Andrea Doucet *Brock University*

# Parental Responsibilities: Dilemmas of Measurement and Gender Equality

*Over the past half-century, enormous changes have occurred in gendered divisions of housework and child care across many countries, with a growing consensus that there is a slow but steady pace of change in gendered divisions of time and tasks but one that is combined with a puzzling persistence of gender differences in parental caregiving responsibilities. Rooted in a 14-year qualitative and ethnographic research program that focuses mainly on breadwinning mothers and fathers who self-identify as stay-at-home or primary caregivers and guided by genealogical and relational sociological approaches, the author argues that the concept of parental responsibility requires greater attention and that its theorization and conceptualization have critical implications for if and how it can be measured, the methodological approaches that might be used to assess it, and the conceptual fit between parental responsibilities and gender equality.*

Over the past half-century, significant changes have occurred in gender divisions of caregiving and breadwinning across many countries, including Canada and the United States. This is evident in rising rates of breadwinning mothers (Wang, Parker, & Taylor, 2013) as well as in fathers' increasing commitment to caregiving, as demonstrated by rising numbers of stay-at-home fathers, single fathers, and gay father households (Chesley, 2011; Goldberg, 2012; Livingston, 2013). These large demographic and social shifts have prompted equally substantial attention from social science researchers who have produced and enacted a complex array of quantitative and qualitative measures to calculate who-does-what to arrive at conclusions about the state of gender equality in housework and parental care work. Most of this work has taken place in a burgeoning cross-national and cross-disciplinary field of research called "gender divisions of domestic labor," which has focused on assessing changes in time, tasks, and responsibilities.

This field of gender divisions of domestic labor evolved slowly, with key works emerging between the 1960s and 1980s (e.g., Berk, 1985; Gavron, 1966; Hoffman & Nye, 1974; R. E. Pahl, 1984), and developed into a large subfield of family and feminist sociologies (for excellent overviews, see Coltrane, 2000, 2010; Davis & Greenstein, 2013; and Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010). Across this field, assessments have pointed to a slow but steady pace of change in gender divisions of domestic labor, but one that is combined with a persistence of gender differences and inequalities in domestic and parental caregiving responsibilities. For example, a recent international 16-country study indicated that "cross-national trends in paid and unpaid work time over the last 40 years reveal a slow and incomplete convergence of women's

Department of Sociology and Department of Women's and Gender Studies, Brock University, 500 Glenridge Ave., St. Catharines, Ontario L2S 3A1, Canada (adoucet@brocku.ca).

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and men's work patterns" (Kan, Sullivan, & Gershuny, 2011, p. 234); this research also demonstrated that "women have been responsible for the bulk of routine housework and caring for others, while men tend to spend their domestic work time on non-routine domestic work" (Kan et al., 2011, p. 236). These researchers, and many others, confirm a point that Sarah Fenstermaker Berk (1985, p. 195) made almost 30 years ago when she wrote about the "outstanding stability" in mothers' responsibility for domestic work and children. Similarly, Hochschild (2012) recently confirmed, more than 20 years after her initial observation of women's "second shift" of gendered responsibilities, that mothers "felt more responsible for the home" (p. 7). Building on Hochschild's arguments about a "stalled revolution," Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, and Robinson (2000, p. 197) referred to the "persistence of employed wives' primary responsibility for domestic labor," and Michael Bittman (2004) wrote, "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" (p. 168; see also Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie, 2006, and Fox, 2009).

In the face of this ongoing problem of the inequality of gendered responsibilities in parental care there lies a persistent puzzle that has received sparse attention in the past few decades. Although massive attention has been given to methodological and theoretical issues associated with housework and child care, much less consideration has been given to developing theoretical and methodological approaches to parental responsibilities. In this article, I address this puzzle of how to define, measure, and research parental responsibilities by asking several questions: What are parental responsibilities? How and where are they enacted? Can they be equal, and what might that equality look like? Can they be measured, and how might they be measured? What units of measurement do we use, and can these units be compared across households and across time? I argue that the concept of parental responsibility requires careful attention and that its theorization and conceptualization have critical implications for whether and how it can be measured, the methodological approaches that might be used to assess it, and the conceptual fit between parental responsibilities and gender equality.

This article is underpinned by a qualitative research program that has explored practices and meanings of parental responsibilities, care, and domestic work; gender equality and gender differences in domestic life; and the methodological and epistemological challenges of coming to know these everyday practices (e.g., Doucet, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2009, 2013). Three research studies carried out over the past 14 years directly inform this article and provide evidence for the arguments I make. Although my research was initially concerned with what is occurring within 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; that is, I have turned more and more of my focus toward 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.

This move is informed by two broad approaches that combine theory, method, ontology, and epistemology. The first approach can be broadly described as relational, rooted in what ~~Ian Hacking (2002),~~ Margaret Somers (2008), and Joan Tronto (2013) call *relational ontologies*, what feminist theorists of care (e.g., Held, 2005; Kittay, 1999; Lynch, 2007; Ruddick, 1995; Tronto, 1993, 2013) refer to as interdependent and *relational subjectivities*, and what Mustafo Emirbayer (1997) referred to as *relational sociology*, whereby social realities are not viewed as static "things" but as "dynamic, continuous, and processual . . . unfolding relations" (p. 281; see also Gabb, 2011; Morgan, 2011; and Powell & Dépelteau, 2013). The second approach is informed by Bourdieu and Wacquant's (1992) concept of *epistemic reflexivity* (p. 41), which entails a "constant questioning of the categories and techniques of sociological analysis and of the relationship to the world they presuppose," and by Margaret Somers's (2008) "historical sociology of concept formation," which is the "work of turning social science back on itself to examine often taken-for-granted conceptual tools of research" (p. 172). In this article, the taken-for-granted conceptual tools explored are parental caregiving responsibilities.

This article is organized into four sections. The first section focuses on selected conceptual shifts that have occurred across the past three

decades in housework, child care, and parental responsibilities while also pointing to ongoing theoretical gaps. In the second section, I provide a brief description of the three specific studies that inform this article and the shared methods across those studies that facilitated data collection on parental responsibilities. These methods include a visual and interactive method called the *Household Portrait*, case studies that included individual and couple interviews, and longitudinal methods. Building on these research studies and the conceptual shifts laid out in the first section, the third section lays out several key findings as I argue for a conception of responsibility that is constituted by movement, fluidity, flux, negotiation, subjective interpretations of what these mean, and how these responsibilities unfold within households and between households and social institutions across time. I demonstrate how this conceptualization emerged through a constant interplay of theory and methods; that is, across my research studies, as I investigated responsibilities, I developed and continually refined methods that could tap into the ontologically relational constitution of responsibilities. I provide examples from my research data of how these approaches bring out the complexity and fluidity of parental responsibilities while also pointing to challenges with measurement and with assessments about gender equality in these responsibilities. In the fourth and final section of the article I point to some of the wider theoretical and methodological implications of my arguments.

## Conceptual Shifts in the Study of Housework, Child Care, and Parental Responsibilities

In this now-burgeoning field of gender divisions of domestic labor, most studies approach parenting and domestic labor for children as a set of tasks. These tasks are measured using qualitative or quantitative self-reported assessments from mothers and fathers and/or time-use studies that track these tasks. In this vein, a diverse set of excellent studies carried out in many countries over the past few decades has produced detailed and complex measurements of household and care work (e.g., Bianchi et al., 2006; Folbre & Bittman, 2004; Kan et al., 2011; Sullivan, 2013; see also Coltrane, 2000, and Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010, for excellent overviews). Over the past decade there has been growing attention to conceptual, theoretical, and methodological complexities in defining and measuring housework and child care; the importance of conceptual and methodological distinctions between housework and child care; and how relational, social, cultural, class, and temporal contexts shape meanings and practices of housework and child care (Coltrane, 2000; Coltrane & Adams, 2001; Goldberg, 2013; Mannino & Deutsch, 2007; Perry-Jenkins, Newkirk, & Ghunney, 2013; Shelton & John, 1996; Sullivan, 2013). However, although there is a consensus across these studies that gendered tasks and time are shifting toward greater equality, gendered responsibilities continue to be largely intransigent to change. This article builds on works that argue for a distinction between the tasks of housework and those of child care and recognize the importance of social, temporal, relational, and spatial contexts. I argue that there needs to be a further distinction between parental caregiving tasks—whether measured by task or by time—and parental responsibilities, which are wider sets of "complex . . . processes of care" (Tronto, 2013, p. 22) that call for greater attention to their unique conceptual and ontological specificities.

Attention to the conceptual particularities of parental responsibilities can be found in a small body of selected work, including that of Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine (1985), who argued three decades ago that although parental responsibility "is extremely important, it has been researched much less thoroughly" (p. 884) than care. Leslie, Anderson, and Branson (1991) suggested over two decades ago that "the concept of 'responsibility' itself presents complex methodological issues that may account, in part, for the lack of empirical attention" (p. 199). Indeed, Michele Budig and Nancy Folbre (2004) noted one decade ago in their exhaustive review of the conceptual challenges of assessing child care time and responsibilities that

> childcare is not just a set of activities. It is also a state of mind. . . . Parental 'on call' responsibilities are normally excluded from measures of both primary and secondary time, suggesting the need for a separate category of "responsibility" time. (p. 59)

I echo these views on the "measurement dilemma" (Leslie et al., 1991, p. 199) and the need to "confront a basic conceptual problem"

with defining parental "responsibility time" (Budig & Folbre, 2004, p. 51). However, I shift my focus from parental "responsibility time" to parental responsibilities as practices and processes; that is, although housework and child care tasks can and have been defined and measured through increasingly sophisticated time-use measures, I argue that we should also attend to the specificity of parental responsibilities as concepts and practices and interrogate the issue of whether responsibilities can also be gathered or gleaned through time and tasks or if they constitute a distinct ontological object of investigation.

Questions about measurement open up a further set of conceptual questions about the fit between parental responsibilities and gender equality. There is a taken-for-granted acceptance of this fit in much of the scholarship on gender divisions of domestic labor. In earlier studies, for example, an *egalitarian household* was defined as one in which the man and the woman within it do "share(d) housework equally" or "whose contributions are roughly equal to one another" whether measured by minutes and hours or by task division (Brannen & Moss, 1991, p. 42). Over the years, many researchers have come to assume that a 50–50, "equal sharers," or egalitarian division of domestic labor is the ideal or most successful model (Brannen & Moss, 1991; Deutsch, 1999; Ehrensaft, 1987; Gornick & Meyers, 2009; Hochschild, 2012; Kimball, 1988), yet there is sparse attention given to how responsibilities might be measured or how one might determine what "50–50" means (see Deutsch, 1999). Gornick and Meyers (2009) argued for "gender equality in parenthood and employment" (p. 3) but then conceded to critiques (see Orloff, 2009) that their version of equality does not "require adults in all dual-parent families to allocate the same time to market and care work" (p. 437). Nevertheless, the field of gender divisions of labor is still underpinned by assumptions that parents should strive for gender equality in parental work and responsibilities (but see critiques by Orloff, 2009, and Sullivan, 2000), that equality with one's partner might take precedence over other family goals of attending to "vulnerabilities" of the cared-for (see Fineman, 2009), and that parents and the researchers who study these matters will know what equality in parental responsibilities looks like and how to measure it.

## Methodological Approaches and Details of Informing Studies

Methodologically, this article is rooted in a 14-year-long qualitative, ethnographic, and longitudinal research program conducted mainly in Canada, but also recently in the United States, on households with breadwinning mothers and fathers who self-define as primary caregiving fathers (stay-at-home fathers and single fathers). This research program has focused on addressing the persistent link between women and domestic responsibilities while also reflecting on what impedes or facilitates active father involvement (e.g., Doucet 2006, 2009). Broadly speaking, three interlocking projects inform this article: (a) a qualitative and ethnographic study (2000–2004; hereafter *Study A*) with 118 Canadian fathers who self-identified as primary caregivers and/or stay-at-home fathers (for at least 1 year); (b) a qualitative research study (2008–2014; hereafter *Study B*) of primary breadwinning mothers in Canada and the United States that included in-depth interviews with 40 women and 15 fathers, an online interactive forum (private and password-protected) with 45 Canadian and American women, couple and father interviews in 14 households, and a 5-year longitudinal case study of 11 breadwinning mothers (with two sets of couple and father interviews held in six of these households); and (c) a 14-year longitudinal ethnographic study of breadwinning mothers and stay-at-home fathers (six households; hereafter *Study C*) with a first series of interviews (individual and couple interviews) conducted as part of Study A in 2000 while follow-up interviews were conducted 9 to 14 years later. All three informing studies are qualitative research studies with a combination of in-depth open-ended interviews with mothers and fathers, couple interviews, selected visual and interactive methods, participant observation in family homes, and some group interviews (for details on these studies, see Doucet, 2006, 2009, and Figure 1, this article).

In addition to shared data collection methods, all three studies used a similar approach to data analysis. Interview data were analyzed using the Listening Guide, a narrative analysis approach for analyzing in-depth interviews (see Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Doucet & Mauthner, 2008; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998, 2003; Tolman, 2002; Way, 2011). The Listening Guide is composed of at least four readings of transcripts as well as listening to the interview tapes

FIGURE 1. THREE INFORMING STUDIES (2000–2014).

| *Study* | *Sample* | *Data Collection* | *Diversity* |
|---|---|---|---|
| A. Canadian Primary Caregiving Fathers (2000–2004) (for details on study, see Doucet, 2006) | **Sample obtained via:**<br>Advertising in local community newspapers, community organizations, snowball sample<br><br>**Numbers:**<br>• 118 fathers<br>  • 57 fathers who self-identified as primary caregivers and/or stay-at-home fathers (at least 1 year)<br>  • 40 single fathers (25 sole custody; 12 joint custody)<br>  • 13 fathers (single and stay-at-home)<br>  • 8 self-identified primary or shared primary caregiving fathers (new immigrant and gay fathers)<br>• 14 mother/father couples | Focus groups, individual interviews, couple interviews, Household Portrait (for examples of the Household Portrait, see Doucet, 1996, 2001, 2006)<br><br>**Details:**<br>101 fathers interviewed through:<br>• 62 in-depth, face-to-face individual interviews<br>• 27 telephone interviews<br>• 12 fathers interviewed in focus group interviews (3 groups)<br><br>17 fathers also participated though an Internet Survey<br>• 14 (mother/father) couple interviews<br><br>Interviews conducted 2000–2004<br>All interviews (except for 2 individual father interviews) conducted by A. Doucet. | **Ethnicity:**<br>• 15 fathers from visible minorities (14 first-generation immigrants)<br>• 4 Native Canadian (Indigenous)<br>• 14 first- or second-generation immigrants of varied White ethnicities<br><br>**Sexualities:**<br>9 gay fathers (divorced fathers who had moved from heterosexual to gay partnerships, gay couples who had used a surrogate, and gay couples who had adopted children)<br><br>**Education (fathers):**<br>• 28% high school education (or less)<br>• 13% technical or community college<br>• 44% university<br>• 17% postgraduate |
| B. Canadian and American Breadwinning Mothers and Stay-at-Home Fathers (2008–2014) | **Sample obtained via:** Online advertising, website, Facebook page, online forum, snowball sample; community organizations<br><br>**Numbers:**<br>• 40 mothers interviewed<br>  • 35 married<br>  • 5 single (2 separated from partners during study)<br>• 15 fathers<br>• 45 women participated in an online forum (i.e., submitted stories and interacted online with other mothers, 2008-2009)<br>• 13 recruited for interviews<br><br>**Longitudinal Case Study numbers:**<br>• 6 couples (6 mother/father interviews and individual interviews)<br>• 5 mothers | Individual interviews, couple interviews, Household Portrait, case study (3- to 5-year longitudinal)<br><br>**Details:**<br>55 in-depth individual interviews with:<br>• 40 mothers<br>• 15 fathers<br>• 14 couple interviews.<br>• All interviews were face-to-face interviews; 4 individual interviews conducted by telephone and 3 interviews by Skype (due to distance).<br>• All interviews conducted by A. Doucet<br>• Interviews conducted in provinces of Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia; and states of New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Connecticut; and by Skype or telephone in Florida, Wisconsin, and Illinois<br>• Interviews conducted 2009–2014<br><br>**Longitudinal Case Study:**<br>Individual interviews, couple interviews, Household Portrait (revisited) 3–5 years after initial interview<br>First interviews conducted 2009.<br>Second set of interviews 2012–2014. | **Nationality:**<br>*In-depth interviews*<br>• 28 Canadian<br>• 12 American<br><br>*Online forum*<br>• 18 Canadian<br>• 27 American<br><br>**Ethnicity:**<br>• 7 visible minorities<br>**Education (mothers):**<br>• 10% high school (or less)<br>• 62% university<br>• 28% postgraduate (MBA, MA, or PhD)<br><br>**Age:**<br>25 to 47 years old (median: 36)<br><br>**Children:**<br>1 to 4 children (from newborn to 19 years old) |
| C. Canadian Couples with Primary Breadwinning Mothers and Stay-At-Home Fathers (2000–2014) | **Sample obtained via:**<br>Follow up phone calls, letters, emails to Sample A<br><br>**Numbers:**<br>14 fathers were contacted from Father as Primary Caregiver Study (Study A), and 6 households participated. | **Longitudinal Study:**<br>Individual interviews, couple interviews, Household Portrait (revisited)<br>9 to 14 years after initial interview<br>• First interviews conducted in: 2000.<br>Second set of interviews conducted: 2009–2014<br>(Timing of second interviews based on children's ages, availability, and geographical location) | **Ethnicity:**<br>White<br><br>**Education:**<br>*Fathers:*<br>• 16.7% high school<br>• 16.7% technical college<br>• 50% university<br>• 16.7% postgraduate<br>*Mothers:*<br>• 100% university |

after each interview. Although there is flexibility in how these readings are conducted, the four readings as I practiced them bring together concepts and practices of epistemic reflexivity and researcher reflexivity; a reading for narrative and narrative emplotment; an attention to the articulation of subjectivity and subjective positioning in the narratives; and relational, structural, and ideological positionings of the interviewees and their narratives.

I personally conducted all but two of the research interviews that inform this article (i.e., hundreds of interviews with 170 individuals). I approach interviews, as Bourdieu does, as a reflexive craft whereby

> a sociological "feel" or "eye," allows one to perceive and monitor *on the spot*, as the interview is actually occurring . . . and to discover and master as completely as possible the nature of its inevitable acts of construction and the equally inevitable effects those acts produce. (Bourdieu et al., 1999, p. 608)

I also conducted all the data analysis in all three projects, informed by a view that data analysis is where researcher reflexivity is critical for the making of knowledges (see Doucet & Mauthner, 2008; Mauthner & Doucet, 2003).

With specific reference to the collection and analysis of data on parental responsibilities, all three studies used three methodological approaches that were critical to my understandings of concepts and practices of parental responsibilities. These included individual and couple interviews, longitudinal methods, and a visual and interactive technique—the Household Portrait—that was used to facilitate stories of change and continuity in domestic tasks, child care, and parental responsibilities.

The decision to complement individual interviews with couple interviews builds on a long scholarly literature on the advantages and disadvantages of interviewing couples together and separately (see Komarovsky, 1987; Mansfield & Collard, 1982; J. Pahl, 1989). Because joint accounts can conceal potentially divergent accounts of events, couple interviews were not held in place of but in addition to individual interviews. Couple interviews can attend to active sets of negotiations, compromises, and struggles faced by women and men as they work to "construct and reconstruct their environments" (Perry-Jenkins et al., 2013, p. 120; see also Deutsch, 1999, and Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010). Moreover, couple interviews proved to be very helpful in illuminating the relational and continually negotiated constitution of parental responsibilities in two-parent households.

Longitudinal research was used as a way of following participants and social processes across time (e.g., McLeod & Thomson, 2009; Neale, Henwood, & Holland, 2012) with attention to changes and continuities across biographical time and historical time. A small subset of couples were chosen, with interviews conducted in the three different studies at different points in time, and with couples being revisited between 3 and 5 years later (Study B) and 9 to 14 years later (Studies A and C).

The third methodological technique across all three studies was a visual interactive technique, the Household Portrait, which was used in couple interviews to collect data on gender divisions of domestic labor (for examples, see Doucet, 1996, 2001, 2006; Dunne, 1998; and Gabb, 2008, 2009). The Household Portrait technique encourages both partners to reflect on and discuss together how their household is run, currently and in the past, with respect to a broad range of tasks and responsibilities (the list of tasks and responsibilities are a combination of the researcher's list and the specific additions and modifications made by particular households). This approach builds on the 5-point scales used by researchers to assess gender divisions of domestic labor (see Doucet, 2001; see also Leslie, Anderson, & Branson, 1991; and Mederer, 1993) and organizes responses according to who performs the bulk of a particular domestic task from the jointly constructed point of view of the couples. The technique, which is used as part of the audiotaped joint interview with couples, involves sorting through different sets of colored papers that represent a wide range of household tasks and responsibilities (including the specific tasks that respondents add), discussing these together, and ultimately placing these colored slips of paper in one of five columns on a large sheet of paper. These columns represent the person who does that particular household task or responsibility: (a) All Parent A, (b) Mainly Parent A, (c) Shared Equally, (d) Mainly Parent B, and (e) All Parent B.

The Household Portrait is meant to be a flexible technique that can be adapted depending on the interview situation, research questions, and

researcher preferences (see Gabb, 2008, 2009). For example, a modification of this technique, and one that is easier to use in situations where space is an issue, when the interview takes place over food, or when children are being tended to or are present at the interview, is to use legal-sized long sheets of paper with the same five columns detailed above and a list of tasks in an additional left-hand column (organized under main categories of domestic work, with empty lines to allow for the inclusion of unique domestic tasks and responsibilities). Parents can then discuss each task and mark Xs in the spaces according to who, according to their discussion, takes on those tasks and responsibilities.

Rather than asking each parent who does a particular task or who takes on the responsibility for it, the Household Portrait encourages discussion and analysis of the definition of each task in conjunction with a determination of who does the task. The data collected are actually not the constructed Household Portrait per se but rather the discussion and analysis of domestic tasks and parental responsibilities along with concrete examples of how tasks are done and how responsibilities unfolded. Responsibilities are also addressed through specific colored slips of paper that facilitate a discussion of emotional, community, and "moral" responsibilities (see below for definitions of these). The negotiations that underpin domestic work, child care, and parental responsibilities are partially revealed through discussion about what a task or responsibility is and the often-disparate perceptions about who-does-what-and-why. For the researcher, the Household Portrait is just one example of a visual and ~~interaction~~ research tool (see also Gabb, 2008, 2009) that offers insights into temporalities and relationalities embedded in gender divisions of domestic labor and individuals and couples' views as to what, how, and why changes do or do not occur.

## Rethinking Concepts and Practices of Parental Responsibilities

The conceptualization of parental responsibilities put forward in this article builds on the work of leading fatherhood scholars who have argued that it is important to recognize a broad range of practices, including meeting children's needs through interaction (direct engagement), accessibility (physical and psychological presence and availability), and responsibility (indirect child-rearing tasks, e.g., planning and scheduling; Lamb et al., 1985). I widen this conceptualization by recognizing that the first two practices also have dimensions of responsibility woven into them, in part because they also require cognition and commitment (Palkovitz, 1997), but I acknowledge that these are "complex phenomenon to operationalize" (Milkie & Denny, 2014, p. 223; see also Leslie et al., 1991; Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000; Palkovitz, 2002; and Walzer, 1998).

Inspired by the work of the late feminist philosopher and care theorist Sara Ruddick (1995), I conceptualize parental responsibilities as a threefold set of (a) emotional, (b) community, and (c) "moral" responsibilities. I also build on Joan Tronto's (1993, 2013) long-standing and recent scholarship on "processes of care" as a series of four interconnected phases:

> 1. *Caring about* [where] someone notices unmet needs;
> 2. *Caring for*: Once needs are identified, someone . . . has to take responsibility to make certain that these needs are met;
> 3. *Care-giving* [which] requires that the actual caregiving work is done;
> 4. *Care-receiving*: Once care work is done . . . [o]bserving that response and making judgments about it . . . to assess the effectiveness of the caring act[s] (2013, pp. 22–23; see also Fisher & Tronto, 1990).

The first two parental responsibilities described in this article—emotional and community responsibilities—bring together all of Tronto's (1993, 2013) four caring phases, especially the phases of caring about, caring for, and care-receiving. I conceptualize emotional responsibilities in parenting as skills and practices of attentiveness and responsiveness; they include "knowledge about others' needs" and "attentiveness to the needs of others" (Tronto, 1989, pp. 176–178; see also Fisher & Tronto, 1990; and 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). They include, for example, the "ability to 'see' or 'hear' needs, to take responsibility for them, negotiate if and how they should be met and by whom" (Sevenhuijsen, 1992, p. 135).

A third type of parental responsibilities, "moral" responsibilities, emerge partly from Sara Ruddick's (1995) argument that parental caregiving is a set of practices that is governed not only by children's needs and responding to those needs but by the "social groups" with associated "social values" within which parenting takes place (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 (see Mead, 1934), 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 & Mason, 1993; McMahon, 1995). These moral responsibilities also encompass expectations and gendered norms about breadwinning and caregiving whereby "masculine norms create workplace pressures that make men reluctant or unable to contribute significantly to family life" and 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 given that women and men 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.

Each of these three responsibilities is described below, along with selected findings from my research studies that illuminate how the methodological approaches of couple interviews, the Household Portrait, and longitudinal methods helped bring forth the complexity, fluidity, temporality, spatiality, and relationality of these responsibilities.

### *Emotional Responsibilities*

Emotional responsibilities are illustrated below through two case study Canadian couples, Tom and Natasha (Study C) and Karen and Dave, interviewed six times across 3 years (Study B). Both couples were interviewed through individual interviews and couple interviews using the Household Portrait.

The first example is from Tom, a stay-at-home father for 7 years, and Natasha, a pediatrician. When I first visited them in 2000 in their home in a small Canadian town in the province of Quebec, Tom told me in his individual interview how his wife's stronger "emotional reaction" to their children (ages 4, 6, and 7) was rooted in the "physical" and "primordial" embodied and emotional connection that had been established through pregnancy, birthing, and breastfeeding. Indeed, they both confirmed distinct mother–father differences in emotional responsibilities in their couple interview and in my interview with Natasha. When I returned to visit them 9 years later (in 2009) and reminded the couple of Tom's earlier statements on mothering and emotional responsibility, they were both surprised that he had expressed this. Natasha admitted, "I mean, I see that the nine months that you are carrying them as different. But, I mean, the dad is caught up with that by the time that the kid is, you know, nine months old."

An interesting addition to this unfolding story came from the insights of one of their teen children (Taylor, their 16-year-old daughter) who floated in and out of the kitchen where we sat chatting. When I asked her what she turned to each of her parents for, she replied without hesitation: "My dad is more the emotional support in stressful situations and stuff." Both parents agreed with their daughter and confirmed that Tom was always the "emotional support" and was "more in tune." Tom then added, "I'm a mother hen," invoking the strong feminine meanings that are still discursively attached to emotional connection.

Natasha and Tom's narratives across time illustrate how their views of parental responsibilities shifted over time, how their own reading of their situation had changed, and how there were gender differences and inequalities ~~in terms~~ in emotional responsibilities. Yet, if Tom does indeed take on most of the emotional responsibilities, is this a difference that should be erased in order to achieve equality? Should Natasha do more, or attempt to feel more, so that they might be equal and, if so, how would this equality be assessed and measured?

A second example of the apparent immeasurability of emotional responsibilities and the challenges to thinking about equality in parental responsibilities can be found in the example of Karen and Dave, a Canadian couple from Newfoundland who are currently living in a small town in the province of Quebec. Karen joined my online forum for breadwinning mothers in 2008 where she posted a long story about being a breadwinning mother. When I first visited them in their home in 2009, their four children were ages 7, 5, 2, and 3 weeks. Karen is a master mariner and has spent most of her working life as the commander of search and rescue ships; Dave was a cook working on naval ships but left work to stay home after their first child was born. Just before the birth of their third child, Dave "gave her an ultimatum" to change jobs so that she would not be away for months at a time, and she moved to a managerial government job with the transportation safety board. With Canada's generous parental leave policies (see McKay & Doucet, 2010), she took about 1 year of leave with each baby, breastfeeding them until they were each at least 1 year old. Thus, as they explained it to me, Karen took on most of the emotional responsibility for each baby in the first year while Dave took on most of the emotional responsibility for each child as they grew. I used the Household Portrait technique in a couple interview with Karen and Dave in 2009 and reviewed it and discussed changes across time with them in 2012.

The Household Portrait technique and the couple interviews brought forward the complex ways that emotional responsibilities play out between two parents and four growing children. One example is when they were speaking together about different emotional responsibilities and deciding which parent responds and attends to each child. Because there are four children, their Household Portrait specified four different possibilities (e.g., "Abby goes to ___ when upset," "Emma goes to ___ when upset," etc.), so as to allow for discussion of the particularities of parent–child relationships and parental responsiveness across time. There was a long discussion of the specific needs of each child and how and why they choose each parent and for what as well as how each child's needs and demands change weekly, monthly, and yearly. The couple also reflected on the related task of "worry," which is part of our discussion of emotional responsibilities. Karen and Dave agreed that they both worry but in different ways and about different dimensions of parenting. Dave admitted that he was an obsessive worrier who "carries the children in my head," whereas Karen worried about "getting them into the right activities," choices of nurseries and school, and the financial aspects of raising four children on one salary. An example of a dialogue follows:

> Karen: I find it hard to not do everything. Dave says, "Don't do that. I can do it."
> Dave: But I want to do it in my time, not Karen's. Don't get me wrong. I'm pretty good at doing stuff.
> Karen: I really do try *not* to micromanage.
> Dave: But you *do*.
> Karen: But what's the big deal?
> Dave: I honestly have no idea. It just bothers me. I will do these things in my own time.
> Karen: It is part of my personality. It comes from my father. He was such a perfectionist.
> Dave: Well, it makes me more anxious . . . I get my anxiety from my mom.

The use of a combination of the visual interactive technique, the Household Portrait, and couple interviews across time brought forth a complexity of intersections between gender and parental responsibilities. Karen felt that she micromanaged the care of the children because of paternal influences, and Dave's constant worry about the children was inherited from his mother. However, another set of caregiving and responsibility tasks revealed a different set of responses that indicated Dave was very hands on in his response and Karen was much more, in her words "laid back," exuding characteristics that are often associated with paternal responses of promoting autonomy and independence and children (see Doucet, 2006). This was brought forth from the Household Portrait technique and the couple's discussion about the tasks of homework and "taking responsibility for homework." On the one hand, it was Dave who worried about homework, supervised it, and was fully engaged in knowing what needs to be done. He explained that this is due to class and parental influences; his father was a fisherman, his mother a stay-at-home parent, and he felt that he was never pushed at school. He reflected on why he takes on this responsibility: "I think it's because I'm at home. It's not a traditional role for me to be in. I just feel if I had been pushed a bit more by my parents, I would have done better in school." On this set of tasks and many others that illuminate emotional

responsibilities of attending to and responding to children's changing needs, both Karen and Dave agreed that it was he who "thinks about the children," whereas her approach was one that promotes autonomy and independence, reasoning that "I think it will be cool if they realize that *this* is what happens when you do not do your homework."

These two examples, gleaned from many hours of interviews from two Canadian couples who live in neighboring towns in the province of Quebec, illustrate three points about the dilemmas of measurement and gender equality in parental responsibilities. First, emotional responsibilities are fluid and mobile, constantly moving between partners, with changing meanings and definitions. They cannot be held still and measured; they can only be observed and narrated within specific relational and temporal contexts and cannot be extracted from those contexts in a generalizable way (see also Tronto, 2013). Second, it is important to use both couple interviews and an interactive visual technique, such as the Household Portrait, that facilitates a joint conversation on a relationally constituted set of practices and shared and individual judgments about those practices; that is, speaking about responsibilities together helps couples clarify and confirm something that is otherwise invisible and constantly slipping in and out of view. Third and finally, there are conceptual and methodological difficulties in making definitive judgments about gender equality in the emotional responsibilities for children.

### *Community Responsibilities*

Community responsibilities are a range of responsibilities for connecting children of all ages with social institutions, including day care, schools, health institutions, community venues, kin networks, and a wide range of sports and extracurricular activities. A frequent example of gender differences in community interactions comes from the narratives of fathers who enter community playgroups with their infants and toddlers. My research on men who were primary caregivers in the early 2000s revealed many awkward moments when men attempted to fit into female-dominated networks of early child rearing only to feel like misfits in what one father called "estrogen-filled worlds" (Doucet, 2006, p. 41). 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. As one Canadian single and 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."

Although in the second decade of the 21st century some men still articulate this view, my research points to how the "dad-in-the-playgroup" narrative has shifted over the past decade. In some Canadian and American communities, some men, especially middle-class fathers in urban settings, join these groups, either as members of female-dominated groups or as participants in fathering groups, with more positive experiences than 10 years ago (Doucet, 2013; Kaufman, 2013; Marsiglio & Roy, 2012). A good example of how this is changing for fathers across historical time as well as biographical time comes from a Canadian father, Peter, interviewed four times in individual and couple interviews across 10 years. He explained to me in our first meeting how he felt constantly judged by onlookers, observing that "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." But 10 years later, he felt much more comfortable on the community landscapes of parenting, as he joined other fathers who cheered their children on in athletic activities: "It's easier now that I am just another dad at the hockey arena. Nobody questions it."

It is also the case that in some households one parent may take on most of the emotional responsibility while another parent takes on some or most of the community responsibilities. For example, in an interview conducted in 2009 with Miele, a Chinese-Canadian pharmacist, and Roy, a stay-at-home father of three children (ages 1, 3, and 5), the Household Portrait helped uncover differences and illustrated that Roy was taking on more of the emotional responsibilities while Miele was taking on most of the community responsibilities.

It was Miele who said in her individual interview that Roy did most of the caregiving as well as taking responsibility for attending to each child's needs and to hers. He even made her lunch every day when he made the children's

lunches for school. It was mainly Roy who took on the emotional responsibilities for their three children as well as for keeping the house clean and tidy. He said in their couple interview, "I wake up in the middle of the night—if the kitchen's not clean, I can't cook the meals. I'm that way." However, even though Miele took on most of the community responsibilities, they did share some of these responsibilities. Roy did all the volunteering at school, but Miele was the one who went to the parent–teacher meetings. She was also the main planner. This emerged when they began to discuss the task "planning children's activities" while constructing their Household Portrait. They both agreed that although they would have liked to have shared this task, it ended up being Miele who did it most often. They discussed the task "organizing the family calendar" and when Roy put it into the "shared equally" column, Miele disagreed and said it should be moved into the "mainly her, he helps" column.

> Miele: No, we should probably move this more here. [Moves the slip of paper] It's a control issue, honey; I have a control issue. [Laughs]
>
> Roy: Yah, you're right. [Speaks to me] I have to tell you something about Miele. [Speaks to Miele] Tell me if I'm wrong, Miele. [Speaks to me] She makes the plan in her head; she can't plan aloud. Right? So by the time she's been through that process, it's all done. Right? So there isn't really a point in me trying to get involved in that. It probably wouldn't even work that well. She is more likely to tell me what has to be done.
>
> Miele: I think he's just not aware of what's out there. He doesn't want to. He just doesn't.
>
> Roy: Miele does the research; she knows what's out there.

Like emotional responsibilities, community responsibilities shift constantly across time. Of note, however, is that some of this only becomes clear in the process of speaking about it together. Moreover, as discussed below, both emotional and community responsibilities are entangled with moral dimensions of these responsibilities and what Ruddick (1995) called the *social acceptability* of parental practices.

### *Moral Responsibilities*

Parental discussions of moral responsibilities were facilitated through several methods. First, upon seeing the domestic division of labor as laid out in their Household Portrait, couples discussed why they did things in particular ways and not in other ways. They reflected on what, in their separate views, worked and did not work and what they would change in their division of domestic work and responsibilities. I also asked, in couple and individual interviews, what they held onto and what they let go of as well as questions about what they desired in parental work, what they would change if they could, and what their ideal parenting and work worlds looked like. Finally, across all three studies, I asked direct questions as to whether or not mothering and fathering were similar or distinct sets of identities, practices, and ways of being (for further details, see Doucet, 2006). These questions—explored in individual interviews, couple interviews, through the shared exercise of the Household Portrait, and across time—revealed a great deal about how men and women experienced what I am calling the *moral responsibilities* of parenting.

Below, I provide three illustrative examples of gendered moral responsibilities for caregiving and breadwinning. The first example demonstrates shifting gendered moral responsibilities of breadwinning and caregiving across biographical and historical time. The second example highlights continuities in gendered moral responsibilities around primary caregiving and how there are still social, community, and normative assumptions that inhibit men being fully accepted as the primary caregivers of children. The third example, from a breadwinning mother, highlights ongoing conceptual and epistemological challenges with measuring and assessing gender equality in moral parental responsibilities.

The first example of shifting gendered moral responsibilities for breadwinning and caregiving is from a Canadian couple living in the suburbs of a city in the province of Ontario. When I first visited Geoff (a laid-off factory worker and now a stay-at-home father and a part-time school bus driver) and Astrid (a high school teacher), parents of two children (ages 2 and 4) in 2009, Geoff explained that he found the adjustment to being at home very difficult, and after 6 months without work he took on a part-time job as a bus driver. It was actually Astrid who came up with the idea because

> on a school field trip, I saw that the bus driver of the field trip had her daughter in a car seat in the bus, and I said to Geoff, "You should apply and you should ask them if you can take the kids on the bus with you."

Geoff learned that he could indeed take both children with him as long as they were in car seats. Astrid explained:

> He took parental leave, we shared a month together, he trained for bus driving, and that September, when [the youngest child] was eight months old, I went back to full-time teaching and he started driving a school bus with the kids on it.

Geoff viewed it as a temporary option that would allow him to work and care for their two daughters. He noted in his individual interview that although norms had changed, there was also continuity in the moral differences between mothering and fathering, breadwinning, and caregiving:

> In the last generation it's changed so much. You know, Dad comes home from work and Mom has slippers and a cigar and dinner on the table. But at the same time, you're sort of brought up thinking that that's the norm. And then it's almost like you're on ice that's breaking up. That's how I felt. Like I was on ice breaking up. You don't really know what or where the father role is. You kind of have to define it for yourself. You can't let society define it for you. I think that's what I've learned the most from staying home with the kids. You can't rely on the social norms to tell you what fathering is. But, well, there is still a sort of twinge: Does it emasculate me that my wife is making more money?

Three years later, when I visited Geoff and Astrid again, they invited me for dinner (a delicious meal that Geoff cooked). He told me that he was enjoying his job as a bus driver, had settled into a routine, and could not imagine going back to work full time until their daughters are older and more independent. He was heavily involved on the school council and was a regular volunteer in the classroom. As he put it, "I don't know how I would fit in full-time work." Whereas three years earlier he and Astrid had each spoken of distinct mother and father roles, they now saw these as much more interchangeable, with Astrid fully embracing the breadwinner role and Geoff settling with more ease into a secondary earning role.

A second example demonstrates the continuity of gendered moral responsibilities in fleeting moments and spaces when men feel that they do not fully belong in child-centered community spaces. As indicated in the dad-in-the-playgroup narrative mentioned above, men can experience a sense of community judgment and surveillance when they take on care work; however, class, sexuality, and locality, as well as time, can mediate community judgments about men and care as well (see Doucet, 2006). Yet, in spite of some change over the past decade, there is still a recurring thread of suspicion about the proximity between men and children, especially the children of others. The best example from my longitudinal research (Study C) is about one stay-at-home father, Richard (and his wife Aileen), whom I first visited just outside Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, in 2000 (when their children were 7, 2, and 2 months). When Richard tried to open a home day care in 2000, the local authorities told him that a day care run by a man would not work in the community. In 2010, he explained to me that, because the family needed extra income, he tried again in 2003 to open his home day care. Although he was "greeted with open arms—literally—by a team of open-minded individuals who were excited at the prospect of having a male child care provider," he was still concerned about parental responses to a male child care provider. To his surprise, his day care was successful, but it also served as a reminder of the constancy of gendered moral assumptions around men and caregiving. As Richard put it,

> Today my day care is full with five kids, and I have eight kids on my waiting list who want to come to my day care specifically. But I am not accepted by all. Some parents refuse to have a man as child care provider. And I can respect that.

These differently experienced gendered moral responsibilities, which occur in fleeting ways in particular moments and times across the years of parenting, raise questions about how equality might be achieved in parental responsibilities when the social contexts within which parenting occurs are still infused with gendered assumptions about men and women and primary caregiving.

Assumptions about mothering, fathering, and primary and secondary caregiving play out in a different way for women. A good example of

this is from an interview I conducted in 2009 with a breadwinning mother of two preschool children in upstate New York. Sally, a university professor married to a stay-at-home father, reflected on what it means to be primary or secondary in relation to breadwinning and caregiving and reminded me why equality as a goal in care work is difficult and indeed elusive. She said, "We have men who are primary breadwinners. And now we have more and more women who are primary breadwinners. But there really is no socially acceptable model for a mother who wants to be a secondary caregiver." And then in varied ways, through words and heavy tearful moments, she let me know directly and indirectly that "I do not want to be the secondary caregiver." Thus, Sally, at least for a time, was the primary breadwinner and the primary, or shared primary, caregiver, thus underlining the difficulties with determining how gender equality in parental responsibilities might be defined or assessed in this household.

The case studies and findings explored above reveal how emotional, community, and moral parental responsibilities unfold in varied ways, in constantly changing relational, temporal, spatial, and social contexts. It is speaking about their parental responsibilities together in couple interviews, with the aid of a visual interactive technique, that helped reveal the fluidity and flow of these responsibilities across time and social spaces. Yet this same flux and flow also point to methodological and theoretical challenges in the study of parental responsibilities.

## Methodological and Theoretical Implications

The central argument of this article is that responsibilities, as an ontologically relational object of investigation, concept, and set of practices that unfold within specific temporal and spatial relationships, are always in constant motion between carers and cared-for individuals. The relational and fluid conception of parental responsibilities put forth in this article leads to four key theoretical and methodological implications: (a) the relationship between responsibilities, tasks, time, and measurements; (b) parental responsibilities as constituted in specific contexts and relationships; (c) the importance of interactive and longitudinal qualitative methods; and (d) questions about the conceptual fit between responsibilities and equality.

### *Parental Responsibilities Are More Than Tasks and More Than Time Allotments*

This article confirms recent thinking that housework and child care must been seen as analytically and methodologically distinct. As Oriel Sullivan (2013) argued, "it is clear that housework and childcare should always be treated separately both theoretically and analytically" (p. 82; see also Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010; Mannino & Deutsch, 2007; and Perry-Jenkins et al., 2013). I have built on and extended this insight to argue for a theoretical and ontological distinction between, on the one hand, parenting time and tasks and, on the other hand, parenting responsibilities. Parental responsibilities, especially emotional and community responsibilities, are related to parental tasks and can be partially articulated through caregiving tasks (e.g., planning, setting up activities, responding to children through caregiving tasks), but parental responsibilities are much more than tasks. As Tronto (2013) noted, they involve "complex . . . processes of care" that include "[noticing] unmet needs"; "[taking] responsibility to make certain that these needs are met"; the "actual caregiving work"; and observing, "making judgments," and planning next courses of responsive actions (pp. 22–23). Parental responsibilities can also be viewed as a form of what Irish sociologist Kathleen Lynch (2007) called "love labour." For Lynch, this labor

> involves higher levels of *attentiveness* and *responsiveness* than would apply to other forms of care. It involves drawing the care map for the other . . . and carrying the care map in one's mind at all times, and overseeing its implementation in terms of scope and quality throughout the care journey. (p. 565)

Lynch wrote further: "While certain care tasks are commodifiable, and there is a case for substantially improving the conditions of its commodification to preclude exploitation . . . love labour cannot be commodified in the same way" (p. 565). I concur with this view and would also add that parental responsibilities as a form of

"love labour" are not commodifiable or measurable and thus pose methodological and epistemological challenges for researchers who study gender divisions of labor.

The view that parental responsibilities are more than tasks invested by parents toward children also leads to a point about the "affects" and "effects" of these responsibilities. Although responsibilities can be experienced as burdens and as constitutive of inequalities outside of domestic life, they can also produce generative changes for carers and cared-for persons. Unlike the dominant understanding of domestic tasks, parental responsibilities are not practices that are done "to" but "with"; that is, they are constituted not by interactions between two or more separate subjects but by intra-active relationships between subjects (see Ashbourne, Daly, & Brown, 2011; Daly, Ashbourne, & Brown, 2009; Doucet, 2013; Lupton, 2012). This point also raises questions about how to assess and know these responsibilities outside of these specific relationships and contexts within which they occur.

### *Parental Responsibilities Are Constituted in Specific Contexts and Relationships*

The meanings and enactments of emotional, community, and moral responsibilities will vary from household to household and by class, race, ethnicity, and culture (see Perry-Jenkins et al., 2013); researchers thus need to attend to the specificity of these responsibilities as they unfold across time as intra-household, inter-household, and inter-institutional (e.g., home–school, home–community) responsibilities. I agree with the general tenor of the arguments made recently by Perry-Jenkins et al. (2013): "Our current assessment techniques don't capture this level of complexity in families' lives" (p. 119). This complexity is partly related to structural factors and contextual diversity; however, the specificity of these responsibilities, as the case studies in this article illuminate, unfold in particular ways between specific individuals in particular households across time (Goldberg, 2013; Tronto, 2013). This raises a further challenge for studying and measuring responsibilities; that is, if parental responsibilities are nested in the specific conditions of particular temporal, spatial, and relational contexts, this leads to methodological and epistemological challenges in capturing and measuring these responsibilities between diverse individuals, in diverse contexts, and across time.

### *Parental Responsibilities Cannot Be Methodologically Measured by Time or Task Allotments*

The field of gender divisions of labor is marked by an attentiveness to methods that can capture change in housework and child care, most notably through significant advances in time-use studies. As Sullivan (2013) noted, "Time-use diary studies are now regarded as the gold standard for large-scale empirical evidence in this area" (p. 73). The usefulness of time-use studies is revealed in how they can demonstrate "how time is divided between production and consumption activities" and in their contributions to analyses of how individuals divide their time between paid and unpaid work and the amount and use of leisure time (Sullivan 2013, p. 73; see also Bianchi et al., 2006). I argue, however, that parental responsibilities cannot be measured by time allotments because of their complexity and their intrinsically relational character (see also Leslie et al., 1991). As Folbre and Wolf (2012) noted, "One could argue that responsibility for young children is a twenty-four-hour-a-day task and that there is little to be gained by measuring it more precisely" (p. 216; see also Bianchi et al., 2006). As astutely described by Leslie et al. (1991), "Responsibility is the integration of feelings, cognitions, and behaviors and may be more accurately represented as an ongoing perceptual state" (p. 199). Responsibilities cannot be held still; neither can they be measured in a quantifiable or comparative way between individuals, between households, and across time and social spaces. However, they can be narrated—ideally, in the case of two-parent families—from two people talking together so as to make visible what is largely invisible and taken for granted. This leads to my argument for a move toward a wide range of mixed methods to analyze and assess parental responsibilities. Assessing emotional, community, and moral responsibilities requires questions that focus less on who-does-what and more on narratives of particular moments and times when a parent felt a compelling "'sense' of being responsible" (Leslie et al., 1991, p. 200). My research using the Household Portrait technique highlights

how reflections on why responsibilities do or do not shift from one partner to the other are best revealed by asking for concrete narrated examples of instances where they felt responsible, times when they held on or let go, and the perceived root causes and effects of those moments of holding on or letting go.

In broad terms, I am arguing for creative, participatory, and visual methods that facilitate dialogue about domestic labor and responsibilities (Gabb, 2008, 2009), longitudinal interviews that examine gendered responsibilities over time (Fox, 2009; Lareau, 2011), and "participant observation and open-ended interviews" (Berk, 1985, p. 69; see also Lareau, 2011). There is a need for methods that can attend to active sets of negotiations, compromises, and struggles faced by women and men as they work to "construct and reconstruct their environments" (Perry-Jenkins et al., 2013, p. 120; see also Deutsch, 1999, 2007). In two-parent households, couple interviews are also critical for tapping into the negotiated dimensions of the processes of responsibilities as they unfold and change across time (see also Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010).

### *The Study of Parental Responsibilities Highlights Dilemmas in Theorizing and Measuring Gender Equality and Brings Forth a Critical Question: What Does Gender Equality Look Like in Parental Responsibilities?*

The conceptualization of parental responsibilities put forward in this article 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. As Sullivan (2000) argued nearly 15 years ago, thinking about gendered change in domestic life begs the question of "what kind of change is actually *desired*" and, indeed, "whether 'gender equality' is in fact a desired goal" (p. 438). It is also important to consider the historicity and cultural specificity of the concept of equality and its fit with the historical and cultural evolution of the concept of care (see Zuo, 2004). Combining questions of desire and goals, both for the people interviewed and for researchers, with methodological, epistemological, and conceptual complexities of measuring stable and similar units across households, diversity, culture, and time can lead to alternative approaches, such as shifting the focus from measuring gender equality in caregiving responsibilities toward making sense of gender differences in these responsibilities. Shifting from equality to differences would mean, as Barrie Thorne (1993) argued in her work on gender equality and gender differences, 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); this shifts the emphasis from differences per se toward asking why, how, where, and when differences recur in parenting that do and do not lead to inequalities (see Gabb, 2008; and Goldberg, 2013). One would consider how differences specifically affect one's opportunities outside of the domestic sphere and the particular interconnections between equality in the workplace and gendered parental responsibilities (Chesley, 2011; England, 2010). This would also mean moving from attempting to measure gendered parental responsibilities to studying wider processes of inequalities, including excavating "the gender dynamics within which identities are forged" (Williams, 2010, p. 5); attending to issues of gendered habitus and "the deep investments people have in gender" (Orloff, 2009, pp. 137–138); and considering 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).

## Conclusion

I began this article by noting how, in spite of dramatic changes in gender divisions of housework and parental care in many Western countries, there still remains a resilient problem of gender differences in parental responsibilities. I have highlighted that although there is a rich theoretical and methodological literature on gender divisions of domestic time and tasks, less attention has been given to the theoretical and methodological complexities of assessing parental responsibilities. Drawing from three specific and connected qualitative research studies carried

out over the past 14 years, I argued for a conceptualization of parental responsibilities that shifts away from time and tasks and toward a threefold set of emotional, community, and moral practices that unfold relationally across time and the diverse social spaces of parenting. This move is informed by "epistemic reflexivity" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) and Somers's (2008) "historical sociology of concept formation," which attends to how the "the categories and concepts we use to explain the social world can *themselves be fruitfully made the objects of analysis*" (p. 17). Guided by a genealogical and relational sociological approach, I raised questions about the overall fit between concepts of parental responsibilities and equality and about the possibility of measuring processes that are ontologically relational and intra-actional between carers and cared-for persons. The arguments put forth in this article lead to theoretical and methodological implications that highlight the dilemmas of measuring responsibilities as tasks or time allocations, the challenges with extracting responsibilities from the specificities of their relational contexts, and the difficulties of assessing and measuring gender equality in these responsibilities. I call for shifts from a focus on gender equality to making sense of differences and for enhanced thinking on longitudinal and interactive qualitative research methods that can begin to illuminate the fluidity, temporality, spatiality, and relationality of parental responsibilities.

## Note

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