

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](http://www.sciencedirect.com)

Women's Studies International Forum

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/wsif

Revisiting radical feminism: Partnered dual-earner mothers' place still in the home?

Xuanqi Liu^a, Suzette Dyer^{b,*}^a *Travelsky Ltd., Level 5 E5 National Convention Center, 100105 Beijing, China*^b *Waikato Management School, P.O. Box 2015, Hamilton, New Zealand*

ARTICLE INFO

Available online 9 August 2014

SYNOPSIS

Despite significant growth in maternal employment, women still perform the majority of unpaid work in dual-earner families. In our qualitative exploratory study, we examine how 10 working mothers make sense of traditional gender roles, experience, and explain the division of unpaid work practised within their home. Similar to prior research, we found that all 10 women experienced time imbalance as a result of combining motherhood and paid work. Moreover, seven of them performed the majority of unpaid work and childcare home, and changed jobs to do so. Importantly, we contribute to current understandings about dual-earner families by uncovering four distinct ways these women made sense of traditional gender roles including: acceptance, resistance, re-negotiation, and rejection. Those who accepted also aligned and identified with traditional gender roles, and expressed a preference to be stay-at-home mothers. Those who resisted and re-negotiated traditional gender roles still performed the majority of unpaid work. The three women rejecting traditional gender roles shared the financial responsibility and the unpaid work in their home. These women implicitly or explicitly drew on biological and socially constructed differences between men and women, their husbands' work commitments and attitudes, and the presence of children to explain their experiences of imbalance and the division of unpaid work practised in their homes. We find that a radical lens provides analytical insight to help explain these women's experiences. We conclude that while traditional gender division of unpaid work in the home is being challenged, it is still widely practised in the majority of these women's homes.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

Dual-earner families have grown significantly in the past 30 years. In the early 1980s, approximately 50% of New Zealand families were dual-earners; currently as many as two-thirds of two-parent families fall in this category (*New Zealand Parliament, 2011; Equal Employment Opportunity Trust (EEO), 2011*). In 36% of coupled families, both parents work full time, compared to 26% of families where the father works full-time and the mother part-time, 2% where the

mother works full-time and the father part-time, and 20% of families where only the father is in employment (*Equal Employment Opportunity Trust, 2011*). Significantly, 29.02% of dual-earner couples work in excess of 80 hours per week between them, and 8.03% work in excess of 100 combined hours (*Fursman, 2008*). This pattern is similar in most OECD nations, with dual-earners becoming the norm amongst coupled families (*OECD, 2010*). This rise is attributed to the significant increase in maternal employment: across OECD nations around 60% of mothers with one child and 55% of mothers with two children are now actively engaged in paid employment (*OECD, 2011*). In New Zealand, 75% of mothers

* Corresponding author.

are returning to paid work within 12 months and two-thirds within six months of taking parental leave (Equal Employment Opportunity Trust, 2011).

Even though mothers have increased their workforce participation rate, it appears that fathers have not proportionately increased their share of the unpaid work and childcare within dual-earner families (OECD, 2010). While there is variation between OECD nations, employed fathers in most OECD countries spend less than one quarter of the hours on housework, and half as much time on childcare compared to their employed female partners (Winslow, 2005). This is still the case even when both partners work full-time (McElwain, Korabik, & Rosin, 2005) and where women earn more than their husbands (Poeschl, 2008). Similarly, in New Zealand, fathers have only slightly increased their commitment to childcare and housework and have more leisure time, while mothers continue to perform most of this domestic labour (Statistics New Zealand, 2011). Thus, while women have entered paid employment in significant numbers, evidence suggests that traditional gender roles still predominate in the home of dual-earner families, with women still remaining responsible for the household work (OECD, 2013). The higher unpaid contribution directly impacts women's labour force participation, and results in gendered income inequalities, time-poverty, and increased stress for women. This time poverty increases with each additional child for women more so than for men (OECD, 2013).

Maume, (2008) and Maume, Sebastian, and Bardo (2011) argue that women's greater contribution to unpaid work is due to the enduring belief that women are simply better at performing housework and childcare compared to men. In their study of 25 couples, Maune et al., found that 12 husbands held this view, while nearly half of the wives believed they performed laundry and household cleaning better than their husbands. Maume et al. argue that this enduring belief that women are better at housework simultaneously gives men an excuse to escape from these tasks and persuades women to take on a larger share within dual-earner families.

Similarly, significant numbers of dual-earner families still parent in traditional ways (Hall & MacDermid, 2009). Being a mother is traditionally defined as providing physical and emotional care for children and often results in mothers sacrificing or putting aside their own desires and interests for her children (Gillian, 2006). According to the traditional role, a father is culturally defined as the breadwinner, often emotionally distant, and is expected to engage in paid employment to provide safety and financial stability for the family (Collier, 2008). In terms of family tasks, fathers are more likely to assume responsibility for social and rewarding times with children; for example, bath time, story reading, and in playful interactions (Gaunt, 2006). In support of this, Maume (2008) found that women are considered to be better at childcare, with mothers making frequent phone calls to check up on the family when their husbands were alone caring for children. Yet, fathers did not question their wives' ability to care for children on their own.

The prioritisation of the male breadwinner status in the family unit is reflected in women being twice as likely as men to put their career on hold for family and to use sick-leave to

care for children (Equal Employment Opportunity Trust, 2011). When men work longer hours, women tend to increase their unpaid contribution in the family and/or reduce their working time in order to perform domestic work (Jacobs & Gerson, 2001). In contrast, husbands rarely make these same sacrifices when their wives work long hours (Halpern & Cheung, 2008).

From a biological position, the differences between what men and women do in the home are determined by their natural differences (Fausto-Sterling, 1992). A socially constructed position suggests that we do gender through the ways we talk, act, and interact with those around us. In this way, the division of unpaid work is explained by how tasks are defined as gendered and how we act in response to those definitions (Butler, 1990). Radical feminists interpret these dialectic and traditional gendered roles as integral to upholding patriarchal social structures (Campbell & Wasco, 2000; Rudy, 2001). From this standpoint, men are considered to gain advantage from relegating women with the responsibility for childcare, housework, and nurturing the nuclear and wider family (Thompson, 2001). Women's greater contribution to unpaid work concomitantly restricts their opportunities in paid employment and opens the space for men to occupy the dominant, better paid, and more powerful positions in the public sphere (Legerski & Cornwall, 2010). This process is facilitated by the gendering of paid employment, and is completed by placing the responsibility for balancing paid and unpaid work commitments on women and the responsibility for the family's financial security on men.

In summary, a significant body of evidence demonstrates that women in dual-earner families perform the majority of unpaid work and this negatively impacts their career and wellbeing. Scholars and researchers offer a number of explanations for this, ranging from biological and socially informed notions that women are better at these tasks, to arguing that the gendered division of labour in the home is designed to uphold male dominance in society. However, less is known about how mothers in dual-earner families make sense of traditional gendered roles and the divisions of unpaid labour as practised in their own home. In this exploratory study, we address this gap by asking: How do women living in dual-earner families make sense of, experience, and explain traditional gender roles and the division of household labour as practised in their own home? We now turn to the method employed in this research.

Method

Exploratory research design and in-depth interviews

An exploratory design is useful when researchers wish to discover what is to be known about a 'general focus of inquiry' (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 44). In harmony with the exploratory approach, we chose to use in-depth, semi-structured thematic interviews (Creswell, 2009; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Opdenakker, 2006). In-depth interviews allowed us to go beyond surface-level discussions of who does what in the household and to inquire about the participants' perspectives, thoughts, feelings, and sense-making of these arrangements. We drew on prior research to develop a

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/375894>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/375894>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)