PART ONE

Coming to Know Fathers' Stories
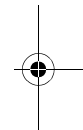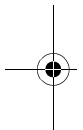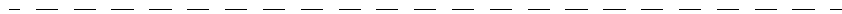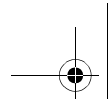
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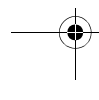
1 Studying Men, Mothering, and Fathering

Introduction

The posing of a question such as 'Do men mother?' pulls together in one breath two seemingly opposed images, that of the male gender with its masculine connotations, and a feminine image of mothering. This pairing can provoke many diverse reactions. Indeed, in the four years that I have spent researching and writing this book, the strong responses to its title have always intrigued me. Whether they have been characterized by approval or d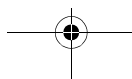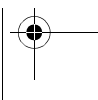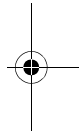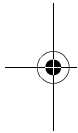isapproval, dismay or amusement, there has always been a distinct sense of its appropriateness or inappropriateness as a way of describing primary-caregiving fathers. Quite simply, the 'Do men mother?' question elicits considerable tension, both creative and abrasive.

Abrasive tension around this question crystallized most notably in the spring of 2003 when, deeply into the writing of this book, I was invited to give a public lecture on fathering and to do some media-related interviews. Like many academics, I was not accustomed to speaking outside the safe and resonant spaces of academic conferences, where one often finds shared understandings of theories, concepts, and issues. Rather, I found myself slightly uneasy speaking about my work (see also D. Mandell, 2002). The source of this discomfort was revealed when I realized that there were a few fathers' rights advocates in the audience who loudly applauded my work on encouraging active fathering. Several of my feminist colleagues looked at me with stony stares, clearly wondering how I could allow my work to be usurped by groups who are often anti-feminist or, more generally, anti-
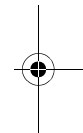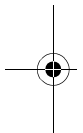
20   Do Men Mother?

women. Days later I was shocked to find that a fathers' rights group as far away as Australia had made a link to a newspaper article about my public lecture (Tam, 2003).

This situation highlights how a positive view of fathers can suddenly be twisted to justify a different, possibly conflicting, set of claims, even exemplifying what the social theorist Tim May has termed 'the epistemology of reception,' which raises critical questions about 'how and under what circumstances social scientific knowledge is received, evaluated, and acted upon and under what circumstances' (May, 1998, 173; see also Grosz, 1995). Such an unexpected usurpation may await positive work on fathering in that some fathers' rights groups – particularly anti-feminist ones – could use the information to criticize particular mothers and mothering in general and, in some cases, to argue that men are better parents than mothers are (see Farrell, 2001). Intricately tied up with trying to understand and challenge a gendered division of domestic labour is the possibility of detracting from the struggles of mothers to have their own unpaid work valued (see Doucet, 2004). Thus, in spite of my intention as a researcher to simultaneously investigate the stubborn link between women and domestic responsibility and to encourage fathers' unpaid caregiving work, I was always vaguely aware of the alarming political and theoretical traps that may await feminist research on fathering.

Although such *abrasive* tension has accompanied my research on fathers, it has also represented *creative* potential in the requirement to think imaginatively about issues of gender equality and gender difference[1] and how they relate to parenting. Are women and men *different* in parenting? If so, how so? Can they be *equal*? If so, what does this mean and how do we define, measure, and evaluate equality and difference?

The question 'Do men mother?' also brings together a host of competing and conflicting views on how we should name, define, and speak about the love and labour invested by men in caring for children. Groups of thinkers and advocates of specific causes fall out on this question; moreover, diversity of approach within and between groups such as feminists, social scientists, and varied men's movements fragments even further on how to define and understand the issue of men's caregiving. Broadly speaking, there are two responses to the 'Do men mother?' question. The first is that *men do not mother* and second is that *men can and do mother*. My own position rests somewhere between the two and will be elaborated after I lay out the first two approaches.
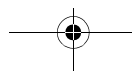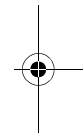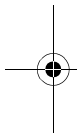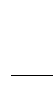
Gender Differences: Men Don't Mother

The first position, that men do not mother, has been taken by writers and researchers whose work is based on the idea of gender differences or incompatibility. A position underlining irreconcilable oppositional positions of women and men is found in many popular television programs[2] as well as in the best-selling books and other media from the *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* series by John Gray. According to him, the modes of behaviour of women and men vary so greatly that the sexes seeem not to be from the same planet (Gray, 1992). And in the scholarly world of debate and disagreement, many authors and fields of study highlight differences between women and men. These include feminists working within a wide theoretical tradition of 'difference feminism.' In addition, particular manifestations of this position can be found in several movements such as historical and contemporary policy issue of wages for housework and the valuing of women's unpaid work; some fathers' rights movements, especially those asserting a more masculine kind of fathering; and, finally, feminists working on issues of child custody and divorce who accept and reinforce caregiving differences largely based on the unequal social and political positioning of women and men.

DIFFERENCE FEMINISM

In feminist theory, attention to *gender differences* has taken many guises, including what authors reviewing this body of work have titled 'difference feminism,' 'the difference category' (Scott, 1988), 'special treatment theorists' (Bacchi, 1990), 'those for whom sexual difference is a necessary and substantial divide' (Phillips, 1991), 'ethical feminism' (Braidotti, 1991), and 'relational feminism' (Rhode, 1989). Scholars such as Luce Irigaray (Irigaray, 1993, 1994) and Julia Kristeva (Kristeva, 1987; Oliver, 1993) and versions of Italian and French feminisms (Bock & James, 1992; Bono & Kemp, 1991; Fraser & Bartky, 1992) are often placed in this strand of feminist thinking. Most difference-oriented writers celebrate activities and work traditionally associated with women as well as challenge the value accorded to them by society. Three issues emphasized by difference feminism are explored below.

VALUING UNPAID WORK

A key area of importance to those espousing difference feminism has been the struggle for greater recognition of the value of unpaid do-
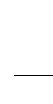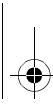
22   Do Men Mother?

mestic work. One theoretical articulation has been the long-running 'domestic labor debate' (see Fox, 1980) and a central policy expression has been the call for wages for housework (Landes, 1980; Malos, 1980). Attention to this issue has not waned in recent years, and feminists have developed a multiplicity of theoretical and policy approaches to it (Folbre 1994; Fraser 1997).[3] These have included the incorporation of unpaid work in census data as well as in national GDP accounting (Crittenden, 2001; Luxton & Vosko, 1998; Waring, 1998), the importance of universal high-quality childcare as a way of reconciling the valuing of care and parents' right to paid work (Mahon, 2002; Jenson, 2002), and the social and economic validation of mother work (Mandell & Sweet, 2004; Marks, 2004; Mink, 1995).[4]
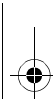
fathers' responsibility movement

Several fathers' rights groups affirm differences between women and men. As we will see later in this chapter, though some of these groups do offer an *equality* discourse, many embrace innate differences between women and men, mothering and fathering – for example, groups formed under the umbrella of the Christian Right such as the Promise Keepers and some sections of the Fatherhood Responsibility Movement that emphasize variance in both the practical *roles* and the divergent nurturing *natures* of women and men (for an overview of these movements, see Gavanas, 2002; Messner, 1997).

feminism and child custody issues

A third group of writers and policy advocates a focus on gender differences in issues of divorce and child custody (see Boyd, 2002; Mandell 2002) and holds that the high and low social status of men and women respectively has led to gender-related styles of parenting. According to Susan Boyd, this approach 'is not based on essential differences between men and women, but rather on social patterns of caring' (Boyd, 2002, 4). Feminists taking this position are, however, mindful that it remains caught in the 'perils and pitfalls' of accepting women as primary caregivers (Boyd, 2002) and that it 'seems to paint women into the very corner they have been trying to get out of' (Mandell, 2002, 230; see also Pulkingham, 1994). Nevertheless, this position is viewed by many feminists as the best possible strategy, given current economic and social conditions around caring and earning and the fact that child custody battles can lead to an erasure of women's investment in child rearing (see also Fineman, 1992, 1995; Smart, 1991).
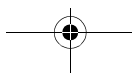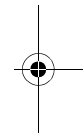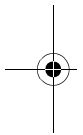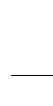
Gender Equality: Men Do Mother

The position that men can and do mother is rooted in equality feminism and has developed mainly in the work of sociologists researching gender divisions of labour or primary-caregiving fathers, and more recently in the advocacy work of some fathers' rights groups. Framed by an overarching concern with gender equality and in minimizing, or explaining, the appearance or effects of differences, an investigation into the divergent life experiences of women and men is viewed as the systemic result of family and peer socialization and the ways that societies and their social institutions are structured. Theories variously describe such macro-level factors that create and sustain gender differences and can include, for example, 'the gender regime' or the 'gender order' (Connell, 1987), the 'relations of ruling' (D. Smith, 1987, 1999) or the 'gender structure' (Risman, 2004). The underlying argument is that if gender relations were altered at the level of social structure (i.e., in the social institutions of the family, workplace, state policies, the courts, and media), a more gender-free world would eventually lead to gender-free parenting. Several theoretical and empirical expressions include feminist theory focused primarily on gender equality, ongoing legal battles over women's equal wages for work of equal value, studies on gender divisions of domestic labour and on primary caregiving fathers, and finally, several fathers rights groups.

EQUALITY FEMINISM

The position that men can mother is rooted in broad theoretical principles of gender equality, much underpinned by liberal feminist assumptions. Many labels have been used to describe gender equality, including what some writers have named 'equal rights feminism' (Braidotti, 1991), 'equal treatment' (Bacchi, 1990), 'those who anticipate a genuinely gender-free theory' (Phillips, 1991), and the 'equality category' (Scott, 1988). This strand of feminist theory and related politics minimizes, or denies, differences between women and men because they represent obstacles to socio-economic equality. Moreover, there is a strong emphasis on facilitating women's participation in paid work on an equal footing, and indeed, the dominant areas of research informed by equality feminism are the investigation of gender divisions of paid labour, gender stratification, and the long-standing feminist struggle for equal wages for work of equal value.

24   Do Men Mother?

STUDIES ON GENDER DIVISIONS OF DOMESTIC LABOUR

Most of the studies conducted on gender divisions of domestic labour are informed by the view that gender differences are to be avoided and gender equality is the gold standard that couples should strive for. Authors have employed various classifications to distinguish equal and unequal divisions of labour. For example, three well-known studies conducted in the mid to late 1980s in the United States (Hochschild, 1989), Britain (Brannen & Moss, 1991), and Wales (Morris, 1985) used relatively similar typologies to investigate equality between women and men in household life. These included 'traditional,' 'transitional,' 'egalitarian' (Hochschild, 1989); 'traditional,' 'traditional-rigid,' 'traditional-flexible,' and 'renegotiated' (Morris, 1985); and 'nearly equal sharing' or 'actual equal sharing' (Brannen & Moss, 1991, 180). Within such typologies, an 'egalitarian' household is one where the man and the woman do 'share[d] housework *equally*' (Hochschild, 1989) or 'whose contributions are roughly *equal* to one another' (Brannen & Moss, 1991) whether measured by minutes and hours, tasks, or overall responsibility. Whatever the terms used, the consensus by researchers is that something along the lines of fifty-fifty parenting or an equal division of labour is the ideal or most successful pattern (Brannen & Moss, 1991; Deutsch, 1999; Ehrensaft, 1984, 1987; Hochschild, 1989; Kimball, 1988). As Francine Deutsch recently put it, 'Equal sharers, of course, were the stars of this study' (Deutsch, 1999, 7).

STUDIES ON SHARED- OR PRIMARY-CAREGIVING FATHERS

The position that men can and do mother is also informed, at least implicitly, in equality frameworks that play down gender differences and assume that men and women are largely interchangeable as parents. Such is the argument made by most researchers who study equal parenting and shared- or primary-caregiving fathers (Coltrane, 1996; Crittenden, 2001; Deutsch, 1999; Ehrensaft, 1987; Hrdy, 1999; Jackson, 1995; Risman, 1987, 1998, 2004; Ruddick, 1995). This position is embraced, as mentioned in the introduction of this book, by authors from disciplines such as sociology (Coltrane, 1989, 1996; Risman, 1987, 1998, 2004; Ehrensaft, 1987), psychology (Kimball, 1988), philosophy (Ruddick, 1995, 1997), as well as by best-selling journalists (Crittenden, 2001; Jackson, 1995) all arguing that where men are doing the work of active caring, they are indeed mothering.
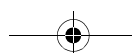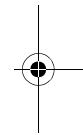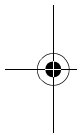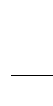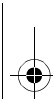
FATHERS' RIGHTS GROUPS

From the opposite end of the theoretical and political spectrum, a gender-equality argument is also made by some fathers' rights groups who have taken up discourses of equality and gender-neutral parenting to reinforce their claims in child custody cases for greater access to children (see Boyd, 2002; Mandell, 2002).

Clearly the positions on gender differences and equality in relation to parenting, and more specifically to the 'Do men mother?' question, are not uniform. Theorists and researchers have invoked varied versions of these approaches, depending on the empirical or theoretical issues under investigation. My own approach is to recognize the utility in each but to chart a third path down the middle. I now turn to the approach that underpins this book.

Charting a Path between Equality and Difference

Navigating the range of theoretical writing on gender differences and gender equality as well as the empirical research on gender divisions of domestic labour, I have been struck by how these two strands of thinking have not been more fully integrated. In reflecting on the Do men mother? question, I begin by considering how to obtain a richer understanding of the interactions of gender equality and gender differences in the domestic sphere. The seeds of my approach lie, first of all, in the growing consensus by feminist scholars that in certain theoretical and historical contexts, the concepts of gender equality and gender differences are highly interdependent, 'so that any adequate analysis must take account of the complex interplay between them' (Bock, 1992, 10; Bock & James, 1992; Offen, 1992).

Several key points recur in efforts to move out of the equality-difference gridlock, and these form some of the theoretical strands in this book. First, I shift my analytical lens from equality to *differences* and, moreover, from differences to *disadvantages* and to the *difference difference makes*. Second, I interrogate the terms on which equality is framed and then creatively envision the potential that arises from incorporating both the traditionally feminine and masculine in our understanding of what is valuable and significant in social life. The third tenet of my approach, which attempts to break down the difference-equality problem, is to focus on how to straddle both equality and difference through a version of 'strategic essentialism.' Fourth, I highlight the
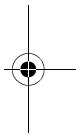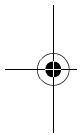
26   Do Men Mother?

importance of considering differences *within* gender difference and ask, *Which men and which women are we speaking about*? That is, I incorporate insights from feminist intersectional theory (see below) in order to reflect on where and how social class, ethnicity, and sexuality can matter in caregiving.

Not Differences but Disadvantages

My first point in moving beyond the equality-difference dilemma has been well posited by the feminist legal scholar Deborah Rhode, who has maintained that rather than simply focusing on 'difference per se,' it is more useful to consider 'the disadvantages that follow from it' (Rhode, 1990, 204). She argues, 'The difference dilemma cannot be resolved; it can only be recast. The critical issue should not be difference, *but the difference difference makes*' (Rhode, 1989, 313; emphasis in original).[5] While it is an intriguing theoretical position, this issue of the *difference difference makes* has been given barely a mention in research on gender and domestic labour (but see Carrington, 1999; Doucet, 1995b). Rather, the overwhelming majority of studies on domestic life are framed by a search for equal parenting or equal divisions of labour.

It is important to note that it is understandable why gender *equality* has been the dominant framework for studying divisions of domestic labour. As mentioned in the introduction to this book, the weighting of the balance of household labour on the side of women has been very costly to many women (Adams & Coltrane, 2004; Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000; Cohen, 2004; Coltrane, 2000; Crittenden, 2001; Folbre, 2001). These costs can include occupational downgrading; loss of earnings, pensions, and benefits; economic vulnerability in cases of divorce; and long-term poverty for women (Arber & Ginn, 2004; Brannen & Moss, 1991; Folbre, 1994, 2001; Ginn & Arber, 2002; James, Edwards, & Wong, 2003). Yet while we know that women's experience in household life does often lead to disadvantages outside household life, this does not necessarily ease the challenges of delineating an equal division of labour. Janet Chafetz's assessment is one that informs research in this area: 'Undergirding all systems of gender stratification is a gender-based division of labour, by which women are chiefly responsible for different tasks than are men' (Chafetz, 1991, 77). Yet, does *different* always mean *unequal*? Can *differences* co-exist with *equality*?
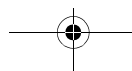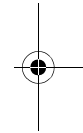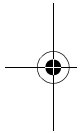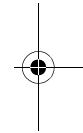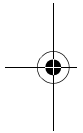
The issue of the *difference difference makes* is the backdrop to my explorations of the complex interplay between equality and differences throughout this book. My approach is to examine what equality might actually mean in domestic life and parenting and to ultimately turn the focus from equality towards issues of gender differences and, moreover, towards considering how *differences* relate to *disadvantages*. Specifically, in chapter 3 ('Understanding Fathers as Primary Caregivers'), I unpack what it means to take on primary care of children, I reflect on what an equal division of labour might look like, and I accord attention to complexity, ambiguity, and the flow of differences and symmetries over time within households. Also, throughout chapters 4, 5, and 6, which focus on three key parental responsibilities (emotional, community, and moral), the question, What difference does difference make? is constantly at the forefront of my listening to fathers' narratives.

Equality on Whose Terms?

A second point in the difference-equality debate is the sombre realization that the *quality of equality* is often framed in male terms and thus needs to be constantly scrutinized. That is, although the equal rights tradition has been important as a theoretical tool and a political strategy for women's struggles to gain equal entry into and access to the rewards of the public world of work and politics, it nevertheless has its limitations as well. Many authors have concurred with Elizabeth Meehan and Selma Sevenhuijsen when they argue that 'the employment of equality as a concept and as a goal supposes a standard or a norm which, in practice, tends to be defined as what is characteristic of the most powerful groups in society' (Meehan & Sevenhuijsen, 1991; Rhode, 1989, 1990; Young, 1990a).

The importance of challenging the terms under which equality is pursued and the content of equality itself has been well expressed in the past decade in scholarship on work and caregiving. As reviewed in the introduction to this book, ample attention has been given to the politics of challenging the value of unpaid word and the conditions under which is it is performed. At the micro-level, the value of mothering has been deemed as 'socially necessary and praiseworthy' (Fraser & Gordon, 1997, 141). At the macro level, well-known scholars of caregiving have eloquently argued that its daily work should be integrated 'into a wide set of social practices, not only when it concerns the com-
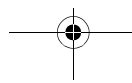
28   Do Men Mother?

bination of paid labor and informal care in the life plans of individual citizens, but also when it comes to integrating care as a consideration in the social infrastructure and institutions of civil society' (Seven-huijsen, 2000, 21).

Questioning the terms on which equality is sought has a twofold sig-nificance in this book. First, the place of men – a group that, according to Connell (1987, 1995), reaps a 'patriarchal dividend' regardless of where they are placed in the social order – remains a complex issue. As mentioned in the introduction, when male voices articulate an 'ethic of care,' they can initially instill a sense of vertigo or tension.

Second, I continually turn the question of equality in whose terms? on its head in this book in the way that feminist theorists have done in reflecting on the problems with attempting to listen to women from male perspectives or with tools fashioned from the lives and perspec-tives of men. In this vein, the well-known American developmental psychologist Carol Gilligan wryly reflected on how models of human development were partly constructed from Levinson's *The Seasons of a Man's Life* (Gilligan, 1982). Similarly, the British sociologist Hilary Gra-ham eloquently asked, 'Do her answers fit his questions?' (Graham, 1983b) when she observed that women's experiences were being mea-sured in surveys designed using men's lives as the model. Still another decade later, also in Britain, the sociologist Rosalind Edwards wrote that the oft-repeated attempts to fit women's lives into male theories was much like trying to 'fit a round peg into a square hole' (Edwards, 1990, 479).

In the same way that feminists have exercised caution about the ways that we understand the voices of one gender against a landscape designed by the other, so too these cautions must be brought to bear when we study men in female-dominated domains of social life. In whose terms will we listen to them? Whether paid or unpaid, caregiv-ing is undeniably a female-dominated profession that builds on what are considered traditionally feminine practices, and identities. In thus asking the question of equality on whose terms?, I am referring to the need to provide space for men's narratives of caregiving and to resist the impulse to measure, judge, and evaluate them through maternal standards (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1996; LaRossa, 1997; Richards, 1982). Adopting such a stance, with room for theoretical or empirical sur-prises, indeed offered innovative ways of describing and theorizing men's nurturing practices and ultimately novel ways of thinking about emotional responsibility (see chapter 4).

Straddling Equality and Difference: 'Both Horns of This Dilemma'

Many theorists have argued that the dilemma of both valuing care and challenging the conditions under which is it performed can best be addressed through a theoretical and political strategy that straddles *both* equality and difference. In relation to women's caregiving and the need to value as well as critique it, Allison Jaggar has referred to this position as 'having it both ways' and of embracing 'both horns of this dilemma' (Jaggar, 1990, 253). Deborah Rhode (1989, 1990) has called this 'taking a more contextual approach,' while Joan Tronto has argued for a disentangling of the 'feminine and feminist aspects of caring' (1989, 184). Referring to feminist struggles more widely, Luce Irigaray has invoked the metaphor of 'occupying two positions at once' (see Whitford, 1991), while Diana Fuss (1989) has employed 'strategic essentialism' as an approach and as a strategy.

How do I use such a theoretical approach in studying fathers? In the introduction to this book, I described my uncomfortable experience of speaking to an audience where several fathers' rights activists applauded my work, and my sudden and stark realization that fatherhood can be a politically sensitive area of research. To find a way to deal with this tension of encouraging men's participating in caregiving while not devaluing women's historical connection to caregiving, this book is underpinned by that approach devised by feminist theorists under the named of 'strategic essentialism,' that of taking a 'contextual position', or simultaneously holding 'two positions.' How, then, does this theoretical strategy actually work in practice?

Following Irigaray's metaphor of the two positions, the first position entails a close attentiveness to 'context and the complexity of women's interests' in concrete situations (Rhode 1990, 204). The second is to remain mindful of the fact that while in some contexts it is important to recognize gender differences, this should not translate into 'absolutist categorizations of difference' but rather a recognition that 'meanings are always relative to particular constructions in specified contexts' (Scott 1988, 175). Put differently, Diana Fuss argued that '… essentially speaking we need to theorize essentialist spaces from which to speak and, simultaneously, to deconstruct those spaces and keep them from solidifying' (1989, 118).

I begin by drawing on a first position, a 'contextual' or strategic essentialist approach, which looks widely to the social positioning of women and men in most societies and recognizes that while gender
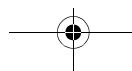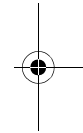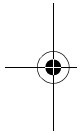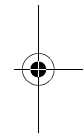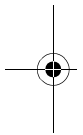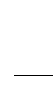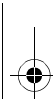
30   Do Men Mother?

equality remains a lofty goal, profound gender differences still exist in regard to caregiving. Within this first position, I am mindful of several social facts: the invisibility of women's caregiving; the fathers described in this study are the exception rather than the norm; women still take on a disproportionate share of the responsibility for children; women's earnings are still less than those of men; and domestic violence and spousal abuse do exist in some families.

The second position is the larger terrain of the politics of challenging unpaid work, such as that described above in Selma Sevenhuijsen (see also Crittenden, 2001; Folbre, 2001; Luxton, 1997; Tronto, 1993), which highlights specific measures to assist mothers and fathers to achieve greater symmetry between employment and caregiving. Such measures would include income equity for women, greater acceptance by employers of fathers' use of parental leave, and work flexibility options for both men and women. It would also mean recognizing the possibility that men can nurture and care for children. This recognition is, however, not an unconditional one. Theoretically and politically, the feminist position that guides my work on fathers calls for the inclusion of men where it does not work to undermine women's own caregiving interests. That is, my feminist position on fathering is one that works towards challenging gendered asymmetries around care and employment, encouraging and embracing active fathering, while always remembering and valuing the long historical tradition of women's work, identities, and power in caregiving.

In adopting this two-part position, I look to the possibility of envisioning a future where men and women share fully and symmetrically in the joys and burdens of caregiving. While holding on to this hope, I remain cognizant of deeply ingrained gender differentials and power imbalances in the social conditions and life choices of women and men.

This perspective is implicitly, but not explicitly, addressed in this book. Rather, I mention it here as an imperceptible framing of both the conception and ultimate reception of this work. As meanings and messages take on a life of their own once they are free of their author's pen (Barthes, 1977; Foucault, 1977b), I am mindful of the need to be clear in my own mind about this book's underlying purpose and the tensions inherent in that purpose. As described earlier in this chapter, the epistemology of reception that will surround this book requires me to anticipate 'how and under what circumstances social scientific knowledge is received, evaluated, and acted upon and under what circumstances?' (May, 1998, 173). In taking a position that both works towards
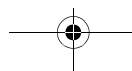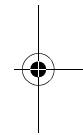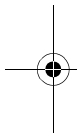
equality and recognizes gender differences in caregiving, I encourage active fathering while not diminishing a long and deep history of active mothering (see also postcript).

Intersectionality

A fourth point on moving beyond equality and differences relates to a wide array of differences *within* gender. Partly in response to the now central presence of post-modern, post-structural and post-colonial theories intersecting with feminism, recognition is constantly accorded to 'the multiple play of differences' (Scott, 1992, 174) among women's and men's experiences across culture, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and body. Arguing against additive models of identity (Spelman, 1988), which consider inequalities as separate from each other, feminists have articulated *intersecting*, or *interlocking*, forms of structure and agency (Cohambee River Collective 1983; hooks, 1981; Collins, 1994). The term in current use in feminist theory is *feminist intersectional theory*.

Studies on gender and household labour have been influenced by intersectional theory. While the initial focus of these studies was on predominantly middle-class white heterosexual couples, there has gradually been greater attention accorded to working-class or low-income households (Bolak, 1997; Luxton & Corman, 2001; Segura, 1994; Waller, 2002); ethnic diversity (Hofferth, 2003; Jain & Belsky, 1997; Mirande, 1988); and non-heterosexual couples (Bozett, 1988; Carrington, 1999; Doucet & Dunne, 2000; Dunne, 1999). In spite of this movement, however, studies on shared-caregiving couples or primary-caregiving fathers have continued to focus mainly on the narratives of middle-class white fathers and families (Deutsch, 1999; Dienhart, 1998; Ehrensaft, 1984; Gerson, 1993; Kimball, 1988; Pruett, 2000; Radin, 1982; Russell, 1987a). Part of the difficulty with qualitative research studies on these non-traditional families is the uneasy task of finding a sample of respondents and then encouraging them to open up their private lives to an inquiring researcher. Such obstacles to achieving diversity were clearly in evidence in my study, which took over three years and multiple strategies to gain a sample with a good level of diversity across social class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation (see chapter 2).

The importance of including diverse groups was thus a clear consideration in the selection of a research sample of fathers, but analyzing the interplay of differences between women and men still posed many challenges. That is, the ways in which multiple differences interact,
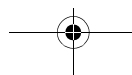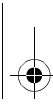
32   Do Men Mother?

and indeed *matter*, are hardly straightforward. In this vein, I draw on recent concerns in feminist literature on how contextual and empirical factors are important in considering how inequalities play out. Barbara Risman, for example has emphasized that '[t]here is a difference between an analysis of psychological, historical or sociological mechanisms that construct inequalities and the subjective experiences of the outcome of such mechanisms ... To focus all investigations into the complexity or subjective experiences of interlocking oppressions would have us lose access to how the mechanisms for different kinds of inequalities are produced' (Risman, 2004, 443).
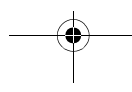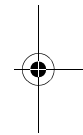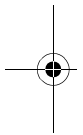
In a similar vein, Jane Ward has argued that 'not all differences are created equally' (Ward, 2004, 83) and that at times 'counting and ranking' inequalities may be a sound political strategy. As demonstrated throughout this book, issues of intersectionality played out in varied ways with gender often being the main axis of differentiation in parenting. There were, however, diverse and unique intersections being mapped out between gender, class, ethnicity, and sexuality in relation to emotional, community, and moral responsibilities (see chapters 4, 5, and 6).

In addition to addressing these four points on gender differences and gender equality, I also incorporate critical contributions from current thinking in five other areas. Under the large umbrella of gender relations and divisions, these include the social construction of gender; gender and domestic responsibility; masculinities; embodiment; and spatial and situational contexts of gender relations.

Gender Relations and Divisions

Gender as Structure and Agency

Although there are now ample theoretical treatments of gender as a social structure (Ferree, Lorber, & Hess, 1999; Lorber, 1994; Martin, 2003; Risman, 2004), R.W. Connell's gender relations approach is a useful one to summarize my overall theoretical perspective on gender relations in that it seeks to 'understand the different dimensions of structures of gender, the relations between bodies and society and the patterning or configuration of gender' (Connell, 2000, 24-5). Like many other gender theorists, Connell maintains that gender exists as both structure and agency. His is a fluid notion of structure, broadly rooted in Giddens's structuration theory and the duality of structure (Gid-
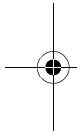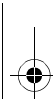
dens, 1984), which posits a constantly dialectical and recursive relationship between individuals and social structure so that, ultimately, they are constantly shaping and reshaping one another (see also Risman, 2004). Gender both structures social practice and occurs in the daily interactional social practices of women and men. In short, gender both constrains and enables action (Connell, 1987). While recognizing, as Pierre Bourdieu does (Bourdieu, 1977), 'the inventiveness and energy with which people pursue their lives' (Connell, 1987, 95), Connell also cautions that social structure is weighty: 'the gender order does not blow away at a breath' (Connell, 2000, 14).

Connell's is a fourfold model of gender relations that incorporates relations of power,[6] production,[7] emotions,[8] and symbolism[9] (Connell, 1987, 1995, 2000). It also focuses on gender as structure and agency, thus recognizing the gender inequities in the local and global structures within which households and families are located while also noting the potential for change by groups of individuals.

At the level of analysing everyday life, and at the level of what sociologists term collective and individual agency, my approach is one where women and men are active participants in the construction of gender. This approach is well captured by Scott Coltrane in his comprehensive overview of household labour; he writes, 'Perhaps the most popular approach to emerge in the last decade, gender construction theories, suggest that women and men perform different tasks because such practices affirm and reproduce gendered selves, thus producing a gendered interaction order. Drawing on symbolic interactionist, phenomenological, ethnomethodological, and feminist understandings of everyday life, the gender construction approach posits active subjects limited by situational exigencies, social structural constraints, and submerged power imbalances' (Coltrane, 2000, 1213).

My work has been especially informed by symbolic interactionism and its concept of the interactionist self as a basis for self-definition and action (see Barker, 1994; K. Daly, 1996, 2002; Finch & Mason, 1993; McMahon, 1995). As detailed at length in chapter 6, the ways in which men and women conduct themselves in their domestic and community lives are simultaneously informed by and form part of their moral identities, which are conceived as the shoulds and oughts of gendered social behaviours and norms. Furthermore, chapters 5 and 6 highlight how both women and men struggle with dominant 'moral' conceptions of how they should act as gendered household and community actors. More specifically, in relation to their identities and practices as
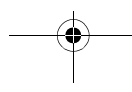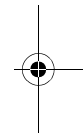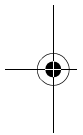
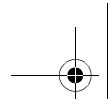page-017.fm Page 34 Friday, October 6, 2006 12:07 PM
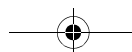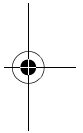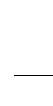
caregivers and/or earners, men not only feel observed and judged, but they can also be subjected to varying degrees of suspicion, monitoring, and surveillance.

Gender and Domestic Responsibility

Throughout the past two decades, increasing attention has been directed at revising methodological and theoretical measurements of *time* (Davies 1990, 1994; Sullivan, 1996; Pleck & Mascaidrelli, 2004) with critical advances in conceptualizing household *tasks* so as to focus on the 'values, meanings and expressive goals with which women and men imbue their housework and understandings of gender' (Sanchez & Kane, 1996: 361; see also DeVault, 1991; Greenstein, 1996; Mederer, 1993). There has also been a focus on defining and theorizing the concept of *responsibility* in relation to the care of children (see Allen and Hawkins, 1999; DeVault, 1991; Doucet, 2000, 2001; Barnett & Baruch, 1987; Leslie et al., 1991; Mederer, 1993). With regard to the latter, several general impulses can be highlighted from this scholarship. First, as indicated in one of the most widely cited works on fathering and responsibility, there is a distinction between engagement (i.e., direct interaction with the child) and accessibility (i.e., availability to the child), and responsibility (i.e., planning and organizing around the child) (Lamb, Charnov, & Levine, 1987). Second, researchers have recognized that domestic responsibility involves 'remembering, planning and scheduling' (Barnett & Baruch, 1987, 33; see also DeVault, 1991, 56; Leslie, Anderson & Branson, 1991). Third, responsibility employs a range of responses, including '"feeling," "thinking" and "taking action"' (see Leslie, Anderson & Branson, 1991, 199). Finally, methodological complexity in measuring responsibility has been highlighted and, in light of such complexity, authors have lamented how responsibility is still rarely measured (see Coltrane, 2004; Leslie, Anderson, & Branson, 1991). For example, Leigh Leslie and colleagues have argued that 'the concept of "responsibility" itself involves complex methodological issues that may account, in part, for the lack of empirical attention'; they thus insist that '[t]o capture the complexity of the work of being responsible for a child, a multi-pronged approach is needed' (Leslie, Anderson & Branson, 1991, 199).

  Throughout this book, I argue for a wide conceptualization of the responsibility for children that is simultaneously relational and interactional (chapter 4), both intra-household and inter-household (chap-

ter 5), as well as both material and 'moral' (see chapter 6). While my arguments begin with the advances made by authors who specifically research issues of domestic labour, they are also rooted in two other sets of literature, as explored below.

DOING GENDER

My first theoretical underpinning for a wide concept of responsibility is rooted in a now well-established body of research in sociology and family studies; this theoretical approach 'focuses on individuals' construction of themselves through relational, interactional labours such as housework and childcare' (Sanchez & Kane, 1996, 361) (see also Backett, 1982; Thompson & Walker, 1989; West & Fenstermaker, 1993; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Originating in ethnomethodological analyses of gender relations, a relational or interactional approach to domestic labour concentrates on the way couples create and maintain gendered distinctions in domestic life and in gendered identities through their daily interactions. As stated by Linda Thompson and Alexis Walker a decade ago, 'Women and men participate together to construct the meaning of gender and distinguish themselves from each other *as* women or *as* men' (Thompson & Walker, 1989, 865). A relational and interactional approach to domestic responsibility builds on the already acknowledged recognition of the cognitive, emotional and activity dimensions of domestic responsibility (e.g., Leslie, Anderson, Branson, 1991). However, in addition to individuals' assessment of their 'being responsible' or 'feeling responsible' (see also Brannen & Moss, 1991; Hochschild, 1989), responsibility is viewed as not only as relationships between a person and particular domestic tasks but more important as relationships *between people*.

INTER-HOUSEHOLD RELATIONS AND DOMESTIC LABOUR

There is a wide body of feminist work that draws attention to the critical significance and role of work and relationships outside household life as key factors in sustaining gender divisions of labour within the home. For example, British sociologists, notably Lydia Morris (1985, 1990, 1995), recognize the importance of gender-segregated social networks in sustaining gender divisions of labour and gender ideologies about women's and men's appropriate employment and household roles (see also Bott, 1957; Gregson and Lowe, 1993, 1994; Finch and Mason, 1993).[10] The work of black feminist scholars widens this discussion in pointing to how community networks and inter-household
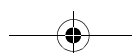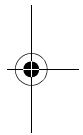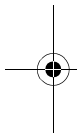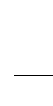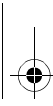
36   Do Men Mother?

relations are integral elements of black motherhood (see Collins, 1991, 1994). In addition, feminist research on 'kin work' (Di Leonardo, 1987; Stack, 1974), 'household service work' (Sharma, 1986), 'servicing work' (Balbo, 1987), and community work in low-income Third World urban settings (see Moser, 1993) also reveal the larger web of social relations within which domestic labour is enacted. Finally, a growing body of feminist work on women's friendships and the 'complex maternal worlds' built up around child rearing help to account for the gender-differentiated experiences of early parenting (see Bell & Ribbens, 1994). What *all* these studies have in common is an emphasis on looking outside the household, at inter-household relations, in order to understand intra-household life and labour. These insights will be developed in this book through an argument that domestic responsibility is relational in both intra-household and inter-household domains.

Masculinities

My approach to understanding gender relations and division in parenting and domestic life draws on the well-developed concept of masculinities.[11] While the literature on this topic, much like its sister field of gender studies, has proliferated over the past two decades, there has been some consensus by scholars on a number of key points. First, there is a plurality of masculinities (Brittan, 1989; Hearn & Morgan, 1990); that is, the meaning of masculinities differs across and within settings and there are, at the level of practice, several types of relations between kinds of masculinities (Connell, 2000; Lesko, 2000; O'Donnell & Sharpe, 2000; Pease, 2000). Second, masculinities are not essences that individuals have. Rather, they occur in social relations where issues of power and difference are at play and where masculinities exist at both the levels of agency and structure. As detailed by R.W. Connell, 'The patterns of conduct our society defines as masculine may be seen in the lives of individuals, but they also have an existence beyond the individual. Masculinities are defined in culture and sustained in institutions' (Connell, 2000, 11). A third point is that there is a distinction between men and masculinities in that 'sometimes masculine conduct or masculine identity goes together with a female body,' and similarly it is also 'very common for a [biological] man to have elements of "feminine" identity, desire and patterns of conduct' (Connell, 2000, 16). This latter observation is particularly relevant when studying men who are engaging in female-dominated or feminine-identified work such as caregiving.

While all the above points inform my work on fathering, the most critical one relates to the much discussed concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' as adapted from the work of Antonio Gramsci and developed by Connell and colleagues (Carrigan, Connell & Lee, 1985; Coltrane, 1994; Connell, 1987, 1995, 2000; Kimmel, 1994; Messner, 1997). Hegemonic masculinity is defined as 'the most honored or desired' form of masculinity (Connell 2000, 10), one that usually aligns itself with traditional masculine qualities of 'being strong, successful, capable, reliable, in control. That is, [t]he hegemonic definition of manhood is a man *in* power, a man *with* power, and a man *of* power (Kimmel, 1994, 125; emphasis in original). Further, as Connell points out, hegemonic masculinity is perhaps most strongly identified '*as the opposite of femininity*' (Connell, 2000, 31; my emphasis). Other forms of masculinity, then, have come to be viewed as subordinated (especially gay masculinities), marginalized (exploited or oppressed groups such as ethnic minorities) and complicit masculinities (those organized around the complicit acceptance of what has come to be termed the 'patriarchal dividend') (Connell, 1995, 2000).

Increased empirical and ethnographic studies of men's lives have shed light on the diverse ways that hegemonic and other kinds of masculinities can play out in the same setting. In particular, the issue of where caregiving and fathering fit into this spectrum requires greater attention. Some authors have argued that fathers' caregiving practices are 'adopted by the hegemonic form of masculinity,' so that rather than challenge hegemonic masculinity, caregiving becomes incorporated into it (Brandth & Kvande, 1998; Dryden, 1999). Others have recently argued that fathering and caregiving can be seen as *complicit* in that fathers can express support for equal parenting while maintaining more traditional patterns of gender divisions of labour (see Plantin, Sven-Axel, & Kearney, 2003). Whatever the configuration of diverse masculinities, it is clear that 'the interplay between hegemonic and subordinate masculinities suggests the experience of masculinity is far from uniform and that new ways of theorizing these differences need to be developed' (Hearn & Morgan, 1990, 11). Moreover, as indicated by Connell, research on these varied combinations of masculinities 'is surely an empirical question, not one to be settled in advance by theory' (Connell, 2000, 23). Through this empirical study of fathers as primary caregivers, I pose questions about where hegemonic masculinity fits into the 'Do men mother?' question.

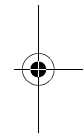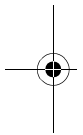Specifically, I explore two key questions throughout this book. First,
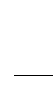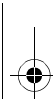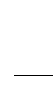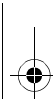
38   Do Men Mother?

I engage with David Morgan's compelling claim that 'one strategy of studying men and masculinities would be to study those situations where masculinity is, as it were, on the line' (Morgan, 1992, 99). Do fathers as primary caregivers put masculinity on the line, or do they reconfigure that same *line* according to what is defined as masculine or feminine? Second, do fathers' everyday caregiving practices confirm or challenge current theoretical understandings of masculinities? Specifically, given that hegemonic masculinity is largely associated with the devaluation of the feminine while caring is often equated with feminine practice, what is the relationship between hegemonic masculinity and care? That is, does fathers' caregiving disrupt the smooth surface of hegemonic masculinity? These questions are dealt with, in varied ways, in chapters 4, 5, and 6.

Embodiment

Like masculinities and fatherhood, the 'human body has in recent years become a "hot" topic in sociology' (Howson & Inglis, 2001a) and, as with the literatures on care and gender, there is indeed a 'whole industry of research and scholarship on the body' (Nettleton & Watson, 1998, 2; see also Shilling, 1993).

   In the expansive field of embodiment, I locate myself in the growing movement away from a largely theoretical sociology of the body to one that accords attention to 'concrete incorporating practices and sometimes messy empirical realities of actual flesh and blood bodies' (Monaghan, 2002, 335). As Lois Wacquant points out, 'One of the paradoxical features of recent social studies of the body is how rarely one encounters in there actual living bodies of flesh and blood' (Wacquant, 1995, 65). Where empirical studies of embodied aspects of men's lives *have* been conducted, they have focused mainly on hyper-masculine displays of bodies (Connell, 1995; Watson, 1998), male violence (Messerschmidt, 1999; Connell, 2000; Klein, 1983), body builders and boxing (Connell, 1995, 2000; Wacquant, 1995), men's health (Watson, 1998), and boys' embodiment in schools (Prendergast & Forrest, 1998). What is noticeable, however, is the scant attention given to these issues of 'messy empirical realities' within family life. According to David Morgan, '[D]espite these new explorations and developments around the sociology of the body it may be argued that there has still been relatively little systematic treatment of family and family issues under the heading of the sociology of the body' (Morgan, 1996, 113). This is a
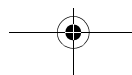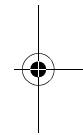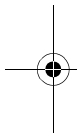
surprising omission, given that families are deeply imbued with embodied interactions and that practices of caring for others are so intrinsically embodied. Building mainly on the work of the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty and the eminent sociologist Irving Goffman, as well as on feminist contributions to understandings of the body and space, my approach to embodiment, as discussed below, is fourfold.

EMBODIED SUBJECTS, EMBODIED AGENTS

For social scientists wishing to explore the 'lived experience' of embodied subjects, it is the phenomenological work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1964, 1965, 1968) and his concept of 'body subjects' that has become one of the most well cited work on bodies and embodiment (see, for example, Burkitt, 1999; Crossley, 1995a, 2001; Csordas, 1990; Howson & Inglis, 2001b; Nettleton & Watson, 1998).[12] The main tenor of his arguments as developed in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962) and his unfinished last text, *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968), include the indivisibility of mind and body, the body subject as active and engaged with the world, human beings as embodied social agents, and human perception as intrinsically embodied. According to Charles Taylor, 'If one were to sum up Merleau-Ponty's philosophical legacy in a phrase, one might say more than any other that he taught us what it means to understand ourselves as embodied agents' (C. Taylor, 1990, 1). In his own own words, '[W]e are in the world through our body, and ... we perceive that world within our body' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 206).

A SHIFT FROM EMBODIED EXPERIENCES TO EMBODIED NARRATIVES

Unlike authors who emphasize that their 'concern is to examine how people experience their bodies and in particular how they articulate their experiences' (Nettleton & Watson, 1998, 3-4) or conduct 'social theorizing from lived bodies' (Williams & Bendelow, 1998b, 3), my interest is in *embodied narratives* or 'embodied ethnography' (Monaghan, 2002). As noted by many other theorists, attempts to grasp one's experience are contentious in that, epistemologically, this assumes a subject that is pre-social and beyond discursivity and representation (Burkitt, 1999; Scott & Morgan, 1993; Young, 1990b). Moreover, methodologically, to view subjects' words as transparent passageways into their experiences or selves is to get caught in what Wendy Hollway and Tony Jefferson refer to as the 'transparent self problem' or the 'transparent account problem' (Hollway & Jefferson,
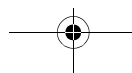
40   Do Men Mother?

2000, 3). Quite simply, processes of knowing others involve interpreta-
tion, translation, and ultimately transformation (see Mauthner & Dou-
cet, 2003). My research thus investigates how men and women *talk*
about the embodied aspects of parenting in direct and indirect ways.
Rather than attempt to bring '"lived bodies" into sociology' (Nettleton
& Watson, 1998, 3), I aim to make visible some of the embodied ele-
ments of fathers' and mothers' narratives and to bring those into soci-
ology and into our larger theoretical and empirical understandings of
mothering and fathering.

BODIES AS CONTINGENT AND VARIABLE
My third point about embodiment is that bodies, and their effects, vary
across particular spaces and sites over time. This is very much in line
with the work of many sociological and feminist writers who argue
that while the body does have a biological and material base, it is nev-
ertheless modified and variably enacted within different social con-
texts. That is, 'the socially contingent nature of the body, and how it is
experienced, will vary according to how, where, and when it is located
and the nature of the social situations which prevail' (Nettleton & Wat-
son, 1998, 8). Moria Gatens has similarly argued that there is no 'true
nature of the body but rather it is a process and its meanings and
capacities will vary according to its context (Gatens, 1996, 57).[13] These
contingent and variable meanings across different contexts further call
for a greater appreciation of body and space.

BODY AND SPACE
In attempting to make sense of the relationship of a body to particular
spaces, I first turned to the work of Goffman (Goffman, 1963, 1969, 1972,
1987) and the lenses through which he is read (see Burkitt, 1999; Cross-
ley, 1995b; Mellor & Shilling, 1997; Williams & Bendelow, 1998a). From
Goffman, I take several concepts that have relevance for my work on
fathers and the ways in which they move with children through female-
dominated public spaces.[14] The most relevant here is the 'moral' quality
of bodily movement through public spaces (Doucet, 2005b).
   Goffman argues that relations between people – inter-subjective rela-
tions – are both practical and moral. They are practical in that we learn
how to move through spaces in ways that are acceptable, normal, and in
concert with public expectations. These movements are also moral in
the sense that embodied agents not only interact but make judgements
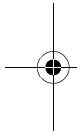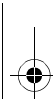about how people maintain or disrupt routine social and public interac-

tions. 'The public order in which body techniques are exercised is not only a practical order ... [but] it is equally a *moral* character' (Crossley, 1995b, 139).[15] As Goffman puts it, 'Bodily norms not only enable individuals to recognize and label others ... but to grade them hierarchically, and stigmatize them in a manner which facilitates discrimination' (1963, 168). Thus, one's sense of self, her moral worth, and her understandings of herself as normal are at stake as she moves through public spaces and engages in public encounters (see Crossley, 1995b).

The image, as related in this book's Introduction, of my husband's attempting to push our daughter's stroller into the moms-and-tots public space in a church basement in Cambridge and his feeling like an abnormal embodied agent disrupting 'complex maternal worlds' (Bell & Ribbens, 1994) is one that constantly came to mind as I worked through Goffman's work on space and body. Throughout this book, fathers narrate similar social scenes of a perceived misfit between embodied gendered subjects as they move through what several men called 'estrogen-filled worlds,' especially in the early years of parenting infants and toddlers (see chapters 5 and 6).

If it is the case that 'bodies do matter' (Messerschmidt, 1999), how *do* they matter in my work on men, mothering, and fathering? Throughout this book, I attempt to make visible the embodied quality of mothers' and fathers' narratives. What will be revealed, in the chapters that follow, is that sometimes bodies *do not* matter. When a father is attending to children – by cuddling, feeding, reading, bathing, or talking to them – gendered embodiment can be largely negligible. But there are also times when embodiment *can* come to matter a great deal, both for the men in these situations as well as for those who are observing them. As detailed in chapters 5 and 6, this 'social gaze' at men's movements with children as they inhabit female-dominated community spaces is made all the more penetrating because it is tinged with suspicion and surveillance.

The sites where embodiment matters as disruption include recent versions of the moms-and-tots groups (community playgroups), schoolyards, classrooms, and other female-dominated venues. They also include instances of fathers caring for the children of others, or of single fathers hosting girls' sleepover parties (see chapter 6). It is in the latter two circumstances that many fathers speak about how they must tread carefully because of moral judgements about the fit between male bodies and other embodied subjects. At certain times and in certain sites, differently gendered bodies cannot simply be substituted for each
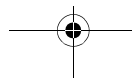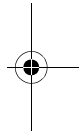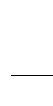
42   Do Men Mother?

other. Yet there are also sites and times where gendered embodiment seems inconsequential. With each passing year and with the increased presence of fathers on the social landscapes of parenting, this sense of disruptiveness has gradually eased, and at times it seems to have completely dissipated. Nevertheless, it can be ignited quickly. Indeed, the situations where gender does or does not matter are examples of 'borderwork' and 'border crossings.' As explored below, this is the final part of my theoretical approach.

Gender and Shifting Contexts: Borderwork and Border Crossing

An innovative way of thinking about gender in particular spatial sites and at particular times is offered in the work of the American sociologist Barrie Thorne. Her book *Gender Play: Girls and Boys in Schools* (1993) provides richly detailed observations of children and the varied contexts of boys' and girls' interactions in classrooms, schoolyards, lunch rooms, school line-ups, and neighbourhood streets and playgrounds. One of Thorne's main points is that in gendered interactions, *contexts do matter*. That is, particular spaces and moments have an impact on the way gender is experienced by people and perceived, in turn, by onlookers and observers. While Thorne's units of analysis are children's spatial sites, her reflections on extensive gender separation, the meanings of these gender divides, and, conversely, the cross-gender activity that breaks down the borders between genders have relevance for our understandings of mothering and fathering. The two key concepts from Thorne's work, which underpin my analysis in this book, are borderwork[16] and border crossings.

BORDERWORK
The concept of borderwork is used to describe spaces and times where intense gender differences are intensely perceived and experienced. Thorne reflects on how certain situations create the illusion of opposite sides between girls and boys. Using commonplace examples such as games of boys chasing girls or contests that pit girls against boys, she notes that there is 'a sense of the boys and the girls as separate and opposing sides' as well as 'the magnetism of gender-marked events for observers, participants and in the realms of memory' (Thorne, 1993, 64). She names these instances *borderwork* because they erect boundaries or borders between the genders, and their presence *works* at creating and maintaining gender borders. In
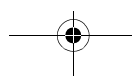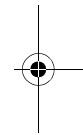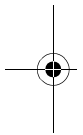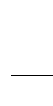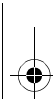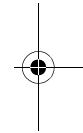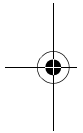
short, our minds and memories hold on to those instances through childhood and later in adulthood, where gender creates and reaffirms differences. As Thorne writes, 'The occasions of borderwork may carry extra perceptual weight because they are marked by conflict, intense emotions, and the expression of forbidden desires' (Thorne, 1993, 85).

Building on her observations of boys and girls play in classrooms, lunchrooms hallways, and schoolyards, Thorne makes several theoretical points. First, she argues that a constant emphasis placed on instances of borderwork has resulted in a 'hegemonic view of gender' that has serious consequences for how we conceptualize gender. Second, according too great an 'emphasis on gender as oppositional dualism' leads to an 'exaggeration of gender difference and disregard for the presence of crosscutting variation and sources of commonality' (Thorne, 1993, 86). Third, while borderwork is a concept that assists us in understanding how there are times and sites where gender boundaries are distinctly strong and oppositional, there are also times when the boundaries are relaxed to the point that they are barely noticeable. Thorne thus cautions that 'although the occasions of gender separation may seem more dramatic, the mixed-gender encounters are also theoretically and practically important' (Thorne, 1993, 36). To develop this point about relaxed gender borders and the less visible mixed-gender encounters that also occur in varied sites and at varied times, she offers her concept of 'crossing the gender divide' or the crossing of boundaries or borders.

BORDER CROSSINGS

By alluding to a concept of border crossing, Thorne shows that 'children sometimes successfully cross the gender divide' (Thorne, 1993, 61). She thus emphasizes not only the 'apart' but also the 'with' instances of gender mingling as a critical part of the contextual nature of gender, since frameworks that emphasize only gender differences 'cannot grasp the fluctuating significance of gender in the ongoing scenes of social life' (Thorne, 1993, 61). Thorne sees gender not as static unchanging interactions but rather as fluid relationships that are adaptive and contextual. She also highlights an important fact about gender research: the times that boys and girls are opposed to each other are more noticeable to observers, and, therefore, these occasions receive more attention in the literature. As a result, '[g]ender is often equated solely with dichotomous difference, but ... gender waxes and wanes in
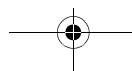
44   Do Men Mother?

the organization and symbolism of group life, and that flux needs close attention' (Thorne, 1993, 64).

These concepts of borderwork and border crossings are utilized in my work on gender differences and gender equality in parenting because they provide useful metaphors for the ways in which space and time matter and how gender borders can be both 'quickly built and as quickly dismantled' (Thorne, 1993, 84). It is worth reflecting, then, on what activates or deactivates the boundaries between girls and boys, men and women, mothers and fathers. Who are the gatekeepers at these borders? In looking at how and when gender crossings occur, Thorne also lays out different tools and resources that facilitate such crossings. Particularly noteworthy are the instances where boys attempt to cross into girls' activities and the tensions that ensue due to being teased about being a sissy or a 'failed male' (Thorne, 1993, 116). The resources that assist boys in crossing over into female-dominated activities have relevance for our understandings of fathers moving into the similarly female-dominated terrain of parenting.

Throughout chapters 4, 5, and 6, my exploration of the question 'Do men mother?' intersperses key examples of borderwork where gender differences and borders are in play between women and men, the resources and factors that take down this same border, and instances where the border is invisible or muted. Moments and sites where borderwork are evident include postnatal massage classes, playgroups with infants and toddlers, men standing in schoolyards and volunteering in classrooms, men and women's friendship patterns around children, single fathers and teen daughters' sleepovers, as well as the range of beliefs about the exclusive social bond between mothers and children. Border crossings are also in evidence throughout the years of child rearing. As detailed in chapters 4, 5, and 6, several factors that encourage border crossing – or that confound gender binaries – include the passing of time within households and within communities; the lead that mothers take in influencing fathering patterns; particular biographical contexts where crisis or challenge force unexpected changes in mothers and fathers; and resources of masculinity such as social class, breadwinning, and demonstrated heterosexuality.

Conclusions

My work on men, mothering, and fathering is framed by several weighty bodies of academic literature. My intention in this chapter has
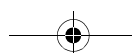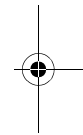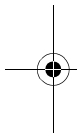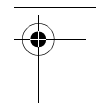
been to sketch some of the elemental contours of my theoretical approach and to convey the ways that the stories of fathering as told here are rooted in such established scholarship and understandings of gender, men's lives, women's lives, mothering and fathering, masculinity and embodiment. I saw and heard fathers' narratives through these lenses and hearing aids, and at times I sought out new ones to make sense of unexpected currents in fathers' stories. In asking the 'Do men mother?' question, I indicate where gender similarities are in evidence, where gender differences ignite, like borderwork, and where gender is muted and fathers become parents in seemingly ungendered ways. In the next two chapters, I highlight the methodological and epistemological details and challenges involved in coming to know fathers' stories, and I unpack some of the key theoretical concepts that form an integral part of understanding fathers as primary caregivers.