefore be seen as a process which occurs over time, making for heterogeneity in leave motivations and experiences.

This diversity of drivers means that the introduction of new policies in some countries is reaching out not only to men who are expecting to become highly involved parents and solo carers but also to some fathers who do not see themselves as equal sharers or primary caregivers at the outset. Experience of leave alone will not necessarily then always be the same, depending strongly on the couples' and the fathers' motivations, their socio-economic position and previous work and life trajectories as well as the fathers' capacity and agency in becoming independent carers and setting up individualized routines.

Lastly, at the workplace level, many organizations are changing to support dual-earner couples and father's leave in response to national policies or by introducing 'family-friendly' policies within the organization (Den Dulk 2001; Haas and Hwang 2009). Here, too, change is uneven. The male model of full-time, long-term dedication to work, based on assumptions of gendered work and family spheres (Lewis 2001), often prevails and may even be intensified in contemporary settings of increased work demands, unemployment and economic austerity. Nevertheless, some workplaces are clearly more supportive of father's leave than others. Supportiveness differs across sector, specific type of workplace, workplace units and for different occupations. Public and female-dominated workplaces, as shown in other studies, continue on the whole to be more supportive. But the qualitative studies reported in this book also demonstrate that there are may be differences in work units and in managers' attitudes as well as differences related to the leverage which some men can bring to bear on their colleagues and managers, both in private and in public sectors. In this respect, highly qualified men in very different national

contexts (e.g. Chapters on UK, Japan, Switzerland, Portugal) tend to emerge as more assertive in pulling their weight, in particular when they have been highly committed to their jobs and careers in the past.

Thus the contributions to this book illustrate the complexity of interacting factors which may impact on fathers' opportunities for and experiences of full-time leave alone. Explicit legal and societal recognition of fathers' paid non-transferable parental leave clearly makes a difference in terms of the normative acceptance and the meaning – more or less "taken for granted" – of fathers' full-time leave, but the impact of this type of provision also interacts with normative, workplace, biographical and family contexts, thereby introducing diversity.

14.2 Impact of Parental Leave Alone on Fathers' Lived Experiences

The social and policy embeddedness of motivations and pathways to leave raises important questions about the intersecting influences which shape and diversify the practices and experiences of fathers on leave. Nevertheless, it is also striking throughout this book that, despite many cross-national and institutional differences, there are also some strong commonalities regarding the consequences of full-time parental leave for fathers. The micro snapshots of experiences within specific employing organizations and family relationships enable us to explore some common trends as well as the specificity of diverse experiences.

A first common trend is related to what fathers "do" while on leave. The rare studies on the practices of fathers using the "daddy months" in the 1990s in Norway and Sweden highlighted a focus on caregiving rather than household tasks, the importance of father-child bonds, a new experience of time ("slower" time, different and also more enjoyable compared to work time), and fathering practices oriented towards more "masculine" care activities such as educating and playing. The experiences reported in this book highlight changes and continuities. Fathers on leave alone continue to report the centrality of caring activities in their interview accounts but also describe intensive hard work and the experience as a fully time-consuming job which requires substantial efforts to reconcile with daily housework and leaves little availability for personal time, leisure or working from home (the fathers who are committed to working from home usually do so at night or when the partner gets home).

This contemporary focus on the intensity of caregiving would appear to be linked to two factors. Fathers who share parental leave today are more likely to take leave to care for a child below age 1, when caring is more demanding. More importantly, most fathers on leave no longer see themselves as "child-minder" parental figures, who are expected to babysit and help out for a few weeks, but rather as fully-fledged carers who carry out all tasks related to organizing and doing hands-on care, who make an effort to build up their own routines and also do other tasks such as clean-

ing, shopping and cooking the family's evening meal. This full assumption of what we might call the stay-at-home "mothering mandate" (Arendell 2000) is associated in fathers' discourses to the context of full-time leave alone and solo caring: in fact, the studies in this book show that fathers differentiate between "paternity leave", taken straight after the birth of the child in order to "help" the mother and "support life", and parental leave allowing for full responsibility in childcare. Those who take part-time leave or 1 day a week off work to care for the child (e.g. see French fathers in this book) do not report experiencing the same kind of impact, implying a shift towards the demands and the mandate of primary caregiving.

A second common trend is related to the many varied consequences of leave. This experience of intensive and involved caregiving is felt to be a positive experience: learning to take responsibility alone; being preoccupied and absorbed with their child; shaping daily life around the child's routines; enjoying increased physical contact with the child; sympathizing with mothers' stress; learning to balance care and housework; experiencing the time as fulfilling, joyful, "a luxury", "an oasis". As such these fathers have taken on *emotional responsibility* as well as direct engagement and accessibility as discussed by Doucet (2016), Chap. 2, in this book. But ambivalence with reports of anxiety, saturation, fatigue and boredom are mixed with these affirming experiences. Such fathers realize that they may not be totally cut out for full-time caregiving and might not like to repeat the experience. Overall, then, these findings are a vivid reminder of the challenges, difficulties and diversity in mothers' experiences of childcare for a new born child at home (Arendell 2000). Moreover, in contrast to fathers in the 1990s, the studies in this book reveal men, albeit not all, who take on household tasks and home planning, in line with the idea that the sharing of leave also implies taking on responsibility for both care and work, on a par with what mothers do when at home.

Some diversity, however, also emerges, under the influence of policy context, conjugal gender roles and father's agency. Some fathers, in particular those who perceive themselves as "helper" rather than "independent" fully-autonomous fathers, still rely on their partner or another person for some of the housework and perceive their task as focused essentially on childminding. Nevertheless, some of these initially "dependent" fathers, moved by a fundamental rupture in gender roles due to full-time solo caring, also experience a break away from this "dependent" profile and report that they have acquired more autonomy and skills. In sum, context, conjugal relations and agency are all important shaping factors of what fathers "do" and experience while taking full-time parental leave.

A third common trend is related to the impact of fathers' full-time parental leave alone on gender equality in families, an issue taken up in all the studies in this book. Rather than clear-cut, linear trends, the contributions in this book stress the exploratory and complex nature of the qualitative findings. This diverse pattern is to be expected given the range of contextual factors and agency as well as the difficulty in disentangling short-term and long-term impacts. Five main conclusions may be highlighted across national contexts. First, fathers' experiences during paternity leave taken with the mother immediately after the birth of the child are consistently reported as different from those of solo caring during full-time parental leave; the

latter is seen to foster more equal parenting, to help fathers and mothers to "trust" each other and understand the situation of the "other gender", and to partially challenge gendered divisions of housework. Secondly, given that many couples were egalitarian-oriented before sharing parental leave, it is wise to be cautious in attributing equal parenting practices to the impact of father's use of parental leave. More longitudinal qualitative research is needed following through couples before, during and after leave to complement emergent longitudinal quantitative studies which have been able to control for sample selectivity.

Thirdly, despite this caution, the narratives of the more egalitarian and innovative fathers report some important effects of leave alone, in particular: the possibility of putting to the test the fathers' capacity to take on and implement the full "parenting" and "housekeeper" mandates; the development of individualized routines and the incorporation, into daily life, of more discussion and negotiation of equal workloads within the couple; the enhanced reflexivity on gender differences which fathers' solo caring incentivizes. Fourth, the need to identify the effects of leave alone according to the different fathering profiles and the duration and type of leave use. For example, the more traditional "dependent" fathers often report the strengthening of bonds, caring skills and emotional competency, and some may even experience a "fundamental break" with previous gender roles, but their perceptions and practices may remain strongly gender unequal and far from the ideal of a gender neutral model of leave, care and housework. Moreover, the impact on practices in the long term, in spite of the acquisition of skills during solo caring, may be weak (e.g. father who took leave to protect wife's job, but was relieved to return to the former gendered division of unpaid work).

Lastly, it is therefore difficult to be sure of the long-term effects of these reported changes, as there are many intervening factors, from perceptions to labour market circumstances, which can affect the future division of unpaid work in couples. As we have noted in Chap. 1, recent large-scale longitudinal studies have suggested that solo caring of at least one month's duration can have lasting effects on fathers' engagement in child care-care. However, unemployment or sudden increased work demands for one parent may lead some couples to change their equal division of childcare and housework, despite egalitarian preferences. The fact that both members of the couple are capable of assuming these full responsibilities does make for flexibility in the gendered division of labour within households and over the life course, which is likely to include periods of precariousness, unemployment or dependency for all adult individuals. So gender flexibility may be seen as positive from the point of view of gender equality in families but should not lead us to forget a broader structural view. For example, gender rotation in unpaid work may also be seen as an advantage for global labour markets wishing to rely less on gender differences and male breadwinning in order to be able to respond to flexible labour demands.

14.3 Final Comments

In summary, the contributions to this book shed light on the pathways and consequences of fathers' use of parental leave alone, both confirming and moving beyond previous findings. In line with other studies, the findings confirm that longstanding well-paid individual entitlements for fathers facilitate, increase and legitimize the uptake of full-time parental leave by fathers. They also confirm the role of other well-known enabling factors. Those connected to workplace factors, such as work sector, managers' attitudes and fathers' occupations, earnings and qualifications, with highly qualified high-earner men able to rely on more resources and leverage to face adverse policy or workplace situations. Those related to gender roles and family context, such as the mother's full-time paid work/career perspectives, shared gender equality values in couples, societal debate on the latter, and family strategies which promote parental care until the child finds a place in early childcare services. More unexpectedly, the exploratory qualitative studies reveal that fathers' experience of barriers or work penalties on return to work emerge in all policy national contexts examined in this book, thereby revealing the slow and uneven nature of change in the direction of societal recognition of gender-neutral leave architecture and practices. Similarly, evidence shows the necessity for new cultural practices to celebrate new forms of father care, particularly in workplaces.

It is in relation to fathers' lived experiences that the exploratory qualitative studies provide innovative findings. The distinctiveness of the lived experience of full-time solo caring, compared to leave taken with the mother immediately after childbirth, is a common trend across all policy contexts. The dimensions of this singularity may be summarized along several main dimensions, when compared to the effects of paternity leave, which have also been shown to promote the practical and emotional involvement of fathers (O'Brien, 2009): sense of and implementation of full responsibility and autonomy; routinisation of father care, based on the building up of own individualized care practices; experience of childcare as intensive hard work, both rewarding and demanding; socialisation to gender equality issues and values, in particular the belief that fathers' can "acquire" the primary caregiving role and combine childcare, housework and home management when on leave.

A further important finding is that lived experiences are diverse and complex, due to variations in policy and leave characteristics, normative and workplace factors, and fathers' and mothers' motivations, subjective perceptions and practices. The comparison across different national contexts illuminates how different policy provisions affect the social meaning of fathers' full-time leave. In the absence of statutory leave policies for fathers, leave can be experienced as a 'gift' from the mother and a normative transgression of maternal primary caregiving; full-time leave comes at a high price, which only a few fathers are willing and able to pay. In contrast, when statutory leave polices for fathers are in existence, leave can be experienced as a 'right', albeit not necessarily as an 'equal' right. Uptake of leave alone is not equally transformative of co-parenting and gender equality for all interviewees, even if its singularity is experienced by all fathers. *Involved fatherhood* and

gender equalitarianism may not always be co-terminous. Nevertheless, the contributions to this book suggest that men on leave alone are viewed, in all national contexts, as agents of social change, as men who are contributing to the redefinition of gender cultural models of parenting and family.

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