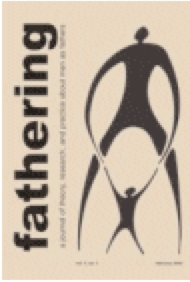

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Gemma Anne Yarwood[a]

The Pick and Mix of Fathering Identities

In this paper I ask, how can discursive research illustrate the flexible and negotiated identities of fatherhood? Using accounts from qualitative interviews with nine employed, first time fathers in the United Kingdom, this paper illuminates the complexities of their everyday lives as they try to make sense of dominant discourses of masculinity and fathering. I argue, fatherhood is dynamic rather than static by presenting discursive analysis of fathering talk. In particular, I critically analyse the hegemonic frames of fathering and masculinity in the UK and the everyday challenges these pose to fathers. I conclude by suggesting that fathers are not cultural dopes but discursive agents, struggling with the institutional norms of fatherhood. Finally I make recommendations for further scholarly research on the fluidity of fathering identities so that it may be embraced rather than side-lined in favour of static normative constructs.

Keywords: fathering, identities, discursive research, work-family integration

Whilst mainstream parenting literature charts widespread changing working and family practices (Smock & Greenland, 2010), I argue that there is a need for evidence examining the everyday negotiations of work-family integration for fathers. In particular, the dearth of existing literature covering changing parenting practices along gender lines insufficiently develops accounts of the fluidity of fathering identities. Furthermore, it is limited in its examination of how hegemonic masculinities are embedded within dominant fathering and working discourse (Marsiglio, Amato, Day & Lamb, 2000).

In this paper, I use discursive research to illustrate the primacy of paid work to fathering identities, and how these present everyday challenges to fathers as they negotiate their identities. Here, I draw on accounts from qualitative interviews with nine employed, first time fathers in the United Kingdom to question the enduring construct of the male breadwinner. I present a critical consideration of the UK context of father-

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ing in which financial imperatives are driving firmly fixed normative work-family practices.

In Seward and Richter's (2008) discussion of fathering in the 21st century they call for the expansion of scholarly study on fathering issues to seek new horizons. They advocate, "An important question to ask is, to what extent, if at all, is a new approach to fatherhood possible under the domination of hegemonic masculinity?"(2008, p. 89). To address this question, I begin by suggesting that, in the UK, there have been some attempts within social, economic and political discourse to construct a gender neutral dual earner family (Gatrell, 2004). This is constructed on the premise of eroding the traditional gendered binary of male breadwinner and female primary caregiver. However, in the UK, the contemporary dual earner family construct itself is saturated with hegemonic representations of work-family practices and policies based on the traditional breadwinner and caregiver binary.

I propose that when fathering talk is examined discursively, we can begin to move away from static enduring constructions to alternative epistemologies acknowledging the complexity of work-family integration and the fluidity of fathering identities. To explore how stakeholders; particularly scholars, researchers and fathers themselves can facilitate this; I draw on qualitative research of fathers talking about their experiences of work-family integration. I now turn to explain this in more detail to provide the landscape of researching fathering identities using a specifically discursive methodological approach.

RESEARCHING FATHERING IDENTITIES USING A DISCURSIVE FRAMEWORK

In this paper, I propose undertaking research on fathering identities drawing on post-structuralist approaches, namely discursive research. A discursive research framework affords the opportunity to focus on the socially constructed nature of fathering. This is in line with contemporary UK research on *Men as Fathers* lead by Henwood, Finn and Shirani (2008) who advocate a discursive approach.

> Although there may be no one right or wrong way of approaching the study of men, masculinity or fatherhood, we believe that certain basic assumptions are now known to be unhelpful (e.g. masculinity and fatherhood as monolithic, unproblematic and unchanging entities). In this we are restating a (milestone) epistemic point for taking a discursive approach to identity. (Henwood, Finn & Shirani, 2008, p. 2)

Discursive research is the study of practices which systematically inform the objects of which they speak (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). Thus, fathers talking about fathering practices inform their constructions and representations of fathering identities. These identities are constructed and reproduced both in language and social reality. The data generated in the process of interviewing fathers about their everyday experiences of work-family life captures the messiness of everyday life as it is constructed and represented by those interviewed (Cameron, 2001). In fact, although there are a multitude

of approaches to discursive research, Gee (2005) frames this positively, arguing that no one approach is uniquely 'right' as different approaches fit different research. Whilst Speer (2007) argues that there is a strong division between particular versions of discursive research, Potter and Wetherell (1998, p. 81) believe that the distinction 'should not be painted too sharply'.

By drawing on the underlying assumptions of discourse studies (Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001), I demonstrate how discourses of work and family are negotiated and lived out in the 'everyday'. I also examine how these everyday negotiations connect to the UK social and political context and its constructions of working and parenting. My rationale for choosing this approach is that it enables me to examine the referential and dynamic nature of father's talk to illuminate the pick and mix fluidity of fathering identities. Discursive research provides the opportunity to examine what resources fathers use, or make relevant, in accounting for their actions. It assumes that people *do* things with their language and that the way fathers speak does much more than simply convey a picture of what they are describing. This approach will lead to a discussion of the flexibility of fatherhood revealed through identity negotiations in their talk. The findings presented in this paper demonstrate the futility of searching for a prototypical father and the need to transform normative fathering practices which embrace fluidity. Before I move on to critically analyse these findings in more detail, I will provide a foundation of the broader methodological and conceptual framework shaping the study.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Hearn (2004, p. 49) has stated that "studying men is, in itself, neither new nor necessarily radical." Here, I draw on the much debated concept of hegemonic masculinity which has played a pivotal role in the development of gendered work on men. Carrigan, Connell, and Lee (1985) characterise hegemonic masculinity; "not as a 'the male role' but a variety of masculinities to which others—among them young and effeminate as well as homosexual men—are subordinated" (p. 586).

Derived from Antonio Gramsci's (1971) Marxist thinking on class relations, hegemony refers to the social, political and cultural dynamics by which particular social groups establish and sustain power. Despite the concept of hegemony, being "as slippery and difficult as the idea of masculinity itself" (Donaldson, 1993, p. 2), scholars interested in the study of gender systems have mobilised Gramsci's work on hegemony. A key feature of hegemonic masculinity is the ways in which particular versions of masculinity are reproduced to establish and maintain dominance in relation to others. Indeed, this formulation recognizes that "masculinities [and femininities] come into existence at particular times and places and are always subject to change" (Connell, 1995, p. 185). This paper focuses on one such culturally exalted way of being a man in the UK today, namely, the breadwinner father and how this is discursively configured. Drawing on this intellectual location, the concept enables both the study of relations between men as fathers and also between men and women, as fathers and mothers (Wharton, 2004).

Hegemonic masculinity enables us to ask, “why, in specific formations, do certain ways of being male predominate, and particular sorts of men rule?” (Donaldson, 1993, p. 2) In addressing this question here, I consider, why do certain fathering identities predominate in the UK? Furthermore, why do particular versions of being a father in the UK focus on the primacy of paid work over unpaid caring work of children? Evidently this enduring prevalence of the breadwinner father has been charted by contemporary fathering research in the UK. Hauari and Hollingworth’s (2009) study of *Masculinity, Diversity and Change* found that the notion of the breadwinning father was endorsed by parents and children across their sample. This concurs with similar research findings on fathers, employment and family life undertaken a decade earlier by Warin, Solomon, Lewis and Langford (1999).

In this paper I explore the male breadwinner construct as a representation of hegemonic masculinity and fatherhood in early 21st century UK. The breadwinner father focuses on notions of ‘a good father’ providing for his family’s material needs by earning an income in paid employment outside the home (Collier, 2009). Earning an income which pays for their family’s food, shelter and material needs is embedded within the breadwinner father identity. The concept of hegemonic masculinity mobilises the discourse of measuring success by paid work and financial rewards within the norms of society. Hegemonic masculinity enables us to study how those who are unemployed or unpaid carers are seen as ‘other’ and subordinate (Willott & Griffin, 1997). With this in mind, I discursively analyse interview data from nine employed first time fathers in the UK with children under five years old. Thus, despite existing research identifying the male breadwinner father as a dominant version of masculinity and fathering, it is important to consider how this is lived out in the everyday experiences of fathers. I aim to take up Wetherell and Edley’s (1999) call for more detailed empirical research on the discursive resources and practices used by men to talk about negotiating their fathering identities.

Here, my discursive analysis considers the differential, persistent and idiosyncratic inflection of recognisable procedures evident in fathering talk. I pay particular attention to referential language used by the fathers interviewed. These fathers give culturally recognisable performances of fathering by drawing on available narratives. I situate these findings within the contemporary UK context which frames the research study and the everyday lives of fathers. The following section of the paper presents a brief outline of this context.

THE UNITED KINGDOM CONTEXT

For some scholars studying British fathering, the nuanced nature of negotiating identities can only be truly appreciated by understanding the context in which the process is situated (Smart & Shipman, 2004). One current research example which effectively acknowledges the importance of locating research in the UK context is the *Men as Fathers* project led by Henwood et al. (2008). They state:

> Instead of taking the substance or content of masculinity (or indeed fatherhood) as static or given, men's identities are studied as they are forged in social interaction—a practice that is itself located, and that locates its (male) subjects, in place and time. (Henwood et al., 2008, p. 2)

Using visual and textual research methods, Henwood et al. (2008) explore the situated nature of fatherhood in time and place. They position fathers as discursive agents within the broader social, economic and political UK landscape of parenting. This approach attends to the contextual features influencing working and parenting lives. It enables researchers to gain a clear understanding of how men's identities as fathers and workers are located in place and time. Thus for the purpose of this paper it is important to review the significant social, economic and political context shaping fathering in Britain today.

Significantly, the UK has experienced a recent political shift from The Labour Party (who were in political office from 1997-2010) to the recently established Conservative - Liberal Democrat Coalition (in political office from May 2010). David Cameron, the present UK Prime Minster, recently spoke of the continued political commitment to what he refers to as "family friendly reform agenda in the UK" (Cameron, 2010). This is based on an economic rationalism discourse (Kahu & Morgan, 2007) and at its heart lies a normative family constructed on the dual earner couple. This is embedded within UK work-family policy and practice, emphasising the financial imperative that parents engage in paid employment. Successive governments have established the political commitment to this agenda with an all political party consensus on parental leave[1] and flexible working for parents.[2] (The Cabinet Office, 2010) In accordance, all UK political leaders advocate, what is often labelled, 'good parenting'. But what is good parenting in 21st century Britain?

British political discourse and policy defines a 'good parent' as economically active within the labour market (Collier, 2009). 'Good parenting' is dependent on challenging individuals to be responsible parents by working hard and reaping financial rewards. Indeed, some commentators argue that within this 'good parent' discourse, the traditional male breadwinner and stay at home mother dualism no longer has currency in 21st century Britain. This dualism is considered contentious in the light of significant changing patterns of gender participation in both paid employment outside the home and informal caring within the home (Gambles, Lewis & Rapoport, 2006). In fact, since the introduction of parental leave rights in 1999 to comply with the European Union Directive, UK work-care arrangements have been transformed (den Dulk, 2001). There has been extended opportunities for less rigid traditionally gendered caregiver and

[1] A maximum 13 weeks parental leave is available if a child is aged under five, (or under 18 if a child is disabled). All employed women are entitled to 52 weeks maternity leave. All men are entitled to 2 weeks paternity leave. Liaison with employers is required due to differentials in financial and other arrangements.

[2] A parent with a child under 17 (or a disabled child under 18 who gets Disability Living Allowance) has the right to request flexible working. Employers have a duty to consider the request if the employee has worked there for 26 weeks. The right to request is available to both men and women, and covers the hours an employee works, the times s/he is required to work and the place of work (i.e. home or a workplace).

breadwinner constructs. Thus, work and family are not static, unchanging institutions but reflect and adapt to developments in wider society. As gender relations change so do work and family arrangements and vice versa. Therefore by locating research in this context we are able to understand the intertwined complexity of work-family integration and the challenges it poses to the everyday lives of working fathers.

In turning to other aspects of the changing nature of UK work-family life, many scholars have focused on women's participation in the labour force. To do this they have utilised the normative definition of work as paid employment and directed research specifically on trends of women's workforce participation. "Women make up nearly half of the workforce in the UK and 80% will become mothers during their working life. With the average age of motherhood in the UK being 30, most women at work over this age will also be working parents." (Working Families, 2010, p. 3) Consequently, much of this work is part-time paid work outside the home. Women continue to provide the majority of informal care in the home (Hansen, Joshi & Dex, 2010). Evidently, as women continue to provide the majority of informal care, the research spotlight shines on women's work-family integration rather than men's (Craig & Sawrikar, 2009). This further demonstrates the need for research on fathers to redress this imbalance in scholarly interest.

Equally significant to Britain's shifting work-family integration landscape is the impact of economic recession in the UK. The country is experiencing rising unemployment rates, marked reductions in the number of men employed in all sectors of UK industry. The latest unemployment figures are higher than predicted, with the coalition government's spending cuts and tax hikes expected to take effect in 2011 (Office for National Statistics, 2010). In fact, despite a recent heightened politicisation of fatherhood (Collier, 2009) some scholars argue that there is a much needed shift in understanding fathering and work-family integration. More broadly, there is a growing number of scholars who argue for a new approach to work-family research which extends research horizons (Smock & Greenland, 2010; Seward & Richter, 2008) taking these contextual factors into consideration.

In this outline I have highlighted the need for research which locates fathering within the changing contemporary UK context. I have attempted to suggest that, "Generalising theories, or even aggregate statistics, cannot fully capture the variability, processes and meaning in people's response to change" (Williams, 2004, p. 23). In this sense, whilst focusing on workforce patterns is useful, it does not provide the rich insights into the complex negotiations taking place within the everyday lives of fathers as they integrate work and family life. It is for this reason that I present discursive research which attends to the intricate nuances of fathering talk so that a deeper understanding can emerge. With this in mind, I will now turn to the research design in an attempt to specify the procedures of data collection and analysis I adopted.

Research Process and Interviews

The data examined in this paper focuses on first time fathers talking about their experiences of work-family integration. This data has been extracted from semi-struc-

tured interviews with nine first time fathers as part of a qualitative research project on experiences of work-family integration. Two out of the nine fathers did not live with their children but had shared care contact arrangements. All nine of the fathers were in paid employment at the time of data collection (2006-2010). Their occupations were as follows- Police officer, Sales consultant, Architect, Administrator, Security guard, Librarian, IT technician, Nurse and Car Mechanic. Thus the occupations covered both manual and non manual work and varied in type and contractual arrangements including part-time, full-time, flexi-time, shift work, compressed hours and temporary contracts. I used the normative definition of work as paid employment within the labour market, drawing on much of the existing work-family literature and research covering labour force participation (Office for National Statistics, 2010).

The data was based on nine first time fathers living and working in the UK. They varied in cohabiting arrangements, marital status and ethnicity. All identified themselves as heterosexual and were aged between 29 and 40 years old. When sampling participants I chose to include first time fathers in paid work with children aged five years and under. I chose this because most contemporary changes to UK work-family policy and practice (between the research period 2006-2010) centred on families with children under five years old, namely extensions to parental leave entitlements (maternity / paternity leave, parental and carers) and flexible working rights. Furthermore I felt that the years from birth to five required the most significant levels of intensive caring (Craig & Sawrikar, 2009) thus provided the most data rich site for this research.

To ground this sample in the broader UK context, my research attempted to draw on the good practice of the Millennium Cohort Study (Hansen et al., 2010), a large scale longitudinal study of 19,000 children born in the UK in 2000/2001. In line with this large scale study, my in-depth study was open to participants from all occupational groups. During the recruitment period, my participants were given the opportunity to learn about the study through initial advertising using posters, websites and electronic communication tools such as emails and notice boards. These requested volunteers to make contact with me in the first instance to discuss potential participation, ethical considerations and research procedures. Unlike the Millennium Cohort Study (Hansen et al., 2010), I used a snowballing sampling technique and do not claim that those recruited in my study are representative. The snowballing sampling technique enabled me to ask those fathers who volunteered in the first instance to act as gatekeepers, providing contact points to other potential participants. This enabled my sample group to expand through fathers recommending others who fitted my sample criteria of being a working first time father with a child under five years old. I was given access to informal networks developed through baby massage clubs, parent and toddler groups, and day nursery rhythm and rhyme sessions. These were all sites where I recruited volunteers using the snowballing sampling techniques.

The snowballing approach focused on recruiting a sample of volunteers who had become first time fathers in the past five years (2006-2010). The rationale for this choice was that during this period there had been significant changes to the UK policy and practice context. It was felt that by choosing volunteers who had become first time fa-

thers in the past five years, the research could draw on their experiences of work-family integration within the recent policy and practice context. In particular I felt that I could explore the impact and influence of most recent work-family policy agenda as it played out in the lived experiences of the participants. This contemporary policy landscape did not differentiate between father and child's residency arrangements therefore co-residency was not a requirement of the sample (although only two of the total nine volunteers recruited did not live permanently with their child.). In fact since the Child Support Act 1991 there has been a conscious effort by policy makers to involve fathers particularly if they are non-resident with their children due to the economic benefits.

Each father was interviewed separately using semi-structured interviews. I gained signed ethical consent from each participant and the interviews took place in a negotiated location that both the participant and I felt comfortable with (Daly, 2007). Interviews were initiated with general demographic questions, followed by a variety of loosely structured questions based on key themes related to the experiences of work-family integration. For example, what does it mean to you to be a dad? Could you tell me about any differences between your worker identity and father identity? And, how do you negotiate your work and family weekly schedule? Although the interviews had a skeleton of common questions, I adopted an open and flexible approach, permitting the participants to raise and focus on the issues that were of central importance to them. This open and flexible approach also allowed reflexivity in the research process because at the beginning of data collection I was not a parent but during the process my status changed, allowing different insight and access into the world of parenting. I made my status known to the participants, allowing my own experiences to be shared in the process (Burr, 2003). Throughout, I documented and explored how my changing personal location informed the research process.

Each interview was allocated an hour slot and was recorded using a Dictaphone which I later transcribed employing a simplified version of Jeffersonian notation- (O'Byrne, Rapley & Hansen, 2006). I examined the data, paying particular attention to both the discursive practices and resources of the participants. This involved reading the transcripts asking, how do working fathers talk about work-family integration and how is this talk framed by wider discursive resources of working and parenting? I used the concept of referential language to highlight how the participants refer to other men and fathers when talking about their identities. I adopted a procedure of reading and re-reading transcripts to generate data of regularities in discursive strategies used to talk about themselves by referencing other fathers. These findings from transcriptions were examined within the broader discursive practices and resources of working and parenting by drawing on existing UK based fathering literature to develop a theoretical account (Day, Gough & McFadden, 2003).

The Findings

In these findings I use interview extracts to demonstrate discursive strategies adopted by the participants to negotiate their identities. Secondly, I highlight the referential na-

ture of talk as the fathers make sense of their complex identities. This demonstrates the socially constructed nature of fathering identities (Burr, 2003). As language is referential and constitutive it provides opportunities to widen the references they use to aid the development of understanding the fluidity of fathering identities. This signifies a departure from the traditionally static search for the prototypical father drawn from dominant hegemonic masculinities which presently persist (Smart & Shipman, 2004). In a sense, this attends to the call by Seward and Richter (2008) to expand horizons of fathering scholarly study in which they recommend considering the extent to which a new approach to fatherhood is possible under the domination of hegemonic masculinity. What follows is my attempt to address this question using discursive data. For the purpose of this paper, I begin by giving a detailed discussion of one father, Rick, a full time employed Sales Consultant. I analyse extracts taken from Rick's interview data. I then move on to briefly discuss extracts from interviews with other fathers in the study to highlight the referential language they use when talking about their fathering identities.

The Dynamic Referential Nature of Fathering Talk

In this study, the data demonstrates how the participants talk about their fathering identities referentially. Frequently they refer to their own experiences of being a child and their relationship with their own parents, father and mother (either biological or legal guardian) (Henwood et al., 2008). Below is evidence drawn from Rick, a full-time employed Sales Consultant. He mobilises particular normative discourses of working and caring. In doing so he depicts the complexity of negotiating fathering identities and the paradoxical relationship between paid work and informal caring. Extract 1 below helps explain these points more fully.

EXTRACT 1.

> Rick: I mean from my point of view, my parents worked. I was brought up by 2 hard working parents. You know, when I was at school we either had to go to other people's houses or I mean my mum did everything up until I was about 6 years old and then she was out working (Rick, a full-time employed sales consultant).

Here Rick chooses to begin his statement by focusing on paid work when referring to his parents. He does not refer to them as patient, fun or loving for instance. "Worked" and "working" are words used by Rick to emphasis its importance to his parent's identities, as well as his own. He depicts his family constituted by "two hard working parents." He discursively constructs a normative family, what he considers 'conventional', based on the family in which he was a child. He uses "you know" to appeal to my understanding as he suggests that paid work resulted in both his parents being absent from the home. To substantiate this, he gives an example of being cared for by people other than his parents who were at work, "…when I was at school we either had to go to other people's houses." Thus extract 1 contains elements of Rick's justification, de-

fending his own position as a full time working father meaning absence from the home. The hegemonic frameworks of masculinity and fathering here are at odds with work-family integration due to the paradoxical relationship between paid work and unpaid caring. Through my discursive analysis I have interpreted that Rick is suggesting there is a choice to be made between working and caring as he cannot be at home caring for his child whilst out of the home earning a wage. The hegemonic frameworks of fathering and masculinity point to the primacy of paid work over unpaid caring.

When we examine extract 1 closer still, what is also interesting is the contradiction in his talk, namely that he depicts both his parents as hard working yet he describes his mother as being present and the main caregiver until Rick was aged six. "I mean my mum did everything up until I was about 6 years old and then she was out working." Therefore although paid work is given primacy in this account, it is embedded more deeply in his father's identity than in his mother's. This primacy of paid work is mobilised through normative constructs of the breadwinner father and is an indication of the influence of hegemonic masculinity within discourses of work and family (Wharton, 2004). Rick draws on notions of being a good role model, a hard working father providing for his family's material needs through paid employment. The data demonstrates Rick presenting a moral self in which he refers to his own father in attempt to position himself as a good father (Collier, 2009). This, however, is not straightforward for Rick who uses talk to convey how he struggles with the complexity of this fathering identity.

In extract 2 below, Rick describes himself as a provider father giving examples of material possessions such as "a nicer home and a garden" paid for by working hard. Once again Rick's talk is referential of his own father as he draws on fiscal discourses when discussing himself and his own parents. He positions himself within an economic rationalism discourse (Kahu & Morgan, 2007) to prioritise his worker identity.

Extract 2.

> Rick: I think from that point of view, I just think, I just want more things. I'd rather have a nicer home and a garden. I know maybe that sounds quite materialistic? Maybe I'd like to have had my dad around more? Maybe I would? But I'd rather have an environment which is going to set him (my son) up for life and is going to inspire (Rick, a full-time employed sales consultant).

Here in extract 2, Rick describes the dilemmatic nature of fathering identities by suggesting that there is a 'trade off' between unpaid caring and paid work. He uses repetition "I just think, I just…" when explaining his paid work and child care choices. As part of this he refers to the choices his own father made to prioritise paid work which meant he was often out of the home. Also, by posing questions, "I know maybe that sounds quite materialistic? Maybe I'd like to have had my dad around more? Maybe I would?" Rick shifts positions between certainty and more ambivalent talk with the repetitive use of "Maybe." This contradictory nature of Rick's talk suggests he is trying to make sense of his identity as a father, using his own father as a point of reference (Henwood, et al., 2008). This poses its own challenges for Rick as he rationalises

the demands of his full time worker identity with the conflicting demands of carer. His talk uses stake inoculation to construct a persuasive account to pre-empt and counter any accusation or claim that he is "materialistic" as he details "I'd rather have a nicer home and a garden. I know maybe that sounds quite materialistic?" To substantiate this he states "But I'd rather have an environment which is going to set him (my son) up for life and is going to aspire to." By drawing on this economic rationalism discourse (Kahu & Morgan, 2007), he positions himself as a good father (Collier, 2009) within the norms of his society.

Extract 3 reveals how I posed a probing question in an attempt to expand my analysis further to gain a clearer insight of Rick's understanding of a good father.

EXTRACT 3.

GY: So, do you mean your role model of a good father has a strong work ethic?
Rick: I know that it sounds really bad.
GY: No I'm not…..
Rick: ... In another way I'd rather have that mentality. I don't know. I just want him to be as successful as he can. I think if you put that idea into his head at an early age then hopefully that is what they will aspire to be.

In response to my probing question "So, do you mean your role model of a good father has a strong work ethic?" Rick replies defensively "I know that it sounds really bad." This suggests that he is aware of the dilemmatic nature of the traditionally masculinised breadwinner and its engendered work ethic (Bunting, 2005; James, 2007). Clearly there is evidence too of my own discomfort with this hegemonic masculinised father identity and in my efforts, as a researcher, not to appear judgemental I try to reassure him by saying "No I'm not." However, as extract 3 reveals, he interrupts me by attempting to further justify and rationalise his position as a working father.

Extract 3 highlights how fathering identities have been transformed to accommodate a position more complex than that of the traditional breadwinner father who goes out to work leaving the caring duties to others. Discursively, Rick presents a moral self (May, 2008) to suggest that his 'public' breadwinner status alone is inadequate to his father identity due to the broader contemporary demands on 'the father' to provide for his son's more 'private' caring needs. Indeed, this dilemmatic private / public division rooted in traditional work-family discourses (Wharton, 2004) was intrinsic to much of the interview data analysed in this research study. For instance, all the fathers interviewed in the study talked of the dilemmas of combining a financial provider identity with the unpaid caring work essential to their children's wide ranging care needs. This data adds weight to the argument that fathering identities are complex, requiring research which navigates a clearer understanding of the flexible rather than static nature of fatherhood (Marsiglio et al., 2000). Of particular note is the potential to expose and utilise the multiple fathering identities to develop a contemporary understanding of how these are negotiated in the everyday (Seward & Richter, 2008).

In light of the detailed analysis of Rick above, I now turn to other fathers from the study to highlight further examples of referential talk. By doing this I highlight how,

similarly to Rick, other fathers discursively traverse a range of fathering identities. For instance, when talking about their own biography, all the fathers in the study mobilised or distanced themselves from their own father's identity. Henwood et al., (2008) comment that by fathers using talk they are:

> Positioning themselves in relation to 'progressive' ideas of the involved 'new' father and more traditional positions of paternal strength, provision, protection and support involved an exploration of identity and relational dynamics in relation to time and change, and to historical and sociocultural contexts, moving us some way towards a fuller understanding of the old/new dynamic as complexly temporal. (Henwood et al., 2008, p. 4)

Extract 4 below illustrates this. Jake, a part-time employed security guard, considers his identity as a father by referring to his own childhood and his father.

EXTRACT 4.

> Jake: I do look back as a dad and think about what mine did with me (Jake, a part-time employed security guard.)

Unlike Rick's father, Jake's father is deceased. Jake found it difficult to talk about his own deceased father without becoming emotional. The silences provided discursive cues (Cameron, 2001) indicating the challenges Jake faced talking about his own identity as a father with that of the memory of his deceased father. When interviewed, he rarely talked about his father explicitly but would use sophisticated discursive strategies to make links about his own identity and his father's identity as demonstrated in extract 5 below.

EXTRACT 5.

> Jake: Yeah we named our son that because of my dad. He didn't do much with me when I was a kid because he wasn't around much but it's in memory to him.
>
> GY: Do you do things differently with your son to when you were a kid with your dad?
>
> Jake: I suppose yeah because it's a bit early stages because I can't remember that far back yet.

Extract 5 shows that when I asked Jake about his son's name he volunteered, "Yeah we named our son that because of my dad. He didn't do much with me when I was a kid because he wasn't around much but it's in memory to him." Jake used "didn't do much" "wasn't around much" repeating "much" to contrast with more detailed lists of what he did with his own son. Extract 5 shows that when I attempted to probe this, Jake gave a plausible argument that it was difficult to compare his own childhood with that of his son's because he couldn't "remember that far back"

What is interesting about Jake's talk is that he appeared to substitute referring to his own father with reference to other fathers he identifies as his contemporaries. This was

also apparent in examining the data from Neil, another father from the study. Neil, a full-time employed nurse, identified himself as "adopted" and followed a similar pattern of talk to Jake with reference to "other dads." For instance extract 6 is taken from Neil's description about his experiences of being a dad.

EXTRACT 6.

Neil: I was adopted so didn't know my parents but I can see what I'm like with my son by looking at other working dads who go to dads' day at the playgroup (Neil, a full-time employed nurse).

Neil uses references to "other working dads" to position himself discursively amongst his contemporaries. Thus, both Neil and Jake present themselves as morally good fathers based on their contemporaries. They talk about 'falling in line with other dads'. Again this leads me to question the influence of societal norms in which a series of prescribed actions provide normative ways of doing and being fathers, namely those built on serving the hegemonic practices and policies of work family integration based on economic rationalism discourses (Kahu & Morgan, 2007). Thus we see how discourses of fathering involve fathers prescribing to and being prescribed by traditional hegemonic masculinity shaping fathering identities. This poses challenges to the everyday experiences of negotiating fathering identities.

For Jake, Neil, Rick, Tim and the other participants, their talk revealed shared meanings of fatherhood. For instance, extract 7 demonstrates that when asked about being a dad, Tim, a full-time employed police officer, draws on the concept of shared meaning.

EXTRACT 7.

Tim: Everyone knows what a dad does, he works and does what he can for his kids. (Tim, a full-time employed police officer).

Tim's talk contains a mutual exchange of shared meanings of fathering. Tim's vague comment above, "does what he can for his kids" is ambiguous, indicating that the cultural norms of fatherhood are based on shared meaning "Everyone knows what a dad does." Interestingly, apart from paid work, he does not state any other specific tasks he associates with fathering practices. Tim constructs fatherhood as a process of "does what he can" yet his talks indicates that there is a challenge in actually pinpointing the specifics of this other than through paid work. As I have stated earlier in this paper, the UK context of fathering places significant emphasis of a good parent being economically active. Therefore Tim's comment that a father "does what he can" can be discursively interpreted as a father providing financially for his child within the norms and practices of good parenting in the UK. Similarly to Tim, the other participants used discursive strategies; sometimes accepting, rejecting or simply recognising the constitutive nature of the shared meanings of being and doing fathering.

The following extract 8 is Jake describing taking his son to playgroup. It shows that with shared meanings, fathers can experience everyday challenges in harnessing the

power to expand discourses of fathering. Essentially, although individuals attempt to challenge hegemonic static fathering identities, Jake's example of self positioning demonstrates "...the conundrum of men who appear to be both hegemonic and non-hegemonic, complicit and resistant at the same time" (Wetherell & Edley, 1999, p. 33).

EXTRACT 8.

GY: Does taking your son to playgroup make you feel good about being a dad?
Jake: Yeah
GY: Go on then, why?
Jake: Because I'm probably the only dad that is there at playgroup. Some weeks anyway. But I seem to have started a trend off in there because they are all women. Older women run it and the women who go, the mums, erm, from like late 20s upwards, erm I think they all got a bit surprised when I turned up anyway. First time anyway. "He's a dad, what's he's doing?" Anyway they must have been having words with their own partners and occasionally you get the odd dad coming.

As the extract demonstrates, Jake talked about his own fathering identity in relation to others. Jake does not, however, liken himself to other fathers in the way Neil and Tim do, as I have illustrated above. Instead, Jake differentiates himself from other fathers. For instance, Jake is a part-time security guard earning less than his partner, a full-time social worker. He suggests that he works part-time rather than full-time so that he can care for his son. He says this is not "the norm" and goes on to provide a detailed scenario of how he does this, positioning himself as being in the minority in terms of challenging hegemonic fathering norms. He gives an example of "I'm probably the only dad that is there at playgroup." When I probe, "Go on then, why?" Jake positions himself as a morally good father compared to his contemporaries.

Extract 8 above shows how Jake uses discursive detail to narrate his experience of challenging hegemonic fathering norms by expressing feeling separate and different to the majority in a group of adults at his son's playgroup. In this extract he talks about his moral self (May, 2008) as a good father by drawing referentially on how others; mothers, fathers and playgroup organisers, respond to him being at the playgroup. As the extract progresses, his talk shifts from his initial tentative language to more confident talk about how he feels good "Because I'm probably the only dad that is there." He positions himself initially as an outsider, challenging norms around who is expected to attend the playgroup. His talk reflects a sense of self pride as a father and as someone who is slowly more accepted into the group by suggesting "I think they all got a bit surprised when I turned up anyway. First time anyway. He's a dad, what's he's doing?" Here he uses tentative phrasing in his account such as "erm," "anyway" and "First time anyway." To substantiate his claim he also includes what he perceives are the questions the other adults are asking themselves and others "He's a dad, what's he's doing?" This adds to his construction of his own identity as powerful by inferring he could 'read their minds', anticipate their questions, thus setting himself apart from the

other fathers he refers to. Furthermore, he adds disclaimers "I'm probably" and "Some weeks anyway" to suggest that whilst other fathers now attend playgroup, Jake positions himself as the leader of this change "But I seem to have started a trend off in there." Thus Jake suggests he has mobilised a new acceptance of fathers who attend the playgroup.

From extract 8 above then, it would appear that Jake's talk and social action is challenging and dismantling the dominant hegemonic masculine constructs which shape fathering norms. Jake does not position himself as the archetypal 'breadwinner' and he talks about himself as a part-time worker rather than full-time worker. This appears, initially, as an informed choice with Jake positioning himself as an active agent choosing to provide childcare to his son at the expense of paid work (Williams, 2004). However, on a more detailed examination of his talk, it becomes clear that this poses challenges for Jake and he is not necessarily the leader of change he earlier constructs himself to be when discussing his attendance at playgroup. Instead we begin to see how he is struggling with the structural restrictions imposed by hegemonic frames of masculinity and fathering which prioritise paid work over informal care.

Jake talks of the financial need to work to support his family and also the dilemma this poses in that he relies on extended family to provide childcare whilst he and his partner attend paid work because formal childcare is too expensive. Thus, in the following extract 9, Jake talks further about his experiences of work-family integration as an intricate arrangement of formal and informal childcare and paid employment. In testament to this, extract 9 highlights Jake saying, "My in-laws care for him, call it from 11am so 6 to 7 hours a day, 3 days a week, whilst we are both working." This supports the depiction of the complex reality of work-family integration which is often glossed over by politicians and policy makers.

EXTRACT 9.

GY: So you work part-time and your partner works full-time? How often does your family care for your son?

Jake: My in-laws care for him, call it from 11am, so 6 to 7 hours a day, 3 days a week, whilst we are both working. Oh aye. It saves on the cost of nursery places these days. They are about £30 a day.

Clearly this account bears evidence that informal care is deemed more financially astute than paying for the cost of formal childcare. Many of the study's participants mirror Jake's discursive strategy of detailing the actual cost of formal child care. Jake states "They (nursery places) are about £30 a day." Thus despite Jake initially positioning himself outside the normative practices of working and parenting, clearly this is not the case. Instead we hear how he too is prescribed by and prescribing to these norms rooted in the primacy of paid work and the priority of paid work over caring for his own children.

By discursively analysing Jake's talk it appears to concur with Finn and Henwood's (2009) findings which suggest that fathering talk reveals how fathers position themselves as gender nonconformists. Ironically the 'gender rebel' they construct is em-

bedded within hegemonic masculine values of independence, autonomy and assertive courage. Thus even if they construct themselves as a nonconformist, this process is packaged within language of hegemonic masculine values and practices. With this in mind it seems appropriate to return to the Wetherell and Edley's (1999) discursive analysis of men's negotiation of hegemonic masculinity;

> The man, for instance, who describes himself as original, as beyond stereotype, as having a personal worked out philosophy of masculinity or indeed just ordinary and average has not escaped the familiar tropes of gender. He is precisely enmeshed by convention; subjectified, ordered and disciplined at the very moment he rehearses the language of personal taste, unconventionality and autonomy or ordinariness and normality. (Wetherell & Edley, 1999, p. 33)

Thus, in analysing the differential, persistent and idiosyncratic inflection of recognisable procedures evident in the data extracts, I have demonstrated the challenges of negotiating fathering identities. Rick, Jake and the other fathers interviewed use talk to make sense of their everyday experiences. These are enmeshed within societal norms and practices of working and caring. Therefore despite fathers like Jake talking of non-conforming by being the only dad at playgroup, in effect, he is prescribed by and prescribing to particular forms of masculinity in practice through talk and social action. By setting himself apart from other fathers he is reinforcing the ordinariness of dominant masculine values which can be found in in Rick and other fathers accounts..

Conclusions

In this paper I have provided empirical evidence that supports earlier research on the negotiation of fathering identities. Despite the associated methodological limitations of providing a small sample of fathering talk, it is clear that discursive analysis provides evidence of the complex and fluid nature of fathering identities. By reviewing the UK context of these findings, I have demonstrated that the breadwinner father remains an enduring dominant construct. My evidence confirms that being economically active within the labour market remains linked to the conception of good fathering in the UK. However, I have also suggested that, in contemporary Britain, being a father is complex. Fathers are expected to be more than a financial provider. Fathers must negotiate complex identities which challenge how they integrate work and family life everyday.

It is apparent that fathering identities pose far more complex everyday challenges than is often acknowledged (Marsiglio et al., 2000). Furthermore, although Connell's (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity provides a starting point for studying fathering identities, it is important to examine how this plays out in their everyday lives. Discursive research provides the tools to undertake a fine grained analysis of culturally exalted forms of masculinity and fatherhood. In this instance, it has illustrated how hegemonic frameworks of masculinity and fathering are at odds with work-family integration policy agenda due to the paradoxical relationship between paid work and unpaid caring.

After examining discursive data, it is evident that fathers draw on a smorgasbord of identities. These identities can be restricted by hegemonic constructs of masculinity

and fatherhood such as the breadwinner father. Within this conceptual framework, those who are in part-time rather than full-time employment, the unemployed and informal carers are deemed subordinate. Thus despite the contemporary broadening of traditional constructs to accommodate notions of fathers as nurturers and carers, this smorgasbord of identifications is restricted by dominant homogenous normative constructs (Smart and Shipman, 2004).

In this paper I have considered Seward and Richter's (2008) call to expand horizons of research on fathering. In asking, "To what extent has a "new" approach to fathering emerged? Is the concept of the caring father just an often stated norm, a theoretical concept, or is it actively practiced?" Seward and Richter (2008, p.88) have raised important questions about the fluidity and negotiated nature of fathering. With this in mind, I have attempted to provide evidence of the ways in which fathering talk is an expression of performing and negotiating fathering identities. I have highlighted how fathering identities are mobilised through shared meanings of masculinity and fatherhood.

By adopting a discursive approach to fathering research, the data presented demonstrates fathers using discursive strategies to present a moral self in which they refer to other fathers, both within and across generations (Henwood et al., 2008). Fathers present a moral self of the 'good' father in line with social and political discourses on good parenting in early 21st century Britain. Discursive analysis of fathering talk reveals how they construct themselves as a 'good father', through a series of sophisticated discursive strategies when talking about challenges of everyday life. It is here that the paradoxes of paid work and caring become evident.

In this paper I have considered the challenges fathers face in negotiating the traditional norms of fathering and working. I recommend that researchers should embrace the development of a body of knowledge which critically considers these in favour of more co-operative work-family discourses acknowledging the rich diversity of father's lives. I suggest that continued scholarly work is needed to develop an understanding of the negotiated nature of fathering identities. This could be undertaken using discursive research to analyse fathering talk. By paying close attention to discursive strategies we can examine how fathers use referential language to navigate discourses of working and fathering in their daily lives. Researchers using this approach could explore the fluidity of fathering identities as fathers mobilise and distance themselves from the breadwinner father and other hegemonic frames of fathering and masculinity. The emergence of a new approach to fathering research (Seward & Richter, 2008) needs to acknowledge the referential nature of fathering talk based on shared meanings about contemporary fathering. By focusing on these shared meanings, discursive research demonstrates the value of understanding the rich diversity of everyday experiences of fathering. To capture this richness I advocate further research which draws on the involvement of a range of stakeholders including scholars, policy makers, practitioners and fathers themselves. In doing so, alternative epistemiologies acknowledging the fluidity of fathering identities can be facilitated.

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