'You see the need perhaps more clearly than I have':
Exploring gendered processes of domestic responsibility

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Abstract:

Drawing on a qualitative research study carried out in Britain in the early to mid-1990's with heterosexual couple households with dependent children, the paper explores domestic responsibility, beginning with the premise that greater research attention is required in this area. With a particular focus on the responsibility for children, the paper discusses two distinct and related conceptions of domestic responsibility; the *emotional responsibility* for children and an *inter-household responsibility* for the planning, organization and management of children's lives. Rooted in feminist research on domestic and community life, family sociology on gender divisions of domestic labor, as well as a symbolic interactionist approach to human relations, I argue for a conceptualization of domestic responsibility that is relational and interactional, intra-household and inter-household, as well as both material and 'moral'. The paper also details an innovative methodological contribution for collecting data on the gender division of domestic labour, the Household Portrait technique. While building on previous methodological work in family sociology, this technique assisted in uncovering the intrinsically relational, taken-for granted and negotiated quality of domestic responsibility. In addition to methodological implications drawn, three theoretical and empirical implications are also underlined. These include: first, the need for greater emphasis on the inter-household dimensions of domestic labor; second the importance of attending to a 'moral' dimension, that is, the gendered 'shoulds' and 'oughts' which occur in domestic, inter-household and community relations; and finally the need to focus greater attention on the links between masculinities, caring and domestic responsibility.

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Introduction

Over the past three decades, domestic labour has received tremendous attention within family studies (e.g. Risman and Johnson-Sumerford, 1998; Spitze, 1988; Thompson and Walker, 1989), within sociological studies on gender divisions of labor (e.g. Hochschild, 1989; Brannen and Moss, 1991) and within feminist research (e.g. DeVault, 1991; Luxton, 1997; Thompson and Walker, 1995). Findings from international research within and between these areas on gender divisions of household labor provide irrefutable evidence that women continue to take on most of the tasks and time allotted to household's work [1]. Authors have also highlighted how, in addition to doing most of the work, women remain '*responsible*' for household life[2]. That is, women continue to be the managers, planners, organizers, and supervisors of housework and child care-related activities in the home as they take on "the second shift" (Hochschild, 1989) or even a "triple shift" of employment, housework and "emotional housework" (Duncombe and Marsden, 1995, 1996).

In addition to measuring the changes, or lack of change, in the divisions of domestic labour, researchers have also focused attention on exploring and revealing the causal factors for this state of affairs (e.g. Barnett and Baruch, 1987; Greenstein. 1996; Kamo, 1988, 1991; Peterson and Gerson, 1992) as well as on the theoretical and methodological concepts used to define and theorize the domestic division of labour. For example, there has been increasing attention directed at revising

methodological and theoretical measurements of *time* (Davies 1989, 1994; Sullivan, 1996) and critical advances in conceptualizing and measuring 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 and Kane, 1996: 361; see also Author, 1996; DeVault, 1991; Greenstein, 1996; Mederer, 1993). Alongside these noteworthy advances in researching household life and labor, increasing attention has also been given to defining, understanding and theorizing the concept of domestic responsibility (see Allen and Hawkins, 1999; DeVault, 1991; Barnett and Baruch, 1987; Leslie et al, 1991; Mederer, 1993)[3].

This paper builds on earlier efforts to define and theorize domestic responsibility, with a particular focus given to the responsibility for children. Drawing on a qualitative research study carried out in Britain in the early to mid-1990's with heterosexual couple households with dependent children, the underlying rationale for this paper is two fold. First, given that many authors have highlighted how in heterosexual households the arrival of children serves to illuminate or further entrench gender differences and gender inequalities in domestic life (Entwistle and Doering, 1980; Cunnison, 1987; Fox, 1997; McMahon, 1995; Wimbush, 1987) it is posited that an understanding of domestic responsibility for households with children must begin with an investigation into its particular character and quality. Second, if as argued by many authors, it is women's responsibility for household life that leaves them disadvantaged in employment (Folbre, 1994; Luxton, 1997) it seems quite important to know just what domestic responsibility is. The paper argues that a stronger

understanding of ***what*** domestic responsibility is may begin to shed light on ***why*** parts of it remain persistently linked to women.

Literature Review:

There is a wide and growing literature that explores the division of domestic labour, the bulk of which has focused on measuring time and task allocations to domestic labour (e.g. Blair and Lichter, 1991; Gregson and Lowe, 1993; Shelton, 1990). According to Blair and Lichter "the division of household labour has two analytically distinct dimensions: number of hours and types of work assigned to each spouse" (1991:92). While the issue of responsibility has, in contrast, received relatively less research attention, there have been gradual and significant advances towards remedying this. First, researchers have called attention to the distinction between tasks and responsibility as well as to "the question of 'responsibility for' versus 'helping with'" (Coleman, 1993:138). Second, researchers have also recognized that domestic responsibility involves juggling, planning, strategizing and managing complex sets of tasks. Barnett and Baruch for example, define responsibility (for childcare tasks and household chores) as " remembering, planning and scheduling" (1987:33; see also DeVault, 1991:56; Leslie et *al*., 1991). A third point, that follows on from the previous one, is the importance of 'feeling', 'thinking' and 'taking action' (see Leslie et *al*., 1991:199). In the words Leslie, Anderson and Branson, "responsibility is the integration of feelings, cognition and behaviors and may be more accurately represented as an ongoing perceptual state as opposed to a behavior (1991:199). Further Leslie et *al*. have also accorded particular attention to the methodological complexities and intricacies

involved in researching domestic responsibility. They argue that "the concept of 'responsibility' itself involves complex methodological issues that may account, in part, for the lack of empirical attention". Thus they insist that: "To capture the complexity of the work of being responsible for a child, a multi- pronged approach is needed" (Leslie et *al.,* 1991:199).

This paper builds on these excellent insights on theoretical, empirical and methodological aspects of studying domestic responsibility and further extends them by arguing for a conceptualization that is relational and interactional, both intra-household and inter-household, as well as both material and 'moral'. While my arguments begin with the advances made by authors who specifically research issues of domestic labour, they are also rooted in other sets of literature. That is, studies that examine domestic work and life more broadly provide some theoretical guidance that may assist in attempts to define and theorize domestic responsibility. Drawing on a wide range of work on domestic life, much of it rooted in feminist research, my approach to domestic responsibility takes three cues from such work.

Responsibility as Relational and Interactional:
In an excellent review of the literature on household labor, Laura Sanchez and Emily Kane point to a growing body of research which utilizes a relational or interactional theoretical approach that "focuses on individuals' construction of themselves through relational, interactional labors such as housework and childcare" (Sanchez and Kane, 1996:361)[4] Rooted in ethnomethodological analyses of gender relations, a relational or interactional approach to domestic labor focuses on how

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 and 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 et *al*., 1991). However, in addition to individuals' assessment of their "being responsible" or "feeling responsible" (see also Brannen and Moss, 1991; Hochschild, 1989), responsibility is viewed as not only as relationships between a person and a particular sets of domestic tasks, but more importantly as relationships *between people*[5]. Furthermore, adopting a relational quality of domestic responsibility has methodological implications; that is, it is critical to develop qualitative methods which can capture jointly constructed definitions as well as the interactive quality of doing, negotiating, and talking about domestic responsibility.

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 of household life as key factors in sustaining gender divisions of labor within the home. For example, British sociologists, notably the work of Lydia Morris (1985, 1990, 1995), recognize the importance of gender segregated social networks in sustaining gender divisions of labor 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)[6]. The work of Black feminist scholars widens this discussion in pointing to how community networks and inter-household 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 point to the larger web of social relations within which domestic labor 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 around early parenting (see Bell and Ribbens, 1994; Author, submitted). What ***all*** of these studies hold in common is a shared emphasis on looking outside of the household, at inter-household relations, in order to understand intra-household life and labor. These insights will be developed in this paper through an argument that domestic responsibility is relational in both intra-household and inter-household domains.

A "Moral Dimension":

Nearly ten years ago, Sara Fenstermaker Berk wrote about the "interwoven structures of the material and the symbolic" and how "the way household labor is brought into line with an image of how it ***should*** be divided" (Berk, 1985:206). Janet Finch and Jennifer Mason (1993) take this idea further in their work on negotiating elder care responsibilities, particularly in their discussion of the "interwoven" material and moral dimensions of family responsibilities. It is not only the "symbolic affirmation" (Berk,

1985:206) of what it means to be a man or a women, a husband or wife which helps to account for why it is that women take responsibility for domestic life. Drawing on symbolic interactionist ideas (e.g. Mead, 1934; see also Finch, 1989:177-211), Finch and Mason argue that it is "through human interaction that people develop a common understanding of what a particular course of action will *mean*: for example, if I offer financial help to my mother in her old age, will it seem generous, or demeaning, or whatever?" (1993:61). In other words, who-does-what within household life is not only tied up with structural and ideological factors but is also intricately connected to "people's identities as moral beings" which "are being constructed, confirmed and reconstructed - identities as a reliable son, a generous mother, a caring sister or whatever it might be" (Finch and Mason, 1993:170). According to Finch and Mason, any particular person is always "actively working out his or her own course of action" from within a social and cultural location and "with reference to other people" (Finch and Mason, 1993:61). These insights are useful for a discussion of domestic responsibility in that they point to the importance of considering not only the wider social relations within which households are located but also the ways in which women and men feel they are being observed and judged in the social worlds, within which they take on domestic responsibility. To add a "moral dimension" to the picture is to bring in an understanding of how people feel they 'should' act, and how they think others will view these actions[7].

Drawing together the three points above, the approach that evolved during the course of conducting my empirical and theoretical research entailed a focus on the relational and interactional quality of domestic responsibility, a recognition of the

importance of both intra-household and inter-household relations in constituting and sustaining particular patterns of responsibility, and the 'moral' dimensions involved in enacting this responsibility.

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

CRITICAL CASE SAMPLE

The qualitative research project which informs this paper was conducted with a 'critical case study' of 23 heterosexual British couples with dependent children who identified themselves as "consciously attempting to *share* the work and responsibility for housework and childcare". Three important points are worth highlighting in the choice of this type of sample. First, I was not looking for couples who claimed to be involved in "50/50 parenting" (Kimball, 1988) or "co-parenting" (Ehrensaft, 1988) as I was interested in household *variation* in the *meaning* and *structure* of sharing with regard to household work. Nor was I interested in couples who labelled themselves as "egalitarian" or "feminist" (e.g. VanEvery, 1995) as I did not want to exclude couples who were not familiar with these labels. Second, the emphasis is on socially situated '*choice'* rather than necessity, such as in cases of male unemployment, since research suggests that the latter most often revert back to traditional divisions of labour once the man is employed full-time once again (Radin, 1982; Russell, 1983, 1987; Morris, 1990; Wheelock, 1990). Finally, my initial interest in speaking to these couples was to investigate where gender differences were most resistant to change in households who were attempting to minimise strict gender divisions of labour. My view was that if these couples were unable to create new patterns of household labour,

less defined and restricted by gender, then it would be apparent how deep rooted these processes were in the wider population.

The couples were found through a combination of snowball sampling and criterion sampling (Miles and Huberman, 1994) through varied community, employment, and parenting organisations in the villages, towns and small cities of south-eastern England. The number of children in each household ranged from one to four and the ages of children were between one year and 25 years of age. The ages of the individuals in the sample ranged from 26 to 51 years of age with the average age being *38 years* of age. I sought couples whose first child was at least one year old as I was aware of difficulties experienced in the early "transition to parenthood" period (Entwistle and Doering, 1980).

Although the individuals in the sample represented a broad range of occupations, they were largely 'middle-class', with 85 percent (n=39) of the sample having educational qualifications, technical or academic, beyond secondary school. Average individual earnings were 16,800 pounds ($27,400 US dollars per annum). The social class composition of the sample should not, however, be surprising given that patterns for sharing housework and childcare were relatively rare in Britain in the late 1980's and early 1990's (e.g. Brannen and Moss, 1991; Morris, 1990; Gregson and Lowe, 1993, 1994).

The sample was also predominantly white, with only three persons of colour participating. While these factors represent limitations of the sample, the gendered findings on domestic responsibility do have relevance across class and ethnicity lines due to the well documented

gender divisions of domestic labour that transcend distinctions based on class, nationality and ethnicity.

DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS:

At least three interviews were conducted in each household: one joint interview with the man and women together and at least one individual interview with each man and woman. The joint interview revolved around a creative participatory technique called the "Household Portrait" (See Author, 1996; Dunne, 1997). The Individual Interviews explored personal and employment histories through the utilisation of the "Life Line" technique (Author, 1995a) and a technique called "Mapping Social Networks" (Ribbens, 1994) allowed respondents to map out their friendships and social networks. Views on gender equality and gender differences as well as their own parental influences and relationships were also explored in individual interviews with both women and men. Interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim. The results of the visual techniques were also collected and analysed in tandem with the interview transcripts, and these served as reference points throughout the analysis.

Data were analysed using an adapted version of the voice centred relational method which consists of at least four readings[8] of interview transcripts combined with Narrative summaries and case studies (see Brown and Gilligan, 1993; Mauthner and Author, 1998, 1998b; Way, 1997); in addition, a computer software program, TextBase Alpha, was employed during the final stage of analysis to assist with thematic analysis. The voice centred relational method accords particular emphasis to issues of social relationships in

narratives as well as to processes of reflexivity in research; it also recognises the epistemological dimensions of both data collection and data analysis (see Author, 1998; Mauthner and Author, 1998a, 1998b; Author and Mauthner, 1999a). With Bogus Temple, I would concur that data are "produced during the research process *by both the subject and the researcher*" (1994:571).

Given that the joint interview revolved around the use of the Household Portrait technique and also that the discussion encouraged by it facilitated my thinking on the elusive and complex quality of domestic responsibility, the next section will detail this data collection technique and its importance within this particular study

DATA COLLECTION AND DOMESTIC RESPONSIBILITY: THE HOUSEHOLD PORTRAIT TECHNIQUE

The Household Portrait technique[9] is a participatory/visual technique for collecting data on the division of household labour which allows both partners to reflect upon and discuss together how their household is run, presently and in the past, with respect to a broad range of tasks and responsibilities. Mirroring the five-point scales used by researchers to assess the division of domestic labour (see Mederer, 1993:138; Leslie et *al*., 1991:203), the Household Portrait organises responses according to who performs the task. In addition it also builds on the idea of a five-point scale in at least four ways. First, the technique is visual, creative and interactional. The technique which was used to facilitate the taped joint interview with each couple, involves sorting through different sets of coloured papers which represent a broad range of household tasks and responsibilities. Tasks are colour coded according to the following general categories: (1) Housework; (2)

Caring work; (3) 'Kin Work' (Di Leonardo, 1987);   (4) General household repair and maintenance work; (5) Financial management; (6) Household subsistence activities (Pahl, 1984); and (7) Overall responsibility for housework and childcare[10]. The couples sort through, discuss and ultimately place these coloured slips of paper in one of five columns on a large sheet of paper. The five columns represent the person who does that particular household task or responsibility: (1) Woman; (2) Woman with Man Helping; (3) Shared Equally; (4) Man with Woman Helping; and (5) Man (see appendix A)[11].

A second point worth highlighting about the Household Portrait underlined how very little people reflected upon what domestic responsibility was and who took it on. For example, in constructing their Household Portrait in their joint interview, Anna and Richard are deciding where to place the sticky paper which denotes the responsibility task: *"remembering, planning and overall management of children's activities*". Initially, Richard thinks it's a shared task:

Richard: "That's shared."
Anna   "Well....
Richard: "You do that more do you?"
Anna: "Well, I tend to - these birthday parties and whether there's got to be a present or a card."

A third way in which the Household Portrait builds on the five-point scale is that, rather than asking each individual in the couples who does a particular task, or takes on the responsibility for it, the Household Portrait encourages discussion and analysis of the definition of each task as well as of determining who does the task (see Author, 1993, 1996). Indeed, the negotiations that underpin domestic labour both silent and overt, were partially

revealed through discussion around who did the task. For example, in the case of Annie and Tom, the "Household Portrait" technique allowed both partners to reveal how they differed in their interpretation of what domestic responsibility entailed. Annie and Tom discuss the coloured piece of paper which denoted the responsibility task: *"making decisions about the children's behaviour"*. Annie immediately puts it into the *"Shared Equally"* column, but Tom quickly disagrees with this. He mentions the example of trying to come to a decision on the children's sleeping patterns when they were infants. Annie felt they should hold on to the strategy of letting the children cry themselves to sleep whereas Tom was much more inclined to want to attend to them in the middle of the night. Here are their words:

Annie: ".... So, we *do* discuss that, don't we, rather than just, sort of - it's not me that's sort of...".

Tom: "I'd say *you* tend to set the agenda for it".
        Annie: "Yeah."

Tom: "So that makes it better to go under 'Woman (Man Helps)'".
        He moves the little coloured paper from "Shared Equally" to "Woman (Man Helps").

Annie: "Except it isn't really like that. I mean I think I'd like to say that...".

Tom: "..it's a conflict area. I don't know if you could define it...".

Annie "I mean it's certainly not an area that I feel that I would want to control because I feel - even if it's somebody taking on more - that it should at least be *discussed* equally, or discussed thoroughly, you know between the two of us, so, you know, it's depending on how you perceive it, and not you're *doing* it more or you're actually *doing* it without discussion".

This discussion between Annie and Tom underlines, among other things, the fact that they both have different views on the **definition** of the task *"making decisions about*

the children's behaviour". As Tom says: "..it's a conflict area. I don't know if you could define it". For Annie, as long as the issue is "*discussed* equally, or discussed thoroughly" then it is a ***shared*** task. Speaking about it together allowed these differences to emerge.

Finally, the technique assisted the couples in my study to remember, conceptualize and articulate how they arranged and carried out their household work, how each household's particular division of labour had changed over the years, and women and men's own views as to ***why*** these changes did or did not occur.

Overall then, The Household Portrait technique highlighted both the taken-for-grantedness of domestic responsibility and the ways in which it was constructed, enacted and perceived differently within and across couples. More specifically, my analysis of the discussions that emerged from the joint interview with couples, as facilitated by the Household Portrait technique, led to several key findings from this research, including tremendous variation in the meaning and structure of sharing domestic labour (see Author, 1995b) as well as varied ways of speaking about and enacting domestic responsibility. More specifically, it led me to the view that there are at least ***two*** kinds of domestic responsibility that occur within households with children. The first is the ***emotional responsibility*** for children while the second is ***inter-household responsibility*** for the planning, organisation and management of children's lives[12].

The first kind of domestic responsibility for children, "emotional responsibility", entails the identification of children's needs and an immediate responding to these needs. The emotional responsibility for children implies an ongoing and fluid relationship of interdependence between parents and children, built on knowing, responding to and loving each particular and unique child. It involves skills which include, among other things, "*knowledge* about others' needs" which the carer acquires through "an *attentiveness* to the needs of others" (Tronto, 1989: 176-8; see also Fisher and Tronto, 1991; Tronto, 1993). This is a view of responsibility as response-ability or the 'ability to respond' in contrast to the more conventionally understood definition as that of having obligations to meet[13]. It combines two aspects of caring from Joan Tronto and Bernice Fisher's (1991) 'phases of caring': - 'caring about' and 'care-giving' in that it involves both the ability to recognise where care is needed and the actual physical work of caring (see also Graham, 1983; Leslie et *al*., 1991).

Emotional responsibility is captured, for example, in the words of three research respondents who describe it as: "just being there" (Mark); "being in tune with his rhythm" (Adam) and "you just have to be there, chatting to him whenever he needs it" (Natalie). Laura expresses what is involved in emotional responsibility when she compares her role with the children to that of her husband, Stephen:

"I would pick up - I would *notice* if they were upset. Stephen might not even notice. But if I told him, then he would pay attention and respond if necessary. I have the vibes out for that kind of thing".

Some women and men pointed out how there are varying dimensions involved in taking emotional responsibility for children, as well as how this responsibility changes over time. That is, the emotional responsibility for children occurs in distinct ways according to the gender of the children, the gender of the parents, the ages of the children, and the unique biographies of the particular people involved. Examples from three couples will be used to illustrate the varied and fluid character of emotional responsibility. While Monica and Joshua, as well as Natalie and Matthew, highlight the complex mixtures that can occur between gendered parents and gendered children, Laura and Stephen underline the intersection between emotional responsibility, gender and ages of the children.

Monica and Joshua, who have two daughters, aged ten and eleven, emphasize how there may be a gender element in the way in which the girls go to their mother more for "physical needs", "confidences" and "bed-time talks". Joshua says: "All I can say is that I think there are things that it's easier for a child to tell an adult of the same sex". While Monica, thus, maintains the role of "main comforter" for their two daughters, Joshua plays a different role in responding to their emotional needs particularly in cases where "they've had a problem with another child or with a teacher" or "the more serious, political and environmental or social discussions that we have... like the nature of the world and humanity and the way the world is". In a similar way, Natalie points to how she and Matthew have different emotional responses to their two young sons and she sees these responses as socialized gendered parental responses that intersect with the fact that the children are boys:

"He does cuddle the kids and everything, but it's not his first sort of approach. But then he does spend time talking in a quite different way to the way that I talk to Sam. The sort of, you know, I don't want to say '*man to man*' (laughs) but in a very different relation and in a very different way."

Some couples came to a point where, as the children grew older, many men became more involved in "bed time talks", "confidences", and taking a significant role in helping with the children's emotional well-being. Laura and Stephen, for example, look back over 27 years of marriage as they discuss how they each respond to their children's emotional needs in different ways. Their two youngest boys, 15 and 17 years of age, now require somebody to attend to the "practical concerns and mental well-being" as well as "anything that has a practical solution like finances or CV's". For these responses, they turn to their father, Stephen. Laura goes further to say that many problems "have a practical slant but they can also become emotional - like when David got his new bike and then it was stolen and it was Stephen who did all the follow-up stuff like that". Thus, while Laura retains the responsibility for being the "main listener and comforter" for all four of their children, she says that as the years have passed, and "as the boys have gotten older", they increasingly turn to their father "for comfort".

For all of the professed shared care-giving couples I interviewed, emotional responsibility for children shifted over the years. All of the men in the sample came to take on varied aspects of this emotional responsibility, particularly when a second (third or fourth) child arrived, as well as in response to the changing needs and demands of children over time (see also Daniels and Weingarten, 1982, 1988; Lamb, 1981; Yogman et *al.,* 1988). These changes intersected, in turn, with the ages, gender, and personalities of both parents

and children, and with the women often coaxing and coaching men. Sometimes there was resistance and disagreement, but this was one area where women insisted that, in contrast to other areas of household work, they did not "go on strike" because the costs to the children would be too high. In the case of Laura and Stephen, the couple with the longest marriage in the study (27 years), she continually pulled Stephen to join her in this realm so that they finally arrived at a position where she feels more comfortable with their respective roles:

"In fact for the first time I feel that if anything ever happened to me, I know that they would be okay. I'm sure they would have been okay before - I'm sure Stephen would have been reasonably coping at an earlier stage. But now I *know* that I could disappear from the face of the earth and they'd be all right".

While men became proficient, in varied degrees, with sharing the emotional responsibility for children, this was much less evident with inter-household responsibility.

INTER-HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITY
"Elizabeth has been very good at saying we should do this and getting it organized and making it happen and finding people to do this, that or the other" (Saxon).

The responsibility for domestic life and for children also involves relationships between households as well as between the social institutions of families/households, schools, the state, and the workplace. Within and between households, and other social institutions, parents share the responsibility for their children with others who take on caring practices - caregivers, other parents, neighbours, kin, child care experts, nurses and doctors, teachers, librarians, music teachers, soccer coaches and so on. Each stage of child rearing introduces its own sets of issues, according to the particular needs and demands of particular children. For all of these issues and decision-making processes – from a child's pre-school to university years- ***other people*** are often consulted and

relationships are thus built up on the basis of a shared interest in a particular child or children. This level of responsibility builds upon the attentiveness and knowledge involved in emotional responsibility, but then somebody works to satisfy these needs by piecing together limited resources of time, energy, and money (see Balbo, 1987). That is, inter-household responsibility is linked to 'emotional responsibility', but it also implies clear relationships between parents and others in order to meet children's diverse social needs. According to one research respondent, Saxon, taking on inter-household responsibility means that one is "very good at saying that we should do this and getting it organised and making it happen and finding people to do this, that or the other".

While inter-household responsibility can differ in how it is enacted and experienced across class, ethnicity, sexualities and cultural lines, feminist researchers who have written about similar and parallel kinds of domestically based work- such as 'kin work' or 'household service work' - have been consistently in agreement that this work remains persistently gendered (e.g. Balbo, 1987; Di Leonardo, 1987). Like emotional responsibility, inter-household responsibility is intrinsically relational. Moreover, it also exhibits what Finch and Mason (1993) have called "a moral dimension". This can be discussed in many ways including the ways in which women and men refer to 'what is expected' within and between households, as well as between households and other social institutions. Three points will be made in order to elaborate on how inter-household responsibility is 'morally' articulated between households.

Between Households - Mothers and Other Mothers:

Child rearing takes place in a social world where women, in particular, observe other mothers and feel observed as mothers (Mauthner, 1998). Women have strong feelings and views on what mothers 'should' do. Kate's view, for example, is that "mothers sacrifice *anything* for their kids". On the other hand, Mandy points to how when "a woman who goes out to work, she has all sorts of criticism thrown at them for not mothering properly, for not supporting their husbands, those sorts of things". Many women pointed out that feelings of 'guilt' were partly instilled in them by the role models provided by other mothers, including their own mothers and caregivers of young children. These guilt feelings about mothering and what mothers 'should' do extend into the sphere of domestic responsibility. Women in my study were concerned that they should be "mothering properly", not only in their eyes but in the eyes of others and "with reference to other people" (Finch and Mason, 1993:61). That is, drawing on the symbolic interactionist approach of Finch and Mason, mothers' "identities as moral beings" were "being constructed, confirmed and reconstructed" (1993:170) in relation to their taking on inter-household responsibility.

Monica, a health services manager, captures the processes whereby women have internalised, as completely taken for granted, an ideal of what a mother 'ought' to do and what, in her words, she "ought to know". Underneath this discussion is a sense that Monica, like many other mothers, have embraced norms and expectations that occur within communities and between households on mother's responsibility for children. For example, Monica describes how, when she is frequently out of town on work related matters, she finds herself getting upset if she can't remember exactly what her daughters

are doing on a particular night. Even though, due to her demanding travel schedule, her husband Joshua has taken over the daily and weekly running of the household and the activities of their two daughters (aged ten and eleven), Monica still feels that as "their mother" she "*ought* to know" exactly what they are doing:

"I *hate* it when I don't actually know *what* they're doing. Like I rang home yesterday evening and I'd got the nights wrong and I was thinking Nina would be going to guides and she wasn't. It was choir. And I *hate* that feeling. Because I'm their *mother* and I *ought* to know".

Monica also finds it difficult to accept the idea that Joshua would like to reduce his working hours so that he is, in his words, "able to give a bit more to house and family, **home** interests". Although she has "never quite worked out why I feel *uneasy*" about it, she alludes to a 'moral' dimension in her recognition that her unease about this is "wrapped up in - in the norms and roles":

"I can't quite work out whether it's because I'm much more materialistic than Joshua and I think - 'Oh God, we won't have as much money' or whether it's all wrapped up in - in the *norms* and roles and it's, you know, it *shouldn't* be Joshua who's working *part*-time. If *anybody*, it should be *me*! Although I don't *wish* to work part-time and I'm far more ambitious and career-oriented and career minded.... There's an *unease* about it. I still haven't worked it out".

Between Households - Fathers and Other Men:

Men who were very involved in caring for young children did compare themselves to, and feel observed by, other men. Sean, a full time caregiver of two pre-school boys, explains how he feels like he is "looked at oddly by other men", thus indicating that, at least in some way, he is concerned about how other men regard him in his role as a primary carer. In this regard he mentions:

"..passing a postman cycling by ... and I was pushing the push chair and holding Luke's hand and I thought he's given me a sort of .. 'what a big sissy. A big sissy'!

Although Joe seems to be less "*worried*" about what other "blokes" think, he nevertheless does "sometimes *wonder* what they think". In his words:

"I'm not particularly worried about being - you know - sometimes I think when I meet another bloke, you know, I wonder what they think. There's a couple of blokes (in the village). They're always doing building work. And farmers - they're very sort of macho. And there's *me* hanging out the washing and getting the washing in, and I sometimes wonder what they think. It doesn't really bother me, but it passes through my mind".

Twelve (out of 23) men in the sample, who all had stronger work commitments than their spouses, accepted and viewed as 'natural' or necessary that women take on all of most of inter-household responsibility. On the other hand, while the remaining eleven men interviewed were relatively successful in their attempts to minimize gender differences in home life, they were still unable or unwilling to take on inter-household responsibility for children. It was partly because women, in relationship to other women, remain firmly tied to doing it and partly because men were uncomfortable with the fit between their internalised conceptions of "normal masculinity" (Hearn, 1990) and a public identity as primary carer of young children (see also Radin, 1982, 1988; Russell, 1987). Men felt observed and judged by other men, as well as by women, and against an ideal of "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell, 1995).

Mothers and Fathers - Birthday Parties and Baby-Sitting

A "moral dimension" was also in evidence around arranging particular children's activities, with the notable examples being setting up child care arrangements (see alsoBrannen and Moss, 1991; Peterson and Gerson, 1992), organizing birthday parties, and arranging (or doing) baby-sitting. As an example, a typical scenario around organizing birthday parties is illustrated by Lilly and Joe, both full-time nurses:

Joe: "I think it's more you organising it than me, in the sense of sending out invitations and contacting people. I help on the day more. I think I don't know the other mums. I think they kind of relate more to you".

Lilly: "Well, they're very stereotypical women around here, so I think they might find it odd that Joe was doing it".

In a similar way, women found themselves arranging baby-sitting because it was mainly women who baby-sat in their social settings. Eve, a tax consultant, says that she tends to take on this task because:

"It's probably this business that it's, you know, maybe I just feel that if I'm asking the neighbour and it's - you tend to ask the *wife*, don't you in (this small village)? I mean they *are* funny about husbands baby-sitting, aren't they sometimes?"

Summary - Inter-Household Responsibility:

Gender processes, both material and ideological, in employment and home life, were intermingled with what women and men had internalised as clearly gendered norms about distinct versions of mothering and fathering; this in turn imparted a 'moral' sense of what they 'should' each do as mothers and as fathers. Even where an intention to 'share' domestic work and responsibility was articulated and worked at, women's and men's gendered experiences and expectations proved more difficult to overcome than they had anticipated. While some aspects of the intra-household division of labour shifted so that

men were more adept at taking on certain parts of domestic labour, including emotional responsibility, public displays of mothering and fathering, as articulated in inter-household responsibility, remained distinctly gendered. In the words of Natalie:

"..So it's partly role models-what we've been brought up with. But it's not just role models, I think it's *expected* that women will be more attached to their children and that brings a certain *pressure* to do it".

One of the most significant findings to emerge from the qualitative research project that informs this paper was that, in spite of efforts to share most aspects of household life and labour, all 23 women interviewed still took on all, or the overwhelming bulk of, inter-household responsibility. That is, they initiated, planned, organised, and managed the bulk of short, medium and long-range planning between households as well as between households and other social institutions. Even in three households where men were doing most of the daytime caring, women orchestrated the inter-household and community-based contexts within which men parented. One example is the case of Jessie, a social worker and Sean, full time caregiver of their two young boys. While he does more of the daily and weekly care of the children, *she* does the planning and organising of their lives and activities. On arranging Luke's nursery and school, she says: "I did the arranging of nursery and I'm the one who contacted the school". With regard to remembering to buy diapers and other baby supplies, she says (to Sean): "I mean you're the one who's here all the time and I have to say, can you go to the shop and get some nappies (diapers)". She also takes Luke to the dentist "because Sean won't go to the dentist" and she organises birthday parties because "I think it's important for the child" and "I thought Luke should have one". As for the children's sporting activities, she says: "I've rung Tumble Tots and Sean is going to take them".

It is also important to reiterate that inter-household responsibility changes over time. As children grow older and parental involvement is more about chauffeuring children to activities, and supporting them in their initiatives, children and teenagers begin to forge their own inter-household, and inter-institutional relations, which exist parallel to the relationships which parents, especially mothers, have created and maintained around their children's lives. Over time, however, my study revealed that many deep-rooted patterns had solidified and women's propensity and inclination to create relationships between households for the sake of their children continued to over-shadows men's efforts. For example, after twenty five years of marriage and seventeen years of child rearing, Saxon admits that his wife Elizabeth, a very successful lawyer, has always had the 'focus" and 'the overall direction" in their daughters' lives. Summing up he says: "Although I've always come along to all the parents evenings and those sorts of things… *You see the need perhaps more clearly than I have*". Saxon thus echoes the words of political theorist Selma Sevenhuijsen who writes that "care" as a predominantly female endeavour is not just the meeting of children's needs but also the "*ability to 'see' or 'hear' needs, to take responsibility for them, negotiate if and how they should be met and by whom*" (Sevenhuijsen, 1992:15).

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Domestic responsibility, as discussed in this paper as the emotional responsibility and inter-household responsibility for children of all ages, encompasses feelings and activities which are deeply rooted in social relationships of interdependence which

change over time. Taking responsibility for children and for the domestic life around children is not simply about tasks and burdens. It requires both labor and love (Graham, 1983). It implies knowing what needs doing based upon identified needs and acting to fill, or find others to fill, these needs (Balbo, 1987; Tronto, 1989; Sevenhuijsen, 1992). It is eminently social, and is located in the social world of relationships between one parent and one child, between both parents and their child/children, and between parents and other people who are involved in caring for and having some responsibility for children. Domestic responsibility for children cannot be reduced to tasks or time allocations.

My research evidence - from a critical case study sample of heterosexual couples trying to share housework and child care in Britain in the early 1990's – suggest that their child rearing experiences took place in a social world whose parameters were still highly gendered and this had implications for how domestic responsibility was organized within and between households. My findings also suggest that where men were given, persuaded, or took the opportunity to develop close relationships with children, they were able to share the emotional responsibility for children. However, while eleven (out of 23) men made some attempts to share inter-household responsibility, it remained more firmly lodged in the hands of women.

The distinctly gendered activities and identities of women and men were reiterated again and again by women and men as they described their experiences within the material and 'moral' domains of parenting. Monica's definitive statement "*I'm their mother and I ought to know*" had a resounding echo for all of the women in my study.

Many women had their "public identities" as mothers established and re-confirmed as they built relationships for and around their children (see Allen and Hawkins, 1998; Graham, 1983; Bell and Ribbens 1994). Even if the situation could be reversed so that men could take on inter-household responsibility, many women said they wouldn't want this. Mary, an astrophysicist, says she "wouldn't *trust* it" while Monica, a heath services manager, reflects that there's an "*unease* about it". Sean, a full time care-giver and Natalie, a computer assistant, use the words "deeply entrenched" to refer to the dividing lines between women's and men's parenting. While the men in this study played a strong role in household life, they never seemed to join women at center stage so that it remained the case that "two different kinds of parenthood" (Backett, 1982:162) persisted, particularly in the early child rearing years.

In addition to the finding on domestic responsibility the research conducted in this paper raises theoretical and methodological issues and opens up future directions for research in this area.

Relational and interactional labor: methodological implications

The arguments put forward in this paper underline methodological dilemmas inherent in conducting research on domestic responsibility (see also Leslie et *al*., 1991). Given that it was only in speaking about it that the couples I interviewed came to know what it was and how it was located within and between households, further in-depth qualitative studies on domestic responsibility are needed. In particular, this paper highlights the need for innovative and creative methods of data collection which

encourage women and men to discuss and reflect upon the quality and locations of

domestic responsibility as well as what might shift its persistently gendered connection.

The Household Portrait technique for collecting data on the division of domestic labor

was highlighted as just one participatory and visual tool that encouraged couples to

discuss together their division of domestic labor and responsibility. Indeed one of the

reasons why domestic responsibility has been insufficiently and inadequately defined

and theorised may be partly related to the methods used to collect data on task

distribution from individuals rather than focusing on the intrinsically relational,

ambiguous, taken-for-granted, and negotiated quality of domestic responsibility.

Inter-Household Relations:

Lydia Morris has recently argued that greater research attention should focus on

"the question of the permeability of household boundaries". She writes:

'Extra-household linkages have, however, remained an unelaborated aspect of the
household approach in UK research, although there is sufficient evidence to suggest that
this may represent a worthwhile topic for investigation' (Morris, 1995:3; see also
Hessing, 1993:46).

The research presented in this paper confirms this view and extends these

comments not only to UK research, but also to North American studies. While much

research has focussed on the connections between paid work/employment and

households/families, less emphasis has been given to the links between the social

institution of the family and the wider "institutional arena" of the community (but see

Goetz, 1995,1997; also Bell and Ribbens, 1994; Author, submitted). In addition much

can be gleaned from research on Black families in the United States and from research

in Third World settings where inter-household and inter-institutional relations are more solidly explored and addressed (e.g. Collins, 1991, Moser, 1993).

Women and a "moral dimension" of domestic responsibility

One of the arguments made in this paper is that a "moral dimension", as rooted in a symbolic interactionist perspective, should be combined with the well-documented material conditions that characterize and structure women's domestic labor and caring. There is now a substantial library of research detailing the social, economic, political, ideological and discursive factors that contribute to the persistence of traditional gendered divisions of labor. Yet, while many authors have aptly detailed the ways in which women's domestic labor is structurally, ideologically and discursively constituted, the overwhelming tendency to focus on the ***roots*** of women's caring has detracted from giving greater attention to the ***qualitative dimensions*** of this labor, what it is about this labor that draws women in, why it is that men remain largely excluded (see Allen and Hawkins, 1999), and what positive aspects this labor may have for both the women and men who take on this work (see Balbo, 1987; Waerness, 1987). Focusing on a "moral dimension" of how women and men think and feel they 'ought' to enact their mothering and fathering practices can lead to greater understandings of why it is that some dimensions of domestic responsibility remains persistently gendered and how women and men together perpetuate this gendering.

Future directions for research:

The findings reported in this paper were derived from a small critical case study sample of 23 British heterosexual couples who were self-defined as "consciously attempting to share the work and responsibility for housework and child care". Future research possibilities would be to replicate the study, utilizing some of the theoretical and methodological insights gleaned from this piece of research, with a more diverse sample in terms of ethnicity, class and sexuality. In addition, research on households where men are primary caregivers over a long-term time period could shed further light on the factors that might encourage a loosening of the gendered persistence in domestic responsibility. Such research "where masculinity is, as it were, *on the line*' (Morgan, 1992:99), could provide insights into varied masculinities, and why it is that "hegemonic masculinity" and "normal masculinity" are presently constructed in ways that preclude, or reconstruct, caring and domestically based responsibilities (see Brandth and Kvande, 1998). Such research might provide new openings that would further our understandings and theorization of gender and domestic responsibility.

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[1] These findings occur across class (e.g. Gregson and Lowe, 1994) and in households where women are in high income positions relative to their partners (e.g. Shelton, 1990). However, as argued by Shelton and John (1993) and John et. *al.,* (1995) greater attention needs to be paid to variations in race and ethnicity and gendered divisions of domestic labour.

[2] See, for example: Berardo et *al.,* 1987; Berk, 1985; Borchorst, 1990; Brannen and Moss, 1991; Fox, 1997; Hochschild, 1989; Lelsie et *al.,* 1991; Liera, 1990; Maret and Finley, 1984; Peterson and Gerson, 1992).

[3] Other works that have given attention to the issue of responsibility include sociological works on children's contributions to domestic labour (Morrow, 1996), the division of labour in elder care responsibilities (Finch, 1989; Finch and Mason, 1993) and works which focus specifically on mothering (Boulton, 1983; McMahon, 1995; O'Donnell, 1985; Ribbens, 1994).

[4] See also Backett, 1982; Thompson and Walker, 1989; West and Fenstermaker, 1993; West and Zimmerman, 1987).

[5] There is now a substantial body of literature, both qualitative and quantitative, which has focused on couples' perceptions of the household division of labour and what Sanchez and Kane refer to as "gender entitlement dynamics" (1996:362). This body of research builds on relational and interactional approaches to domestic life in that gender as well as domestic labor are viewed as interactional and infused with multiple meanings. As well summarized by Sanchez and Kane (1996:361): "This symbolic and interactional strain in the literature suggests the importance of another set of factors in attempting to explain housework outcomes: gender-role attitudes, perceptions of the qualities of housework, and social interaction within the couple..." (See also Blair and Johnson, 1992; Hochschild, 1989; Sanchez, 1994; Thompson, 1991).

[6] See also Melody Hessing's (1993) Canadian study of female clerical workers' which details strategies for managing employment and domestic life and the significance of household networks in sustaining gender divisions of labor.

[7] Finch and Mason' s idea can be viewed as somewhat congruent with those put forth by Thompson when she argues that women and men make same sex comparisons when assessing their own or their spouses' domestic contributions (Thompson, 1991; see also Gager, 1998).

[8] The four readings I conducted were the following: a first reading for the plot and my responses to the narrative (see also Riessman, 1993; Strauss and Corbin, 1990); second, a reading for the "I" or the subject in the interview text (see Author and Mauthner 1999b); third, a reading for relationships - family, kin, friendships, work-related and social networks; and finally a reading for social contexts and social structures and the broader "relations of ruling" within which people's everyday lives were placed (see also Smith, 1987). For greater details on the adaptation of the voice centered relational method used in his project, please see Mauthner and Author (1998a).

[9] The process of developing the technique was informed by principles from non-formal participatory education and my experience as a participatory research trainer and facilitator (1986-89) with UNICEF and the United Nations Development Programme in Central and South America. The basic principles of this approach are summed up in Srinivasan, 1977, 1990; see also Author, 1993, 1996.

[10] The Household Portrait technique examined tasks as well as responsibility for domestic tasks and for children, for financial management and for household maintenance and repair.

A standard list of household tasks was drawn up with unique variations for some households. This list was based on information gleaned from a short background questionnaire sent to all couples as well as from the literature on gender divisions of labor (e.g. Berk, 1985; Brannen and Moss, 1991; Pahl, 1984). Variations between households in task definition were found depending upon: the number and ages of children; household type and amount of household repair and maintenance undertaken; household income and the ability to buy-in services; the contribution of older children to household work; as well as some households' own particular additions to the list of household work tasks - i.e.: "walking the dog"; "getting firewood"; "bed-time talks"; "confidences"; and "responding to children's emotional needs in a practical way". See Appendix A for an example of a "Household Portrait".

[11] In addition, a sixth, though less frequently used, point on the scale allowed couples to indicate where hired help or older siblings assisted in housework and childcare tasks.

[12] Other kinds of domestic responsibility include financial responsibility (see Siltanen, 1994), responsibility for housework tasks (i.e. tasks that are viewed as separate from childcare related housework), and responsibility for household maintenance and repair.

[13] I am grateful to Carol Gilligan for pointing this out to me.