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Fathering, parental leave, impacts, and gender equality: what/how are we measuring?

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Received 25 April 2019
Revised 12 December 2019
Accepted 15 January 2020

Abstract

Purpose – This research article explores several questions about assessing the impacts of fathers' parental leave take up and gender equality. We ask: How does the conceptual and contextual specificity of care and equality shape what we focus on, and how, when we study parental leave policies and their impacts? What and how are we measuring?

Design/methodology/approach – The article is based on a longitudinal qualitative research study on families with fathers who had taken parental leave in two Canadian provinces (Ontario and Québec), which included interviews with 26 couples in the first stage (25 mother/father couples and one father/father couple) and with nine couples a decade later. Guided by Margaret Somers' historical sociology of concept formation, we explore the concepts of care and equality (and their histories, networks, and narratives) and how they are taken up in parental leave research. We also draw on insights from three feminist scholars who have made major contributions to theoretical intersections between care, work, equality, social protection policies, and care deficits: Nancy Fraser, Joan Williams, and Martha Fineman.

Findings – The relationship between fathers' leave-taking and gender equality impacts is a complex, non-linear entanglement shaped by the specificities of state and employment policies and by how these structure parental eligibility for leave benefits, financial dimensions of leave-taking (including wage replacement rates for benefits), childcare possibilities/limitations and related financial dimensions for families, masculine work norms in workplaces, and intersections of gender and social class. Overall, we found that maximizing both parental leave time and family income in order to sustain good care for their children (through paid and unpaid leave time, followed by limited and expensive childcare services) was articulated as a more immediate concern to parents than were issues of gender equality. Our research supports the need to draw closer connections between parental leave, childcare, and workplace policies to better understand how these all shape parental leave decisions and practices and possible gender equality outcomes.

Research limitations/implications – The article is based on a small and fairly homogenous Canadian research sample and thus calls for more research to be done on diverse families, with attention to possible conceptual diversity arising from these sites.

Practical implications – This research calls for greater attention to: the genealogies of, and relations between, the concepts of care, equality, and subjectivity that guide parental leave research and policy; to the historical specificity of models like the Universal Caregiver model; and to the need for new models and conceptual configurations that can guide research on care, equality, and parental leave policies in current global contexts of neoliberal capitalism.

Originality/value – We call for a move toward thinking about care, not only as care time, but as responsibilities, which can be partly assessed through the stories people tell about how they negotiate and navigate care, domestic work, and paid work responsibilities in specific contexts and conditions across time. We also advocate for gender equality concepts that attend to how families navigate restrictive parental leave and childcare policies and how broader socio-economic inequalities arise partly from state policies underpinned by a concept of liberal autonomous subjects rather than relational subjects who face moments of vulnerability and inter-dependence across the life course.

Keywords Canada, Gender equality, Parental leave, Policy impacts, Fathering, Historical sociology of concept formation

Paper type Research paper

International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy
Vol. 40 No. 5/6, 2020
pp. 441-463
© Emerald Publishing Limited
0144-333X
DOI 10.1108/IJSSP-04-2019-0086

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Fathers' take up of parental leave and its effects are now "hot topics" in many cross-disciplinary research fields, including feminist sociology, feminist economics, work and care, social policies, and social welfare state analysis. As more and more countries make leaves available to fathers (i.e. through paternity leave or gender-neutral parental leave benefits, "fathers' quotas"[1] or "use it or lose it"[2] parental leave for fathers or second parents), researchers are increasingly studying the impacts of parental leave on fathering involvement and gender equality. Although most of the work on this topic from the 1970s to the 1990s focused on Sweden and Norway (see overview in Haas and Hwang, 2008), since the 2000s, research on the causal links between men's leave-taking and its possible effects has burgeoned internationally. Recent studies on the effects of fathers' leave-taking address several key areas, including father-child relations, gender equality in housework and care work, gender equality in paid work, women's pay equity, and changes to workplace cultures. The strongest focus, however, has been on how fathers' leave-taking can and does contribute to gender equality in families.

Many parental leave researchers agree that fathers' leave taking can and does contribute in varied ways to gendered change in families and workplaces, yet few have raised the conceptual and methodological issues and questions we take up in this article. We ask: How does the conceptual and contextual specificity of care and equality shape what we focus on, and how, when we study parental leave? What and how are we measuring?

Our interest in this topic emerged partly through a 10-year longitudinal study conducted in Canada, the first phase of which aimed to study how fathers and mothers narrated their experiences of fathers' leave. In individual and couple interviews conducted 10 years later, our second phase of research explored parents' narratives of fathers' leave-taking as well as their reflections on what they viewed as its possible impacts. Concurrent with our research, we also engaged over the past few years in national media, government, union, and community consultations on issues surrounding Canada's current parental leave policies and future policy designs aimed at encouraging gender and class equality. In all of these consultations, the most pressing questions were similar to our own: What difference does it make if fathers take parental leave? When men take leave, do they take on more housework? Does fathers' leave lead to gender pay equity? Do impacts of leave-taking vary depending on whether fathers take their leave time alone or at the same time as mothers? What length of leave time leads to maximum gender equality results? Through these consultations we observed a growing trend in research and public policy discussions of envisioning fathers' parental leave as a seemingly "magic solution" for resolving longstanding gendered inequalities in care work and paid work.

Building on the contributions of key theorists and the findings from our longitudinal follow-up study with families in which fathers took leave, we counter the view that fathers' leave-taking is an easily quantified solution to the vexing problem of gender inequality. As Iris Marion Young (1984, p. 142) argued so well over 30 years ago, changing gender relations requires much more than an "add men and stir" approach; only systemic efforts leading to social change on multiple levels will allow the "whole edifice erected on the base of exclusive female parenting [to] topple."

In this article, we contest the existence of direct causal links between fathers' leave-taking and gender equality, and we hold to the view recently expressed by a group of Nordic parental leave experts (Duvander *et al.*, 2019, p. 192) that "the relationship between Parental Leave and gender equality is far more complicated than a linear association." This article is both methodological and theoretical. We bring selective attention to the relational intersections between concepts, contexts, and practices of care and equality, as well as to

the methodological and epistemological complexities of assessing and measuring gender equality within families and between domestic spaces and worksites.

Our analysis of concepts of care and equality is guided by Margaret Somers' (2008, p. 172) "historical sociology of concept formation," a genealogical, historical, and relational approach to concepts that involves the "work of turning social science back on itself to examine often taken-for-granted conceptual tools of research." Her approach resonates with long and rich trans-disciplinary epistemological traditions, including epistemic reflexivity (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) and Foucauldian (1971/1984) genealogies that envision concepts as *performative* in that "the terms used to describe social life are also active forces shaping it" (Fraser and Gordon, 1994, p. 310). Somers (2008, p. 268) argues that concept formation begins with thinking about what concepts *do*, rather than what concepts *are* because "all social science concepts lack natures or essences; instead they have histories, networks, and narratives."

In relation to assessing concepts of care and equality and their "histories, networks, and narratives," our analysis leans heavily on three feminist scholars who have made major contributions to theoretical intersections between care, work, equality, and social protection policies: Nancy Fraser, Joan Williams, and Martha Fineman. They also share Somers' concerns about how the multiple and variable meanings of concepts are dependent on their socio-political, geographic, and historical contexts.

In specific terms, we draw on these authors in the following three ways. First, we consider Fraser's (1994, 1997, 2013) call for a "Universal Caregiver model," in which women and men "combine employment with responsibilities for primary caregiving" (2013, p. 9) using "women's current life patterns as the norm for everyone" (1997, p. 61). Her work informs our push for a shift towards assessing equality in care through gendered changes in the *responsibilities* for work and care across time as complementary to the now dominant focus on measuring domestic tasks and time. Second, we engage with Williams' (2010) and Fineman's (2008, 2009) shared desire to avoid the two key forms of equality that have dominated feminist theories—formal equality and substantive equality (or equity)—in favor of more robust conceptions of equality that would require work and state policy restructuring. Williams (2010, p. 128) especially focuses on "eliminating masculine work norms" that affect both women and men and that can impede or undo possible positive impacts of fathers' leave-taking (see also Moss and Deven, 2015). Finally, Fineman (2009, p. 113) argues that we need to "challenge the existing equality regime" by replacing the autonomous individual (a concept at the center of most equality theories) with a recognition of vulnerability because the "vulnerable subject should be the subject at the heart of social and state responsibility." These three authors provide us with the theoretical scaffolding for our arguments as we revisit and reconfigure concepts of care and equality and attempt to rethink how we assess and measure the impacts of fathers' take-up of parental leave policies.

This article is organized into five sections. First, we briefly examine recent research on fathers' parental leave and its impacts, highlighting the main, sometimes conflicting findings. Second, guided broadly by Somers' genealogical and relational approach to concepts, we seek to assess the concepts of care and equality that underpin most parental leave research. Rooted in selected insights from Fraser, Williams, and Fineman, we lay out an approach that attends to shifting caring and breadwinning responsibilities, moving beyond formal and substantive equality to explore links between leave policies and childcare, fathers' leave-taking and masculine work norms in the workplace, and issues of social class exclusions in access to leave benefits. Third, we provide a brief overview of the Canadian context and the 10-year research study that inform this article. Fourth, our Findings section draws on our interview data to explore how fathers and mothers narrate their shifting responsibilities for care, housework, and paid work across time. Finally, in our Discussion section, we weave our findings with insights from our three key authors (Fraser, Williams, and Fineman).

Fathers' parental leave impacts, care, and gender equality: concepts and measurements

Fields of scholarship that link fathering, parental leave, care, and gender equality measure changes using different methodologies and units of analysis: quantitative surveys to analyze contributions of time to childcare (and sometimes housework) tasks (Haas and Hwang, 2008; Petts and Knoester, 2018), birth cohort data (Huerta *et al.*, 2014; Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel, 2007), policy analysis of national reforms (Duvander *et al.*, 2005; Duvander and Johansson, 2019), time use studies or diaries (Hosking *et al.*, 2010; Meil, 2013), qualitative research interviews with couples (Almqvist and Duvander, 2014; Farstad, 2015; O'Brien and Twamley, 2017; Rehel, 2014), and qualitative interviews with fathers (Duvander *et al.*, 2017b; Eerola, 2014; Gíslason, 2017; Kvande and Brandth, 2017; Meil *et al.*, 2017).

Within research on the connections between fathers' leave time and gender equality, we identify three recurring, intersecting, and at times contradictory arguments. First, many studies argue that taking leave-time encourages fathers to be involved in care work after their leave time, thus enhancing gender equality in caregiving at home (e.g. Almqvist and Duvander, 2014; Haas and Hwang, 2008; Meil, 2013; Petts and Knoester, 2018). Yet, as indicated in O'Brien and Twamley's (2017) thorough review, "not all the literature reports that male parental leave has a positive impact on [men's] participation in childcare" (see also Haas and Hwang, 2008).

Second, the relationship between fathers' leave time and more egalitarian divisions of routine household work remains inconclusive. Across countries such as Sweden (Almqvist and Duvander, 2014), Norway (Kvande and Brandth, 2017), Iceland (Gíslason, 2017), and Spain (Meil, 2013), care tasks and/or time were found to become more equally shared when men take parental leave, whereas housework tasks and/or time remain heavily gendered. At the same time, some studies from Sweden do suggest that gendered responsibilities for housework shift when fathers take longer leaves (Almqvist and Duvander, 2014).

Third, the specificity of leave-taking arrangements is, possibly, significant to the connection between fathers' leave time and gender equality at home. Researchers have argued that the likelihood that couples will divide care work and domestic work equally within the household increases when fathers engage in more solo caregiving (i.e. when their parental leave is taken at a different time than their partner's) (Duvander *et al.*, 2017b; Kvande and Brandth, 2017; O'Brien and Twamley, 2017). Fathers' solo leave can lead to "routinization" in men's caregiving and is "a platform for initiation in caregiving" (Meil *et al.*, 2017, p. 120). Yet, some studies highlight that even short fathers' leaves (of as little as two weeks) can still have long-term impacts on fathering engagement (Petts and Knoester, 2018).

In spite of conflicting evidence of the impacts of fathers' leave time on gender equality, there is a growing consensus that fathers' leave time does *begin* the process of shifting gendered responsibilities at home (Wray, 2020) and at work, albeit slowly (see Duvander *et al.*, 2017b). It also leads to what commentators have called "caring masculinities" (Elliott, 2015; see also Brandth and Kvande, 2018). Yet, parental leave is just one social policy among a larger array of social and employment policies that need to be considered when we assess links between parental leave and gender equality.

Our conceptual and theoretical approach to equality and care

Working with a relational approach to concepts, we are mindful of the historicity and cultural specificity of conceptualizations of care and equality. We also recognize how care and equality play out differently in relation to one another across diverse sites. If, as Somers (2008, p. 171, citing Hacking, 2002) argues, "concepts are words in their sites," then

the particularity of these sites matters to the meanings and enactments of concepts. Below, we lay out five key points that bring together the particular conceptual meanings of care and equality and the related methodological matters that guide our analysis in this article.

Measuring care: a shift from time and tasks to responsibilities

Overwhelmingly, most work on parental leave has focused on measuring equality through domestic tasks or time use studies. This approach parallels a longstanding pattern in the larger field of research on gender divisions of domestic labor, in which most studies approach housework and care work as sets of tasks or as time bound activities that can be measured through time-use studies or diaries (for overviews, see Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard, 2010; Sullivan, 2013). Similarly, approaches to studying "fathering engagement"'(see Lamb *et al.*, 1985), a key dimension of paternal responsibilities, are connected to the expansion of time use studies, which attempt to measure "the father's direct contact with his child, through caretaking and shared activities" (Lamb *et al.*, 1985, p. 884). Indeed, Pleck (2010, p. 63) notes that the relationship between father engagement and time use as a methodological measure of paternal involvement came "full circle" in the 1980s in that research on time use "contributed to the initial conceptualization of engagement as fathers' total time spent with his children or a particular child."

Although such assessments are useful and important for tracking gendered change in domestic life, far fewer studies have attempted to assess responsibilities for care work and housework (but see Doucet, 2006/2018; Duvander *et al.*, 2017b; Eerola, 2014; Rehel, 2014). This trend is puzzling, as many have argued that despite some gendered shifts in time and tasks, gendered responsibilities for caregiving and breadwinning have been very resistant to change (e.g. Bianchi *et al.*, 2006; Bittman, 2004; Doucet, 2006/2018). We argue that this continued lack of scholarly attention to changes in housework and care work responsibilities may reflect a "measurement dilemma" (Leslie *et al.*, 1991, 199; see Doucet, 2015; Lamb *et al.*, 1985) in that responsibilities are difficult to define and they cannot be (easily or effectively) measured by time or by tasks, partly because they occur across temporal and spatial relationships.

In order to go beyond the limitations of approaches that focus only on measuring time and tasks and towards responsibilities, we work with Nancy Fraser's (1994, 2013) well known Universal Caregiver model that aims to achieve some version of gender equality or symmetry between paid work and care work *responsibilities*. As she puts it, this approach begins with the assumption of "women's current life patterns as the norm" as it aims "to overcome the separation of breadwinning and carework" (Fraser, 2013, p. 9) while also deconstructing the gendering of these activities.

While Fraser's writing frames our approach, we also build on and extend Doucet's (2006/2018; 2015) theoretical and methodological research on parental responsibilities to assess changes in domestic divisions of labor and a broad range of responsibilities (emotional, community, moral, and housework). Theoretically, she adapts ethics of care scholar Sara Ruddick's (1995) threefold conception of parental responsibilities into "emotional," "community," and "moral" responsibilities. Briefly put, "emotional responsibilities" refers to attentiveness and responsiveness based on "knowledge about the needs of others" (Tronto, 1995, p. 141; see also Tronto, 2013); community responsibilities include organizing, managing, and maintaining inter-household and inter-community connections based on children's changing social and developmental needs (see also Lamb *et al.*, 1985; Pleck, 2010); and moral responsibilities for work and care are guided by how people feel they *ought to/should* act in society as parents and as workers. Williams (2010, p. 5) discusses how moral responsibilities develop, writing

that "masculine norms create workplace pressures that make men reluctant or unable to contribute significantly to family life" and that women face "hydraulic social pressure to conform to societal expectations surrounding gender" (107). Recognizing conceptual and methodological distinctions and overlaps between housework and childcare (e.g. Sullivan, 2013), we add housework to this list, as a fourth key parental responsibility.

Equality and care: moving beyond formal and substantive equality

It is important to note that feminist theoretical debates have been dominated by two understandings of the concept of equality. Formal equality refers to "sameness of treatment" for all, including women and men (Fineman, 2010, p. 261); it has been associated with liberal feminism and liberal individualism (Fineman, 2009) and has also been referred to as "assimilationist feminism" (Williams, 2010, p. 117).

Substantive equality (also referred to as equity)[3] describes "special" treatment for some and the need to "recognize and accommodate differences and consider outcome as well as treatment" (Fineman, 2015, p. 610). It could be argued that one form of substantive equality is the "use-it-or-lose it" approach to paternity leave, which is premised on the wide socio-historical evidence that as it is mainly women who take leaves, and face the long-term job-related losses that come with being treated as primary caregivers and secondary earners, special treatment must be given to men.

Feminist theorists have long pushed to move beyond the limitations of these two understandings of equality, especially when they are connected to concepts of care and work. As Fineman (2008, p. 2) has argued, "(f)ormal equality leaves undisturbed—and may even serve to validate—existing institutional arrangements that privilege some and disadvantage others," while substantive equality cannot do enough to alter these same institutional arrangements. In parallel and intersecting ways, Fraser, Williams, and Fineman all emphasize the limitations of using men's lives as the standard by which all lives are measured, and they argue that such conceptions of equality disadvantage both women and men and exacerbate social class inequalities. Alternatively, it is women's pattern of weaving work and care (see Garey, 1999) across the life course that should guide social policy. As Fraser (2013, pp. 8–9) writes, a key goal should be to "induce men to become more like women are now: people who combine employment with responsibilities for primary caregiving." This means we must work towards collective and structural changes that will help us "overcome the separation of breadwinning and carework" (Fraser, 2013, p. 9), including the gendered nature of this separation.

Fineman (2015, pp. 609–610) also deepens this analysis by advocating for a particular conceptual configuration that links equality with a relational concept of human subjectivity (see also Tronto, 1995, 2013); this is not the liberal and independent subject that underpins formal equality but rather a "more complex legal and political subject," wherein "vulnerability is recognized as *the* primal human condition" and which therefore calls "for a more responsive state." In the case of parental leave policies, this means recognizing the vulnerability and dependence of infant children, who have the right to be well cared for, as well as the vulnerability of parents who require access to social protections and financial supports while they are caring for their infants.

Parental leave and childcare

Focusing on the relational and vulnerable subject in connection to care and equality brings attention to a key weakness in both policy development and parental leave literatures: parental leave and access to childcare are rarely connected (but see Mahon *et al.*, 2016; Valarino *et al.*, 2017). Yet, as we detail below, parental leave and childcare are deeply

connected in the decisions that parents make about the care of their children during leave time and afterwards. Parental leave negotiations and choices are part of a larger set of decisions about how to best divide parental leave time between parents and plan for the transition (including financial transitions) between parental care and other kinds of childcare. Ignoring this connection may be less problematic in counties like Sweden, where "*there is no gap* between the end of leave" and childcare/early childhood education entitlements[4] (Duvander *et al.*, 2017a, p. 396; emphasis added). Yet in other countries, including Canada, it is "possible that the availability, cost, and quality of child care influence the ways in which parents use (or do not use) other policies, such as leave and work time policies [and] . . . make decisions in a context influenced by a package of policies" (Sullivan *et al.*, 2009, p. 250).

Workplace as "an unresolved presence"

As we have discussed, parental leave impacts are mainly studied in relation to gender equality in the home; yet there is a growing body of literature that attends to connections between parental leave policies and workplace cultures (e.g. Duvander *et al.*, 2017b; Haas and Hwang, 2019a, 2019b). As Moss and Deven (2015, p. 143) argue: "the workplace remains a massive and unresolved presence. Not just as a main determinant of whether parents (and particularly men) take leave or not; but also as an environment into which parents return after taking leave."

In this vein, we heed Williams' (2010, p. 2) call to focus not only on differences within household life, but also on masculine work norms in the workplace. She writes, "the family dynamics that drive women out of their jobs often stem from workplace norms and practices that pressure men into breadwinner roles and women out of them. Workplaces not only produce widgets. They also 'produce gender'" (Williams, 2010, p. 2). We agree with Williams' (2010, p. 88) argument that any attempt to assess "equality first requires changing masculine norms to allow women, as well as men, to have both conventional careers and a conventional family life." Connecting this to Fraser, in order to shift gendered responsibilities, we must contest the view of "social policy as a full substitute for employment policy" (Rubery, 2015, p. 515; see also Fraser, 2014; Moss and Deven, 2015). Both state and workplace policies need to work in tandem to support the Universal Caregiver model.

Social class

The points above also lead to an argument about the need to center social class in these discussions, so as to "challenge the existing equality regime" (Fineman, 2009, p. 448) and "existing allocations of resources and power" (p. 444). As Fineman (2009, 447) notes, "we might formally have equal citizenship as an abstract entitlement, but the benefits of that citizenship are unevenly distributed through existing social and cultural structures, particularly through the family." In a similar way, Williams (2010, p. 6) contests "the conventional assumption that gender is the only crucial framework for understanding work-family issues." She advocates "changing the way we think about class" as well as race/ethnicity and other structural forces that affect how parental leave policies are designed and how people have or do not have access to those policies (Williams, 2010, p. 6; see also de Guzman Chorny *et al.*, 2019). Fraser also addresses how the contemporary "crises of care" (2016, p. 100) are unevenly distributed by social class and race/ethnicity.

This concern about a broader range of intersectional inequalities, including social class, has recently been taken up as a key issue in international parental leave scholarship with a focus on how parental leave benefits in some countries, including Canada, are predominately lodged in employment-based policy that excludes growing numbers of citizens (see Dobrotić and Blum, 2019a, 2019b; Doucet *et al.*, 2019; Koslowski *et al.*, 2019). We thus highlight exclusions that underpin Canadian leave policies where, with the exception of the province of

Québec, eligibility criteria are high, wage replacement rates are low, and universal and affordable childcare is still out of reach for many Canadian families. We now turn to our Canadian case study to flesh out these issues in more detail.

Canadian case study and methods: sample and data collection

The project that informs this article is a longitudinal study in which the first stage focused on understanding what facilitated fathers' leave-taking and the second stage, occurring roughly 10 years later, aimed to understand its possible impacts. Our first stage of interviewing (couple interviews) was conducted jointly by the authors between 2006 and 2008, with 25 heterosexual birth-parent couples and one gay male adoptive-parent couple, recruited from the province of Ontario (16) and the province of Québec (ten).

In 2016, in the second stage, all 26 couples were approached for follow-up interviews, but only nine (of the 11 couples who replied) ultimately agreed to the process (three interviews in each family: a couple interview, and individual interviews for a total of 27 face-to-face interviews conducted by the authors of this article). We learned through correspondence with the larger sample that at least four of the 26 couples had separated (three in Québec and one in Ontario)[5]. In the second stage of research, 17 of the parents were white and one parent was Latin American; eight were mother/father couples and one was a father/father couple; all families were middle to lower-middle class and all were dual earning with the exception of one parent on long-term disability (LTD) and one who was on short-term disability leave from work. They also all had at least two children, ranging from 7 to 14 years old (average age of ten), none of whom had a physical disability, although both children in one family had developed learning disabilities. There was a total of 22 children in this second phase of interviews.

The fathers among the couples who were willing to speak to us a decade later about their family lives had something in common: they had all qualified for and taken relatively long paid leaves for at least one of their children (10–35 weeks, with an average of 19 weeks) compared to other Canadian fathers, who qualified for and took an average of nine weeks of paid parental leave in 2015[6]. Yet, as we lay out in Table I, the couples were extraordinarily diverse in terms of eligibility for leave, financial top-ups to their wage replacement rates, and access to unpaid leaves. *Of the 18 individuals, seven parents did not qualify for paid leave for at least one of their children and ten parents took unpaid leaves (from four weeks to two years), mainly due to the high cost or unavailability of childcare.* When the Ontario couples had their children, parental leave coverage for self-employed workers in Canada did not exist (this was implemented in 2011). Additionally, the two Québécois families who agreed to be interviewed in Phase 2 did not qualify for the use-it-or lose it weeks for fathers (implemented in Québec in 2006) because their children were born before 2006; *thus, our analysis does not compare Québécois and Ontarian couples.*

Although a larger sample of 52 individuals participated in the first interview phase, this article only draws directly on the second data set because our interest was in tracking how these participants perceived the impacts of their experiences and how they navigated the transitions between parental leave and childcare (for findings from the first set of data, see Doucet and McKay, 2017; Doucet *et al.*, 2009; McKay and Doucet, 2010). In the second phase, in 2016, we conducted interviews jointly in person (three per household) with eight of the couples and one of us conducted the three interviews with one family by Skype (due to distance). We started with individual interviews (of roughly one hour each) using the "Life Line technique," whereby the participant marks key moments in their work and family life along a timeline that began just after they completed secondary school (see Doucet, 2006/2018 for an overview). We then asked participants to tell us their story as visualized on the page, asking questions about key moments while also focusing on decision making about work and childcare arrangements during and after leave-taking.

Ontarian couples

Matthew (48), public servant in Ontario government, and **Michelle (45),** now French teacher, formerly self-employed athletic coach, then student. **Children:** Three (8, 11, and 13). **Eligibility**: Matthew: 17 weeks paid parental leave (with first two children), eight weeks (third child). Michelle: Not eligible. **Top-ups**: Matthew: 93 per cent for all three. **Daycare:** No. "Tag team parenting." She cared for children in day, Mathew cared for them in evenings while she coached and studied

Tom (60), university professor, and **Brie (45),** federal public servant. **Children**: Two (8 and 10). **Eligibility:** Both parents eligible for leave. Tom: took six weeks parental leave, four weeks vacation, two weeks unpaid leave (12 weeks total) with first child; Brie took 52 weeks maternity and parental leave. Top-ups: Brie at 100 per cent placement rate for full leave [10]. **Unpaid leaves or work reduction**: Brie took 68 weeks unpaid leave with first child. For second child, Tom took 32 weeks unpaid leave, then reduced to 20 per cent workload for one year. When children were 1 and 3, Brie worked 80 per cent workload and Tom took a year-long sabbatical. **Daycare**: No. Unavailable in their rural area and a 2.5 h daily commute to work (i.e. long days in daycare)

Craig (47), formerly technical and creative writer and co-owner of small arts-based business with **Christian (54).** **Children:** Two (10 and 13, adopted) **Eligibility:** Both self-employed and ineligible for parental leave. **Unpaid leaves and work reduction**: First child: Craig took one-year unpaid leave; Christian reduced his hours. Second child: Christian worked reduced, flexible hours for first six weeks and Craig worked at home. They then switched to a 50/50 arrangement (mostly day/evening split, with flexible hours) for one year. **Daycare**: Yes, local home daycare, flexible hours

Brendan (40) and Arianna (40), both public school teachers. **Children:** Four (9 [triplets] and 11). **Eligibility:** First child: Arianna took first 26 weeks and Brendan took last 12 weeks. Second child: Arianna on pregnancy sick leave (eight weeks), then took maternity and parental leave (28 weeks) and he took 28 weeks (parental leave). **Top-ups:** For both, two-week period of 90 per cent replacement rate for maternity leave, 75 per cent wage replacement for the remaining leave time. **Unpaid leaves or work reduction:** After his first leave, Brendan took two years unpaid leave, teaching night and summer school to avoid daycare expenses. Arianna then took two years unpaid leave and taught summer school. (Their contracts allowed up to four years unpaid leave with job security). **Daycare**: No. Managed with unpaid leaves and her parents moving closer to help with care

Pierce (46), working for non-profit, formerly for in communications for private company, and **Louise (42),** university employee. **Children**: Two (7 and 9). Eligibility: Louise took 30 weeks maternity/parental leave for first child; Pierce took last 10 weeks (80 per cent top-up). She took the full leave time (50 weeks) for second child, Pierce did not take leave. **Top-ups**: She had 95 per cent with both leaves. He had 80 per cent with first child, no top-up for second (new job, this is partly why he did not take leave). They both worried about sufficient income for daycare. **Daycare:** Yes: in her workplace

Daniel (46), university administrator, and **Janine (45),** currently on short-term disability and working towards degree. Two children (7 and 9). [9] **Eligibility:** They had planned to split leave (50/50) but Daniel lost his job before taking leave; he took 11 weeks for the second child**.** She took 50 weeks with both children. **Top-ups**: None for both parents (i.e., 55 per cent wage replacement). **Unpaid leave:** He took 26 weeks (forced) unpaid leave (while looking for work). **Daycare:** Yes, local home daycare (with some changes due to quality and their child not adjusting, mainly due to autism which was diagnosed later)

Ross (43) and Liza (47). Two children (9 and 12). **Eligibility:** Liza ineligible for maternity/parental leave (self-employed). To maintain subsidized childcare spot in local community, Ross was limited to four weeks parental leave (although he wanted to take full 35 weeks parental leave). Ross lost his job soon after he returned to work; thus, was off for another four weeks (paid by EI, partly caring for the children and also looking for work). **Unpaid leave:** With second child, neither parent took formal paid leave (both ineligible), but Liza took 11 weeks unpaid leave and juggled her small business and childcare. **Daycare:** Due to income level and number of hours worked, they qualified for a (municipal) daycare subsidy and secured good daycare for both children

Québécois couples

Charles (46), public nurse and nursing instructor, and **Naomi (46),** on long term disability, formerly health sector worker. Two children (9 and 14). **Eligibility**: Each parent took 25 weeks leave for first child. Naomi then exited the workforce on long-term disability. Charles took 35 weeks parental leave for second child. **Top-ups:** Neither received top-ups but received the Québec wage replacement rate of 75 per cent; for second leave he received 70 per cent for 32 weeks and 55 per cent wage replacement for three weeks. **Daycare:** Wanted part time daycare, but not available in government-funded daycare in Québec

Phillipe (51), public administrator and **Helen (48),** health librarian. Three children (10 and 13 [twins]). **Eligibility:** Phillipe took 29 weeks when twins were born, Helen took 40 weeks. With third child he took 29 weeks, she did not qualify. **Top-ups:** He received 93 per cent top-up for all three leaves, she received 75 per cent (the Québec replacement rate) for hers. **Unpaid leave:** She took 12 weeks unpaid leave with twins, was then laid off two months after returning to work. **Daycare:** Could not get a spot in government-funded daycare for a child under 18 months; Phillipe's leave of 29 weeks provided care while she looked for and found a job; then they found an opening in a private daycare

Table I.
Couple details

Couple interviews (ranging from sixty to ninety minutes) followed the individual interviews and raised some of the same themes, but through a joint accounting of events. In order to asses shifting responsibilities across time, we adapted Doucet's (2006/2018, 2015) Household Portrait technique (See Figure 1), a visual and participatory method for facilitating discussion about the changing gender divisions of labor and responsibilities over time. It is used as part

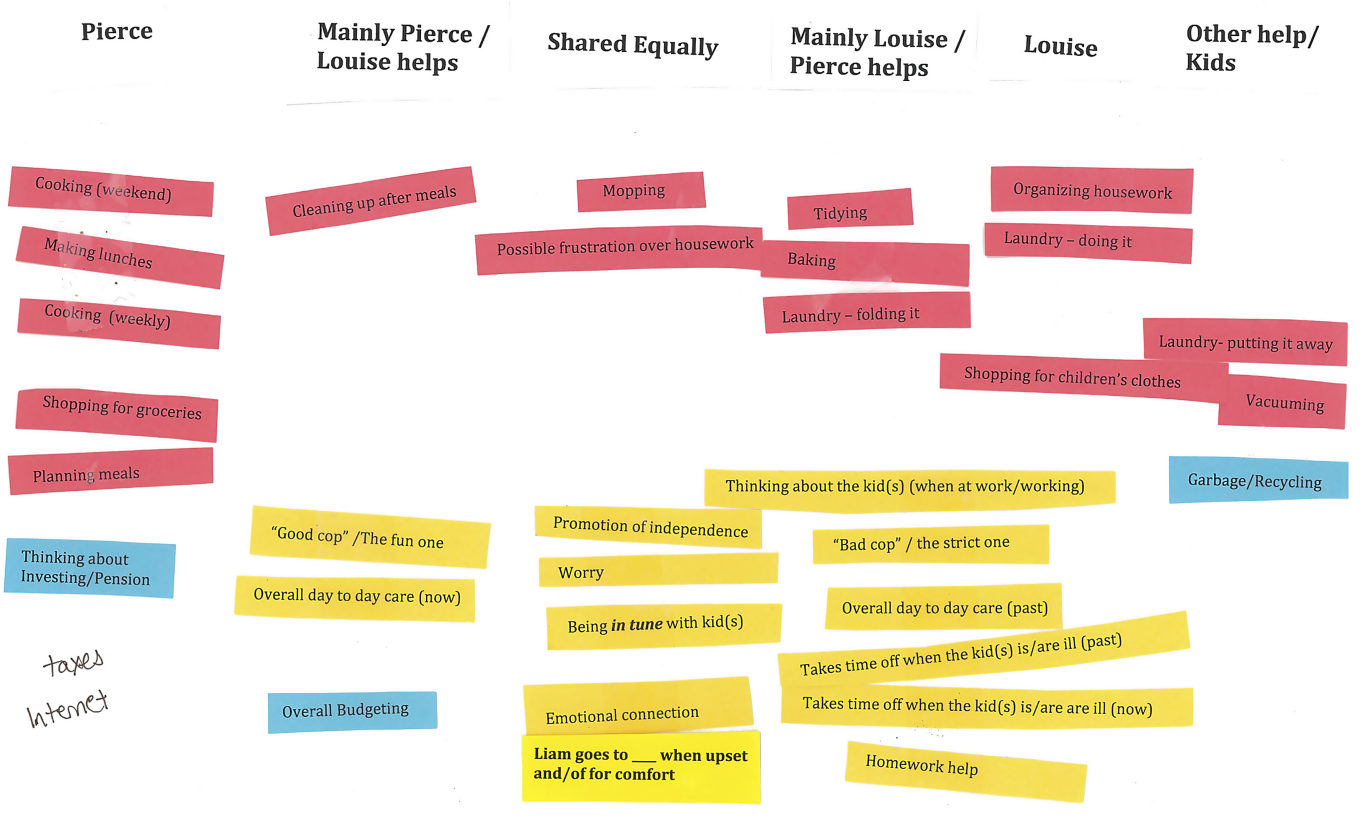

Figure 1.
(Part A) Household Portrait (Louise and Pierce, 2016)

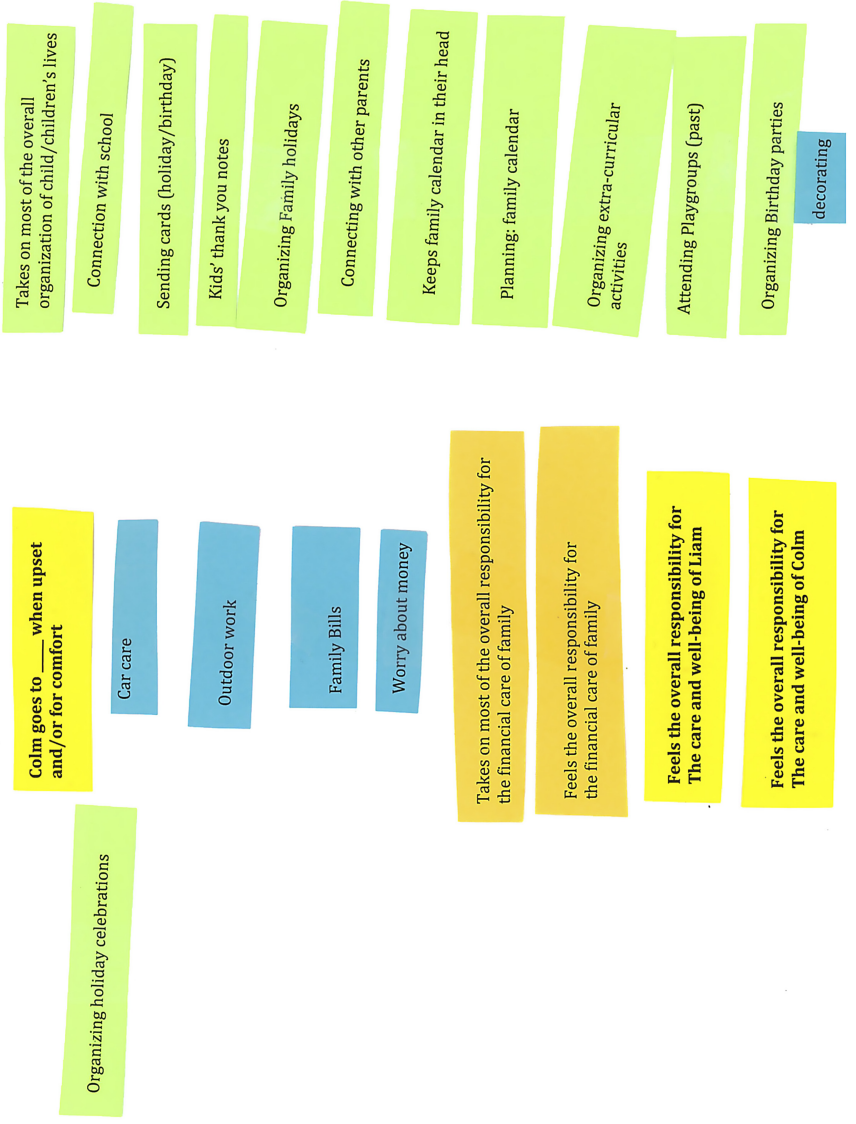

Figure 1.
(Part B)

of the audiotaped joint interview with couples and involves sorting different sets of colored papers that represent a wide range of household tasks and responsibilities, discussing them together, and ultimately placing the slips in one of five columns (on a large sheet of paper) that represent the degree (all, most, shared, least, none) to which each parent takes on a particular household task or responsibility.

Data analysis and case studies

In both stages of the research, we recorded field notes (used as part of our data) and undertook data analysis together. We began with the interview transcripts, which we approached with a modified version of the Listening Guide (see Doucet and Mauthner, 2008), a narrative analysis approach that we further adapted and reconfigured between our two stages of research (2006–2008 and 2016). In the second stage, our transcript readings were also guided by Somers' (1994, p. 616) nonrepresentational approach to narrative analysis, which addresses four narrative features: "(1) relationality of parts, (2) causal emplotment, (3) selective appropriation, and (4) temporality, sequence, and place." We also worked with her typology of intra-connected and nested narratives, including "ontological narratives," which are "the stories that social actors use to make sense of—indeed, *to act in*—their lives [emphasis added]" (Somers, 1994, p. 618), "social, public, and cultural narratives" (p. 614) (i.e. changing conditions of possibility, including shifting state policies, workplace norms, and gendered ideologies), and "conceptual narratives," meaning "the concepts and explanations that we construct as social researchers" (p. 620; for a fuller overview, see Doucet, 2006/2018, 2018a, 2018b).

We conducted our analysis together, and then apart, working on paper copies of the transcripts, and then both conducting all three narrative readings (ontological; social, public, and cultural narratives; and conceptual narratives) through *Atlas.ti's* (a computer assisted qualitative analysis software) coding and memoing functions. This data analysis approach, conducted over the period of one year, led us to a set of arguments, a few of which we lay out in this article. Our analysis was neither inductive nor deductive, but rather "abductive" (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012, p. 27), in that we were "simultaneously puzzling over empirical materials and theoretical literatures."

Our selection and in-depth work with a small sample of eighteen individuals (in 27 interviews) drew on Flyvbjerg's (2006, p. 14) characterization of case studies, especially his description of "critical case studies, which have "strategic importance in relation to the general problem." That is, "If it is valid for this case, it is valid for all (or many) cases."

In our research, we characterize the nine families who participated in the second stage of our research as a critical case study because these couples, who chose to return to speak to us a decade later, were not typical couples; they were families with fathers who had taken relatively long leaves compared to the norm in Canada and they were striving, with varied success, for some form of a Universal Caregiver model (Fraser, 1994, 1997, 2013). Most couples (five out of nine) enacted patterns of work and care that resonated with this model; yet they also used individualized solutions (such as unpaid leave) that allowed both women and men to combine earning and caring. The other four couples sometimes adopted the model, but were more strongly impeded by gendered workplace conditions, financial pressures, variations in caregiving support, and disability leaves. Given their relatively advantageous social class positioning (access to jobs and the ability to take unpaid leave and to navigate institutional supports for both paid work and care work), the fact that they nonetheless experienced both systemic constraints and stress in attempting to overcome the lack of institutional support for childcare, low levels of eligibility for paid parental leave, and low wage replacement rates, raises questions and concerns about larger sectors of the population who do not have access to (or are not eligible for) the same levels of financial resources and who have even weaker state support for care work.

Findings

In this section, we explore the impacts of fathers' leaves by considering the complexities of concepts and practices of care and equality. We do so by exploring the connections between fathers' leave taking and care practices, as articulated in four parenting responsibilities (emotional, community, housework, and moral [and enacted] responsibilities for work and care), and by examining the links between fathers' leave and shifting workplace norms, parental leave and childcare, and issues of social class.

Does fathers' leave-taking shift emotional responsibilities?

All the fathers (and mothers) insisted that they shared the emotional responsibilities for their children. At the same time, they were also all uncertain or ambivalent about if or how parental leave had an impact on fathers' emotional connections with, and emotional responsibilities for, their children. A few couples invoked the "chicken or egg" analogy. As Tom put it: "It's like chicken and egg: like maybe I took leave because I'm like that or did it make me more like that? Is it part of just making the commitment?"

What was clear to us was how interchangeable parents were in terms of who responded to each child, and how. We arrived at this assessment through our analysis of individual and couple interviews as well as the making of their Household Portraits, in which all nine of the couples agreed that emotional responsibility should be placed in the "shared equally" column. Our data analysis leads us to argue that when fathers were able to take leave without financial or workplace penalties or worries, or if they could afford to take unpaid leave, they took leaves (or accepted unpaid leaves) because they desired a stronger emotional connection to their children and/or their leave-taking further solidified this connection.

Does fathers' leave-taking shift community responsibilities?

Mothers in our sample took on most of the organizing and managing of their children's lives during the infant and preschool years, but this began to shift for most families (six out of nine) as the children entered school and participated in extracurricular activities. This pattern aligns with the persistence of female-dominated early years parenting in Canada, which stems partly from continued low levels of parental leave take-up by Canadian fathers. As far fewer fathers are involved as primary caregivers in the early months and years of their children's lives, they can feel excluded in female-dominated caregiver settings (see Doucet, 2006/2018). Indeed, many men in our study commented on the isolation of being a father at home with infants. For example, Tom, describing how he tried going to playgroups when the children were young, said, "the other moms would not talk to me." He added: "... once they got into school, I joined school council immediately. And I was in the kindergarten class, cutting things (laughs) ... So, I've been part of that ... 10 years now." His wife Brie, referred to how, once the children were in school, she and Tom developed a "diffusion of responsibility," with each of them organizing the children's activities and appointments without obvious specialization. For Helen and Phillipe, she did most of the organizing when the couple's three boys were younger but now that their extracurricular activities are sports, which Philippe coaches, he organizes those activities.

Louise and Pierce had one of the most specialized yet symmetrical divisions of labor: she took on most of the community responsibilities for their two sons from infancy into primary school, but she also recognized that her husband did work that complemented hers. For example, she insisted that Pierce took on more of the day to day care of their children—a pattern that began in the first months of parenting—saying: "if you look at the number of hours that we spend with the kids, then Pierce wins hands down. But then when I think about it. I'm like, 'I bring them to all the lessons.'" When we asked her why this is the case, she responded: "I like it and I'm a control freak, so I like to map out." In sum, while most couples

sought to share community responsibilities, others drew on their individual differences or on women's social networks to take on this work in ways that they narrated as uneven, but not necessarily as leading to disadvantage or inequalities.

Does fathers' leave-taking shift housework responsibilities?

For these nine couples, we observed three approaches to housework responsibilities: (1) specialization, (2) shared, with a great deal of back and forth and alternating who does what (and with one couple buying outside support), and (3) differences with tension.

A good example of specialization can be seen in how two couples referred to cooking and laundry. In the case of Matthew and Michelle, he does most of the cooking. As Michelle says: "Matthew's always been a cook . . . He was cooking before we were married, before we had kids. Yeah, there has not been a huge shift in roles." After doing their Household Portrait activity, we asked if they would change anything, and they spoke about the laundry. Matthew commented that he did his own laundry before they were married but since then, "Maureen insisted on doing the laundry." Michelle added: "I like things done a certain way." In a similar way, Louise does all the laundry, although she sometimes asks Pierce to help her bring it off the line in the summer. As she said to Pierce in their joint interview: "I *have* to do all the laundry, I have to hang it up the way I hang it up. You cannot do the laundry . . . I like it. I have *my* way." On the other hand, "Pierce does all the food. I do none of the food," she said.

For three of the nine couples, both partners took on many tasks interchangeably. Naomi, who is on LTD, still shares the bulk of the housework with Charles. In keeping with a pattern that began before they had children, he does most of the cooking, including the meal planning and the grocery shopping for food. Naomi, on the other hand, does the laundry, but admitted that she does this "because he does more than me . . . and this is one thing I can do" and that Charles helps, especially with the folding.

In two of nine households, we observed tense disagreements about how the couple should divide the housework responsibilities. For example, Janine (who is currently on health leave and studying part time) insisted that all childcare responsibilities are shared equally between her and Daniel, but that she "own(s) the list" in relation to housework. She added: "And I *do not want to have the list*!"

We asked the couples directly if there is a connection between men taking leave and their taking on more housework. With the exception of one couple (Tom and Brie) where he had taken long (mainly unpaid) leaves and also worked reduced hours (80 per cent of full time) for a year, all responded that their overall housework patterns were set in place before they had children. Our analysis leads us to caution against drawing direct links between men taking time off from work and their taking on more housework. It may also be the case that because it is not yet the norm in Canada for men to take parental leaves, especially relatively long periods, these men who took leave might have already been highly (or somewhat) involved in domestic work.

Does fathers' leave-taking shift moral (and enacted) responsibilities towards a Universal Caregiver model?

A key research concern that emerged from our analysis is whether fathers' leave taking shifts how responsibilities for paid work and care work are felt or enacted by each parent. We were partly guided by a Universal Caregiver model which "promote(s) gender equity by effectively dismantling the gendered opposition between breadwinning and caregiving" (Fraser, 1997, pp. 61–62). We also found resonance between our findings and those of Duvander *et al.* (2017b) from their recent research on Swedish fathers who took "considerably longer than average" leaves (i.e. two to nine months, with an average of 6.86 months). Their work distills

the Universal Caregiver vision into several concrete everyday care and work practices or issues[7]. We draw on four of their key arguments.

First, in relation to the moral responsibilities and priorities of work and care, Duvander *et al.* (2017b, p. 128) write: "Fathers' orientation toward employment seems to have changed and it was commonly expressed that *work was now less important* than actively participating in family life." This was also the case for all of the men in our study, who expressed an interest in slowing down, working less, moving into jobs with more flexibility, or retiring early so that they could spend more time with their children.

Second, our work also concurs with Duvander *et al.*'s (2017b) assertion that fathers organized their work lives around their family lives. The fathers and mothers in our study planned their careers in tandem, always assessing their needs at home and each making workplace adjustments accordingly. The two women on health-related leaves also worked to ensure that they did not revert to a breadwinner/caregiver model; rather, these mothers pushed for the fathers to remain heavily involved in the day to day care and the emotional responsibilities for children. In the case of Janine and Daniel, for example, who have two children on the autism spectrum, Daniel rearranged his work schedule, in spite of some push back from his employer, so that he could be present at all of the children's appointments.

Third, like Duvander *et al.* (2017b), we found a correlation between fathers' leave-taking and their partners' careers[8]. In our study, when fathers took leave, mothers were able to further develop their careers, either by continuing their education (for Michelle) or having time to look for work (for both Michelle and Louise); Helen and Phillipe were not able to secure a childcare spot for their second child in Québec, but Phillipe's leave enabled Helen to start a new job. We also found a correlation between fathers' leave-taking and household financial goals. Among the couples we studied, fathers' leave-taking extended parental care time and helped families avoid the large financial impact of childcare. The strongest example of this was how Brendan and Arianna (teachers and parents of four children, including triplets) each took two years of unpaid leave, with the first leave (his) taken explicitly to forgo the high cost of childcare.

Our final point about moral (and enacted) responsibilities for work and care relates to masculine work norms. Our findings are similar to those of Duvander *et al.*'s (2017b, p. 141), that "At the workplace level, fathers expressed both change and continuity with a traditional male norm." Although we were not able to do a systematic comparison between Québec and Ontario, all seven fathers living in Ontario mentioned that they experienced some scrutiny and criticism for taking parental leave. One father, Ross, lost his job in the non-profit sector after taking four weeks of parental leave (which he believed was partly related to his leave-taking). Overt or subtle pressure was also felt in the public sector. As Matthew put it: "By that third maternity leave, I felt like I was losing face with a couple of key guys in the ministry that did not really like the idea that I was not there." In the case of Brendan, who took twelve weeks off from his teaching job to be off with their first child, both he and Arianna noted that his principal was not completely supportive, but Brendan maintained that he had "asserted his rights."

Some of the men we interviewed challenged workplace norms and tried to set an example for male colleagues, and, over the ten years of our study, some workplace cultures did change. In the first set of interviews, most of the fathers who had taken paid parental leave said they had been questioned at work about their decision, but in our second round of interviews, they mentioned that men in their workplaces were increasingly taking leave to care for their children. The two Québécois fathers and one Ontario mother who worked in Québec observed that there had been a cultural shift: Québécois fathers were now expected to take leave. Our findings confirm the work of Tremblay and Dodeler (2017, p. 723), who write that in Québec, "leave has come to be seen as a 'right' for most fathers, and relatively well accepted in the work environment, although there are surely workplaces that oppose these leaves more actively."

Discussion

Overall, our research analysis leads us to the following seven points about shifting practices of care and gender equality. First, men's leave-taking is connected to fathers' growing emotional responsibilities for children. That is, fathers take leave because they desire a stronger emotional connection to their children and/or their leave-taking further solidifies this connection. We agree with recent reflections by a group of Nordic authors (Duvander *et al.*, 2019, p. 191) that, generally, "it is often assumed that the participation of fathers is *the first step* to gender equality [emphasis added] and in particular gender equal sharing of childcare."

Second, although women's longer leaves, their social networks, and the still-female-dominated worlds of early parenting mean that women remain the ones who usually take on community-based parental responsibilities, these responsibilities do shift as children grow older and as fathers begin to partake in community parenting responsibilities (i.e. sitting on school council or organizing extra-curricular activities, especially athletic ones). We posit that as more and more fathers take leave, they could also become increasingly involved in community-based dimensions of parenting.

Third, the connection between fathers and housework is less clear; our research suggests that this may be less about fathers taking parental leave than about whether symmetrical divisions of labor are established before partners become parents.

Our fourth point is that men's leave taking is critical to shifting the moral and "felt" responsibilities for earning and caring. When men ask for and take parental leave, they begin to disrupt "masculine work norms" and to shift broader "social, public and cultural narratives" (Somers, 1994, p. 618) about men and the care of very young children.

Fifth, there is ample research on how women are penalized for prioritizing care commitments, and it has often been "politically risky for women to negotiate" leaves (Williams, 2010, p. 140); now, men are increasingly facing similar treatment. In Canada, we found that fathers are indeed pushing against masculine work norms, but that they also face suspicion and, in some cases, penalties because of their desire to take leave to care for their children.

Sixth, men taking parental leave can also contribute indirectly to women's success at work, in that father's leaves can allow women time to study, retrain, or look for work. This is especially important in contexts like Canada, where 38 per cent of all mothers still do not qualify for paid maternity and parental leave (McKay *et al.*, 2016) and where accessible and affordable childcare is not available for many Canadians (Langford *et al.*, 2017). Fathers' leave-taking can thus directly assist families to financially support themselves as they cope with loss of income (either through low wage replacement rates or not qualifying for leave) and by postponing daycare expenses while mothers search for or return to work or while families wait for childcare spaces to become available.

Finally, the complexities of caregiving responsibilities highlight the methodological challenges of their measurement. Responsibilities are both cognitive and practice-based processes that involve "taking initiative and monitoring what is needed" (Pleck, 2010, p. 66); they are a set of relational and fluid "practices that unfold within specific temporal and spatial relationships (that are) are always in constant motion between carers and cared-for individuals" (Doucet, 2015, p. 236). The methodological and epistemological challenges posed by the work of assessing caring responsibilities require creative methodological approaches that can facilitate dialogue and longitudinal interviews that examine gendered responsibilities over time. In two-parent households, couple interviews are also critical for tapping into the fluid and relational dimensions of responsibilities as they unfold and change across time (see also Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard, 2010).

Conclusion

In the longitudinal research project that informs this article, we worked with a small case study including nine Canadian couples (from a larger sample of 26 couples) whom we

revisited one decade after our first interviews with them. All of these couples implicitly aspired to Fraser's Universal Caregiver model. At the same time, in spite of their efforts and their relative class privilege, they faced challenges with fully enacting this model of work and care due to the specifics of Canadian parental leave and childcare policies: a high eligibility bar for leaves, low wage replacement rates, enduring masculine work norms, limited or expensive childcare services, and entrenched gendered ideologies about work and care, especially regarding infants. While Québec exhibits stronger social policy for families, in comparison to other Canadian provinces and territories, there are still gaps in Québec's social welfare net, notably, a low number of spaces for all children (particularly those under the age of eighteen months), a lack of part-time spaces, and a rise in private providers and quality concerns (Mathieu, 2019).

In thinking about fathers' parental leave take up and gender equality, we concur with Moss and Deven (2015, p. 143) that "[p]arental leave is just one way into this issue, not the final destination." That is, soon after we began to study the impacts of fathers' parental leave, we recognized the limitations of attempting to define a causal relationship between parental leave and specific measurable outcomes (see also Duvander *et al.*, 2019). Overall, we found that maximizing both parental leave time *and* family income in order to sustain good care for their children (through paid and unpaid leave time, followed by limited and expensive childcare services) was articulated as a more immediate concern to parents than were issues of gender equality. Our research supports the need to draw closer connections between parental leave, childcare, and workplace policies and how these all shape parental leave decisions and practices and possible gender equality outcomes.

Our relational and genealogical approach to concepts guided our research and analysis, making us think critically, historically, and relationally about concepts of care and equality. We moved towards thinking about care as *responsibilities*—complex processes that can, we would argue, be partly assessed through the stories people tell about how they negotiate and navigate care and work responsibilities in specific contexts and conditions across time. Our questions about gender equality in care work widened to include how families navigate restrictive parental leave and childcare policies and how broader socio-economic inequalities arise partly from state policies underpinned by a concept of liberal autonomous subjects rather than relational subjects who face moments of vulnerability across the life course.

The findings and arguments that we have made in this article are deeply connected to the approach that guides it, including Somers' relational, and genealogical approach to concepts, and her non-representational approach to narratives. We understood the stories that people narrated and told us (ontological narratives) as one layer of what we heard, analyzed, and retold as scholarly narratives. Those ontological narratives are constituted within and by the social, public, and cultural narratives that make them possible; they are shaped by the specific features of social welfare states, workplace norms, and gendered ideologies about work and care. Specific conceptual narratives about care and equality also informed our analysis, meaning that we are telling a particular scholarly narrative and that using another set of concepts would likely have resulted in a different analysis.

We conclude with two points. First, models of work and care, including the Universal Caregiver model, however desirable, were conceived within Euro-western social democratic welfare states, with their associated political, institutional, and ideological histories. As concepts are "words in their sites" (Hacking, 2002, p. 24), the genealogies, relationalities, and specificities of the concepts of care and equality that guide parental leave research and policy formation need to be constantly revisited. This is especially important as researchers attempt to conceptualize how culturally diverse populations, within and across countries, articulate

and navigate diverse practices of care and equality in relation to parental leave benefits and childcare services.

Second, in the twenty years since Fraser introduced the Universal Caregiver model, neoliberalism "has come to dominate the policy direction of the Anglophone countries" both as "a set of ideas" and as "a series of political economic practices" (Baird and O'Brien, 2015, p. 200). Fraser (2016, p. 100) highlights that care work is now defined and structured by the "financialized neoliberal capitalism of our time" and that the "care deficits we experience today are the form this contradiction takes" in what she names "a third, most recent phase of capitalist development." Greater attention needs to be given to how these deficits and contradictions shape leave policies and access to childcare services—as well as the concepts we use to make sense of these policies, how they are experienced, and their possible effects.

Notes

1. "Fathers quotas" are non-transferable, highly paid entitlements in Northern Europe.
2. For example, Québec implemented these "use it or lose it" non-transferable entitlements in 2006, and the rest of Canada is following suit (with lower wage replacement rates and only for couples who qualify for leave benefits) in 2019.
3. The concepts of formal and substantive equality are a massive subfield (see, for example, Barnard and Hepple, 2000).
4. In Sweden, "There is an entitlement to ECEC from one year of age, available on a full-time basis in centers or at licensed family day cares to employed parents (or part-time if parents are not employed)" (Duvander *et al.*, 2017a, p. 396).
5. There are well documented differences between Québec and the rest of Canada in relation to parental leave and childcare (see Langford *et al.*, 2017; Mahon *et al.*, 2016; McKay *et al.*, 2016).
6. Unpublished data from Statistics Canada Special Surveys Division, 2015.
7. It is important to note that the Swedish context is significantly different from the Canadian one, with many commentators noting that Sweden is a Social Democratic welfare regime with "policies to support working mothers, dual earner families and working fathers" while Canada, with the exception of the province of Québec, can be characterised as a Liberal Welfare regime, with "conservative and market-oriented governments attempting to fit fathers into leave policies, albeit in minimalist ways" (Baird and O'Brien, 2015, p. 213).
8. They also note: "It was not clear if this was a cause or consequence of fathers' extended leaves" (Duvander *et al.*, 2017b, p. 139).

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