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Is the Stay-At-Home Dad (SAHD) a Feminist Concept? A Genealogical, Relational, and Feminist Critique

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Abstract This article is a critical examination of the stay-at-home dad (SAHD) as a concept and set of practices in Canada and the United States (U.S.). It is informed by a feminist relational approach to practices of work and care, a genealogical approach to concepts, and by case study material from a 14-year qualitative and longitudinal research program on stay-at-home fathers and breadwinning mothers primarily in Canada, but more recently in both Canada and the U.S. I take up three theoretical and conceptual issues. First, I explicate the concepts of work, care, and choice that underpin the SAHD concept and I explore how these are taken up in government reporting and some research studies in Canada and the U.S. Second, drawing from my longitudinal research on stay-at-home fathers, I apply feminist and relational theoretical approaches to work, care, and choice and argue that this approach leads to specific theoretical and methodological implications for the study of SAHDs. Finally, I attempt to answer the question: Is the SAHD a feminist concept? I argue that while studies on SAHDs can offer important glimpses into possibilities of egalitarian family relationships and are fruitful sites for feminist analyses of family relationships, the SAHD concept is located in a conceptual net that includes binaries of work and care and individualized conceptions of choice. I thus question the utility of the SAHD as a feminist concept since the binaries that inform it have long been contested by feminist scholars.

Keywords Stay-at-home fathers · Breadwinning mothers · Feminism and families · Paid work and care work · Genealogies of concepts · Relational sociology · Qualitative methodologies

Introduction

Over the past decade, there has been more and more media, public, and scholarly attention to stay-at-home dads (SAHDs) in Canada and the United States (U.S.). Headlines such as “5 Reasons Dads Shouldn’t Work Outside the Home” (Lesser 2014), “More Fathers Staying at Home by Choice” (Miller 2014), and “Men Choosing Fatherhood Over Careers” (Landes 2012) have appeared in leading media outlets such as *Time* magazine, the *New York Times*, and *Forbes*. Government statistics cite growing numbers of SAHDs (Livingston 2013; Statistics Canada 2012; U.S. Census Bureau 2013) along with a correspondent rise in numbers of breadwinning mothers (Kramer et al. 2013; Meisenbach 2010; Statistics Canada 2009; Sussman and Bonnell 2006; Wang et al. 2013). In light of these changes, more and more researchers are studying SAHDs in Canada and the U.S. (e.g., Chesley 2011; Harrington et al. 2012; Latshaw 2011; Medved and Rawlins 2011; Ranson 2010; Rochlen et al. 2010; Solomon 2014), as well as in other countries, such as Belgium (Merla 2008), Chile (Olavarria 2003), and Australia (Stevens 2015). As discussed below, most studies define a SAHD as a father who leaves full-time paid work for intermittent or extended periods of time. Studies on SAHDs can offer important glimpses into pathways, potential, and possibilities of egalitarian family relationships and are fruitful sites for feminist analysis of family relationships. Yet, little attention has been given to the conceptual underpinnings of the SAHD or to how these cohere with approaches to work, care, and choice by

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feminist scholars (e.g., Ferree 1990, 2010; Folbre 1994, 2012; Garey 1999; Williams 2010). Indeed, questions about the fit between feminism and SAHDs have remained largely unexamined. As more and more feminist and family scholars focus on SAHD families in their research, this paper calls for a conceptual rethinking of the SAHD. While rooted in research on Canadian and U.S. families, it has important lessons for other countries where fathering and mothering practices are changing, where neoliberal policies are eroding family policies and supports, and where more and more researchers are focusing on fathering and primary caregiving.

This paper is a theoretical and conceptual one that is informed by feminist approaches to work, care, and choice and by a 14-year qualitative and longitudinal research program on stay-at-home fathers and breadwinning mothers primarily in Canada, but more recently in both Canada and the U.S. I take up three theoretical and conceptual issues. First, I explicate the concepts of work, care, and choice that underpin the SAHD concept and I explore how these are taken up in government reporting and research studies in Canada and the U.S. Second, drawing on case study material from my longitudinal research on stay-at-home fathers, I apply feminist theoretical approaches to work, care, and choice and argue that this approach leads to specific theoretical and methodological implications for the study of SAHDs. Finally, I attempt to answer the question: Is the SAHD a feminist concept?

My attention to the SAHD as a concept is informed by a relational approach to practices of work and care and a genealogical approach to concepts. In terms of relationality, it is rooted in a transdisciplinary and diverse field of relational theory, and some of its theoretical strands, including feminist theories on the ethics of care with their focus on *relational ontologies* (e.g., Held 2005; Kittay 1999; Lynch 2007; Ruddick 1995; Tronto 2013) where “relations of interdependence and dependence are a fundamental feature of our existence” (Robinson 2011, p. 12); relational sociology with its view of everyday practices as “dynamic, continuous, and processual ... unfolding relations” (Emirbayer 1997, p. 281; see also Powell and Dépelteau 2013; Somers 1994, 1998); and work influenced by feminist science studies and their contestation of binaries (e.g., Haraway 1991, 1997). By binaries, I am referring to what Clarke and Olesen (1999, p. 17) call “two-sided frameworks”; while these binaries are commonly posited as relating to, for example, male/female, subject/object, and nature/culture, these efforts at “complicating the binaries” (Clarke and Olesen 1999, p. 8), they have also been taken up in rethinking separations, divisions, and binaries of work and care (Bowlby et al. 2010; Doucet 2013a; Krull 2011).

With regard to genealogies, this paper and its conceptual project are informed by Margaret Somers’ (2008, p.172) “historical sociology of concept formation,” which is the “work of turning social science back on itself to examine often taken-for-granted conceptual tools of research.” This entails an

analysis of concepts as “words in their sites” (Hacking 2002, p. 24), or within “a conceptual net” or “conceptual configuration” (Somers 2008, p. 267); that is, concepts are “not only related to each other in the weak sense of being contiguous; they are also ontologically related” and “fit” together “(l)ike a point and a line in basic geometry” (Somers 2008, p. 267). In this paper, my focus is on the fit between concepts of the SAHD, work, care, and choice.

This paper is divided into three sections. The first section provides a brief overview of informing literatures, including selected feminist insights on work, and care, and choice, and research on SAHDs. Using these literatures as theoretical lenses, I then review how research studies and well-cited statistics on SAHDs in Canada and the U.S. define and research SAHDs. The second section of the paper builds from my own case study material collected over 14 years on SAHDs and applies a feminist and relational approach to concepts of work, care, and choice. I argue that this approach leads to a rethinking of current methodological and theoretical approaches to SAHDs. Finally, the third section addresses the question of the SAHD as a feminist concept. Unless otherwise noted, the literature reviewed in this paper, the studies cited, and the informing case study material, are from Canada and the U.S.

Feminist Approaches to Work and Care

Since the 1980s, feminist scholars have amply explored interrelationships between home and work, paid and unpaid work, and public and private spheres for women (e.g., Ferree 1990; Glucksmann 1995, 2009; Lamphere 1987; Zavella 1987). Feminist approaches to gender, paid work, and care work have highlighted interconnections between families and other social institutions, including workplaces, state policies, and communities, so that families are viewed “not as a separate sphere at all, but as only one of a number of interlinked institutions where gender relations are constructed, reproduced, and transformed” (Ferree 2010, p. 421). As Lynn Uttal (2009, p.134) notes: “One of the fundamental, yet underacknowledged contributions of feminist thought to family studies is its attention to how families are intertwined with communities and contexts” (see also Goldberg 2013; Perry-Jenkins et al. 2013).

Parallel to this attention to linkages between families and other institutions, there has been a contestation of clear divisions between paid work and care work. Garey’s (1999, p. 164) work on how mothers weave together work and care is especially instructive here in that rather than viewing parenthood and paid work as “opposed categories,” she views these in constant relationship with one another and in “changing patterns over the life course.” While feminists have sought to make the interconnections between work and care and multiple institutions and family life visible, this theoretical

approach, as I argue in the next section of this paper, has largely fallen flat in the study of SAHDs.

Feminism and Stay-At-Home Fathers

Feminism's attention to fathering has slowly evolved, beginning in the 1980s with growing calls for men to take an active part in caregiving, which was informed by the view that women's socio-economic equality with men is dependent on men's participation in domestic life (e.g., Ruddick 1995; Young 1984). This sustained attention by feminist scholars on the importance of men's involvement in care work has led to a burgeoning body of fathering scholarship by feminist and family scholars (e.g., Dermott 2008; Dowd 2012; Featherstone 2009; Kaufman 2013; Miller 2011; Williams 2010). Within this body of work, there has been a small but growing focus on SAHDs, as these households provide important lessons on shifting gender relations and the possibilities and difficulties of achieving gender equality in paid and unpaid work. Yet some of these studies inadvertently rely on binaries between work and care, on concepts of choice as separate from the contexts within which they are enacted, and on methods that further entrench the idea that men's choices can be individualized and studied apart from the relations within which these choices are constituted. These points can be demonstrated by looking at selected recent statistics and the studies on SAHDs that draw upon these statistics.

In contextualizing the statistics and studies that are reviewed here, as well as the informing case study material below, it is important to provide the socio-cultural contexts for this paper. As indicated in the Introduction of this article, both Canada and the U.S. have seen significant rises in SAHDs and breadwinning mothers. Both countries also lack a national childcare program (see Langford et al. 2016; Warner 2013), with the exception of the Canadian province of Québec, which has a government-subsidized childcare program. Canada and the U.S. differ, however, in their approach to parental leave provisions. The U.S. Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 grants eligible employees (both male and female) 12 weeks of unpaid leave following the birth or adoption of a child; however, the Department of Labor estimates that only 60 % of the U.S. labour force is covered by this policy, leaving many without access to protected family leave (Rehel 2014). Canada has a more comprehensive parental leave program, and since 2001 many Canadians in standard full-time employment have access to 15 weeks of maternity benefits and 35 weeks of parental leave benefits (with varying rates of leave time and pay depending on province) (see Doucet et al. 2015). While this appears to be a generous provision, a full quarter to a third of Canadian mothers and an unknown number of fathers (as Statistics Canada does not collect data on the ineligibility of fathers) are consistently ineligible for parental leave benefits

(see Doucet and McKay 2016). This information about childcare and parental leave help to contextualize men's work-care patterns and their *choices* to be at home.

Most statistical analyses and qualitative research studies of SAHDs in Canada and the U.S. are informed by the assumptions that SAHDs do not work, do not have a connection to the labour market, and that, as a group, they can be divided between fathers who are home by choice and those who are home through forced choice or the termination of employment. Government statistics in Canada and the U.S., for example, are informed by specific concepts of the SAHD that have an implicit, and sometimes explicit, assumption that fathers who are home have chosen to care for family rather than to engage in paid work. Canada's main government statistical body, Statistics Canada, defines a SAHD family as a married couple with at least one dependent child where a mother is employed and a father is not employed for 1 year (i.e., not going to school and not looking for work but able to work) (Statistics Canada 2011). According to their definition and conceptual approach, in 2010 there were 60,875 Canadian SAHDs, which means that men constituted 13 % of all stay-at-home parents (Statistics Canada 2011).

The U.S. Census Bureau and Current Population Study data define a SAHD in a similar way to Statistics Canada: as a married father with children, who has been unemployed and not looking for work for more than 1 year because he is taking care of his home and family (Kramer et al. 2013; U.S. Census Bureau 2012). These definitions underestimate the numbers of fathers who are caring for children on a regular basis as they are underpinned by a binary between paid work and care work; notably, they exclude fathers who have some connection to paid work, including men who work part-time or in irregular or flexible work, as well as fathers who work at home, are unemployed job seekers, are underemployed and discouraged workers, and fathers who are students (see Latshaw 2011). Moreover, these government statistics, which fuel many research projects in both Canada and the U.S., are hetero-normative and nuclear family-centric in that they exclude lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) families, as well as men who are single, divorced, or living in a cohabiting union. According to this definition, in 2012 there were 189,000 SAHDs (compared to 105,000 in 2002), which is 3 % of all stay-at-home parents (U.S. Census Bureau 2013). It is worth noting here that the percentage of fathers in comparison to all stay-at-home parents is lower in the U.S. than Canada because the U.S. Census Bureau collects data on the reason that fathers are at home and distinguishes between fathers who could not find work and fathers who state that they are home caring for their children. Statistics Canada, on the other hand, only collects data on fathers who are not employed and not looking for work.

A wider, but still limited definition of a SAHD is the one used by the U.S. Pew Center, a nonpartisan U.S. think tank, which has published major reports on SAHDs and

breadwinning mothers, bringing widespread public and media attention to these issues (Livingston 2014; Wang et al. 2013). The Pew Center's definition includes men not employed for pay at all in the prior year and living at home with dependent children younger than 18. Unlike the Canadian and U.S. government statistics, the Pew Center data includes ill and disabled fathers and fathers who are looking for work. This is a wider and more inclusive definition as it is not contingent on marital status, having a spouse or partner of the opposite sex, or on the work status of the spouse or partner. At the same time, it excludes fathers who engage in some paid work. According to the Pew Center definition, there were over 2 million SAHDs in the U.S. in 2012, constituting 16 % of all stay-at-home parents.

A third definition is one that appears in many qualitative research studies where the focus is on fathers who *choose* to be at home; this definition is used, for example, in a highly publicized 2014 report by the Boston College Center of Work that focuses only on fathers who had chosen to be at home rather than fathers who were “‘forced’ into the role of primary caregiver” (Harrington et al. 2012, p. 8; see also Farough 2015; Solomon 2014). Other studies draw a distinction between SAHDs who are home by choice and those who are forced to be at home through job loss and include both groups of SAHDs in their research (e.g., Chesley 2011; Kramer et al. 2013; Livingston 2014). Yet, this distinction between SAHDs who *choose* to be at home and those who are home through *forced choice* continues to inadvertently hold in place binaries of work and care. Moreover, this distinction is also premised on the conception of a seemingly unstructured choice made at one moment in time rather than viewing choices as unfolding, relational, and shifting processes across time. As I argue below, this approach is at odds with a broad body of feminist and sociological scholarship on choice.

Feminist and Sociological Perspectives on Choice

Feminist scholarship and critical sociological scholarship have problematized the concept of choice as a way of theorizing people's actions and everyday practices, pointing to how a focus on choices can downplay the structured constitution of these choices. These critical interventions on choice are cross-disciplinary ones. In feminist economics and feminist philosophy, for example, there have been critiques of rational choice theory and liberal theory, including liberal feminist political theories that emphasize autonomy, choice, and “the extreme individualism embedded in the rational actor” model (Folbre 1994, p. 28; see also Friedman 2000).

In sociological theory, longstanding debates about the relationship between structure and agency have led to reflections on the loosening of the structural conditions of choices in late twentieth and early twenty-first-century societies, so that, for

some, there are possibilities of what has been called a *choice biography* (Beck 1992), an *individualization thesis* (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995), and a *reflexive project of self* (Giddens 1991), in which people reflexively enact their identities. These ideas have, however, been heavily critiqued by family and feminist sociologists (e.g., Bauman 2001; Brannen and Nilsen 2005). Brannen and Nilsen (2005), for example, drawing on the classic sociological arguments of Mills (1959), point to how people's lives and the narratives they tell are often “characterized by being unable to make sense of the connections between their own personal lives and the structural forces that shaped their lives” (Brannen and Nilsen 2005, p. 423). This does not mean, they argue, that these structural forces are not in play, but rather that “the structural side of life is more often expressed in the silences which punctuate narratives” (Brannen and Nilsen 2005, p. 423).

In feminist scholarship on families, work, and care, there has been ample attention to the limitations of a focus on choice. Garey's (1999) work is noteworthy again as she highlights how women's employment reflects “a pattern not of their choosing” (p. 106). In her view, “the metaphor of ‘weaving’ better represents the actions and intentions of employed women with children than the current dominant model of individual orientation that pervades discussions of work and family” (Garey 1999, p. 192; see also Damaske 2011; Ferree 1990; Stone 2007, 2008; Williams 2010).

A Feminist and Relational Approach to Work, Care, and Choice: A Case Study Example

This section of the paper draws on case study material from a 14-year-long qualitative and longitudinal research program conducted mainly in Canada, but also recently in the U.S., that included in-depth interviews with breadwinning mothers and fathers who partially or fully self-define or are defined by their partners as a SAHD (Doucet 2004, 2006, 2013a, b, 2015). The longitudinal case study material that informs this article is comprised of two interlocking research projects wherein 134 interviews (97 individual interviews and 37 couple interviews) were conducted with 112 individuals. The two studies are: (a) Study A, a qualitative research study (2000–2014) with 70 Canadian stay-at-home fathers (at home for at least 1 year) that included interviews with fathers and couples (father/mother) interviewed between 2000 and 2004, and follow-up interviews between 9 and 14 years later with six households (for details see Doucet 2006, 2015); and (b) Study B, a qualitative research study (2008–2014) of primary breadwinning mothers in Canada and the U.S. that included in-depth interviews with 14 breadwinning mothers and their husbands/partners who self-identified as SAHDs (individual and couple interviews), and follow-up interviews 3 to 5 years later with six of these mother/father couples (individual interviews and couple interviews)

(Doucet 2013a, 2014, 2016). The samples for both studies were mainly white and middle and lower-middle class, but there was also some diversity of class, ethnicity, and sexuality. I personally conducted all 134 of the research interviews for these studies with the informing view that research interviews constitute “privileged moment(s)” of knowledge construction (Bourdieu et al. 1999, p. 615). All interviews lasted between 60 and 90 min with return visits to households taking 3 to 5 h for individual and couple interviews. This research program was informed at the outset by feminist theoretical insights on paid and unpaid work; across 14 years, my evolving feminist, relational, and genealogical approach to concepts led me to critical insights on work, care, and choice. I explore some of those insights below.

A Weaving of Work and Care Across Time

From the longitudinal research program and its two connected studies, I identified three categories for father's approaches to paid work. These three categories of SAHDs are:

- (a). **Fathers in transition.** This category included fathers who were laid off, re-thinking their career path or jobs, re-training/studying, or who had left work as they were in low level or unsatisfying jobs that did not justify the high cost of childcare services. They were *choosing* or willing to be the home-based parent for a period of time.
- (b). **Fathers working flexibly, at home, self-employed, freelance, in part-time jobs.** This group of fathers remained tied to the labor market in flexible, part-time, or intermittent ways. They were the household's supplementary earners and made their earning capacity a secondary priority while they gave more attention to the household's caring responsibilities.
- (c). **Fathers taking a break from paid work.** These fathers had achieved at least some of their career goals and were looking for other forms of fulfillment, including caring for their children, alternative work, or leisure interests (e.g., travel, sports, writing, or blogging). There was class privilege inherent in this category in that these SAHDs could afford to have one parent at home without pay for a time or a sudden inheritance had made it possible to reconsider work commitments. Fathers with illnesses or disabilities were also included in this category, thus indicating that these can be temporary or permanent positioning.

While these three categories have been consistent ones across my 14-year research program, my approach to these categories has shifted. That is, while my earlier work identified, and argued for, three distinct categories of fathers' work-care patterns (see Doucet 2004, 2006; Doucet and Merla 2007), my more recent work argues that these patterns shift and change across time so that the majority of fathers fit into

more than one work and caregiving pattern at any one time (see Doucet 2013a, 2014, 2016). Nevertheless, while my approach to the categories has changed, what has stayed firm is my argument from the analysis of my research interviews that all SAHDs in both Canada and the U.S. maintain some formal or informal, firm or loose connection to the labor market or they are in a class position that allows them to relinquish that connection for a short time. Moreover, my longitudinal research (in both Studies A and B) has led me towards a more fluid and mobile conceptualization of the relations between work and care and the recognition that most fathers' (and mothers') work-care patterns shifted over time so that there was a weaving between care and work patterns for individuals and between partners.

An excellent example of this inter-weaving between patterns of work and care and between partners comes from Theo and Lisa from Ottawa, Canada. They are both engineers and parents of four children, all 1 year apart in age; they were interviewed as part of Study A in 2004 and then again in 2014. When I interviewed them the first time, Theo had taken three different parental leaves for their first three children (6 weeks, 10 weeks, and 25 weeks). His job was about to be phased out and so he took his full parental leave entitlement (35 weeks) with their fourth child, and then took a severance package. He was at home for the next 5 years. During that time, he was the coordinator of a local playgroup, a volunteer in his children's classrooms and at extra-curricular activities, and he also kept up his connections with his engineering colleagues, so that by 2006 he had laid the groundwork to launch his own company. He also did renovation work on their house, which they then sold before moving into a larger house, where Theo took on more renovation work as a way of increasing their home equity and long-term financial security. When Theo returned to full-time work in 2006, Lisa began to take 2 months of unpaid work each summer so as to have a home-based parent in the summer months. They thus moved from a SAHD/work-at-home dad situation to one where he worked full time and she worked more flexibly around the children's needs and schedules (Doucet 2014, 2015).

Fathers' Choices: Relational, Structured, Unfolding Processes

Across 14 years of studying SAHDs, I have asked 84 stay-at-home fathers “How did you come to be here?” and in follow-up interviews, I asked “Remind me why you made the decision you did?” In my interviews with the female partners of SAHDs, I asked them about their family choices with regard to why they had arranged their lives as they did, with her working and him being at home or more home-based. The final question I asked in all my interviews was “In your ideal world, what would your working and parenting life look like?” My research has highlighted how, as both individuals

and couples, parents had a complex series of reasons constituted by relational and structural entanglements that attempted to explain fathers' choices to be SAHDs. From multiple interviews within households—with mothers, fathers, and couples—my research demonstrates that there are multiple reasons for the decisions of fathers to forgo full-time paid work for a time. Below I detail three of my key findings about fathers' choices.

Relationally Constituted Choices

Fathers' choices and decisions to be at home were relational ones made in concert with their wives or partners. My earlier work on SAHDs reveals that, with very few exceptions, fathers mentioned the situation of their partner in the first few lines of that response. That is, most SAHDs provided openings that began something along the lines given by Joe, a Canadian indigenous father at home with two preschool daughters, who started his interview in 2003 by explaining: *I wasn't working. Well, she decided. She said, "I'm pregnant, and one of us has to stay at home with the baby." She said, "I don't want a daycare." I agreed. I said, "Okay, you make a lot more money than I can." So that's when it started.* (Doucet 2006, p. 216).

More recently, in multiple interviews conducted between 2009 and 2012, the decision to stay at home for Geoff (a Canadian laid-off factory worker who became a part-time school bus driver) was described by him and his wife, Astrid, as one based on four inter-related factors: his wife's permanent job with benefits, his being laid off, their ability (and frugality) to live on one income for a short period of time (before he took part-time work), and the high cost of daycare. In their joint interview in 2009, Astrid, a high school teacher, pointed to the cost of daycare as a key reason:

Part of our decision for Geoff to stay home with them was the fact that ... she [their childcare provider] had informed us when I went on maternity leave the second time that she had planned to retire. So we sort of used her numbers as a basis, and I talked to some of my coworkers about what they paid for [childcare]. And we knew that it was going to be, you know, significantly more than what she charged. So that played a role in the decision (Doucet 2014, p. 12).

Geoff's account in 2009, confirmed in a revisit interview in 2012, was that it was a combination of: her career, his job loss, and his ability to work part-time in a job that enabled him to take both daughters with him (driving a school bus).

A striking finding from both research studies was that *all* of the SAHDs with partners or wives mentioned their partners' work and the relational context of decision-making in their narrations of their decisions to stay home. The relationality

of decision-making was also highlighted by how narratives were constituted within larger sets of structural relations.

The Choice was Made for us

The complexities of and constraints on choice did not emerge immediately in my interviews with mothers and fathers, but arose through reflections by both partners throughout their interviews. That is, approaching the question through multiple angles with different viewpoints and across time provided openings into the complexities of choice within specific and constantly moving temporal, relational, and structured constraints that brought together household negotiations, state policies, and work/family policies and contexts. In Study B, for example, Christopher, a U.S. SAHD of four living in Massachusetts (interviewed in 2009 and 2014), mentioned several reasons for his choice to be at home: his wife's career, his limited work options, the cost of daycare, and the number (four) and ages of children (infants and pre-schoolers). As he told me in his second individual interview in 2014: *The choice was made for us. She has the job with benefits. Since college, I have been doing contract work. We had four children under the age of five. Daycare would have eaten up all her salary. It just made sense for me to be the one at home* (Doucet 2016).

Also in Study B, Guillermo, a Canadian-Latino father of three, whose wife is in the Canadian foreign service, also pointed to how their constant moves and the cost of daycare for three children influenced their choices: *[O]nce you're past the \$30,000 or so [for childcare costs], we kind of just say, well, then it's just not worth it* (Doucet 2014, p. 15).

Choices Across Time, Choice as Process

My revisit interviews with six Study B families brought wider perspectives to choices and decision-making. Choice no longer seemed to be a stable and singular end product, but rather a shifting set of processes and practices. In those interviews, all of the fathers indicated a readiness to return to work, while all six women expressed concern about *how* to balance afterschool care, chauffeuring children to extra-curricular activities, and the cost of summer camps. As Callista, a U.S. finance banker living in a small town outside New York city told me when I returned to interview her 5 years later, having a parent at home was greatly valued: *I love having him at home with the kids ... I feel like he keeps everything running smoothly in our lives* (Doucet 2014, p. 18).

In Study B, 100 % of fathers and mothers mentioned their partners' job and breadwinning capacity and 36 % referred to his job loss or unemployment as two key reasons for fathers becoming SAHDs. Yet, my research also indicates (see Doucet 2006, 2014, 2016) that fathers and mothers cited multiple reasons for fathers being SAHDs, or the more home-based working parent, and for family decisions to support that

model of work and care. All of these choices emerged from relational processes that drew together both positive and negative forces that led fathers to forgo full-time paid work.

Work, Care, and Choice Tapestries: Relationalities Rather than Fixity

While the points made above, from selected longitudinal case study material, focus on work and care, on the one hand, and choice, on the other, as two separate tracks of findings, I argue that they are deeply connected as fathers' approaches to work and care are entangled with the choices they make and the conditions of possibility that structure those choices. Moreover, choice is not a singular product but a process of multiple, constantly intra-acting threads that are constituted in relationships and in shifting temporal, spatial, local/global, and socio-cultural processes (Garey 1999). My review of feminist literatures on work, care, and choice and my case study material leads me to argue that SAHDs' practices of paid work and care cohere with feminist scholarship on families, which has noted how women's lives are marked by an *interweaving* of work and care (Garey 1999) and shifting temporalities and relationalities rather than binaries of work, care, and choices. As Garey (1999) notes in her concept of *sequencing*, it is important to recognize "concepts of continuity and relationship of work and care" and "changing patterns over the life course" (p. 164). Just as she argued that the women she interviewed "want to combine employment and motherhood" (Garey 1999, p. 164), these findings should also be extended to the lives of fathers who do not choose to be at home or to work, but rather seek to find ways of doing both. Moreover, men retain a connection to paid work partly because, as others have argued, earning and breadwinning remain a central part of hegemonic masculinities and men's identities (see Doucet 2006; Latshaw 2011; Townsend 2002; Williams 2010). At the same time, men are moving closer to an intertwining of work and childcare that has long been associated with women, a situation that has been made more urgent by shifting economic conditions, the costs of "concerted cultivation" (Lareau 2011, p. 2), and increasing difficulties to sustain reasonable standards of living into retirement. In short, there is a gap between, on the one hand, feminist scholarship on interconnections between work and care and on structured choices and, on the other hand, scholarship and statistical reporting on SAHDs in Canada and the U.S.

There are also methodological implications that emerge from my discussion of choice in this paper. Feminist research calls for a focus not on individuals but on "(h)ow *gender relations* structure family dynamics and interactions with other social institutions" (Allen et al. 2013, p. 139; see also Goldberg 2013; Perry-Jenkins et al. 2013). These relational and negotiated dimensions of parental choices related to work, care, and choice raise methodological issues for research on

SAHDs. Most research to date has relied on individual face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, or online surveys with fathers only (Fischer and Anderson 2012; Rochlen et al. 2010; Solomon 2014) or on separate interviews with mothers and fathers (Chesley 2011; Farough 2015; Harrington et al. 2012; Medved and Rawlins 2011), which may downplay the relationally constituted and performative aspects of narratives (see Doucet 2008; Presser 2005). This paper points to the importance of supplementing fathers' individual interviews with couple interviews because responsibilities for care, and choices about work and care, are relational processes that require methods that can tap into these relational and negotiated processes (see also Bjørnholt and Farstad 2014; Fox 2009; Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard 2010).

Is the SAHD a Feminist Concept?

There are at least two concerns that need to be taken into account when we consider the question of the SAHD and whether it can be regarded as a feminist concept. The first relates to questions about gender and the costs of care; the second relates to feminist theorizing on models of breadwinning and care.

Gender and the Costs of Care

While there is increasing attention to SAHDs by feminist researchers because of the promise and potential they offer to gender egalitarian domestic labour, very little attention has been paid by feminist family researchers to how to conceptualize men's disadvantages and potential loss of (male) power as a result of being at home for several years with little or minimal connection to paid work and its socio-economic benefits. How should feminist scholars address the issues of potential losses for men from prioritizing caregiving when it is clear that men, in general, still reap a "patriarchal dividend" (Connell 2005, p.77) from *not* caring. There is a large body of work detailing how the weighing of the balance of household labour on the side of women has been very costly to many women (Budig et al. 2012; England and Folbre 1999), and this has led to the understandable need for sociologists to continually "emphasize links between parts of a social system" and to "trace how gender inequality in jobs affects gender inequality in the family, and vice versa" (England 2010, p. 162). Yet, there has been little attention paid to how this plays out for men who give up full-time paid work.

One set of feminist lenses that are useful for theorizing SAHDs' potential disadvantages are intersectionality theories, which arose partly from attending to differences between women, but also from the recognition of commonalities between women and men (Collins 2004; hooks 2004). These commonalities are present when men and women are both

caregivers and when issues of gender may be less central than “vulnerabilities” in carer/cared-for relations when men or women are caregivers (Fineman 2009, p. 107). Moreover, significant class implications and their wider consequences underpinning the SAHD, as a concept and as practices, have remained largely unexplored in research on SAHDs.

The SAHD and Breadwinner/Caregiver Models

A second issue to consider when thinking about the SAHD as a feminist concept is to ask: How does the SAHD concept relate to wider feminist debates about gender equality in caregiving and breadwinning? One line of thinking is to draw on Fraser's (1994, 1997) well-known argument against a male breadwinner model, which is based on an ideology of separate gender roles with men working full time outside the home and women responsible for domestic and reproductive activities. In contrast to this model, Fraser and many other feminist scholars have argued for a universal caregiver model or dual-earner/dual-carer model (see also Gornick and Meyers 2009), which aims at transforming gender roles inside and outside the labour market by promoting men's and women's equal or symmetrical engagement in paid and unpaid work.

I would argue that the SAHD concept is yet another version of the male breadwinner model; it reverses the gender but leaves the principles and the problem of one breadwinner and one caregiver largely intact. As I have argued elsewhere (see Doucet 2006, 2013b), this can sometimes lead to a situation where the mother is the primary breadwinner and remains primary or shared caregiver, thus further exacerbating, rather than alleviating, gender inequalities. That is, while scholarly research and media reporting often collapse the categories of SAHD and primary caregiver (see Harrington et al. 2012; Solomon 2014), these are not necessarily synonymous (see also Chesley 2011). This complicates feminist attention to SAHDs as a potential pathway towards greater gender equality in paid and unpaid work, and works against longstanding feminist arguments against a primary breadwinner/primary caregiver model of work and care.

Conclusions

Feminist research on families offers a strong foundation for thinking about work and care and multiple social institutions as interconnected and mutually shaping, but these insights have not yet filtered into government accounting of SAHDs and the growing number of research studies that posit a concept of a SAHD who is at home by choice. Informed by a feminist and relational approach to practices and a genealogical approach to concepts, this paper posits that the SAHD concept is located in a conceptual net that includes binaries

of work and care and individualized conceptions of choice. The paper makes four key arguments.

First, I argue that public accounts of SAHDs and recent academic studies have used a concept of SAHD that is premised on what I refer to as work/care binaries. Counter to this, I argue that all SAHDs maintain some formal or informal connection to the labour market that is premised on past connections, future aspirations, a likely dependence on a partner in paid employment, and particular conditions of possibility that enable or force one parent to forgo full-time paid work for a specific time period.

Second, I argue that current conceptualizations of SAHDs who are home by choice play down longstanding feminist and sociological arguments about choices that are structured, or constituted, by state and workplace structures, ideologies, and discourses. Fathers' choices to be at home or to opt out of the labour market are not unfettered choices but reveal a complex tapestry of decision-making moments across time, ongoing family negotiations, children's changing needs, and increases in non-standardized work arrangements in the context of ongoing neoliberal restructuring. Notably, fathers face different choices in countries such as Sweden where the SAHD concept does not exist because family and labour market policies support varied combinations of paid work and care work, including long parental leaves, paternity leave, and high quality daycare (Almqvist and Duvander 2014; Duvander [personal communication, June 11, 2012]). It follows from this argument that the focus of researchers should be less on a division between fathers who are home by choice and those who are not, but more on the conditions of possibility that makes choices possible.

My third argument is a methodological one. Here, I point to the importance of data collection methods and the role they play in generating narratives of fathers' choices. Wider research that explores multiple narratives, including interviews with partners and with couples, calls into question the transparency of accounts of fathers who may highlight the choice to be at home. Accounts from partners and across time can moderate what I have elsewhere called “*heroic narratives*” (Doucet 2008, p. 80), in which fathers may seek to emphasize a positive and intentional SAHD narrative at a time when there is ample media, public, and scholarly attention to SAHDs and their potential social benefits to families. Greater attention needs to be given by researchers to the methodological complexities of generating and analysing stories of individual and relational choices.

My fourth argument is that the SAHD is a specific cultural and historical construct and a complex one that requires greater attention by feminists researching family relationships. On the one hand, it points to the radical potential for gendered shifts in caregiving responsibilities, as men's time at home can engender significant personal, political, and ideological shifts in gendered caregiving and breadwinning (see Chesley 2011;

Doucet 2006; Wall 2014; Wall and O'Brien 2016). On the other hand, it represents a household response in Canada and the U.S. to ongoing neoliberal restructuring that includes the downloading of care responsibilities to households and away from more publicly framed solutions for the care of children, including parental leave and paternity leave, that could benefit all social classes. Feminist attention to intersectionality is an important lens, here, in thinking about differences between households (see Lloyd et al. 2009; McCall 2005). Indeed, I would argue that greater feminist scholarly and policy attention must be given to how the SAHD, as a concept and as practices, may be invisibly entwined with growing class inequalities between households in Canada and the U.S., and possibly in other countries.

As more and more feminist and family researchers look to SAHDs as offering evidence of moves towards gender equality and gendered social change, this paper is a plea for a conceptual pause and caution. If feminist family scholars continue to accept and apply in their research projects a concept of the SAHD premised on a division between men who choose to care and men who choose to work, then this raises questions about how this position aligns with or contradicts longstanding feminist contributions about the inseparability between work and care, the structuring of women's (and men's) work-care choices, and feminist strategies aimed at finding public and collective, rather than private and individualized, solutions for family caregiving needs. In calling into question binaries such as work and care, and choice and *forced choice*, I thus question the utility of the SAHD as a feminist concept since the binaries that inform it have long been contested by feminist scholars.

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