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‘That’s my job’: Accounting for division of labour amongst heterosexual first time parents

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Abstract

For heterosexual couples who enter into parenthood, having a first child often has a significant impact on the ways in which their lives are organised. Importantly, women typically take on the greatest share of household and care work, reflecting broader cultural norms in relation to gender. Drawing on case studies of four Australian heterosexual couples, this article examines the ways in which the couples discussed the distribution of household and care work. By tracking the same couples from prior to pregnancy to after the birth of their child, we are able to focus on expectations and ideals in relation to unpaid and paid work, and how these relate to what happens in practice. The cases suggest four key issues, namely 1) the positioning of household and care work as not being work, 2) the positioning of women as 'lucky' if their male partner is 'helpful', 3) the primary orientation of men towards earning a paid income as a way of providing for their family, and 4) the unequal distribution of caring responsibility. The paper concludes by considering the implications of these issues with regard to how the division of labour is understood in the context of heterosexual first time parents.

Keywords: division of labour, gender, first time parenting, heterosexual couples, care work, case studies

Introduction

Feminist theorists in western countries have long critiqued the unequal division of household and childcare labour amongst heterosexual couples who are parents (e.g. Chodorow, 1978; Friedan, 1963; Hochschild with Machung, 1989; Rich, 1976). In terms of first-time parenthood specifically, many have suggested that parenthood produces or increases gender inequalities (e.g. Fox, 2001; 2009; Grunow & Evertsson, 2016; Sevón, 2012; Yavorsky, Kamp Dush, & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2015). Researchers have found that the division of labour is most gendered in households with very young children, largely as a result of many women stopping or pausing paid work and most men continuing in paid work (Craig & Mullan, 2011). These gender divisions are significant in that to some extent they carry on throughout life (Grunow & Veltkamp, 2016; Martin et al., 2014). These divisions, with women on average responsible for far more unpaid care and household work than their male partners (e.g. OECD, 2014), continue despite broader social changes, including the movement of middle class women into the paid workforce.

Although individual parents may attempt to challenge dominant gender norms, ultimately they may feel they are judged (and may judge themselves) by the expectations that circulate with regard to their gender, thus impacting on the ways they parent in practice. As Goodwin and Huppertz write in relation to images of the 'good mother' specifically, '[t]hese images persist in public policy, the media, popular culture and workplaces, and saturate everyday practices and interactions' (2010, p. 1). Whilst there are competing ideologies about what makes a 'good mother', dominant understandings of being a 'good mother' include being the primary carer for children and being responsible for the management of children's lives (e.g. medical

appointments, what they eat, who cares for them when mothers are at work etc), regardless of women's paid employment status or that of their partner.

Yet despite the emphasis upon primary caregiving as part of the image of what constitutes a 'good mother', primary caregiving typically comes at the cost of paid work, which can impact upon how women are viewed more broadly. An attitudinal study about maternity leave with mostly US and UK participants, for example, found that women who took maternity leave were seen as less competent at work, however women who did not take maternity leave were viewed as worse parents and partners (Morgenroth & Heilman, 2017). Analysis of Australian data from the *Household, Income, and Labour Dynamics in Australia* (HILDA) survey found that following the birth of their first child, women's views on motherhood became more traditional, more strongly agreeing that a woman's main role is being a mother, mothers should not work unless they really need the money, and children under three should not be in childcare for five days a week (Baxter et al., 2015), essentially positioning a 'good mother' as one whose life is framed around being with (and being responsible for) her child(ren).

Men are also impacted on by persisting gender norms in relation to parenting. Whilst there has been increasing attention to the idea of the 'involved father' since the 1970s, ultimately men are still primarily expected to contribute to their children's lives by earning money to support their families (e.g. Eerola, 2014; Hunter, Riggs & Augoustinos, 2017; Kushner et al., 2017; Shirani, Henwood, & Coltart, 2013). Indeed, a recent Australian study found that men's paid work hours *increase* by four and a half hours when becoming a parent, even when controlling for other factors such as career stage (Gray, 2013). Thus, whilst there is a balance needed between providing in terms of

finances and care, generally children and care work are fitted in around paid work for men (e.g. Carlson, Kendall, & Edleson, 2015/2016; Miller, 2012). As such, being viewed as a 'good father' requires significantly less care work than being a 'good mother'. For example, as Rose and colleagues (2015) found in their study of 11 heterosexual couples with 6-8 month old babies in Australia, mothers and fathers both viewed fathers as being 'involved' even when they rarely engaged in child care tasks they did not like. Furthermore, an analysis of Australian data showed that women in heterosexual couples had more traditional attitudes towards fatherhood after becoming parents, including being less likely to agree that fathers should be involved in as much care work as mothers (Buchler, Perales, & Baxter, 2017).

These gender norms, attitudes, and practices influence and are influenced by broader institutional frameworks, such as policies surrounding parental leave, work flexibility, and part-time work. For example, although there is an increasing (although still largely lacking) provision of paid parental leave in many western countries (OECD, 2017b), the uptake of this is impacted on by gendered ideals. Australia was one of the last countries in the OECD to introduce a national paid parental leave scheme (in 2011), leaving only the US without such a scheme (Newsome, 2017). The current structure of this scheme in Australia is complex, does not cover all workers, and is arguably still based on a female caregiver/male breadwinner model. In addition, paid parental leave is not always taken even if available (Martin et al., 2014). A total of a maximum of 20 weeks paid leave is available per family. Parental Leave Pay is available to birth mothers, adopting parents, or 'another person caring for the child under exceptional circumstances', at a minimum wage for a maximum of 18 weeks. Dad and Partner Pay has also been available since 2013, although only at a minimum wage for 2 weeks (for full details see Department of

Human Services, 2017). Whilst these paid parental leave schemes are likely to benefit many families, they still carry with them deeply gendered assumptions about the roles of women and men with children, and are based on heterosexual couple families.

Indeed, Newsome (2017) argues that the national scheme was only able to be introduced in the first place because female leaders of political associations lobbying for paid parental leave relied on the framing of women as needing to be supported in their role as mothers. An evaluation of the impact of paid parental leave in Australia found that it did not have an impact on the share of childcare, housework or total household work undertaken by mothers and their partners at 12 months following the birth (Martin et al., 2014).

In addition, whilst the availability of part-time work has increased, it is primarily women who undertake this (OECD, 2017c), often due to child care responsibilities (e.g. Craig & Sawrikar, 2009). In the context of our study in Australia, women's engagement in part-time work due to child care responsibilities is much higher than most other OECD countries (OECD, 2017a). The OECD (2017a) found that of women in Australia who have partners and children, and are in paid work, 45% are employed part time, with 80% saying this is for family reasons. This is, at least in part, a reflection of the entrenched gender norms in Australia, including in relation to government policy often supporting the breadwinner/caregiver model, and the high cost of formal childcare. Baxter and colleagues (2015) argue that the high availability of part-time work in Australia means that women are more likely to engage in both paid work and care work, and that ultimately this means they are primarily responsible for the care of their child(ren).

In the present paper we take up the concerns above through consideration of four case studies derived from our Australian longitudinal qualitative study focused on first time parenting amongst heterosexual couples. The cases focus on how the couples discuss the division of household labor and care for a baby, and how the latter is often constructed as not being work. Our approach, as elaborated in the discussion, both echoes previous research about the undervaluing of direct care work, whilst also adding something new in terms of suggesting that a focus on 'providing' may be a useful way to reorient public discussion so that unpaid care work is more greatly valued and recognised.

Method

This article draws on an ongoing qualitative longitudinal study examining the experiences of ten heterosexual couples through their journey to conception, pregnancy, and birth. The study is focused on desires to have children, decision-making and expectations related to planning for a first child, and subsequent experiences during pregnancy and after the child is born. More details about the broader study and sample are available in our other publications (Authors, 2016; 2017). Ethics approval was granted by the authors' university [details removed for blind review].

Participants

Participants were a purposively normative sample (white, middle-class, heterosexual) with no known significant infertility concerns. As has been noted elsewhere, heterosexual couples are often treated as the unmarked norm within research on

reproduction (e.g., Morison & McLeod, 2015), Further, longitudinal research on pathways to parenthood for heterosexual couples has primarily focused on the journey from pregnancy onwards, rather than speaking with couples prior to conception (Authors, 2016).

The cases and the discussion of them presented in this article draw on three rounds of interviews with four couples: Justine and Craig, Alice and Paul, Monika and Graham, and Lara and Nathan (all pseudonyms). Demographic details relevant to the focus of the present article are summarised in Table 1 below.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Interviews

Participants were recruited during February-May 2015 by advertising in local media and community newspapers, and on Facebook, Twitter, and internet forums that focus on parenting. All participants signed consent forms after being provided with an information letter detailing the research.

Individual semi-structured interviews occur or have occurred at four stages: 1.) when couples are planning a pregnancy via reproductive heterosex (i.e. without the assistance of reproductive technologies), 2.) when the couple is six months pregnant, 3.) six months after the birth of the child, and 4.) 18 months after the birth of the child. Men and women in each couple are interviewed separately. Participants selected the method of interview they preferred, with most interviews conducted in person for the first and

second rounds, with others conducted via Skype or telephone. All first interviews were conducted in 2015, second and third interviews were conducted as applicable in 2015 and 2016, and fourth round interviews are now being conducted in 2017. All interviews were audio-recorded, with the average length of recordings for the four couples discussed in this article being just over 60 minutes, with the average time increasing for each interview round. Recordings were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription service and participants were allocated pseudonyms by the authors following transcription.

During the first interviews (n=20), questions focused on what it would mean to have a child, reasons for wanting a child, and others' expectations for them to have children. The second interviews conducted to date (n=14) have focused on the process of finding out about the pregnancy, the experience of pregnancy, preparation to become a parent, medical appointments, and plans for the birth and for post-birth. The third interviews conducted to date (n=10) have focused on experiences at the end of pregnancy, the birth, the first few weeks of parenting, and current experiences now their baby is six months old. The fourth round of interviews to date (n = 8) have focused on experiences of parenting since the third interview.

Analytic Approach

As noted above, the primary focus of the study is on motivations and desires amongst a sample of heterosexual couples with regard to having a first child. As such, publications arising from the data have to date focused on this area (Authors, 2016; 2017). Given the wide ranging nature of the interviews, however, and the fact that each participant will

be interviewed a total of four times, it is perhaps unsurprising that other topics have become salient during the interview process. As might be expected, repeated readings of the interview transcripts found many topics which coalesced around gender differences (mainly inequalities) between male and female participants. In particular, division of labor in the context of having a first child was identified as a repeated theme raised most often by participants themselves (i.e., rather than in response to a specific interview question). This suggested that division of labor and reported differences between 'care' and 'work' were a higher order theme within the data.

Having decided upon the theme of division of labor, it was important to identify a way to present the data that did justice to the longitudinal and qualitative nature of the project. In particular, it was important to allow for a comparison of women's and men's experiences within each couple. As such, rather than further analysing extracts coded as indexing division of labor for subthemes, the decision was made to present four case studies of the couples who have to date conceived and birthed a child. As Flyvbjerg (2006) suggests with regard to case studies, overarching theories are best derived from specific iterations of any given phenomenon. As indicated earlier, the aim of this article is to utilise the case studies as a springboard from which to engage in a theoretical discussion about how division of household labor and distinctions between 'care' and 'work' are understood in the context of heterosexual couples having a first child.

With case studies determined to be the best way to represent the data, decisions were then made about the nature of the case studies themselves. Again following Flyvbjerg (2006), the decision was made to adopt a maximum variation approach, where the four cases are unified under the one thematic grouping (division of labor), but are diverse in

terms of how they speak to this thematic grouping. Without making claims to generalizability, such an approach allows for comparisons to be made within and between cases, and for a more comprehensive picture of the thematic grouping to be painted.

Finally, whilst the case studies are presented here as an accurate record of the participants' experiences as expressed in the interviews, their analytic purpose is to draw out more broadly how their individual experiences are rendered intelligible in the context of broader social structures, and specifically as noted in the introduction to this article, in the context of gender norms and constructions of 'care' and 'work'. As such, whilst the presentation of the four cases follows a relatively simple narrative structure (from pregnancy planning to after the birth of a child), each case concludes with a comment on the key analytic features of the case with regard to how 'care' and 'work' are constructed or made sense of.

Cases

Case 1

Justine had always wanted children and had been very keen to start a family. She had fears about not being able to conceive due to being in her late 30s, her mother's experience of early menopause, and her difficulties having a child in a previous relationship in which she conceived but had an early miscarriage. Craig also always wanted to have children, viewing it as an 'inherent kind of drive' and particularly important to 'contribute to the species' (first interview). However, Craig was a decade

younger than Justine and said he would not have thought about becoming a father yet if it wasn't for age-related fertility concerns. Much to their surprise, Justine and Craig conceived quickly after having fertility testing but no treatment.

For Justine and Craig, it was treated as axiomatic that Justine would be the primary carer of the baby:

I want it to be 24 hours a day, and I want it to be a product of my hard work and mine primarily, mine and [Craig's]. (Justine, first interview)

It goes without saying for both of us [that I would stop working], I think because we're both quite traditional. I wouldn't have it any other way personally [...] I'm ready to be not working anymore, and I've looked forward to this for so long he [Craig] would never take that away. (Justine, second interview)

The continued importance of 'breadwinning' to contemporary fathers (e.g. Eerola, 2014; Kushner et al., 2017) was reflected throughout the three interviews with Craig who was particularly focused on earning money to support his family, viewing it as a burden, yet also as the most important thing he can do:

I've been applying for jobs that I don't really want to do but right now we know we need the money. That's always been a thing I've said, that if we had children I'll work in a supermarket if it's the only job I can get if it means putting food on the table. I think responsibility is one of the main things [that would be different if I had a child]. (Craig, first interview)

At work, I'm trying to just do everything at 110% mainly so I can get a pay rise and be happier that I'm able to adequately provide for my family. In that way, I feel far more like the head of a family now if you want to look at it as an olden view of things. With Justine resigning and not working anymore (Craig, third interview)

Following the birth, Justine appeared torn between feeling frustrated when Craig did not make the contribution she wished he would, and recognising that Craig did make a contribution to the household and care work:

there's the feeling of resentment that I have that whenever there's a problem it will come down to me. Like you know, I guess during the night if [baby] gets up I've got to get up and if [baby] gets up twice I have to get up twice and if [baby] doesn't settle well then that's my job to make sure she settles. So, when those sorts of things happen it's down to me. And I get this jealousy about the fact that he gets to go to work and leave it all behind, which is stupid because I don't want to go to work, but there's a sense of resentment I think that he has the freedom that I don't have any more. (Justine, third interview)

Craig reported that he was finding balancing full-time paid work and caring for their baby demanding, although was also sympathetic towards the challenges faced by Justine:

It's more a case of it's usually to do with weekends and who's going to get up at six o'clock to feed. She thinks, 'Yay, he's home for the weekend. He can take over from what I was doing.' I'm thinking, 'Oh gosh, I don't have to get up at six and go to work'. Both of us know that the issue is we're both being selfish about our own situations, and it's really a lose-lose in that regard. (Craig, third interview)

A key issue evident in this first case, and which is taken up in the discussion below, are the differences between how Justine understands work (i.e., a baby would be 'a product of my hard work') and how Craig understands work (i.e., 'I'll work in a supermarket and 'I don't have to get up at six to go to work'). Interestingly, however, Justine is not immune from referring to work only in terms of paid work (i.e., 'he gets to go to work and leave it all behind'), even as at the same time she refers to raising a child as 'my job'. What sits in between these types of accounts (which largely equate work with paid work), it is suggested, is that the naturalization of Justine's desire to be the primary caregiver positions her care work as not really being work, which is perhaps most evident when Craig positions Justine's expectation that he will 'take over' on the weekend as 'selfish', thus ignoring that if he is entitled to the weekend off from work, then so too is Justine.

Case 2

Alice comes from a large family and feels that having children is 'innate' and 'one of my greatest desires and goals in life' (first interview). During the first interview with Paul, he mentioned a similar belief that it is innate to have a child and that it is a natural progression of the relationship. He said that both he and Alice knew that they wanted

children and discussed it early in their relationship. According to Alice, now was the right time to have a child due to her age (nearly 30), their secure housing and financial situation, and that she has moved back to her home state. As she said, 'all the ducks are in a row' (first interview). Alice calculated that it took about nine months to conceive and that 'it was getting a little bit frustrating' (second interview).

Prior to the birth Alice noted that she was looking forward to taking time off from her demanding paid job and staying at home, suggesting that she expected to be the one primarily focused on the baby, but that Paul would contribute to housework:

I think it will be really nice to be at home and to be able to have that home role. Yeah so I suppose I'll probably be doing a lot more of the housework or the lion's share of the housework and the daily runnings of the household even though I'm looking after baby. But I imagine Paul will be helping out a lot with that which will be good. (Alice, second interview)

Paul took off four weeks from paid work after the birth, two weeks of paternity leave and two weeks of annual leave. Since returning to paid work he stated that 'it's not like I've worked less' (third interview), though there are options for more flexible work hours which he knows are there if he wishes to use them. Notably, Paul made little mention in either his first or second interview about his intentions with regard to household labor following the birth of the child.

Following the birth, Alice said that staying home and raising her baby felt natural:

it feels very natural to sort of to be home and to be investing in the family I suppose. That feels a very natural, primitive thing to be doing I suppose. (Alice, third interview)

Yet despite feeling that it is 'very natural to be at home', the fact that Paul is often away for paid work led Alice to say that it 'has been hard' during the first six months of their baby's life (third interview). In addition, that her family live an hour or two away means she is often left by herself, although she has spent time with her mother and sister since the birth.

During her third interview, Alice spoke at length about the disappointment she has felt at Paul's lack of involvement with their baby, particularly because it was not something that she had expected and that, in turn, it may impact on how many children they would have (see also Andrade & Bould, 2012; Mills et al., 2008 for discussions on division of child-care and the impact on intentions to have more children):

I think I've had to encourage him to be as involved as he is and I think that because he always wanted to be a father and he always wanted a family, I expected him to want to know everything about [baby] and what he was doing and want to be intimately involved. And he wasn't and that made me quite disappointed with him and also disappointed in potentially what I could expect for the future and, you know, how many children we might be able to have if that was to continue. (Alice, third interview)

By contrast, however, in his third interview Paul reported that he was the one who gets up during the night to tend to their baby and Alice only gets up when the baby needs to be fed. Alice did note that over time Paul had become more involved, albeit at her prompting and following lengthy discussions on the matter.

Whilst Paul had initially spoken in the first interview of his keen desire to have a child prior to the birth of the baby, this shifted following the birth. He suggested retrospectively that Alice wanted children much more than him and he was happy to help her achieve it, implying that because having a child was her desire, the care of the child was also her responsibility:

I'm glad I could help [Alice] achieve something she really wanted. I think the pull to have a child is definitely a lot stronger with her. [...] that maternal instinct was, you know, really strong in her. Whereas it wasn't as strong, paternal instinct in me wasn't as strong, like I didn't feel as strongly about it as she did. (Paul, third interview)

This second case repeats the concern from the first case, namely that wanting to be the primary caregiver is not the same as desiring to do all of the household and care work. For Alice, it would seem, staying at home to raise a child should not automatically come with the expectation that she will solely run the household and be responsible for nearly all of the care of the baby, even if it appears that this is how things have played out. Also of note in this case is Alice's use of the word 'involved' with regard to Paul. As noted in the introduction to this article, 'involved fathering' has been a recent focus of literature on men and parenting. Yet in the context of the present analysis, 'involvement'

extends beyond simply being interested in or playing with a child, so as to also include a broader contribution to the raising of the child. That Paul appeared to have backtracked on his desire or his feelings that it was 'innate' to have a baby may potentially function as a way to disclaim a need to make such a broader contribution.

Case 3

Monika noted that she always had a strong desire to have children, but only wanted to have children with a partner, saying 'I feel like I would have failed' (first interview) if she couldn't find someone to have children with (first interview). Graham said that he has always wanted to have children, and that he had tried with his ex-wife but believed they could not conceive because she had fertility issues. Monika and Graham believed they had experienced an early miscarriage previously (before they had realised they had conceived), but it didn't take long for her to conceive again.

Whilst in her first interview Monika spoke as though she presumed she would be doing most of the work with the baby (and wanted to do this due to her lifelong goal to be a mother), during the second interview she said she hoped Graham would become more involved with housework after the baby was born, although she suggested that paid work may prohibit this:

Maybe Graham will become more helpful around the house [...] when the baby comes because I'll probably be getting tired, but then again I'm only saying this if I'm working as well then. I'll probably feel like look, just help me clean and cook

but if I'm staying at home I think I'll feel okay cooking and cleaning because then Graham's working all day. (Monika, second interview)

During his first interview Graham said that Monika wanted to take three years off to look after their baby, and he was concerned about the financial impact of this. Graham was particularly concerned about needing to be the financial provider for the family, evident in his first and third interviews, between which he had changed paid jobs twice:

when you've got a kid then you need to stay gainfully employed because you've got to be the provider, I suppose. (Graham, first interview)

[Being a father] gives you that sense of responsibility where I feel I've got to plan a bit further ahead for my [baby] and make sure that I can provide for [baby] well into the future. I don't know if the job I'm in now is really going to pan out to be that job, so I've got to plan a lot more about my future in order to make sure [baby] is going to be okay. So, I suppose a little bit more of a weight of responsibility, which realistically that's part of being a father, isn't it? (Graham, third interview)

Nonetheless, Graham was engaged in paid work for only 20 hours a week when their baby was six months old, so he had 'more time to do the shopping, do the cooking, help with the cleaning', as well as to 'keep a good connection with my wife and also generate a good connection with my [baby]' (Graham, third interview).

During her third interview Monika made no mention of Graham's involvement with the baby shortly after the birth. She spoke about her own exhaustion and her fears and dreams that she might fall asleep on the baby when breastfeeding. In his third interview Graham did mention his contributions to housework, though it was clear that Monika was primarily responsible for the care of their baby:

I think for Monika having a baby is one of the important things in life for her and being the primary care giver is just as important. (Graham, second interview)

He's a beautiful kid, happy, healthy. Haven't even had to take him to the doctor for any sickness or anything like that. So, I feel like a really lucky dad. Yeah, very lucky man. Lucky to have my wife. She's great looking after [baby]. Realistically, I think she does most of the looking after of [baby]. (Graham, third interview)

Graham's involvement largely appeared to be looking after Monika and doing some of the housework:

The first few weeks I suppose I was trying to look after Monika and then Monika looking after [baby]. Almost like a hierarchy of looking after people, which is kind of how it works for us (Graham, third interview)

Graham's involvement had increased as the baby grew, although Monika's language around 'helps' and 'do that for me' positioned her as responsible for the baby. As Monika said:

He helps me a lot and he plays with [baby] and looks after him. It was really good as well that with my [course] I had workshops on Wednesdays, and my mum and Graham were like a tag team for me. I used to go to my classes, and then my mum used to look after [baby] in the morning, and then Graham in the afternoon after he finished work. I really appreciated that they could do that for me. (Monika, third interview)

Salient in this case is the language of 'help', which situates Graham's contribution as a 'help' to Monika, but without similarly situating all that Monika does as a 'help' to Graham (although he does mention he is 'lucky'). Monika, it may be suggested, reinforces this logic via her concession that if she is 'staying at home', she will 'feel okay cooking and cleaning because then Graham's working all day'. What disappears in this account is that Monika too is 'working all day'. Graham's references to 'providing' introduce a further area of analytic concern that is taken up in the discussion below, namely that like the unequal accounting for 'helping', only his paid work classes as 'providing', with the household and care work that Monika does not equally treated as providing.

Case 4

During her first interview Lara noted that previously she hadn't been sure that she wanted children. Being now a little older (early 30s) and in a secure relationship, however, had meant that Lara had decided she wanted to have a child. Nathan said he wanted to have children but was waiting until Lara was ready, and he thought now was

the ideal time due to Lara's age. Lara and Nathan conceived in the second month of trying.

During his first interview, Nathan spoke about the fact that he was 'open to' staying at home with their baby, particularly due to the fact that Lara had her own business and that he could do a lot of paid work from home. However, Lara's reported desire to stay at home meant it did not need to be seriously considered:

Lara said that she wants to be a stay-at-home, you know that's what her mother did and that's what my mum did. We did discuss, when we first discussed kids a while back, about whether or not it be I stay home or her, but she's now decided that it's something that she would want to do. So, yeah, I think the role is that she'd probably be home, and then outside of that probably not really, just kind of make the load as easy as possible for both of us and share the load and the things we have to do. (Nathan, first interview)

During her second interview, Lara said she was planning to go back to paid work part-time after taking four months off. She said that Nathan was happy to stay at home but that she wouldn't want to work full-time as a result of this:

Nathan says that he's quite happy to be a stay at home dad. [But] if he's a stay at home dad I'd have to work five days a week. I don't want to do that. So yeah, he might stay at home part of the time. (Lara, second interview)

Following the birth, Lara reported that her parents stayed with them for three weeks cooking and cleaning, leaving Lara and Nathan to care for their baby. In these early weeks Lara spoke about Nathan being with her and the baby constantly, and then how he continued to work flexible part-time hours:

Nathan was here the entire time, he stayed with me. He didn't even leave the hospital and then he didn't even leave me at home. He just stayed with us the whole time which was just so wonderful. I was so lucky that I had a husband that was able to do that [...] It's worked out really well so Nathan works part-time so we just fit in with each other. (Lara, third interview)

Whilst Nathan was not as focused on earning money for his family as some of the other fathers appeared to be, he also said that being a father:

creates a responsibility but you know I think it also gives life a lot more meaning and a lot more drive. And you know when I go out for work it's not about me or earning money for Lara and myself, there's another little mouth to feed and it's also thinking about school and high school and all those types of things. (Nathan, third interview)

Yet although both Lara and Nathan both worked part-time at the time of the third interviews, it was evident that Lara felt responsible for their baby:

if I leave him for the day I'm like 'now you've got his solids here, you've got his milk here, do this, that, xyz. Here's the pram if you want to take him for a walk'.

(Lara, third interview)

However, she did mention that Nathan attended to the baby during the night, which started as soon as they came home from hospital:

I was just very fortunate that I have a wonderful husband who was in a position to be able to sit up with him a lot so I could get my sleep because I was very tired within that first six weeks, I was just exhausted. So I was just so lucky because not everybody has that. (Lara, third interview)

Whilst Lara and Nathan were sharing the care of their baby at the time of the third interview, Lara mentioned Nathan was planning to start working full-time and thus the responsibility was on her to reorganise her paid work and the care of their baby around this.

Of all the couples, Lara and Nathan were the most equitable in their distribution of household labour, particularly with regard to the care of their child. It also appeared significant that not only did Nathan have access to a great degree of flexibility in his paid work, he actually took up this opportunity, enabling him to spend more time at home and in care work. This supports previous work arguing that access to flexible paid work practices (and the incentives for men to take these up) are of key importance (e.g. Ranson, 2012). Importantly, however, as was evident across both of their third interviews, things were still not as equitable as the extracts above might suggest, with

Lara still being primarily responsible for managing the care of their child. This is evident above in Lara feeling responsible for their baby even when it was her day to engage in paid work or otherwise be outside of the house, and for organizing her paid work around Nathan's. With this in mind, it is thus notable that despite the relative inequities, Lara still positioned herself as 'fortunate' and 'lucky' to have a 'selfless' husband (see also Hochschild with Machung, 1989; Hochschild, 2003).

Discussion

Considering the four cases, and even when taking into account the differing desires, situations, and experiences of each couple, there are four issues that repeat across the cases, and which offer specific analytic leverage for thinking about broader discourses pertaining to parenting, paid work, and care, particularly in relation to gender norms. These are 1) the positioning of household and care work as not being work, 2) the positioning of women as 'lucky' if their male partner is 'helpful', 3) the primary orientation of men towards earning a paid income as a way of providing for their family, and 4) the unequal distribution of responsibility. We now utilise the case studies to make broader theoretical points about how the division of labour in heterosexual couple parent households is understood, with particular attention to the transition to first-time parenthood.

The first issue, and arguably the central one, pertains to the ways in which both household and care work are positioned as not being work. Obviously paid work and unpaid work serve different functions in the context of household economics. Yet at the same time, they potentially serve very similar purposes if we consider Rubin's (1975)

argument about the western reification of the couple unit, and its role in both the production of goods, and the reproduction of a consuming workforce. Following Rubin, Friedan (1963), and others since, it can be further suggested that the naturalisation of motherhood so that women are expected, and indeed encouraged, to want to have children and to be their primary caregivers, serves to further cement the heterosexual couple unit as central to western economics, specifically by positioning household and care work as outside of the public sphere, and thus outside of the category 'work'. Furthermore, such a framing is reflected in the institutional arrangements within Australia, where a gendered model of care is reinforced via policies which privilege the female caregiver/male breadwinner model.

What follows from the purported non-work status of household and care work, then, is that for heterosexual women whose male partners make a contribution to the household, such women are positioned as 'lucky' or 'fortunate'. This type of logic reinforces gender disparities and inequalities by excusing men from making significant contributions to household and care work by privileging paid work as the core business of a successful family life. One consequence of this logic is that women are expected to be at work non-stop, whilst men are allowed to treat work as paid employment, and home as a space to engage in minimal activities that could otherwise be construed as work. This is evident, for example, in Craig's comment in the first case that he considers it selfish that he should be expected to engage in paid work and then spend his weekend mornings caring for their baby. As the women in the cases often noted, whilst they made the 'choice' to be the primary caregiver, this did not mean that they were similarly opting to be the primary or sole person responsible for the running of the household. That the men often appeared to collapse household and care work into one category for

which women were expected to be primarily or solely responsible again reiterates how both of these forms of work are positioned as akin to not being work.

These points about men and work lead to concerns raised in the cases about how fathering is depicted primarily as involving financial provision, and that father involvement thus rests largely on the capacity to earn a wage (see also Shirani et al., 2013). This is not to say that the men in the cases did not, to differing degrees, engage in household and care work. Rather, it is to suggest that their primary orientation to responsibility appeared to pertain to earning a paid income, reflective of a long entrenched gender norm, both socially and institutionally. The question that must be raised, then, is what it would mean to think about 'providing' as a task that all parents engage in, and which can involve playing with a child, earning an income to enable the care of the child (including paying others to do so), feeding the child, and so forth. If we consider the etymology of the word 'provide' (from the Latin 'providere', meaning both 'foresee' and 'attend to'), it is mothers who are primarily tasked with both pre-empting their child's needs, and attending to them. Australian time use data clearly indicate that it is mothers who undertake these dual tasks, more so than do fathers (Craig & Mullen, 2011; 2012). The point here is not to discount the role that fathers play in providing for their children, but rather to suggest that the language of 'provision' may be usefully harnessed in discussions about mothering so as to more fully acknowledge the provider role that women play in the context of heterosexual relationships where children are present.

The final key issue raised by the cases pertains to responsibility. Echoing the point made above, for men being responsible appeared to primarily refer to earning a wage.

Yet the women raised the point that in some cases they too earned a wage (or would be returning to paid work in the near future), and in three of the cases were primarily responsible for the majority of household and care work. In addition to this responsibility, however, the women were also to differing degrees responsible for their partner's involvement with the child and his contribution to the household and care work. As such, it would seem, the women were doubly responsible: responsible for their own contributions, and responsible for their partner's contributions. This suggestion provides an important counter to ideas of maternal gatekeeping, in which mothers are blamed for preventing fathers from engaging with their children (e.g. Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Hauser, 2015; Pedersen & Kilzer, 2014). The cases presented in this article would suggest that the issue at stake is not women gatekeeping men's relationships with their children, but rather how responsibility is differentially distributed according to gender.

Importantly, as we suggested above, there is a need for a shift in how division of labor is spoken about: men do not 'help' women by earning an income, women are not 'lucky' if a male partner contributes to household or care work. Identifying how particular terms serve to entrench disparities with regard to gender and care work is an important first step towards social change. Terms such as 'helpful fathers' and 'lucky mothers' need to be challenged so as to identify the parenting practices that they reference, and ultimately to change such practices in terms of the division of labor. However, and as Nentwich (2008) argues, it is not enough for 'alternative practices' to take place if new subject positions beyond the financial provider or caregiver are not also taken up. As such, subject positions which specifically reference normative gender roles in relation to parenthood (e.g. breadwinner/homemaker, provider/primary caregiver) need to continue to be problematized. Indeed, our participants did just that, noting that the

default subject positions accorded to them as women and men often did not align with their own views of what parenthood should be like. The disjuncture between culturally intelligible subject positions and those that individual mothers and fathers wish to inhabit is thus something that must be reflected both in institutional (e.g. policy relating to paid work and child care that affords women and men opportunities to engage in differing forms of 'provision') and cultural (e.g. the disaggregation of care and household labor in public accounts of parenting) spaces.

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Table 1. Education, paid employment, and care role status

	Education at first round	First Interview	Second Interview	Third Interview
Justine	University (bachelor level)	Paid employment (FT)	Paid employment (FT)	Carer (FT)
Craig	University (honours level)	Student (FT)	Paid employment (FT)	Paid employment (FT)
Alice	University (bachelor level)	Paid employment (FT)	Paid employment (FT)	Carer (FT)
Paul	TAFE* Certificate IV	Paid employment (FT)	Paid employment (FT)	Paid employment (FT)
Monika	University (bachelor level)	Paid employment (FT)	Paid employment (FT)	Carer and student (PT)
Graham	TAFE Diploma	Paid employment (FT)	Paid employment (FT)	Paid employment (PT)
Lara	University (bachelor level)	Paid employment (FT)	Paid employment (FT)	Carer and paid employment (PT)
Nathan	Secondary school	Paid employment (FT)	Paid employment (FT)	Carer and paid employment (PT)

* Technical and Further Education institution