

The Gendered Journey of Parenthood

A comparative study of how couples in Norway and Britain organise
their family and working lives in the transition to parenthood.

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Abstract

This study explores how couples in Norway and Britain adapt to parenthood in ways that establish, modify or reject a traditional gender split in family roles and responsibilities. By conducting in-depth interviews with mothers and fathers, both during the time of pregnancy as well as after the period of parental leave has come to an end, the study aims to achieve a greater understanding of how and why heterosexual couples often, but not always, develop a more pronounced gender-asymmetry in their employment and household roles and responsibilities when they become parents. The dynamics of the gendered family life will be analysed. In couples where a traditional division of labour is fully or partly rejected, the paper will explore how parents arrive at a more egalitarian distribution of unpaid and paid work and why this practice has emerged. The existing parental leave policies in Norway and Britain will be used as a framework for the study. This study, building on the voices of both men and women in two different welfare states, seeks to understand why gendered earning and caring choices are often made when heterosexual couples have a baby. While attention will be given to the transition to parenthood, and hence the use of parental leave entitlements, the study will also explore the lived realities of motherhood and fatherhood once the period of leave has come to an end and the mum and/or dad have either returned to work on a full-time basis or chosen alternative arrangements. The challenges of combining earning and caring responsibilities will be explored, comparing the choices and the experiences of parents in the two national contexts.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In 1979, in her book *From Here to Maternity*, Oakley portrayed motherhood as 'a crisis in the life of a woman, a point of no return' (Oakley, 1979: 1). When a woman welcomes her first baby, Oakley argued, she 'confronts the full reality of what it means to be a woman in our society' (Oakley, 1979: 1). By the time couples reach their mid-thirties, Oakley maintained, parenthood has 'wedged the sexes apart' (Oakley, 1979: 13). While men concentrate on their breadwinner responsibilities, women become the homemaker. Oakley described how deeply gendered family roles emerge when couples become parents.

This thesis sets out to explore men and women in expectant dual-earner couples and the way they envision and plan their lives after welcoming their first child. The research is longitudinal and will hence also *follow* these families from pregnancy until their maternity/parental leave period has come to an end and the mothers and fathers have either returned to full-time employment or chosen alternative earning and caring arrangements. The gendered journey of parenthood will be investigated in two different European societies, Norway and the UK. The selected countries are theoretically interesting as they represent substantial variations in how public and private responsibilities towards care for young children are viewed, valued and supported. There are differences in the welfare states development and the policy reform. Whereas Norway has been at the forefront of encouraging egalitarian caring practices, the UK has only recently opened the door, rather cautiously, to fathers taking on a more active and involved role at home while temporarily stepping away from the labour market. The macro-level gender ideologies and their institutional representations which structure and frame men's and women's journey to parenthood differ fundamentally in these two

welfare states. In this study, a comparative framework is established which allows individuals' and couples' expectations as well as lived experiences to be linked to the wider national political and cultural context surrounding them.

More than a generation has passed since Oakley's ground-breaking publication. Women today have a growing presence in the world of paid work, in higher education and in public activities, yet parenthood continues to crystallize a gendered division of labour (Grunow, 2019; Kaufman, 2018; Matysiak and Cukrowska-Torzewska, 2021; McMunn *et al*, 2020). In the aggregate, motherhood is associated with *lower* levels of labour force participation whereas fatherhood tends to involve a *higher* labour force participation (Matysiak and Cukrowska-Torzewska, 2021). Indeed, as argued by Singley and Hyne (2005), 'many of the stratification processes that generate social and economic inequalities between women and men appear to intensify across the life course as a result of women's disproportionate responsibility for child care' (Singley and Hynes, 2005: 377). What explains this incongruity between women's considerable social and political equality and the persistent, family work, parenthood, and employment inequality? While so much has changed over in the last forty years, the patterns that seem particularly resistant to change are those 'involving negotiations between women and men in intimate relationships' (Fox, 2001: 387). What is it that happens in these intimate and ongoing 'negotiations' which in the words of Oakley, often 'wedges' the sexes apart and continues to generate such a gendered allocation of unpaid family-related work and care? At the same time, although the change in the gendered distribution of earning and caring roles and responsibilities in heterosexual couples is, in the words of Sullivan (2004), both 'slow' and piecemeal', gender relations are indeed moving in new directions and couples organising their lives along more egalitarian and

'non-normative' lines, are on the rise. What is it that makes couples rethink and negotiate motherhood and fatherhood in ways that are either modifications or complete rejections of the gender asymmetry in employment and household roles often seen in the transition to parenthood? The research questions this thesis sets out to answer are:

How do couples in Norway and Britain adapt to parenthood in ways that establish, modify or reject a traditional gender split in family roles? Why do these patterns emerge? How do the stories of first-time parents differ in the two countries before, during, and after the period of parental leave?

By comparing individual stories of how men and women subjectively navigate the transition to parenthood within and across two diverse national contexts, the aim is to understand the various ways and the circumstances under which mothers and fathers, reproduce but also challenge deeply rooted gender ideologies around the division of labour. *Like Oakley*, the study will analyse the journey of 'becoming a mother', and investigate *how* and *why* women often, but by no means always, adopt a more traditional role when their first child arrives. *Unlike Oakley*, however, this research will also give a voice to men, and embrace *their* experiences, choices, feelings and thoughts as they become *fathers*. The thesis will therefore equally include the journey of fatherhood. What this study will not include is the stories of parenthood of same-sex couples. While the rapid progress in the legal recognition of same-sex families that has taken place in recent decades has led to an increase in the proportion of children growing up in these households (Evertsson, et al., 2021) studying their transition to parenthood adds dynamics, perspectives and patterns which would add complexities this research was not designed to capture.

Why study the journey of parenthood?

The arrival of the first baby turns a couple into a new kind of family. For many men and women in stable, long-term relationships, it represents the initial step into an official

family life. Parenthood which involves a whole new set of responsibilities, worries, interests and joys, is one of the most significant milestones of adult life. The paid and unpaid labour that both partners may have been engaged in before they become parents assumes a new significance when a dependent child needs to be taken care of while enough money to pay for daily necessities must be earned. The transition to parenthood is therefore often perceived to mark a real turning point in the life course, 'altering not only everyday practices and patterns of conduct in fundamental ways but also imposing a need to reconsider life priorities as new parents adapt to their shifting obligations as carers of an infant, in addition to their other social roles, in particular, their work roles' (Grunow, 2019: 9). It is, however, *mothers* who are more likely to consider this transition a critical juncture in their life. Despite the documented trend of young couples today dividing paid and unpaid work more equally compared to older cohorts during the early stages of their relationship (Buhmann *et al.*, 2010; Fuwa and Cohen, 2007; Sullivan, 2021) the initial egalitarian division of responsibilities is often replaced by what Gunow and Veltkamp have labelled 'a traditionalization of gender roles' (Gunow and Veltkamp, 2016: 8) once the journey of parenthood is embarked upon (see for example Fox, 2009; Grunow, 2021; Miller, 2007; McMunn *et al.*, 2020; Schober, 2013). According to Fox (2001) motherhood can therefore be regarded as 'the most gender-enforcing experience in the lives of many women' (Fox, 2001: 374). Despite the dramatic increase in women's labour market participation as well as their growing presence in previous male bastions such as higher education, senior management and commanding positions in the political domain, the unpaid and time-consuming task of child-rearing, continues to fall within mothers' socially prescribed primary responsibilities (Matysiak and Cukrowska-Torzewska, 2021; Sanchez and Thomson, 1997; Sullivan 2021). Whereas the last generation has seen women with

acceleration entering and occupying the 'public sphere', men have been slow to make a corresponding shift where time and attention are dedicated to housework and childcare (see for example England, 2010; Layte, 1999; McMunn *et al.*, 2020; Sullivan, 1997, 2021). Hochschild (1990) has labelled this situation the 'stalled revolution' where women have joined men in the public sphere of commerce and civil activities, but men have failed to make a corresponding shift in the time and attention they dedicate to home life. In dual-earner middle-class families with infants, research indicates that mothers carry out on average twice as many caregiving jobs compared to the fathers (Manlove and Vernon-Feagans, 2002). Duncan *et al.*, (2003) argue that even in couples where men *do* spend significant amounts of time on domestic and childcare work, it continues to be the women who in most cases carry the overall responsibility for the house and the family as the homemaker and the main carer. Consequently, mothers tend to substantially reduce their employment to make time for the demands of the children and the accompanying housework (McMunn *et al.*, 2020; Sanchez and Thomson, 1997). Research shows that even if the couple intends for the gendered division of labour established upon entering parenthood to only be a temporary 'solution' to the competing demands of market work and family work, these traditional roles and responsibilities usually persist during the later stages of the parents' life course (Deutsch, 1999; Fox, 2009; Hays, 1996; Yavorsky *et al.*, 2015; Walzer, 1998). This would indicate that formerly egalitarian sharing patterns are being adapted to less egalitarian realities in the journey of parenthood (Kaufman, 2018, McMunn *et al.*, 2020). The transition to parenthood is hence particularly salient in exploring the persistence of gendered separate spheres. What forces are at play that mean couples so often are swept along a stream of traditional attitudes and gendered labour market realities

(Sanchez and Thomson, 1997)? Also, when heterosexual couples choose to swim 'against' rather than 'along' this gendered stream, how and why are those decisions made? In this thesis, the aim is to create a greater understanding of how and why heterosexual couples, often, but not always develop a more gender asymmetry in their employment and household roles and responsibilities when they become parents. The dynamics of the gendered family life will be analysed.

Whereas the existing parental leave in the UK and in Norway will be used as a 'framework' or 'reference point' for the research when exploring the gendered effect of parenthood, the thesis will include the time before the birth as well as the time when the maternity/parental leave has come to an end and both mum and dad have either returned to the workforce or agreed on a different family earning and caring strategy. Attention will be given to how structures mould individual decisions and social interaction but also to how human action, both conscious and habit-driven, serves to create, maintain and modify existing structures. The thesis draws on Risman's (2004) gender structure theory, a theory which sees gender structure as embedded in all aspects of society and as a basis for stratifications in people's personalities, cultural rules and institutions. Conceptualising gender as a social structure allows an identification of the conditions which create gender inequality in each of these dimensions as well as how it transpires. Throughout this study, Sullivan's (2004) use of 'gender consciousness' is adopted as well. Men and women, mothers and fathers are perceived to be reflexive, conscious human beings who respond to the structures of opportunities and the constraints in their daily lives. Together, this ensures a conceptual framework for exploring the gendered journey of parenthood in a way that also embraces the potential for diversity and transformation. While the conceptual

framework will be further elaborated upon in Chapter 2 of the thesis, this section will now turn to the following critical question: why is the male breadwinner/female caregiver model of the family which up until a generation ago was regarded as 'natural' and 'self-evident' now considered so problematic?

According to Williams (2010), understanding the gender asymmetry associated with the transition to parenthood where the time women and men invest in the labour market and the household goes in opposite directions, has implications for understanding how systematic injustice is perpetuated (Williams, 2010). Parenting arrangements are linked to gender inequality as many of the stratification processes that generate social and economic inequalities between men and women appear to intensify across their life course as a result of women's disproportionate responsibility for childcare (Gatrell, 2005; Grinza *et al.*, 2017; Sanchez and Thomson, 1997; Boje and Leira, 2000). Losing a tie with the labour market, even for a short period, is detrimental to women's human capital and consequently to women's future career prospects and earning possibilities (see for example Matysiak and Cukrowska-Torzewska, 2021) which then serves to further reinforce the pressure for gendered specialisation (Kan *et al.*, 2011). Evertsson and Duvander (2011) found that mothers who left the labour market for a period of 16 months or more after the birth of their child, were less likely to see upward occupational mobility, a pattern also emphasised by Matysiak and Cukrowska-Torzewska (2021) who maintain that employers often avoid promoting women after long maternity/parental leave as they are perceived as less committed to paid work. The penalty for mothers for taking long periods of parental leave appears to be higher in male-dominated sectors, sectors that expect and reward long working hours (Bertrand *et al.*, 2010 in Matysiak and Cukrowska-Torzewska (2021). Moreover,

as argued by Matysiak and Cukrowska-Torzewska (2021), mothers display worse labour market outcomes because they frequently choose jobs that are possible to combine with caring responsibilities. These 'family-friendly' positions tend to offer limited career prospects as well as lower wages. While there are numerous mechanisms through which the journey of parenthood affects women's earnings and career prospects, the overall trend is that women with children tend to earn less than their male counterparts. This makes them economically dependent and limits their bargaining power at home. Sullivan (2021) also points to not only the *gender pay gap* but the *pension gap* as well which 'continues to have an impact on women's quality of life and life chances in older ages' (Sullivan, 2021: 342). It should be noted too that the gendered system described above has severe consequences for children where children of divorced mothers often experience a significant reduction in their standard of living or accompany their mother into poverty, as the woman's earning power tends to be much less than that of her ex-partner's (Schober and Scott, 2012; Williams, 1999). In addition, women's relatively weak ties to the labour market have left them vastly underrepresented in positions of commercial and political leadership, jobs offering influence, prestige and substantial financial remuneration (Matysiak and Cukrowska-Torzewska, 2021; Williams, 2000). Although much feminist literature has focused on how the gendered distribution of earning and caring is key to women's subordination in society (Fox, 2001) and how this system has put men in an advantageous position, it should be noted that men's breadwinner role makes them emotional outsiders in family life and limits their access to and emotional connection with their children (Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006; Karu and Tremblay, 2018). Understanding *how* and *why* the transition to parenthood frequently leads to a gendered division of labour is key to understanding other aspects of social change as well (Grunow and Veltkamp, 2016). Research shows

that a traditional earning and caring strategy reduces couples' intention of having another child (Mills *et al.*, 2008) and it increases the risk of divorce (Cooke, 2004). Conversely, a more egalitarian arrangement has, according to Duvander and Jans (2009), the potential to increase family stability and fertility. As argued by Fox, (2009), it is therefore surprising that the questions of *how* and *why* heterosexual couples often, but not always, develop more pronounced gender asymmetry in their employment and household roles and responsibilities in the journey to parenthood, have to date received limited attention. Before giving an overview, chapter by chapter of how this thesis will attempt to answer precisely these questions, the focus will now turn to how such a research enquiry was carried out and the reasons why this methodology was chosen.

How should the gendered journey of parenthood be studied?

The research design guiding this study was to understand the complexities involved in 'disentangling' the interrelation between individual-level, couple-level and institution-level elements, which together contribute to an intensified gender divide in the transition to parenthood as well as capturing the factors and the process of less traditional family-strategies being embraced. The data for this thesis comes from in-depth interviews with 15 couples in Britain and Norway (30 individuals in each country) who were expecting their first child. The interviews were conducted between 2012 and 2016. Research by Risman (1998) and Walzer (1998) shows that for most parents, employment decisions and related use of work-family policy are negotiated within the context of the heterosexual couple. Exploring the multiple family strategies new men and women use as they become mothers and fathers, the couple's perspective helps to illuminate how individual parenting choices and experiences of parenthood are tied in with the wishes and behaviours of the other parent (Elder, 1998). Ellingsæter and Leira (2006) state that these couple negotiations are 'subtle and implicit rather

than exhaustive and explicit' (Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006: 88). This calls for qualitative research methods to be applied to capture the intricate nature of the decision-making process that take place in a couple where roles and responsibilities concerning earning and caring develop over time. While numerous studies are attempting to understand men's and women's, mothers' and fathers' employment pattern and their often different roles and responsibilities within the household (see for example studies by Crompton *et al.*, 2005; Gornick *et al.*, 1998; Kan and Gershuny, 2010; Kitterød and Pettersen, 2006; Sanchez and Thomson, 1997; Smeaton, 2006; Vlasblom and Schippers, 2006), those working from large quantitative data sets can only speculate about the reasons and will find it hard to reconstruct how these couple-level processes unfold over time (Grunow and Evertsson, 2019). These processes tend to transcend 'distinct, measurable socioeconomic characteristics and quantifiable gender inequalities and are therefore difficult to capture using the indicators typically applied in quantitative research' (Grunow and Evertsson 2019: 30). By listening to men and women's own stories, their explanations and their plans, it is possible to move beyond any predefined indicators that shape couples' journey of parenthood (Neale, 2015). This research will allow the participants to tell their stories in their own words, from their perspectives. In doing so, the hope is to contribute to research which emphasises the need to focus on the details of how women and men, mothers and fathers reproduce, dismantle or 'undo' gender in their everyday life (see for example Fox, 2009; Risman, 2009).

It is also worth mentioning that traditionally the research around gendered work patterns in paid and unpaid labour has focused almost exclusively on *women's* choices and preferences, building on their voices and their view of the world. *Men's*, or arguably more relevant, *fathers'* presence and contributions in the home, their earning and caring

choices and preferences, articulated by the men themselves, have frequently been left unexplored. The historic exclusion of men from parenting studies, treating fathers as invisible, irrelevant members of the household, is arguably based on the questionable assumption that household work is a woman's domain and childcare is a dilemma for mothers to solve (Valentine, 1999). The fact that men today are increasingly involved in caregiving and a substantial proportion of men would like to be even more present in the upbringing of their children (Grunow and Evertsson, 2016, 2019) has rarely been incorporated into studies. In this study, fathers are very much included. Leaving out the role of fathers when trying to explain gendered patterns in paid labour, caregiving and household chores also goes against the research by Risman (1998) and Walzer (1998) who found that for the majority of parents, employment decisions, the use of work-family policies and the allocation of domestic responsibilities is negotiated in the context of the heterosexual couple (for notable exceptions, see Cowan and Cowan, 1992; Grunow and Evertsson, 2016, 2019; Kaufman, 2018). A starting point for this research was therefore that any attempt at explaining women's employment behaviour and involvement in unpaid work in the home, and especially those of mothers, in isolation from their partner and the couple context will fall short of understanding the mechanisms at play when the decisions regarding earning and caring are being made. Correspondingly, to comprehend men's journey of parenthood, the choices they make, the roles they adopt and the responsibilities they take on, the relationship they are in and the dynamics in the couple should be included. The stories and the reflections should, however, come from the fathers themselves, and not be versions of it given by their female partners.

The transition to parenthood

As mentioned previously, this research aims to study the gendered journey of parenthood in Britain and Norway. In doing so, the very *transition* into motherhood and fatherhood, both the planning and the envisioning of it as well as the lived experiences and reflections around it, individually and in the couple, should be analysed. Today, in all industrialised countries, this *transition* to parenthood involves a substantial period away from the labour market for mothers, and in a growing number of welfare states, for fathers too. Norway and the UK are no exceptions, but the two countries differ fundamentally, both historically and presently, in the rights granted to fathers to stay home to look after their babies and in the degree to which parents can share earnings and caring responsibilities more equally during the early stages of their child's life. Up until April 2011, the year before this research commenced, fathers in the UK were only allowed two weeks of voluntary paternity leave after the birth of their baby whereas mothers were entitled to 52 weeks of maternity leave. With the introduction of Additional Paternity Leave (APL), parents were given the right to share the latter half of the yearlong maternity leave period. Fathers in the UK were then suddenly able to take as much as half a year of leave as long as the child's mother returned to work. This meant that British parents now had the opportunity to experience the transition and subsequent journey of parenthood in more equal ways. As maintained by Doucet (2017) fathers having time at home *alone* with their baby is critical to shifting 'deep-rooted everyday processes of gendered responsibilities' (Doucet, 2017: 12). Research carried out in the 1990s showed that the longer the parental leave taken by the father, the more equal was the sharing of the daily housework as well as the tasks directly related to childcare such as changing nappies, getting up at night and staying home from work when the child was ill (Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006). The introduction of this rather

radical policy inviting men to take on a more active and involved role at home while temporarily stepping away from the labour market planted a seed for fundamental *alterations* in the gendered earning and caring arrangements commonly adopted in heterosexual couples in the UK. A similar ‘seed for change’ was planted in 1978 in Norway when parents were, as part of a profound political commitment to gender equality, given the right to share most of the leave period between them. Additionally, Norway was the first country in the world to introduce a 4-week daddy quota on a ‘use-it-or-lose-it basis, in 1993, a policy intervention using ‘gentle force’ to make men into present and caring fathers during the first months of their baby’s life. Given that father care is a theoretical possibility in both Britain and Norway, how do couples decide to share the leave entitlements between them and why did they come to this arrangement? In the first interview with expecting mothers and fathers, this is exactly the focus. Although the first interview explored aspects such as the current sharing of domestic tasks, finances, gender ideologies, and the nature of their employment, many of the questions concerned themselves with how the mother and the father-to-be intended to use the parental leave entitlements available to them, how they are to be shared, why they decided on these arrangements and how this division of leave-taking came about. Studying the transition to parenthood in Norway and in Britain - one country that has had a political commitment to gender equality since the late 1970s and the other that slightly opened the door to ‘father care’ a decade ago - can give unique insights into why the continued asymmetrical behaviour in both countries continues to exist. On the other hand, this research will also improve our understanding of *how* and *why* changes to the traditional division of labour in the family are in fact taking place.

Exploring this transition involves looking at the use of maternity/paternity/parental leave. According to McKay and Doucet (2010), the knowledge about what 'facilitates and inhibits' a father's take-up of leave, and 'how couples negotiate who will take leave, when and why' (McKay and Doucet, 2010: 304) is limited. They further maintain that research on father's use of leave 'is informed predominantly by macro-level analyses of population-level patterns' (McKay and Doucet, 2010: 304). The findings from this study, building on rich qualitative data from both mothers and fathers, can help to understand the low take-up of gender-neutral leave entitlements and inform policy change and implementation for welfare states worldwide. That said, the aim of this paper is not to have a full policy analysis, but rather to examine how the policies which have opened for father care in both Norway and the UK interact with other institutional, cultural, individual, and couple-level factors in shaping the journey to parenthood in often more, sometimes less, traditional ways.

The second and final set of interviews took place *after* the parental leave period had ended and the mother and/or the father had either returned to work on a full-time basis or chosen alternative arrangements. The challenges of combining earning and caring have become apparent at this stage. This interview focused on how the couple currently 'do parenthood', it explored how the couple had allocated areas of responsibilities in the home and the decisions made regarding their paid work. How and why did they come to these decisions and what are the consequences of these choices? What were the mechanisms at play and how do participants feel about how their life is organised post parental leave? As the subsequent chapters will reveal, the research discovered diversity and uniformity, conflict in the couple, internal conflict and work-related conflict, anger, resentment disappointment and disbelief. The stories told by the British

and Norwegian interviewees also found marital harmony, personal growth and career development. Whereas for some men and women their plans around the parental leave period and how they had envisioned parenthood, were both in line with their values and their ambitions, for others the transition to motherhood and/or fatherhood carried a high cost and became, in the words of Oakley, a 'crisis' and 'a point of no return' as the lived reality within existing institutional and cultural arrangements shaped or restricted more desirable family-strategies.

Chapter outline

In the next chapter of this thesis, Chapter 2, there will be an extensive review of some of the most influential theories and theoretical frameworks that have been developed in trying to explain and understand the prevailing gendered earning and caring roles and responsibilities couples tend to adopt in the transition to parenthood. The review will cover early feminist writing like that of Oakley (1974, 1976, 1981), Rich (1977), Vanek (1974), Meissner *et al.*, (1975) and Hartmann (1976) challenged Parson's idealised notion of the natural roles of men and women within the household and instead portrayed the processes within the family and between husband and wives as structural inequality. It will also critically look at the work of Becker (1974, 1976, 1981, 1985) and his neoclassical economy of the family, the work of Goffman (1976, 1977) where gender is perceived as a social construct and the interactionist sociology of West and Zimmerman (1987). Additionally, this chapter explores the concept of 'intensive mothering' and evolving ideas of fatherhood before it engages in the debate around individual agency, institutional structures and dominant gender discourse. With Evans' (2002, 2017) notion of the 'bounded agency', Sullivan's concept of 'gender consciousness' (Sullivan 2004), and Risman's (2004) theory of gender as a social structure, the literature review concludes with a conceptual framework which gives full

attention to the web of interconnections between the individual gendered selves, the gendered cultural expectations guiding interactional patterns and gendered social institutions. Having established the 'lenses' through which the gendered journey of parenthood will be examined, a conceptual framework which sees the individuals taking part in this research as reflexive men and women, fathers and mothers, operating in and being part of a gendered social world who respond to structures of opportunities and constraints in their daily lives, the two *social worlds* included in this study, Norway and Britain, will be portrayed. Norway and the UK constitute two vastly different social structures regarding the norms and values around parenthood as well as their profile of the family and the historical and existing caring policies. Whereas Norway is a country 'characterised by working-time regimes with few disincentives against gender equality and an active policy on reconciling work and family' (Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006: 196), the UK, a more market-oriented welfare state and a late-comer compared to much of Europe in the development of explicit family policies, substantial parts of care work continue to be provided by individual households and the prevalent long-hour work culture means earning and caring responsibilities are challenging to combine (Kaufman, 2018). That said, although in contrast to Norway, gender equality has never been an explicit political goal in Britain, with the relatively recent introduction of transferable leave entitlements, Additional Paternity Leave (APL), the UK did indeed join Norway in encouraging a more equal sharing of market and family work between mothers and fathers in the transition to parenthood. As will be argued in Chapter 3, as well as in the subsequent ones, leave entitlements which may be largely gender neutral in design, remain gendered in its 'ownership' and use, in both welfare states studied in this thesis. Given that there are additional structural, cultural and legal forces at play in shaping couples' journey of parenthood other than maternity/paternity/parental leave

entitlements, this chapter will also look at the availability, affordability and quality of childcare, cultural ideas of 'good motherhood' and 'good fatherhood', gendered earning and caring patterns and gendered organisations. In short, an institutional and contextual background to the plans, expectations, ideals and lived experiences of the transition and journey of parenthood in Norway and the UK will be provided.

Following Chapter 3 where the 'scene is set' for the study exploring how British and Norwegian couples adapt to motherhood and fatherhood and why these family strategies are embraced, the next chapter will explain the methodology applied to best answer the research questions at hand. Whereas the other chapters in this thesis focus on the gendered journey of parenthood, the methodology chapter aims to give insights into the *journey of designing and carrying out* this sociological enquiry. There were challenges, surprises, and disappointments. The chapter will debate quantitative vs. qualitative research methodology, consider strengths and limitations, defend the use of in-depth interviews and a longitudinal research design, look at why maximum variation sampling was an appropriate sampling strategy, describe the participants in this comparative study and explain the data analysis process. It will also reflect on my role as a researcher, the ethical dilemmas I encountered, the emotional work involved, and how due to the emergent nature of qualitative research, adjustments had to be made. Even though the information collected often felt 'messy', from this 'immense forest of data', a complex but still rather orderly and clear storyline did eventually emerge.

In Chapter 5, *The gendered use of parental leave*, the first part of this storyline is presented. Building on the voices of Norwegian and British men and women as they transition into parenthood, the chapter explores how maternity and parental leave entitlements are shared in the couple given that both welfare states now allow an equal

division of time at home to care for the baby. This right to share, a right that opens new ways of 'doing parenthood', giving mothers and fathers the option of organising earning and caring roles and responsibilities along more egalitarian lines, has, however, not translated into a widespread lived reality. Couples in both national contexts opting for an equal distribution of the leave period is far from the norm. Whereas there seemed to be a growing *acceptance* for father-care in Norway, and more couples in the UK were supportive of the policies recently introduced allowing dads to spend considerable amounts of time at home with the young child, the trend discovered was nevertheless one of gendered use and gendered ownership of what is largely designed as a gender-neutral leave period. Why is it that when given the legal opportunity to share the parental leave period in more egalitarian ways do couples today continue to follow gender traditional paths? It could be argued that the decision amongst the British couples to distribute the parental leave period along traditional lines is not surprising given the fact that these entitlements were a recently introduced policy reform which, from the interviews, seemed to have been poorly communicated to the public. The gendered ownership of the parental leave period amongst Norwegian couples, on the other hand, is more unexpected given this nation's profound and long-running political commitment to gender equality and father care. Chapter 5 points to individual, institutional and interactional dimensions which all need to be included to explain these gendered practices and outcomes. As this chapter emphasises, however, whereas the shared parental leave entitlements are indeed gendered in both countries, the fact that the Norwegian state has implemented a daddy quota meant that for most of the parents taking part in this study, the father spent a significant amount of time *alone* looking after the baby. These weeks when the mother returned to work and the dad was responsible for the domestic sphere served to *naturalise* fathers at home. It also seemed

to re-establish the egalitarian balance in the relationship where the traditional gendered family roles which developed during the first few months into parenthood, were 'uprooted' and a new and more equal sharing of family work again became the norm.

Whereas Chapter 5 incorporates the stories of both Norwegian and British men and women, the next section focuses exclusively on the gendered journey of parenthood in Norway post-parental leave. Chapter 6, *Norway – a gender equality utopia in the making?* presents research findings that constitute quite the contrast to the gendered family practices discovered in the initial stages of parenthood. The traditionalism evident in the use and ownership of what fundamentally is equality-promoting parental leave entitlements features to a lesser degree as the Norwegian first-time parents continue their journey after the period of parental leave has come to an end. The study found that the principle of 50-50 sharing of housework and childcare as well as the expectation that both partners should engage in full-time employment, appeared to have been established as the starting point for couples' negotiations. All the Norwegian mothers interviewed continued in full-time jobs and the fathers were generally active in all areas of childcare and domestic labour. There *were* examples of women having reduced the number of hours they spent at work, altering their schedules and sometimes changing career direction after they became mothers, however, this pattern was equally found amongst the men. The equality uncovered in couples' earning and caring family strategies was not only enabled by men's seemingly equal participation in the domestic sphere. It was also made possible by the availability of affordable and high-quality nursery spaces coupled with organisational cultures and structures accepting of and accommodating to the caring responsibilities of both male and female

staff. Where *inequality* in the couple was identified, though, was in the more invisible aspect of family work, the mental work of organising, initiating and planning. It seems, therefore, that even in this egalitarian utopia, deep-seated normative assumptions about the domestic roles and responsibilities of men and women are still prevalent.

The same journey of parenthood, post parental leave is described and analysed in Chapter 7. This chapter, *The gendered and diverse journeys of parenthood in the UK*, explores the experiences of British mothers and fathers once the period of leave has ended and 'normal' everyday life resumes. In doing so, comparisons are made to the stories told by the Norwegian interviewees. Unlike the rather *uniform* ways in which Norwegian mums and dads adapted to parenthood, the research found substantially more *diversity* in the choices made by the British participants in how responsibilities for paid and unpaid work were distributed in the couple. Whereas the Norwegian parents seemed to engage symmetrically in employment, in caregiving and housework, for the British mothers and fathers, the arrival of their first baby brought a wave of extensive gendered changes. In a cultural and structural context where working hours are generally long and inflexible, the cost of childcare is high, but the availability low, where the dominant perception of 'good mothering' entails making career sacrifices to ensure sufficient maternal presence, a pattern emerged of deeply gendered 're-structuring' of earning and caring roles and responsibilities. In contrast to Norwegian mothers, for most of the women interviewed in the UK, parenthood involved a reduction in their attachment to the labour market, either by choosing less demanding full-time jobs or by going to part-time positions, to 'balance' the competing demands of their responsibilities as an employer and that of a mother and homemaker. Although there were exceptions to this overall trend, British fathers did not tend to make similar career

sacrifices to accommodate the new caring work. Oakley's claim made a generation ago, stating that parenthood 'wedge the sexes apart' seems to still be true in the UK today. The journey of parenthood in Britain is fundamentally gendered.

The thesis will conclude with a final chapter tying together and summarising how the participants in Norway and Britain 'do parenthood', explore the main findings of why they chose to swim in one direction along the 'gendered river' and not the other, how they feel about their choices, their family and working lives and what the consequences of their decisions are. In this section, limitations and future research will also be discussed.

Chapter 2: Literature review

There was a time, not that long ago, when a large proportion of women with young children in the Western world were full-time caregivers while the fathers in the household worked outside the home to provide for their families. This has been labelled the era of the male breadwinner/female caregiver model of the family (Wright, 2008). Although it should be emphasised that this model was never universal as women of lower social classes were often required to take an active part in the world of paid work, even during the early childhood of their children, the idea of the male breadwinner with the stay-at-home-wife, was a pervasive normative ideal as well as a widespread practical reality (Coontz, 1992). This era has now passed, and the breadwinner/homemaker traditional model has largely eroded, both in terms of the normative picture of a 'proper' family that it provided as well as how most of today's families organise earning and caring responsibilities (Yavorsky *et al.*, 2015). The last decades have witnessed a dramatic increase in women's labour market participation, with the sharpest rise seen amongst mothers with preschool children (Bardasi and Gornick, 2000). Women have also entered previous male bastions such as higher education and senior management as well as positions of power and influence in the political sphere.

Despite these radical changes involving wide-ranging changes to women's roles, opportunities and achievements, much has also remained the same. While women may have joined men in the public spheres of commerce and civil activities, men have failed to make a corresponding shift in the amount of time and attention they devote to the private sphere of the home (see for example England, 2010; Grunow and Evertsson, 2016, 2019; Layte, 1999; Sullivan, 1997). Women have increased their hours in paid

work to a much larger extent than men have increased their hours in unpaid family work, and this is true for all developed countries (Lewis, 2009). This 'gender gap' becomes particularly wide with the arrival of children (Bianchi, 2000; Matysiak and Cukrowska-Torzewska, 2021). Comparative time-use studies indicate that employed fathers in most of the OECD countries devote fewer than one-quarter of the hours given by their female partner to routine housework, and less than half as much time to caring for their children (Gornick and Meyers, 2008). The family responsibilities which continue to be mainly carried by women frequently undermine their career prospects and serve to reinforce other gender-based discriminatory practices by employers (Wright, 2008). England and Hochschild have labelled this situation a 'stalled revolution' (England, 2010; Hochschild, 1990). As Esping-Andersen (2005) noted

"When one studies life-course behaviour over the past, say 50 years, one is struck by a massive gender-asymmetry: all the while that women have adopted a new life-course, men have barely changed at all" (2005: 271)

The 'gender-asymmetry' referred to by Esping-Andersen above and the degree to which modern couples continue to adhere to a traditional division of labour becomes acutely evident in the transition to parenthood as mothers and fathers must reorganise their lives to accommodate the new and demanding task of raising a child (Kan and Gershuny, 2010; Grunow, 2019; LaRossa and LaRossa, 1981; Offer and Schneider, 2011; Sullivan, 2021; Walzer 1998). Cross-sectional studies demonstrate a direct association between parenthood and a traditional gender split in family roles where the father becomes the main breadwinner and the mother the homemaker (Gjerdingen and Center, 2005; Sanchez and Thomson, 1997). While men tend to increase their attachment to the labour market by working longer hours women, although often not leaving the world of paid work completely decide to 'scale back' on their employment commitments by

taking a job at a lower level than what they held before becoming a mother or by reducing the number of hours they work (Kan and Gershuny, 2010; Lewis 2009; Vlasblom and Schippers, 2006). In all OECD countries, mothers' employment rates lag far behind those reported among fathers (Lewis, 2009). The career breaks often taken by women when they become mothers, their periods of part-time employment, their parenting-related occupational and job choices as well as the general discrimination they face in the labour market based on their parental status have been labelled the 'mummy tax' by Gornick and Meyers (Gornick and Meyers, 2008: 317).

While influences on women's labour market participation after they have become mothers have been widely investigated from individual as well as institutional perspectives (see for example Smeaton, 2006; Vlasblom and Schippers, 2006) the factors shaping how couples divide the increased housework and the childcare after they have become parents, however, may have a rather different determinant than mothers' employment decisions. Despite it having been clear for decades how parenthood moves heterosexual couples to a more gender-traditional division of labour (see for example Allen and Hawkins, 1999; Coltrane, 1996) there has been surprisingly little research on parenthood by sociologists concerned with gender differences and gender inequality (Rehel, 2014). The factors which lead to an increase in couples' unequal division of family responsibilities in the transition to parenthood is still an area which science knows relatively little about (Schober, 2013).

The traditionally gendered earning and caring roles and responsibilities that often emerge in couples when they become parents where women typically carry the main burden of baby care while men tend to become 'mothers' helpers' and family providers are formative of patterns that are likely to remain in their relationship and structure the

organisation of their household (Deutsch, 1999; Fox, 2001; Hays, 1996; Walzer, 1998). The transition to parenthood was described by Yavorsky *et al.*, (2015) as ‘a pivotal life course transition in which gender performances in the family may be cemented for the next several years’ (Yavorski *et al.*, 2015: 673). These gender-based divisions often arising during the transition to parenthood are at the heart of the problems that frequently strain the relationships between new mothers and fathers (Cowan and Cowan, 1992; Feeney *et al.*, 2001). Parenthood as a realm where men and women continue to experience unequal responsibilities also means women pay a high personal and economic price for motherhood while fathers are given a marginalised role in the home, including in the care of their children. While the ‘absent father’ is most acute in families headed by single mothers, in a significant number of two-parent homes, the resident father is almost as absent from their children’s lives as fathers who reside elsewhere (Gornick and Meyers, 2005).

With the social and economic consequences of the gendered transition to parenthood, why is there a tendency for women to continue to invest more time and home and men more time at work? Why do couples often adopt more stereotypically male and female roles as soon as a baby is born? Conversely, in the relatively few couples where untraditional gender roles are embraced, even after they have become parents, how and why did the mother and the father decide on this allocation of responsibilities? What are the inequality-sustaining mechanisms impeding a wider movement towards stronger gender egalitarianism in the domestic sphere?

These questions tap into eternal questions about nature and nurture, social structure and free will which underlie much analysis and writing about human experiences and social life. The following sections will review some of the most influential theoretical

frameworks that have been developed to explain and therefore understand the prevailing gendered pattern found in earning and caring roles and responsibilities. Relevant empirical studies will also be explored and their contributions to the development of suitable theoretical tools for understanding the gendered journey of parenthood will be discussed. While there is a strong tendency for couples to adopt a traditional set-up when they become parents, there are also signs of convergence in the work and family life of mothers and fathers (Fox, 2009; Sullivan, 2004). The conceptual framework for studying the gendered journey of parenthood therefore needs to enable an understanding of both continuity and change in the family roles and responsibilities.

Gendered roles and responsibilities in paid and unpaid work

The last half a century has witnessed a distinct shift in how sociologists view household and domestic labour (Gardiner, 1997; Layte, 1999). Up until the 1970s the division of family roles by gender was largely regarded as natural and unproblematic. It was assumed that all the members of a family shared the same standard of living and that the division of roles and responsibilities by gender was self-evident. This perception of the household derived from a sociology that was still deeply steeped in functionalist theory (Parsons, 1949; Parsons and Bale, 1956) made 'inequalities of power invisible and saw conflict in the household as pathological' (Layte, 1999:1). With the widespread ideal of the separate spheres, born from the rise of industrialisation, the home was perceived as a private haven exclusively under women's control (Welter, 1966). A woman's 'true' nature was to be realised by marrying, giving birth, and most importantly, tending to the children. Her inherently unselfish, morally pure and nurturant character was understood to uniquely qualify her to rear young children and prepare them for adulthood. Motherhood was hence elevated to an esteemed status, and wives' homemaking was regarded as a 'moral calling and a worthy profession'

(Coltrane, 2000: 88). While women's natural place was the domestic sphere as mothers and wives, men belonged to the world of paid employment and the ideal father was the breadwinner who 'set a good table, provided a descent home, paid the mortgage, bought the shoes, and kept his children warmly clothed' (Bernard, 1981:3-4). How family life was largely organised was not questioned and the family was uncritically taken to be a natural and good institution for all the members within it (Layte, 1999). Even though studies such as that of Bott, (1957) questioned Parson's notion of the universality of the clear differentiation between the tasks undertaken by husbands and wives, gender roles were still not considered problematic (Layte, 1999). With studies like that of Young and Willmott (1973), a shift is detected in conjugal roles away from traditional arrangements and it is argued that society is moving towards more joint forms of relationships with a greater sharing of domestic tasks (Young and Willmott, 1973 in Young and Willmott, 2023). Their focus, though, was on the possible effects of these structural changes and the research did not explore the processes involved or the conflicts this development may have been a result of. A much less optimistic and uncomplicated investigation about the family and the gendered division of labour was first expressed in studies such as that by Pahl and Pahl (1971) where tension in couples arising from the unequal division of labour was brought to the surface and analysed. The real sea-change as far as studies on gender and the private sphere were concerned, however, came with the feminist writings by Oakley (1974, 1976, 1981), Rich (1977), Vanek (1974), Meissner *et al.*, (1975) and Hartmann (1976). Suddenly how social sciences had until then conceptualised 'gender', as a natural aspect of a person and not something worthy of analysis, was fundamentally challenged (Layte, 1999). Housework came to be defined as *work* and the role of the housewife and the institution of motherhood was de-romanticised. While Oakley wrote that becoming a mother was 'a

crisis in the life of a woman, a point of no return' (Oakley, 1979:1), Rich (1977) described motherhood as

"A keystone in the most diverse social and political systems. It has withheld over one-half of the human species from the decisions affecting their lives; it exonerates men from fatherhood in any authentic sense; it creates the dangerous schism between "private" and "public" life; it calcifies human choices and potentialities" (Rich, 1977:13).

These early feminist writings allowed the processes within the family and between husband and wives to be portrayed as structured inequality or even oppression. This represented a decisive shift in perspective away from Parson's more idealised notion of the natural roles of men and women within the household (Smart and Neale, 1999). How women's domestic role in general and motherhood specifically brought social isolation, economic dependency and unequal distribution of power within a marriage, was highlighted (Fox, 2001). Having said that, this research failed to question the *process* through which conjugal roles and obligations were distributed, the very dynamic of gendered family life (Fox, 2009). It remained largely descriptive in nature (Crompton, 1989) and a limited attempt was made to systematically evaluate *how* partners in heterosexual couples negotiated between themselves and *why* the gendered family roles were continuously reproduced (Layte, 1999). No coherent theoretical schema was therefore developed to explain the practices whereby women tend to assume the responsibility and the care for children and the home, while men typically do not (Fox, 2009).

A theoretical framework that has indeed looked at *how* responsibilities are distributed between husbands and wives and *why* certain family roles emerge and are sustained, is the human capital theory. This theory has its roots in the work of Reid (1934) but found its most powerful statements in the writings of Becker and his neoclassical economy of

the family (1976, 1981, 1985). Becker stresses the role of rationality in the division of domestic labour proposing that the household is a unit for both production and consumption where the man and the woman share a single utility function. The husband and wife rationally divide their time between the domestic domain and the labour market to maximise their joint welfare. The household is thus treated as a decision-making unit and with its goal of utility maximisation, it pursues the best configuration of inputs, given opportunity costs and productivity (Becker, 1985; Mincer and Polachek, 1974; Polachek, 1985). This configuration of inputs will tend to involve men spending more time on labour market work than on domestic work, whereas the reverse behavioural pattern is true for women. Becker attributed the variance in behaviour between the sexes both to their dissimilar 'taste' for certain types of work as well as deriving from a rational calculation of what division of labour would produce the greatest possible well-being for the members of the family. This theoretical framework maintains that both sexes will gain from specializing their roles in the world of paid work and the family respectively. Men and women in couples will therefore 'willingly allocate their time and other resources to maximize the commodity output of their household' (Becker, 1981: 16).

The specialised investment in a couple will according to the logic of the neoclassical economic perspective intensify greatly in the transition to parenthood with the increased demand for domestic work after the birth of the baby. Although specialisation does not necessarily have to shape up along gendered lines, the biological differences between the sexes, women's essential preferences for caregiving as well as husbands' and wives' dissimilar premarital investments in skills, means a gendered division of

labour would yield the most beneficial outcome for all parties. Becker (1981)

maintained

“Women not only have a heavy biological commitment to the production and feeding of children but they also are biologically committed to the care of children in other, more subtle ways. Moreover, women have been willing to spend much time and energy caring for their children because they want their heavy biological investment in production to be worthwhile” (Becker, 1981: 21-22)

Men on the other hand, are less biologically committed to the care of children and with their relative advantage over women in terms of their human capital in the labour market, they would instead focus their time on providing food, clothes and protection.

If we leave aside for a moment the biology and intrinsic preferences of mothers and fathers when it comes to care-work and market-work and focus exclusively on the value of men and women’s time in the labour market, a family where the wife earns more than her husband should in theory, bearing in mind their joint aim of utility maximisation, lead to a more untraditional division of roles and responsibilities. The woman’s higher relative wage should limit the decline in her postnatal employment and result in a smaller increase in her time spent on domestic work while her partner’s time in unpaid and paid work should follow the opposite pattern. Research, however, shows rather mixed trends when it comes to the impact of the relative earning within a couple on their gendered division of labour. Empirical findings vindicating Becker’s neoclassical economic theory of the family include previous American and British studies like that of Kan, (2008) and Sanchez and Thomson, (1997). They showed that a wife’s earnings relative to that of her husband were often associated with a less traditional distribution of paid and unpaid work after the couple had become parents. Studies by Bianchi *et al.* (2000) and Presser (1994) using data from representative national surveys also found

that the imbalance in the division of unpaid family work between husbands and wives reduces when the gap between the spouses' financial resources decreases. Research by Hochschild (1990) and Kan and Gershuny (2010) on the other hand, demonstrated how even in couples where the woman has the highest income or in couples of equal earners, the woman often continues to carry the 'double burden' (Hochschild, 1990). A study by Schober (2013), although finding some support for the influence of women's income on the time they spend on unpaid family work, showed that it was their *absolute wages*, rather than the *relative wages* which mitigated the trend towards a more traditional division of labour amongst new parents. This pattern though was simply a result of their ability to pay for childcare and outsource housework rather than their partner taking on more in the home. There was therefore no alteration in the distribution of family work within the couple and limited reason to conclude that money would trump gender (Bitteman *et al.*, 2003).

The suggestion that women's absolute income may have more impact than their relative wage package on the amount of time spent on unpaid family work due to their then ability to pay for services, was supported by Gupta (2006) and Gupta and Ash (2008). Schober (2013) further argues that the economic resources of mothers may be particularly important in the British context given that the typical cost of a full-time nursery space exceeded average household spending on either housing or food. The fact that it is the *mother's* income which is used, if high enough, to outsource domestic work to the market, not the father's indicates that it was *her* responsibility to begin with and hence her issue to solve.

Although there is indeed some empirical support for the neoclassical economic theory of the family with studies pointing to trends where the mother's relative and/or

absolute wage affects both the probability of her remaining in the labour market and the likelihood of a less traditional division of unpaid family work, the fact that this economic rationality does not seem to lead to uniform couple outcomes would suggest more complex forces are at play. The high nursery costs in the UK, for example, highlighted by Schober (2013), draw attention to societal structures acting as barriers to mothers' involvement in the labour market. These structures then interact with dominant gender ideology which continues to lay the overall responsibility for family work on women and a reproduction of gendered domestic roles tends to occur. As argued by Gornick and Meyers (2005) decisions about work and family life are made in a world with specific constraints and opportunities for men and women, fathers and mothers. While it would make financial sense for parents to give greater support and hence allow more time to be invested in the employment activities of the highest earner in a couple, these decisions are not made in a gender-neutral vacuum. Portraying individuals as rational agents responding purely to their opportunity structure ignores the gendered nature of that structure itself in which couples negotiate their work-family strategies. Normative, structural and institutional constraints are omitted from the model.

In addition to the rational choice model's failure to include the gendered social world in which couples make decisions about their division of labour, the thesis also leaves out any analysis of the individual's gendered self, assuming biological determinism rather than social construction of gendered identities and gendered 'tastes' for certain types of work. This presumed essentialism where women are thought to have an intrinsic preference for caregiving as well as a biological commitment and advantage for the production and feeding of children combined with the taken-for-granted benefits of

specialisation serves to ignore vital trade-offs. Although specialisation may be an efficient income-maximising strategy in certain couples, it should also be highlighted that it creates inequalities within families. For full-time homemakers, specialisation can lead to not only social isolation but also a partial or complete absence of bargaining power within the family, leaving them in a precarious economic position if the couple breaks down. Similar vulnerabilities apply to partners with a reduced attachment to the labour market or in less well-remunerated or poorly paid positions. Power is theorised away in human capital theory and so is the existence of conflict as it is assumed both the man and the woman in the couple will want to work towards the same goal of utility maximisation, their different roles taken for granted and their specialised area of responsibility unchallenged. This represents a sharp contrast to the early feminist writing reviewed above.

The theoretical assumption of universal intrinsic differences between women warrants further critical review. As maintained by Gornick and Meyer (2005),

“Arguments that claim that men and women are intrinsically different risk confusing differences with destiny and fail to recognize that women and men can decide to organize their partnerships in ways that overrule those differences. Despite substantial social and economic constraints, many couples are attempting to craft more egalitarian divisions of labor”
(Gornick and Meyers, 2005: 105).

Although changes in the gendered division of labour have been ‘slow dripping’ (Sullivan, 2004, 2006) and uneven, change *is* happening. Men are taking on more housework and spending more time with their children than their fathers did when they were growing up. By regarding the two sexes as intrinsically different, their ‘taste’ for a certain type of work as biologically determined, involves an understanding of men's and women's nature as both static and universal. As argued by Becker ‘preferences are assumed not

to change substantially over time, or to be very different between wealthy and poor persons, or even between persons in different societies and cultures' (Becker, 1976: 5). Research shows, however, that there *is* a great variety not universal patterns amongst couples in the in the way in which earning and caring responsibilities are distributed. This points to more agency in family decisions than was assumed in the neo-classical economic model. Not only is it variety in couples' work-family strategies between different national contexts, cultures and social classes, but there is also notable diversity in the distribution of earning and caring roles within families belonging to the same demographic group. Both the social construction of gender as well as agency will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

In the view of the new economic theory of the division of household labour biology determines not only the different roles in the bodily production of children and the feeding of babies, but also a male specialisation in market work and a female focus on family work. The combination of couples' efficiency maximisation objectives, their different intrinsic preferences and their biological functions, a specialisation along gendered lines would be both rational and natural. While maintaining that women have a biological advantage when it comes to nursing and that they are indeed the ones who give birth is a justified claim, one has reason to doubt that this 'natural function' can serve as an overall explanation of the production and maintenance of the division of labour.

The absence of consideration to the institutional and normative constraints which are shaping couples' behaviour has been noted by both sociologists and economists (Berk, 1985; Hannan, 1982; Reskin and Padavic, 1994). As argued by Berk (1985) there is a need for a conception of 'gender' in human capital theory. While attempting to avoid

invoking everything which Dennis Wrong (1961) said was 'wrong' about sociology including the emphasis on determinist social or cultural structure within which men and women act out determinate roles, Berk turned to the interactionist sociology of West and Zimmerman via the work Goffman. In his work, Goffman (1977) maintains that men and women in a couple have gendered identities that are the result of their socialisation. Although the theory of socialisation was well known in sociology at the time, Goffman does not see gender identities as a direct determinant of patterns of behaviour. Instead, he attempts to 'create a seamless sociology that integrates societal and institutional structures with the agency of individual actors' (Fine and Manning, 2003: 56). The use of a determinist social or cultural structure is hence avoided. Instead of regarding gender identities as the decisive force of behaviour, a person's role is used in a dramatological sense. Roles, according to Goffman, is the foundation for the ongoing construction of behaviour according to the prevailing circumstances and the individuals encountered. Berk then attempts to combine this theoretical insight with the materialistic elements of the neo-classical economic theory of the division of labour by showing how the production of both household work and market work is in fact only one part of the production process. The family should also be seen as a 'gender factory' in the sense that every time individuals in the home vacuum the floor and clean the toilet, or they negotiate who will perform that task, they engage in a reproduction of cultural conceptions of gender and gender behaviour. At the same time, this production creates new cultural conceptions of what the 'proper behaviour' of men and women in the family is. The active construction of gender displays leaves room for both continuation and change in gender roles.

Although there was indeed a need for gender to be incorporated into the human capital approach, how Berk writes about gendered practices, the use of power and the possibility of conflict between partners seems to be ruled out. While there was a necessity for a theoretical framework seeking to analyse patterns of gendered division of labour to 'combine economic 'behaviour' with social 'action' in a cohesive whole' (Layte, 1999: 19), further dimensions must be incorporated if such a goal is to be reached. This chapter will now turn to the social constructionist approach to understanding the gendered division of labour.

The social constructionist approach to studying people, culture and society has an extensive and diverse history within sociology, philosophy, anthropology, and social psychology (see for example Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Garfinkel, 1967; Goffman, 1967; Mead, 1967; Shutz, 1972). The basic idea behind this theoretical framework is that our 'reality', how we 'see' the world, depends on factors such as personal histories, individual characteristics, environmental contexts and social experiences (Coltrane, 2000). From this perspective, not only what is considered good or proper behaviour but also thoughts and emotions, are always defined both in the broader cultural context as well as in the more specific social settings in which it occurs (Reskin and Padavik, 1994). Gender is perceived as a social construct and is conceptualised as a central part of individuals' social being, controlling their conduct by channelling it in directions set up by predefined normative patterns (see for example Coltrane, 1989, 1996; Walzer, 1998). This way of understanding gender therefore represents a sharp contrast to the neoclassical economic theory and their idea of men and women's intrinsic characteristics and preferences. Moreover, rather than individuals' behaviour being

understood as driven by utility maximisation, the social constructivist approach perceives people's conduct as shaped by socially created normative expectations.

The perception of gender as a social construct (Mead) and Goffman's account of 'gender display' was further developed by West and Zimmerman (1987). In their seminal article *Doing Gender* they proposed that gender should be regarded as 'a routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment' (West and Zimmerman, 1987: 126). The relationship between biological and cultural processes became theorised as a complex and reflexive one where structural arrangements such as that between paid work and family work enable some capacities, for example, that of being a mother or a father, which was formerly associated purely with biology. Doing gender, West and Zimmerman argued, involves 'socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities' (West and Zimmerman, 1987; 126) which will define certain pursuits as masculine or feminine natures. Gender then becomes an accomplishment, a social performance, it is not something that an individual *has* or *is*, but it is something an individual *does*. The writing of West and Zimmerman firmly shifted the attention away from gender as a property internal to the individual and instead laid the focus on interactional as well as institutional arenas. Gender then becomes an emergent feature of social settings, it is both an outcome but also a rationale for certain social arrangements and a way in which to legitimise one of the most fundamental divisions in our society (West and Zimmerman, 1987).

Although it is the individual who 'does' gender, the social constructionist approach emphasises it as a situational doing, a performance carried out in the actual or abstract presence of other members of society who will hold the 'performer' 'hostage to its production' (West and Zimmerman, 1987: 126). According to this theoretical tradition,

we are all required to 'do' gender to be considered competent members of society. The audience of our 'doing' will hold us accountable for our performance, judging it as fitting or not fitting socially created normative conceptions of attitudes and behaviour appropriate for the ones belonging to a sex category. Although every individual is aware of the expectations of others, however, there is the possibility of not conforming to the established ways of doing masculinity and femininity. By maintaining that people can themselves choose to behave in ways that go against the dominant gender ideology the social constructivist perspective leaves room for agency and avoids the determinism found in Parson's idea of the internalisation of structured normative orientations.

An essential part of the gender categories of male and female is linked to the roles of mothers and fathers' Just as gender is socially constructed, so are motherhood and fatherhood (Carter, 1995; Coltrane, 1998, 2000; Wall, 2001; Walzer, 1998). Mother and father therefore have meanings attached to them, 'meanings that are socializing influences on new parents and that are institutionalised in cultural imagery associated with motherhood and fatherhood' (Walzer, 1998: 7). How men and women *approach* parenthood is, therefore, a form of 'doing gender' – or 'doing parenthood' according to Walzer (1998) – which entails reproducing themselves as socially defined mothers and fathers as well as socially defined women and men (West and Zimmerman, 1987). West and Fenstermaker (1993) argue that the reason why men and women have such different transitions into parenthood is in part because they are *expected to*. A study by Bass (2015) even showed how men and women not only have dissimilar *transitions* to parenthood but that they have gendered *anticipations* of the transitions to parenthood as well. The research by Bass draws on qualitative interviews of 30 heterosexual couples who are not yet parents, exploring how anticipations of parenthood affect their

career aspirations and career choices in gendered ways. The study discovered that women in the sample were more likely than their partners to change or downshift their present-day career goals as a way of preparing for their future role as mothers. Their expectation that both their preferences would be transformed once they became mothers as well as the belief that the responsibilities for the children would be mainly theirs to carry, lead many of the women to play down their career ambitions. For men, on the other hand, it was found that the idea of fatherhood did not affect their career aspirations or their behaviour in the same way. While most of the men in the study did not alter their career plans in anticipation of parenthood, the few who did follow the traditional breadwinner path where the focus was on establishing themselves in economically stable and well-remunerated work roles. Bass argues that this gendered anticipation of the transition to parenthood is the result of internalised expectations about fatherhood and motherhood. Dominant representations of women's character show motherhood as a natural extension of women's caring and self-sacrificing nature while simultaneously establishing standards for what conduct, thoughts and feelings are required from the 'good' mother.

In sharp contrast to the essential role given to mothers in their baby's life, fathers are given a much more peripheral role with the moral tales around fatherhood principally focusing on their responsibility as the protector and the financial provider (Batinter, 1980; Braun, *et al.*, 2011; Coltrane, 1996; Dienhart, 1998; Singley and Hynes, 2005.) In a study by Walzer (1998), for example, of couples who had recently become parents, it was shown how both parents came to define the mother's employment as less essential to the financial well-being of the family, by instead placing a high-value mother-intensive caregiving. Corresponding findings were identified by Garey (1999) where

through narratives of employed mothers it was found how some women distance themselves from the idea of having a career by referring to their employment as a 'job'. Similarly, Potuchek (1997) illustrated how women sometimes reject the concept of breadwinning even when they in fact make significant contributions to the family income. While breadwinning represents a central aspect of what it means to be a 'good' father (Williams, 2008), notions about the desirable, appropriate and acceptable practices of a 'good' mother emphasise different criteria such as putting the needs and the care of their children before everything else, including their own needs or the requirements of a career. Feelings of 'mother's guilt' and issues associated with the difficulty of finding a work-life balance continue to be part of a working woman's life when she has dependent children. Time-greedy organisations and time-intensive motherhood ideologies are not easy to combine. Working fathers, on the other hand, are subjected to a different parenthood ideology where being a 'good' father, a 'family man' does not necessarily involve a need for them to spend time with their family physically (Braun *et al.*, 2011). Fathers are then given an ancillary role, a secondary position next to the maternal primary carer.

Both the time and energy-consuming components of the dominant discourse around mothering were famously labelled by Hays (1996) as 'intensive mothering'. This discourse requires mothers to take complete responsibility for every aspect of their children's cognitive, social, physical and emotional advancement. According to Hays, there is now an expectation of motherhood as 'child-centred, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labour intensive, and financially expensive' (Hays, 1996: 8). This prominent cultural conceptualisation of motherhood demands a complete focus on children and their needs inside and outside of the domestic life, together with a

considerate degree of maternal self-sacrifice (Hays, 1996). From a 'couple' perspective intensive mothering requires a significant involvement from the fathers as well, but as earners and secondary carers, allowing the mother to have a child-centred approach to parenting. This ideology therefore challenges the identity of full-time employed and/or career-oriented mothers. The employed mothers in Hays' research found that the expectations of intensive mothering left them 'feeling pressed for time, a little bit guilty, a bit inadequate, and somewhat ambivalent about their position' (Hays, 1996: 151). The study also drew attention to how employed mothers justified their labour market attachment by emphasising the benefits of their paid work on the well-being of their children rather than on the positive impact it had on themselves, again highlighting how intensive mothering demands a continued focus on the needs of the children. Although Hays recognises that there are social class differences in the way in which 'intensive mothering' is practised, differences also identified by Lareau (2002) in her research on childrearing cultures, it is still argued that as a childrearing ideology, intensive mothering has grown to be so dominant that mothers from all social classes are conscious of its existence.

The social context of mothering requiring an unselfish centring of attention on the needs of the children sets a standard for what it means to be a good mother which is hard to live up to for employed women. A study by Duncan *et al.*, (2003) found how mothers in paid work used what they labelled 'gendered moral rationalities' to negotiate their attachment to the labour market while maintaining responsibilities for their children and an identity as a mother. Duncan *et al.* (2003) explained gendered moral rationalities as

“gendered because they fundamentally dealt with notions of mothering, they were moral in providing answers about the right thing to do, and they were rationalities in providing a framework for making decisions about participation in the labour market” (Duncan et al., 2003: 313).

The mothers in the study, in other words, made decisions about earning and caring referring to moral and socially defined views about what behaviour was proper. The study points to the deeply gendered moral obligation to take responsibility for children and to place their needs first. Calculations about the perceived financial cost and benefit of taking employment or not, decisions about what type of employment to take and the time dedicated to market work, are all made in the context of women’s understanding of the demands on them as mothers. Although the study found some variations according to the mother’s income and lifestyle, the conventional perception of good mothering seemed in this research to transcend class differences.

Similar moral negotiations between women’s role as mothers and that of workers were found in a study by Johnson and Swanson (2007) where it was maintained that mothers engaged in what they labelled ‘cognitive acrobatics’ to rationalise and defend their labour market attachment given the ubiquity of the intensive mothering ideology. From their qualitative interviews with married women, they concluded that most full-time employed mothers were ultimately incapable of reconciling the tension in their identities as mothers and workers. Although some of the women in the study made use of what was labelled a ‘reframing’ strategy to integrate their worker and their mothering identity whereby they would maintain that employment would make them better parents, this strategy is still consistent with intensive mothering as it emphasises the benefits for the children. The research therefore confirms the pattern found in Hays’ study.

While, as maintained by Hays (1996), it may be the case that all women are indeed conscious of the existence of the ideology of 'intensive mothering', research by Miller (2007) points to a more dynamic interplay between mothers' subjective experiences and the gendered parenting discourse. Using qualitative and longitudinal data the study found how women 'draw on, wave together and challenge dominant strands of discourse that circumscribe their journeys into motherhood' (Miller, 2007: 337) Even though Miller points to the obduracy of certain strands of dominant motherhood ideology, she calls attention to the various ways in which women discursively position themselves and she calls for a more nuanced understanding of early mothering experiences and agency.

The notions of agency and the active challenging of the ascendant cultural ideologies surrounding motherhood were further explored in a study by Christopher (2012). From in-depth interviews with a diverse group of employed mothers, the research looked at how these women navigated the 'intensive mothering' ideology and engaged in the construction of their own version of good mothering. Instead of justifying their attachment to the labour market through narratives about how this ultimately was beneficial to their children, the mothers interviewed focused on the personal benefits they themselves derived from paid work such as self-confidence, enjoyment, using their educational credentials and a feeling of accomplishment. The referring of their own needs above and beyond those of their children represents a clear rejection of the culturally dominant models of motherhood. Rather than emphasising 'intensive' mothering, these women came to define good mothering as 'extensive' mothering where they were responsible for delegating caregiving tasks while ultimately remaining responsible for the children. A 'good' mother was therefore reframed as one who was 'in

charge' of children and their overall wellbeing. This gendered responsibility will be discussed later in the thesis. Even though this study shows agency in how women rejected dominant motherhood ideologies and created new definitions in their place, Christopher (2012) still found that even when they rejected the main tenets of intensive mothering, they remained accountable to them. These findings correspond with what West and Fenstermaker stated about 'doing gender' and how the internalisation of gendered normative orientations did not have to translate into predefined conceptions of what constitutes acceptable behaviour. Doing gender, they maintained 'does not always mean living up to normative conceptions of femininity or masculinity; what it means is rendering action accountable in these terms' (West and Fenstermaker, 1993: 157).

As mentioned above, the ideology of intensive mothering places the women in the centre of the children life while the father, although given a secondary carer or 'helper' role, establishes himself as the 'good' father mainly through his breadwinning capabilities. Studies concerning gender-differentiated expectations of parenting and how these impact on father's involvement with their kids and in the home compromise a large body of literature (see for example Futris and Schoppe-Sullivan, 2007; McBride *et al.*, 2005). These studies illustrate the cultural expectations of men and fathers as the main earners in the household and of women and mothers' socially defined role as primary carers. They identify how parenting practices and intra-family divisions of labour are both created by - as well as being active themselves in *recreating* - deeply embedded motherhood and fatherhood ideologies and power structures within the household that run counter to egalitarian parenting practices. With the erosion of the breadwinner/homemaker traditional model as most couples today, including those with

children, are dual earners, it has been argued, however, that a *new* present and caring father is replacing the absent wage earner in terms of what is perceived to constitute the 'good' father. Cultural conceptualisations of fatherhood have according to researchers such as Cohen, (1993), Lamb (1987), Pleck (2010) and Yoshida (2012) progressed from a sole focus on economic responsibility to involve expectations of fathers being directly involved in the care of their children and develop close emotional bonds. These fatherhood ideologies run contrary to the cultural expectations of 'intensive mothering' with the mother as the centre of the children's lives. Research exploring the extent to which this fatherhood ideology of an involved and caring dad is resulting in behavioural and attitudinal changes in men, however, seems to find mixed trends. In a study by Furstenberg (1995), it was found among his sample of American inner-city fathers that emotional involvement was perceived to be central to fulfilling the idea of being a 'good' dad. A British study by Brannen and Nilsen (2006) interviewing fathers and sons from a working-class background, identified similar patterns identifying a model of 'hands-on fathering' amongst the younger generation of dads. Although it was highlighted that fathering was typically about engaging in various physical activities with their children, these men also talked about fathering in relational terms. Brannen and Nilsen argued that in the absence of labour market opportunities, these men had utilised the new culture of fatherhood where fathers' active and equal involvement in their children's lives is thought of as a desirable way of 'doing fatherhood'. Instead of investing in *worker* identities, these men had created identities as *fathers*. While the study did identify heterogeneity in men's practices as fathers pointing at more diversity in the lived experiences of fatherhood, it was only a small minority of the dads interviewed who showed tendencies of living up to the new, involved and caring dad ideology. This carving out of a new definition of masculinity in

fathering roles is also found in the study by Braun *et al.* (2011). Again, while most of the dads were seen to follow more traditional fatherhood practices with a focus on being the financial provider and the mum's 'helper', there were still examples of men highly involved in their children's lives. The men's participation in the labour market, though, appeared relatively unaffected by their new status as fathers and even amongst what Braun *et al.* (2011) termed 'active' fathers, there was a tendency to refer to the mother for instructions and reassurance on childcare matters revealing a gendered ultimate responsibility for the well-being of the children.

While research clearly shows a variety of co-existing and sometimes contradictory fatherhood ideologies as well as lived experiences and fatherhood practices, men's role as financial providers for the family does not seem to be an entirely outdated cultural definition of what constitutes the 'good' father and hence its impact on how men 'do' fatherhood should not be underestimated (Williams, 2008). From the interviews of the 'active' dads in the study by Braun *et al.* (2011), it was evident that economics and work status influenced both the conduct and the experience of fathering. Moreover, the couples where the mothers earned the main or the only family income, their male partners were 'uncomfortably aware that they had to negotiate the question of how to be a father whilst not being the main provider' (Braun *et al.*, 2011: 25). This resonates with Doucet (2006) and her study of Canadian fathers. Doucet finds that men, particularly those without a job or on a low salary, have concerns about maintaining their masculinity and worry that being 'placed in a position of primary caregiver without having achieved success as a breadwinner signal something out of sync with what many communities consider as a socially acceptable 'moral' identity for a male and a father' (Doucet, 2006: 707). The provider ideologies, Braun *et al.* (2011) argue, remain

powerful irrespective of how couples organise their everyday family life. While fathers today are taking a more active part in their children's lives than their dads did with them, this involved fatherhood ideology is not necessarily translating into new dominant forms of masculinities where men's role as wage earners no longer constitutes a substantial part of their identity. This novel form of fathering does not either appear to result in more egalitarian parenting roles in couples or lead to any radical changes in the gendered division of labour in the transition to parenthood. Ranson (2001) maintains that while there is certainly a trend where fathers are moving towards greater family involvement, this involvement usually fits *around* the demands of the workplace (Ranson, 2001). Fathers making changes at work to accommodate family responsibilities are rare to see. Mothers, on the other hand, have the opposite tendency where they fit the requirements of the workplace around the demands of their children. The study by Ranson (2001) found that the men who were willing to challenge the demands from their workplaces to be more involved as fathers were the ones who had fulfilled their career goals by then and hence already lived up to the cultural expectation of being the breadwinner. Instead of the involved fatherhood ideology having taken over from the provider ideology, Ranson argues that the different approaches to fatherhood, rather than coexisting, should be understood as priorities that are changing over time as men's career goals are met and financial security is achieved.

Although the research discussed above can be seen to go against the claim of a new fatherhood discourse having replaced the traditional breadwinning ideal, some scholars (Cohen, 1993; Pleck, 2010) have argued that the relative absence of changes to fathers' actual behaviour is not due to a continued impact of a provider ideology, but rather is

the result of society currently experiencing a period of *transition* comparable to the 'lagged adaptation' envisaged by Gershuny *et al.* (1994) in terms of the gendered division of labour. The disparity in the behaviour and the attitudes of fathers is then understood as the disparity between what men see as their *ideal* practice versus what is *possible* given the societal constraints. The need to understand the small-scale alternations in fathers' behaviour in a context of social limitations is supported by Doherty *et al.* (1998) who argued that 'fathering is uniquely sensitive to contextual influences, both interpersonal and environmental. Fathers' employment status and conditions, their relationships with the mother and wider cultural and social environments all appear highly significant in shaping the conduct of individual men' (1998: 289). While it may be the case than that, as maintained by Van Dongen (1995), most men today would like to have a closer relationship with their children than did their fathers, the circumstances dads are finding themselves in – financial, relational, institutional – rather than only the fatherhood ideology itself, prevents a merger between cultural conceptions and lived realities. The social limitations that shape men's behaviour – as well as women's – and the inadequate consideration given by the 'doing gender' or 'doing parenthood' approach to the variety of factors influencing individual conduct in a complex way, deserve some reflection.

The idea that the disconnect between the *ideology* of the involved father and how fatherhood is practised can be explained by the argument of society being in a period of transition, is rejected by Dermott (2008). Instead of there being a 'lagged adaptation' Dermott maintains that this new fatherhood ideology with its emphasis on the emotionally close relationship between father and child fails to encourage men to take on more of the family-related work burden. Rather than promoting hands-on fathering,

this discourse focuses on the caring and relational aspects of the father-children relationship. Being an involved and loving dad does not necessarily demand a heavy investment of time and therefore allows a lack of engagement by men in the daily and time-consuming tasks of childrearing to co-exist with the involved dad ideal. From his study, Dermott concluded that how the men interviewed for his research viewed good fathering including ideas about emotional openness, having a close relationship with their children and communication, were all characteristics which do not necessarily translate into a large time commitment. Whereas it may be the case then that a new fatherhood ideology has established itself, both competing and existing alongside the breadwinner discourse of what constitutes the 'good' family man, these new cultural definitions do not challenge the traditional division of labour as it seems fathers can meet the criteria of being both involved and caring while making few if any, alterations to their working lives. Living up to the ideology of intensive mothering, on the other hand, at the same time as meeting the demands from time greedy contemporary organisations, is a combination of roles which is much harder to merge. According to Yavorski *et al.* (2015), the intensified expectations put on mothers are culturally contradictory to the market pressure employees are facing. The pressure men experience as fathers is less hard to combine with the responsibilities of paid work. The 'doing' of parenthood therefore seems to mean fundamentally different 'performances' for mothers and fathers. The deeply gendered normative climate in which women and men experience the transition to parenthood therefore more often serves to *reproduce* traditional work-family strategies in a couple than it *challenges* these unequal divisions. So far, the discussion has focused on the contribution of the social constructionist approach to understanding the continuation of a gendered transition to parenthood by

emphasising the dominant discourse and how it shapes conduct and identity. While this perspective sees gender as an 'ongoing activity embedded in everyday interaction' (West and Zimmerman, 1987: 130), and hence certainly recognises the role of social interaction and social relationships in the construction of social practices that divide men and women as well as in the creation of gender identities, there is according to Fox (2001) in this tradition still a lack of examination of the very dynamics of these social relationships. The couple context and the processes taking place between mothers and fathers have been given limited attention. How the social interaction within the couple shapes parenthood experiences and conduct is acknowledged by McMahon in her *Engendering Motherhood* (1995) where she argued that for many women motherhood is rooted in heterosexual relationships. Her focus, however, was on the processes that made women identify as mothers and on the meaning that motherhood had to them, not on the forces at work within the relationship with their partner. Early studies such as the one by La Rossa and LaRossa (1981), although looking at interpersonal dynamics within heterosexual couples and the development of gender divisions in parenthood, the focus was primarily on the parent's interactions with their baby and on how mothers and fathers dealt with the demands of the early stages of parenthood. The negotiations within the heterosexual couple context and how the mothers and the fathers actively constructed their roles, were left unexplored. Fox (2001) argues that while the dominant cultural conceptions of what constitutes 'good' mothering and fathering will impact individuals' parenting practices, this social context also influences the interpersonal dynamics in the couple which then determine how couples organise or *negotiate* their parenting. To understand how mothers and fathers conduct their parenting and why these roles and responsibilities emerge, the *couple* needs to be studied; the social relations of parenthood and the negotiations that take place within it

(Fox, 2001). According to Fox, 'focussing on social relations will acknowledge that the way people parent is largely a product of couples' negotiations' (Fox, 2001: 377). In negotiation there is agency and in agency is the potential for change. Fox calls for not only a greater focus on the interpersonal dynamics that take place within the couple context, the negotiations that occur in how mothers and fathers construct their roles in the household, but also on the demonstration of agency within these interactions. Although studies such as that of Miller (2007) and Christopher (2012) emphasised agency in how women challenged dominant cultural discourse on motherhood and established their definitions of 'good' mothering, this research focuses exclusively on mothers and hence fails to incorporate the *couple dynamics* in the negotiation of motherhood identity and conduct.

Apart from the limited attention given to agency within the couple context, it has been widely argued that the general existence of agency and its potential for creating social change has been relatively undeveloped in the applications of the social constructivist theorisation of gender (see for example Deutsch, 2007 and Sullivan, 2004). This is ironic given that when 'doing gender' as a conceptual contribution to social thought was first introduced, gender became for the first time recognised as something fluid and changeable rather than static and permanent. Gender as a situated accomplishment points to an *active* and continuous construction of gender which then contains the possibility for change. According to Andersen 'This revolutionary potential of human agency is the most important contribution of this approach' (Andersen, 2005 in Deutsch, 2007: 108). If gender is constructed, it can be deconstructed by the individuals involved in its 'doing'. Yet, paradoxically, 'doing gender', instead of having been used as an analytical framework for the study of human agency and social change, it has been

applied to show how gender relations are reproduced, demonstrating the persistence rather than the dynamic nature of inequality in individual interaction (Sullivan, 2004). As stated by Deutsch, 'Doing gender has become a theory of conformity and gender conventionality, albeit of multiple forms of conventionality' (Deutsch, 2007: 108). While one should not underestimate the contribution this framework has made in drawing attention to what Deutsch has labelled 'the missing piece in the story of gender inequality: the importance of the interactional level' (Deutsch, 2007: 109), this approach also has served to undermine the potential for resistance (Deutsch, 2007). In seeking to understand the forces at play in the gendered journey of parenthood the approach chosen for such analysis cannot merely explain the reproduction of traditional patterns but must also serve as a framework for recognising examples of 'doing parenthood' which goes against conventional expectations of how motherhood and fatherhood should be practised. While the sections above have mainly documented the *continuation* of gender inequality in the domestic sphere and presented theoretical approaches to explaining this trend, the subsequent part of this literature review will shift focus slightly and explore in greater detail the *changes* that are happening in couples' distribution of earning and caring roles and responsibilities.

In response to the criticism that doing gender is a theory of gender conventionality, West and Fenstermaker (2002b) reiterated the potential for diversity and change within this theoretical framework. How they define gender, however, with the assumption of the universality and ubiquity of doing gender is, according to Deutsch (2007), irreconcilable with a theory of change. While West and Fenstermaker do acknowledge that an individual's failure or resistance to living up to the normative conceptions of gendered acceptable behaviour may serve to weaken the link between

this specific conduct and the sex category to which they belong, the omnipresence of gender as a socially created system of difference is nevertheless stressed and the idea that some forms of gender might be compatible with equality between the two sexes seems to be ruled out (Deutsch, 2007). Although the trend continues to be one where women overwhelmingly carry the larger domestic burden both in terms of housework and when it comes to childcare, there is also a growing number of *egalitarian* couples (Sullivan, 2000). Additionally, there is a well-documented *diversity* in how mothers and fathers share responsibilities for earning and caring with their partners pointing to more *individualised* rather than *standardised* and socially shaped parental practices. The practice of multiple as well as egalitarian ways in which couples *can* and *do* create equality in their roles as parents was documented by Deutsch:

“Some created a genderless model by taking turns and equalizing all aspects of parenting. Others, however, divided the work equally overall but specialized in aspects of parenting that were more or less gendered (Deutsch, 1999). She cooked and he cleaned; she comforted and he helped with homework.” (Deutsch, 2007 in Ranson, 2010: 27)

Gender is not static and traditional scripts are being re-written, old gender norms are losing their currency as new ones emerge. The work by Deutsch (1999) also makes it possible to extend the discussion on change into an exploration of ‘undoing gender’ and what these kinds of conducts might look like. Her research included a group of nonconformist couples who in one form or another shared all the parental work between them. Deutsch argued that her study demonstrated how parenting did *not* need to be gendered, it could be practised and shared in non-gendered ways. The concept of ‘undoing gender’ first introduced by Butler (2004) has also been explored by Risman (2009). Risman questions why it is that new kinds of behaviour adopted by groups of boys and girls, men and women must be perceived as alternative

masculinities and femininities just because the social group is itself made up of biological males and females. She asks,

“If young women strategically adopt masculine or feminine behaviours to fit the moment, is this really doing gender, or is it destabilizing the taken-for-granted persona that was in the past assumed to match sex category”
(Risman, 2009: 82).

Risman calls for researchers to pay careful attention to whether their findings are in fact a documentation of different kinds of gender, whether it is looking at how gender could be changing or whether it is witnessing gender being *undone*. The ‘cage’ (Risman, 2009: 83) of traditional femininity and masculinity is according to Risman in the process of being eroded and young people today are much freer to develop their potential beyond the ‘gendered straitjacket’ than they were in the past.

The idea that we are now living in a society where men and women, fathers and mothers are freer to form their own identities and choose their own life path, is supported by theorists like Giddens, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim. Their theorisation emphasises the growing and significant individualisation of gender and gender relations in late modernity maintaining that the framework and social rules of everyday life are crumbling away. In their view, people’s lives are becoming increasingly ‘individualised’ and less standardised, their biographies largely removed from traditional scripts and instead dependant on individual decision-making and free choice (Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1990). The variety in how people organise their lives as well as the rapid social change that has taken place over the last decades are accentuated. Human beings are thought to be the designers of their biographies, the standard biography becomes instead a preferred biography, or, in the words of Giddens, a ‘reflexive biography’ (Beck, *et al.*, 1994). Great emphasis is given to

the *ability* and the *opportunity* of the individual to rethink and choose their way of life rather than following predetermined gender roles. According to Beck, 'whatever a man or a woman was and is, whatever he or she thinks or does, constitutes the individuality of the individual' (Beck, *et al.*, 1994: 15). The transition into adulthood and parenthood are therefore less norm-conforming and collectively patterned. How men and women live as mothers and fathers and how they decide to organise their earning and caring responsibilities are hence essentially individually designed paths and lifestyles. The increased participation of mothers in the labour market, it is argued, has led to a weakening of the male breadwinner model and couples are no longer tied together in a complimentary domestic and commercial specialisation as has traditionally been the case.

Although Giddens embraces the transformative powers of human action, his Structuration Theory simultaneously sets out to demonstrate how each person is not entirely 'free' but instead is an agent within social structures. These social structures, however, are both created by human agency and simultaneously the medium of this construction. Giddens explains how structures are created through actions but that reciprocally action is constituted structurally. The perception of structure and agency as a mutually interacting duality is captured in the concept of 'duality of structure', a central notion in Giddens' structuration theory. While individuals are a product of their social world, they are still not determined by them, and people are themselves the architects of the social world around them. Moreover, actors are never 'cultural dopes'. Instead, they are 'knowledgeable and capable agents who reflexively monitor their action' (Bryant and Jary, 2003: 254). It is these reflexive and transformative abilities of social agents which has now moved society into what Beck (1992) and Giddens, (1990,

1991) have labelled the era of 'Reflexive Modernisation'. The term 'reflexive modernisation' refers to 'the possibility of a creative (self)-destruction of an entire epoch: that of the industrial society' (Beck *et al.*, 1994: 2) The inherent dynamism of this reflexive modernisation undercuts the former formations of class, stratum, occupation and sex roles (Beck *et al.*, 1994).

The 'reflexive modernisation' thesis with its assumptions of a decline in power and legitimacy of authoritative norms and therefore a corresponding rise in a new form of identity creations, as well as the associated decay in the power of social institutions to dictate individuals' biographies, is implying a convergence in men and women's identities and experiences (Wajcman and Martin, 2002). While these changes signify a 'freeing' of the social agent from institutional and normative constraints (Giddens, 1991), gender in identity formation and the inherently gendered aspects of institutional structure are inadequately addressed. The assumption of a convergence of men's and women's lived realities was explored in a study by Wajcman and Martin (2002) where they looked at the relationship between identities and experiences in paid work and family life amongst managers in large companies. This research drew on both quantitative and qualitative data, first comparing the career orientations and attitudes of female and male managers and then drawing on interview material to gain a greater understanding of how managers understand themselves and their careers. The main question Wajcman and Martin wanted to answer was how these career narratives fit together with the stories of their family life and what this would subsequently disclose about the meanings men and women attach to their employment and the decisions and actions in their private lives. What they found was that the career experiences and orientations of female and male managers did hardly differ at all. Men and women were

equally likely to regard their work as an essential part of their self-concept and their career stories largely emphasised individualisation and choice where their decisions in the market were driven by their preferences and needs. These 'market narratives' are consistent with Beck's and Giddens' individualisation thesis where men and women become 'choosing selves', principally autonomous agents, free from authoritative norms and life patterns. No obvious gender content was found in their narratives of choosing and selling individual selves and career paths. Quite the contrary, both men and women placed themselves as 'ungendered market actors' (Wajcman and Martin, 2002: 999), adopting similar career strategies. When the study examined how these male and female managers related their career narratives to the stories of their family lives, however, a different pattern emerged. The men interviewed showed an awareness of the changing cultural expectations around fatherhood but generally perceived no conflict between being a 'good' father and working the long hours their career demanded. This relatively unproblematic integration of the role of the worker and the role of a parent represents a sharp contrast to the stories of female managers. The addition of their family stories to their market narratives revealed a deep sense of conflict and for some a plain choice between being a mother and having a career. While new ungendered *career* identities seem to be appearing, *private* identities remain deeply gendered. Men can combine earning and caring without any threat to their identities as generating income and wealth through their labour market activities are still considered vital components of their responsibilities as fathers. Mothers, on the other hand, are not subjected to the same cultural expectations and moral discourse. Women are hence confronted with a negotiation of employment and household responsibilities which is completely different to that of men. These research findings therefore raise critical questions about the extent to which women and men today are

free to choose their paths and write their subjective biographies. The gendered ideologies in the private sphere do not seem to have lost their impact. Men and women continue to 'do gender' albeit not in a uniform way and with more agency than assumed in the social constructivist approach, but still with more cultural constraints than acknowledged by the individualisation thesis. The journey to parenthood therefore remains gendered at the same time as couples negotiate new and more egalitarian strategies for integrating working and caring roles, challenging and changing traditional structures and socially created ideologies.

Another theorist who advocates agency and supports the individualisation thesis is Hakim (Crompton and Lyonette, 2010). According to Hakim, women in affluent societies are now for the first time in history in a position where they have a *real choice* between family work and market work. Lifestyle preferences, Hakim claims, are determinants of women's employment choices (Hakim, 1995). Hakim maintains that the adult female population can be divided into two main groups according to of their earning-caring preferences. The first category of women ('work centred') are 'committed to careers in the labour market and therefore invest in training and qualifications, and generally achieve higher grade occupations and higher paid jobs which they pursue full-time for the most part' (Hakim, 1995: 434). The second group of women ('home centred') give priority to what Hakim labels the 'marriage career'. These women do not invest in what economists have called 'human capital and instead rapidly choose to transfer to part-time jobs as soon as their breadwinner partner allows them to. They are therefore often found in undemanding jobs with limited responsibilities, concentrated in lower-grade and lower-paid employment in which this second cluster of women are perfectly happy, enjoying convenient working hours and being free from career-related stress (Hakim,

1995). The priority these home-centred women give to non-market work activities such as having and raising children is, Hakim argues, a choice, it is made *voluntarily* and per their lifestyle preferences. There is also a third group of women which Hakim has labelled 'adaptive'. The women belonging to this category are the ones who have no firm preference for either market work or family work and will therefore drift in one direction or the other depending on circumstances.

For Hakim, preferences are formed early on in life, they are assumed to be fixed over time and independent of the behaviour of others (Duncan and Edwards, 1997). This essentialism, although perhaps not a product of innate characteristics as maintained by Becker and instead shaped by early socialisation, struggles to explain the changes in individual women's career patterns. While many women reduce their labour market attachment in the early stages of motherhood, some strengthen their ties to paid work at a later stage in their lives when their children are older. The focus on preferences as being the motivational force behind lifestyle choices also assumes women's caring and earning decisions are taken in a vacuum, unaffected by interactional, cultural, structural and institutional forces. Although several studies point to the importance of attitudes in determining women's labour market attachment (see for example Crompton *et al.*, 2003, Crompton *et al.*, 2005; Schober, 2013; Schober and Scott, 2012) these attitudes, while themselves having been shaped by cultural discourse, interact with social constraints – and in the case of mothers and fathers in heterosexual relationships – formed within a couple context. It should also be mentioned here as a side comment, that Hakim's focus on women's preferences and not men's, the emphasis given to how women now have a genuine choice between family work and market work, not only

reveals a supposition that a combination of these two roles can prove tricky to balance, but also that this balancing act is the responsibility of women, not that of men.

Continuing with the assumption that women, as well as men, are 'free' agents making life decisions according to their preferences, it could be claimed that this view fails to question the gendered origin of these preferences. It also serves to ignore the context in which these choices are being made. While men's and women's work and family decisions may be labelled 'choices', they are not unconstrained choices (Smeaton, 2006). To understand women's labour market choices after childbirth, McRae (2003) maintains, one needs to comprehend how these decisions are shaped by gendered restrictions rather than focusing on their preferences. As argued by Gornick and Meyers (2005), in a world with such different constraints and opportunities for women and men it is 'impossible to know whether these decisions reflect underlying and enduring preferences or accommodations to inflexible working arrangements, limited options for nonparental childcare, career penalties for allocating time to parenting, and the like' (Gornick and Meyers, 2005: 104). While it may be difficult to pinpoint the exact variables impacting couples' family-work strategies as well as map out how they relate to each other, the fact that cross-national differences in mother's attitudes and behaviour are found, points to how people's practices in various ways are mirroring the opportunities presented by various policy regimes, labour market conditions and gender cultures (Fagan, 2001).

Although it is highly questionable that individual agency overrides institutional structures and dominant gender discourse, the writing of Hakim, as well as that of Beck, Beck-Gernsheim and Giddens, nevertheless represents a valuable contrast to the social constructivist approach with its emphasis on the power of predefined social norms. If

we are to understand both the reproduction of and the changes to the traditional division of labour, both unequal and egalitarian journeys to parenthood, the framework applied needs to incorporate both agency as well as the context. Human beings should be viewed as reflexive selves but operating within a constrictive environment. The human being as a constrained agent is captured in Evans' (2002) notion of the 'bounded agency'. The bounded agency is bounded by the interactional process of 'doing gender' as well as embedded in a wider structural context which is rife with gender disparities (Risman, 1998). Gender, according to Acker (1990), must be seen as a system of social relations that is embedded in the way that major institutions are organised and operate. Social institutions embody gendered arrangements and simultaneously create and retain differences in their female and male members. As argued in the introduction to this literature review, the male breadwinner/female caregiver model of the family belongs, at least in its pure version, to the past. The assumptions inherent in this model, however, are still mirrored in policy regimes in most industrialised countries (see for example Boje and Leira, 2000; Gornick and Meyers, 2003; Lewis, 2009) as well as in the structures of the labour market (see for example Halford *et al.*, 1997; Liff and Wajcman, 1996; Reskin and Padavic, 1994). When seeking to understand how and why there is a tendency for couples to adopt a traditional division in family roles in the transition to parenthood, the structural or institutional context in which parents' choices are made needs to be incorporated into the analysis. Just as Hakim assumes that family and the household are primarily female 'domains', it can be claimed that many family policies and modern organisational life assume the labour market is essentially a male territory. With the expectations of the Scandinavian countries, fathers are given limited parental leave rights which reflects the idea of the mother as the primary caregiver. This supposition is complemented by how 'full-time' work is defined and consequently how

most work opportunities are organised (Drake and Solberg, 1995; Wajcman, 1998). Modern corporations with their often long and inflexible hours culture and the value placed on uninterrupted career progression reveal a workplace largely structured according to the male-breadwinner model assuming a worker without substantial family responsibilities (Moen and Han, 2001). The complications of combining earning and caring become especially acute at managerial levels. In the words of Liff and Wajcman (1996)

“... a visitor from Mars could be forgiven for thinking that management jobs have been specifically designed for men married to full-time wives and mothers who shoulder the burden of family life” (Liff and Wajcman, 1996: 90-91).

Towards a usable conceptual framework

While gendered structures and institutions reinforce gender role ideologies which in turn shape action, human action and interaction impact on gender role ideologies and gendered structures. Hence there seems to be a need for an integration of the symbolic, the structural, the interactional and the institutional levels of analysis if a satisfactory theoretical framework is to be established and an understanding of the gendered journey of parenthood is to be achieved. Such research should use conceptual tools which can generate greater insight into how and why gender inequality is constructed and reproduced when couples become parents but should also be able to explain how and why this inequality is sometimes *deconstructed* as new motherhood and fatherhood practices and identities are embraced.

In the study of changing as well as alternative constructions of gender, Sullivan (2004) suggests a conceptual framework which combines ‘the emphasis on interaction and negotiation of the doing gender approach with a theoretical frame in which the

conditions for the accomplishment of change in interaction is explicitly addressed' (Sullivan, 2004: 208). A theoretical framework which does indeed combine these elements, Sullivan maintains, is the concept of 'gender consciousness', a term referring to people 'seeing' or being *conscious* of the social construction of gender. Although the concept of gender consciousness was originally applied to women only, there is no reason why this notion cannot be applied to men as well (Thompson, 1993). According to Thompson (1993), men and women in a couple must be able to 'see' the social construction of gender in mothering and fathering for them to organise parenthood in egalitarian ways. It is a critical enabling element for women to push for changes in their relationships (Thompson, 1993). Similar arguments were put forward by Komter (1989) who stated that 'real changes in marital power can occur only if husbands and wives recognize their stereotyped self-concepts and ways of seeing each other... [and] lay bare the sociocultural and psychic roots of gender inequality' (Komter, 1989: 214 in Sanchez and Thomson, 1997: 749). The concept of 'gender consciousness' is described as a continuum where at one end there is a generalised awareness of gender issues. This generalised awareness, however, may develop into a complete consciousness of the rights associated with certain gender locations (Sullivan, 2004). The development of such a consciousness depends on the conditions of the wider society in which the individual is a member. The rise of feminism and its' focus on equality in heterosexual relationships, egalitarian divisions of family work and on intimacy represent a discourse from which an awareness of rights can grow, and gender consciousness can develop (Sullivan, 2004). When mothers and fathers 'do gender' or 'do parenthood' within their relationship, they do it, according to Sullivan, as part of a dialectic process which involves both an interpretation of their partner's gender consciousness as well as an interaction with his or her doing of gender. This complex process, however, is also

affected by the material and the relational resources of both partners in the relationship and is entrenched in the wider societal discourse (Sullivan, 2004).

While changes at the level of gender ideologies and discourses impact gender consciousness, so do the day-to-day social interactions. Sullivan therefore calls for an interlinking of the analysis of everyday interaction with the notion of changing gender consciousness. This, she maintains, involves 'the development of a multilevel theoretical frame that can link changes in the wider discursive sphere to processes of change as they occur in the interaction between men and women in the domestic sphere' (Sullivan, 2004: 209). While the changes at the level of ideologies and discourse are vital to identify as these will shape gendered interaction, the key, Sullivan, argues, lies in an in-depth analysis of the continuous interactive processes of change as described by the subjects themselves. The daily negotiations and struggles that take place in a couple around the distribution of earning and caring roles and responsibilities are all happening within - and are themselves part of - a wider social process where changes are occurring in both gender consciousness and in practice. These signs of change in the daily practices and interpersonal interactions both mirror and are themselves constitutive of attitudes and discourse. While change may be 'slow and piecemeal' (Sullivan, 2004: 209), gender relations are moving in new directions, unevenly, yes, and perhaps slower than changes in ideology would suggest, but progress is being made and the number of couples organising their lives in egalitarian ways are on the rise.

Although a conceptual framework for studying the gendered journey of parenthood should indeed be able to explain shifts towards a variety in constructions of gendered motherhood and fatherhood identities and practices, such a theoretical approach should also enable an understanding of how and why more traditional choices and role

allocations are taking place in heterosexual couples. There is, therefore, a need to develop an explanatory framework of both change and continuity, of conformity and resistance, that can 'incorporate the intersection between ideology, attitudes, and practice in situated, located contexts' (Sullivan, 2004: 211-212). This multilevel conceptual approach links the wider discursive sphere to the interactions between women and men in the domestic sphere while not excluding the societal structures in which these interactions, these negotiations, take place. Examples of conceptual frameworks which are addressing all these elements include Risman's (1998) gender structure (Sullivan, 2004). While Lorber (1994) maintains that gender is an institution that is entrenched in all the social processes of daily life and social organisations, gender, according to Risman (1998, 2004) must be understood as a social structure in itself, 'embedded in the individual, interactional and institutional dimensions of our society' (Risman, 2004: 429). Gender, she argues, should not only be understood as situated in individuals but throughout social life. Risman's theorisations fit with the integrative approaches also embraced by Sullivan where 'macro' and 'micro' are recursively and interactively linked, where individual practices are shaped by institutional forces and cultural beliefs but where simultaneously the behaviour of boys and girls, men and women impact on societal structures and dominant discourse. This interlinking of structures and individual behaviour follows similar ways of thinking to that of Giddens (1984) and his structuration theory. Giddens emphasised the transformative powers of human action and highlighted the recursive relationship between structures and agents. When individuals act on structure, Giddens argued, they have their reasons for doing so. Social research should therefore concern itself with understanding *why* people choose their actions. This search for rationale and meaning must move beyond the verbal explanations people give, however, as so much of social

life is based on routine and taken-for-granted ways of behaving. In Risman's gender structure theory, this nonreflexive habituated action refers to the cultural component of social structure. It is the 'taken for granted or cognitive image rules that belong to the situational context' (Risman, 2004: 433). The cultural element of the social structure consists of the interactional expectations individuals are met with in all social encounters. With her theory, Risman wishes to develop an approach where gender is the structure being analysed and to recognise when men and women act out of habit - where they behave unreflexively according to taken-for-granted gendered cultural expectations - and when they 'do gender' in a more conscious manner - intentionally, rebelliously and even ironically. Attention needs to be given, Risman says, to not only how structures mould individual choice and social interaction but also to human action, both conscious and habit-driven, which serves to create, maintain and modify existing structures. While action may turn against structure it can never be free of it. The gender structure is embedded in all aspects of society and is a basis for stratification in peoples' personalities, cultural rules and institutions. Gender as a structure has according to Risman consequences on three dimensions: 1. The individual level where it serves to develop gendered selves; 2. At the interactional level where female and male members of society face gendered expectations; 3. At the institutional level where rules and regulations regarding resource allocation and material goods are gender specific. When gender is conceptualised as a social structure, it enables an identification of the conditions which produce gender inequality in each of these dimensions as well as how this occurs. The 'how' is imperative according to Risman because once we know the mechanisms which lead to gender inequality, it also becomes possible to intervene.

Seeing gender as a structure embedded in every aspect of social life, operating in complex and recursive ways allows full attention to the web of interconnections between individual gendered selves, the gendered cultural expectations guiding interactional patterns and gendered social institutions. It links the macro level institutions to the individual and couple-level processes of decision-making and action and helps explain how and why there can be more egalitarian gender structures on one level, for example, the individual, but that this dimension is 'defeated' when it interacts with the other gendered structures. Risman (2004) gives the example of a feminist woman whose attempt at creating an egalitarian heterosexual relationship fails due to culturally gendered interactional expectations. The focus on the embeddedness of gender in every societal structure easily leads to a rather pessimistic view of change, however. A conceptual framework for examining the gendered journey of parenthood should also embrace the potential for variation and transformation at all the gendered levels mentioned above. Sullivan's use of 'gender consciousness' proves valuable in meeting such an aim. Reflexive men and women, fathers and mothers, while operating in and being part of a gendered social world, are also conscious human beings who respond to the structures of opportunities and constraints in their daily lives. People conform and rebel, 'do gender' and 'undo gender' in a variety of different ways within a gendered but changing social world.

Chapter 3: The gendered journey of parenthood in two national contexts: Norway and Britain

Today, as governments in many European countries are embracing the goal of improving the lives of employed mothers and fathers, the Scandinavian model is met with renewed interest (Morgan, 2008). Gender equality, facilitated by generous work/family policies, is increasingly perceived to be a prerequisite for a productive society (Esping-Andersen *et al.*, 2002). In a European policy context, the mobilisation of women's labour market reserves, including those of women with young children, as well as the maintenance of reasonable fertility rates have developed as major policy ambitions (Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006). In Scandinavia, the employment of mothers was starting to gain ground in the 1960s and 1970s and the position of women in society was increasingly debated. The inequalities women were met with 'in the education system, in access to the labour market and in wages, politics and public life' (Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006: 2) became redefined as political concerns and coincided with the greater societal project of welfare state enlargement and institutionalisation of societal entitlements (Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006). Gender equality and the politicisation of parenthood were treated as closely connected and became a central part of the welfare state model (Kitterød and Pettersen, 2006).

The politicisation of parenthood starting two generations ago was strongly influenced by a culture embracing and promoting *universalism* and *egalitarianism*. The Scandinavian welfare state model today thus provides services and benefits that are universalist in their orientation, redistributive in aim and are frequently perceived as entitlements of the citizens (Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006: 6). The focus on equality, both in opportunities and in outcomes, has been noted as the main distinguishing aspect of

the welfare state in the Nordic region (Graubard, 1986). Norway, a society with a culture as well as social policies supporting this universalism and egalitarianism is nevertheless a society that has been perceived to diverge from the Scandinavian welfare model. While Norway has a profound political commitment to gender equality, this pledge coexists with lingering traditional family values as well as an ambivalence towards working mothers. As will be argued in this chapter, however, what was described by Sainsbury (2001) as the 'Norwegian puzzle', referring to this country's divergence from the Nordic earner-carer model of gender and welfare, has during the half a century since its initial institutional foundations were laid, matured into a nation where more equal sharing of paid and unpaid work, equal parenthood, has been established as a guiding principle across the political spectrum (Ellingsæter, 2018).

Britain, the other national context in which the gendered journey of parenthood is explored in this thesis, represents a vastly different welfare state. Whereas Norway is 'characterised by working-time regimes with few disincentives against gender equality, and an active policy on reconciling work and family', the UK 'scores medium of several employment indicators for women, but extremely low both on consistent childcare policy and on a working-time regime favourable to women' (Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006: 196). Up until 1997, with the election of New Labour, care work and the difficulties parents were experiencing balancing employment and domestic responsibilities were considered a 'private matter' and outside of the boundaries of the state (Kaufman, 2018). The post-war welfare state in Britain was built on the assumption that men went out to earn money while women remained at home (Lewis, 2008; Scott *et al.*, 2010). Although, as was the case in Norway, women's increased labour market participation challenged this male breadwinner model of the family as

did the recognition that most households needed two incomes to meet their financial needs, the UK continued to lag behind other Western countries in introducing policies enabling better work-life balance (Lewis, 2009). Today, two and a half decades after Labour firmly put the issue of work and family on the agenda, there has indeed been an increase in public expenditure with the development of formal childcare services and parental leave schemes. That said, there continues to be a persistent maternalistic orientation in the existing family policies in the UK as well as public support for male full-time breadwinner and female part-time carer model.

Given the historical and current political, cultural and institutional differences between Norway and the UK, how will men's and women's lived experiences vary in these two nations as they go from 'single' couples to a family unit with caring responsibilities? This chapter will give the contextual background to the plans, ideals, expectations and hopes expressed by first-time parents-to-be and the surroundings in which the interviewees made decisions, negotiated and revised initial goals as they navigated their transition to parenthood. Because the maternity/paternity/parental leave provisions were used as a framework for this study, much of the chapter will focus on outlining and debating these entitlements. Additional policies, structures and institutions will also be covered, however, including aspects of formal or non-familial childcare as well as paid work.

The politicisation of parenthood

The 1970s marked, according to Leira, a 'watershed in Scandinavian work/family policy' (Leira, 2006: 31), and Norway was no exception. The welfare state was in the process of being redesigned as a service-provider state (Sipilä, 1995), or a caring state (Leira 1992) where funding and provisioning of a wide range of services and benefits in

welfare and social care increased (Leira, 2006). Special importance was given to gender equality and parenthood policies advocating and supporting working motherhood and caring fatherhood. Policies particularly directed at increasing father involvement at home were implemented and a symmetrical family model where men and women share domestic duties and earning responsibilities equally between themselves became an established political goal (Bergsvik *et al.*, 2020). As part of Norway's political aim of supporting and advocating working motherhood and caring fatherhood, shared parental leave was introduced as a family right in 1978, giving mothers and fathers 18 weeks of paid leave. At the time, 6 of these weeks were reserved for the mother allowing women time to recover after the birth of their baby. The remaining 12 weeks, however, were to be *shared* between the parents (see for example Brandt and Kvande, 2019; Haas and Rostgaard, 2011; Ellingsæter, 2018). The redesign of *maternity leave* to *parental leave*, a gender-neutral statutory right to paid absence from one's employment after childbirth (Brandt and Kvande, 2020), was part of the 'institutionalisation of gender equality objective in all the Nordic countries' (Ellingsæter 2009 in Ellingsæter 2018: 376). For the first time, fathers were regarded by the state not only as breadwinners but also as carers. Whereas Norwegian women had been provided with special protection from the demands of work in the form of paid leave when they became mothers since 1956 when they were guaranteed 12 weeks, no such rights had previously been given to men (Rostgaard, 2002). This pre-existing 'maternity leave' or post-natal leave' was part of the male breadwinner model and one-income family which was customary at the time (Brandt and Kvande, 2020). The leave reform of 1978 therefore represented a radical rejection of these gendered earning and caring roles and responsibilities and a welcoming of men as involved and hands-on fathers. New

fatherhood ideals were rapidly being established in Norway and men were increasingly expected to care for their children on a more equal footing with their female partner.

Whereas in Norway, the state has for nearly half a century played a vital role in enabling families to combine paid and unpaid work, in the UK, the balancing of earning and caring was until 1997, with the election of the New Labour government, largely considered a private matter (Lewis, 2009). Up until this point, the UK lagged behind the rest of Western Europe on policies facilitating work-family reconciliation (Kaufman and Almquist, 2017). In fact, successive governments chose to forego the development and implementation of explicit family policies (Hantrais, 2004). Only limited childcare services were offered, predominantly aimed at 'children at risk' (Randall, 2000) and the statutory maternity leave, first introduced in 1978, was short and meagre in its remuneration (Kaufman *et al.*, 2010). Since the election of the Labour government in 1997, however, the matter of 'work and family' was firmly put on the agenda and a coherent social policy package was developed (Lewis, 2009). That said, in contrast to Norway, gender equality was not stated as an explicit goal (Lewis, 2009) and although policies shifted to become more attentive to the needs of the family (Daly, 2010), there was a deep-seated 'ambivalence towards fathers' (Kilkey, 2006) in the political climate at the time. Fathers were therefore only explicitly written into policy in 2001 with the introduction of paid statutory paternity leave (Daly, 2010; Kaufmann, 2018). The statutory paternity leave entitlements in Britain which came into force in April 2003, were given the label Ordinary Paternity Leave (OPL), and even though fathers were for the first time given the right to take time away from work after their partner had given birth, the two weeks of leave offered were paid at a flat rate which meant that many families could not afford for dads to stay at home (Kaufman *et al.*, 2010). As argued by

Atkinson (2017), however, not only was OPL policy limited in pay, but it was also limited in length and hence did nothing to challenge the traditional assumptions around the sharing of earning and caring responsibilities in heterosexual couples. While the family policies introduced by New Labour may have appeared to be making significant and material changes, it also continued to *underpin* more conservative gender ideologies where women were expected to take on the role of the primary homemaker and primary carer (Kaufman, 2018).

Overall, the work-family reconciliation policies brought in at the end of the 1990s and early 2000s in the UK were primarily focused on ‘reconciliation for women’, aimed at helping *mothers* better balance earning and caring. The wider policy agenda implicitly regarded the reconciliation challenge as one facing mothers as it was *their* attachment to paid work, which was adversely affected by parenthood while for men, their attachment, if anything, was strengthened when they had children (O’Brien and Shemilt, 2003). Although the language used was often gender-neutral in nature, using words like ‘parents’ and ‘families’, the desire to better integrate women, and particularly *mothers* into the labour market, represented much of the impetus for the UK’s family-policy launch in the late 1990s (Kilkey, 2006). Policy interventions attempting to *emphasise* and *enable* fathers’ caring role were absent.

In Norway, as this nation entered the 1990s, the gender-neutral model of parental leave introduced in 1978, had failed to translate into the egalitarian sharing practices with the symmetric family of two worker-carers which the policy interventions had intended to encourage. Norwegian father’s use of shared parental leave weeks was at the time close to zero (Bjørnholt and Stefansen, 2019; Rostgaard, 2002). Although Norwegian fathers did indeed tend to take their two weeks of ‘daddy days’, a generously remunerated

leave that was paid for by their employer, the parental leave entitlements, despite its largely gender-neutral design, remained deeply gendered. The Norwegian state's attempt to make men into hands-on fathers had not had the impact it had set out to have and earning and caring roles and responsibilities continued to be gendered long after more egalitarian practices in heterosexual couples had become an explicit political goal as well as a realistic option. Seeing that presenting father care as an 'option' clearly did not transform practice, a decade and a half after gender-neutral leave was introduced, a completely novel policy intervention which established men's time at home to care for their baby not only as a 'right', but as a 'duty', was pioneered. This chapter will now discuss what has become known as the 'daddy quota' and how making parental leave for fathers an *obligation* rather than an *option* impacts couples earning and caring decisions. Can earmarked and well-remunerated leave periods for men construct caring fatherhood and working motherhood?

Father care as a duty – the daddy-quota

In 1993, four years before any comprehensive family policies in the UK were introduced and ten years before British fathers were given any rights at all to take time away from work to care for their babies, the Norwegian Social Democrat Party suggested that four weeks of the parental leave period should be *earmarked* fathers on a use-or-lose-it basis (see for example Brandt and Kvande, 2017; 2019; Duvander *et al.*, 2010; Naz, 2010; Rostgaard, 2002). At the time, the parental leave entitlements had already been gradually extended from 18 weeks in 1978 to either 24 weeks of 100% wage compensation or 32 weeks of 80% pay. Ahead of the policy reform, 2 of these weeks were reserved for the mother before the birth as well as 6 weeks after the arrival of the baby. Fathers, on the other hand, even though their rights and responsibilities as fathers were acknowledged by shared parental leave entitlements, no paid absence from work

was specifically allocated to them. This all changed in 1993 when Norway, as the first country in the world, came to enact the 4-week quota, weeks that were reserved for fathers on a use-it-or-lose-it basis (Eydal *et al.*, 2015). The idea was to transform men's parenting practices with a 'loving push' (Ellingsæter, 2018: 379). If the father did not use his earmarked weeks, it would be forfeited. Decisions around the sharing or not sharing parental leave were therefore no longer completely up to the parents. According to Brandt and Øverli (1998), the daddy quota represented a move away from the *right* for men to take parental leave to a *duty* for men to take leave and to care for their babies. It was a 'welfare state contribution to mobilise fathers to carers' (Brandt and Kvande, 2017: 29). The initiative was fiercely criticised by the right-wing parties for making men's family role into a public issue proclaiming that the state should not interfere in how couples decided to distribute their earning and caring responsibilities (Ellingsæter, 2018). The Christian Democratic Party, a socially conservative party, on the other hand, supported the quota, arguing that the 4 earmarked weeks would give men valuable insights into women's care work and a deeper understanding of its importance (Ellingsæter 2018). The benefits for young children of having a present and involved father were also emphasised. Overall, even though this new law involved a potentially fundamental 'shake up' of traditional parental practices in Norwegian families, the quota was met with limited opposition from the wider population and was barely debated at all (Rostgaard, 2002). Culturally, the Norwegian public had largely, but not fully, moved towards embracing the idea of working motherhood and caring fatherhood. As commented by Leira (1998), the new policy did not seem to interfere much with the norms around masculinity at the time – not in the family setting nor the field of paid employment. It should be noted, however, that the introduction of the reform was accompanied by an increase in the length of the shared parental leave as

well. This daddy quota, hence, did not involve *removing* any time from the mother and therefore did not constitute a significant challenge to the gender balance in the private and the public domain (Rostgaard, 2002). Moreover, even though 4 weeks constitutes a substantial amount of time away from paid work, it is nevertheless short enough to not cause too much disruption for employers.

The political decision to establish 4 weeks of leave reserved for the father on a use-or-lose-it basis resulted in a remarkable increase in men taking time off work to stay home with their babies. Following the introduction of the daddy quota, the percentage of fathers making use of their leave entitlements rose from 4 to 45% in just one year and to 57% the year after (Brandt and Kvande, 2020). By 2000, 85% of eligible fathers were using their earmarked leave (Brandt and Kvande, 2003a in Brandt and Kvande, 2020). Since then, father care has not only gradually become more and more institutionalised, but the length and flexibility of the daddy quota has also increased along with the overall parental leave package.

The daddy quota has been regarded as a success story in Norway. Data from NAV (Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration) shows that for men who had children in 2014 and who would have moved beyond the 3-year limit to use the daddy quota in 2017, only 7% had failed to take any leave (Schou, 2017). According to Kitterød *et al.* (2017), a mere 14 % utilised less than the full quota. The high take-up rate indicates that the daddy quota has established a new norm for fathers in Norway, or in the words of Ellingsæter and Leira, it is 'the normal thing for fathers to do' (Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006: 126). A reform that was originally launched as a 'loving force' on men, has translated into an aspect of the leave package which is regarded by most Norwegian parents as positive for individual families as well as for the wider society (Lappegaard

and Bringedal, 2013). Additionally, it should also be noted that from a recent study by Brandth and Kvande (2017), there has also been a general change towards men at home on leave doing more housework. What Brandth and Kvande refer to as 'the three Cs: caring, cleaning and cooking' (Brandth and Kvande, 2017: 37) are now part of men's workload when they are off work caring for their children, a practice that seems to be largely continuing once they return to work (Kitterød, 2012). That said, most fathers do not spend any more time at home on leave than the days that have been *reserved* for them (Fougner, 2012; Schou, 2017) whereas the shared leave weeks, despite them being gender neutral in character and highly compensated, are given to the mother (Brandth and Kvande, 2019; Neuman and Meuser, 2017). Despite the Norwegian state's promotion of the caring father as the companion of the working mother, advocating equal sharing of family work and paid work for more than a generation, it continues to be mainly women who interrupt their careers to stay at home with the children (Naz, 2010).

In the UK, as stated earlier in this chapter, the promotion by the state of caring fatherhood and working motherhood under New Labour was non-existent. Men as parents were barely explicitly written into family policies at all. They had eventually been given the 'right' to two weeks of paternity leave, but father care was far from a 'duty'. That said, whereas the limited focus on fathers in policies and the failure to address the gendered distribution of paid work and care in families under New Labour should be noted, there is nevertheless clear evidence that there was a growing political understanding that an erosion of the male breadwinner family model was underway (Lewis, 2009). The 1990s saw a declining marriage rate and an increase in divorce (Atkinson, 2010). Instead, cohabitation and births outside of marriage were becoming

more common, forcing policymakers to reassess how to better support new and varied family models (Atkinson, 2010). Whereas, in the 1980s, the political focus on fathers had been on divorced fathers or fathers who had separated from their wives or partners and who had failed to adequately provide for their children financially, the decline of the male breadwinner model and a rapidly changing economy where parents struggled to strike the right balance between paid work and family responsibilities resulted in, as the UK moved into the 21st century, a new policy intervention attempting to invite men to play a more active role as fathers was introduced. This ‘invitation’, however, in the form of shared leave, implemented in 2011, a reform similar to what had already been tried and tested in Norway since 1978 with disappointing results, had, as will be argued below, limited, if any impact on the well-established gendered earning and caring roles and responsibilities in heterosexual couples in Britain. The chapter will now turn to the Additional Paternity Leave (APL) before it will move on to explore the reasons why leave entitlements which to a great degree are gender neutral in design continue to have gendered use or ‘ownership’ in both the UK and Norway.

Father care as a right – Additional Paternity Leave (APL)

According to O’Brien and Twamley (2017),

“There has been caution in restructuring or reforming parental leave architecture based on a post-war maternalist template of long, low-paid maternity leave. The legacy of a long mother-centred leave has been resilient and to some extent has hindered design innovation in the UK”
(O’Brien and Twamley, 2017: 164).

Despite what O’Brien and Twamley (2017) described as a ‘caution in restructuring or reforming parental leave architecture’, in April 2011, the first transferable leave entitlement was implemented, called Additional Paternity Leave (APL), giving mothers the option of transferring between 2 and 26 weeks of their maternity leave to the father.

Unprecedented in the UK, the policy made it possible for couples to *equally* share the time they spend at home on leave caring for their baby (Kaufman and Almqvist, 2017). Fathers taking APL could have access to maternity pay entitlements which are called Additional Statutory Paternity Pay (ASPP). By week 20, this is a flat rate and available until week 39 of the 52-week-long maternity leave package (O'Brien and Twamley, 2017). For the father to take this leave, the mother must have been eligible for maternity leave and is obliged to have returned to the labour market (Mitchell, 2023). Men who wished to use these new entitlements were also subject to the national eligibility criteria which included having worked uninterrupted for their employer for 26 weeks. The requirement of continuous and secure employment served to exclude British fathers who had less stable employment situations such as zero-hour and temporary work contracts (O'Brien and Twamley, 2017). Even though APL was not an individual right given to fathers but instead 'a provision mediated at their partner's discretion and her formal eligibility' (O'Brien and Twamley, 2017: 165), government ministers acclaimed APL legislation 'as innovations to enhance fathers' engagement in the first year of children's lives' (O'Brien and Twamley, 2017: 165). Whereas the decision to open the door to fathers spending a substantive amount of time at home on leave while their partner returned to paid work, was ground-breaking in this national context at the time, the formal regulatory impact assessment predicted a low uptake – between 4-8% of eligible fathers (HM, 2010 in O'Brien and Twamley, 2017). Data published by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, however, reveal that less than 1% in the year when APL came into effect and approximately 1.4% of eligible fathers between 2012 and 2013 made use of their newly introduced family entitlements (O'Brien and Twamley, 2017). As there is no formal recording of the number of men who utilise the APL, these figures are based on the amounts of requests from employers

claiming back statutory payments for fathers taking this leave (Moss, 2014). It should be noted, though, that not all employers do claim back statutory pay and if men go on leave after 9 months since the birth of their baby, no statutory pay is offered. It is therefore reasonable to assume that these estimates are lower than what may be the reality when it comes to couples' use of the option to transfer parts of the maternity leave to the father (O'Brien and Twamley, 2017). That said, the reported numbers are nevertheless indicative of the limited take-up. As argued above, and as was the case in Norway when couples since 1978 were given the right to share leave, the fact that a leave policy does not grant individual entitlements for each parent, it is a right, not a duty, has resulted in minimal changes to male breadwinner/female carer model and fathers taking more than a couple of weeks off work after their child is born, remains a rarity. Interestingly though, it should be noted that the Government did indeed, as the APL was being introduced, propose a 4-week period to be reserved for fathers similar to the daddy-quota introduced in Norway 20 years earlier, but following discussions with stakeholders decided to abandon such plans over concerns about complexity as well as the cost to employers (Atkinson, 2017). Instead, Shared Parental Leave (SPL) was introduced in 2015. Whereas APL gave mothers the option of transferring the *latter half* of the 52-week-long maternity leave to their partner, SPL made it possible for men to take on the caring responsibilities for a total of 50 weeks while the mother returned to work (Mitchell, 2023).

As the interviews with the British couples took place before the introduction of the SPL, this policy reform will not be further expanded upon here. It should be mentioned, though, that whereas SPL can be viewed as an improvement on previous parental leave, schemes, it remains fundamentally flawed as a policy because it does not reserve any

time for fathers, and it remains relatively low in remuneration. Although, unlike APL, SPL is more flexible as it does not have to be taken in a single block, employers can veto discontinuous leave (Atkinson, 2017). As argued by Atkinson (2017),

“The weakness in SPL as a policy reflects the reluctance of the government to challenge the expectation that it is mothers who will take time away from work to be the primary carer” (Atkinson 2017: 367).

So, whereas the UK government has to a certain extent accepted the importance of involved fatherhood, the policies it has introduced to date have failed to challenge maternity leave as the main leave period for parents. The introduction of APL has generally not translated into a greater commitment amongst fathers to take parental leave beyond the first few weeks after their baby is born (Atkinson, 2017). The discussion will now turn to gender-neutral leave entitlements and why such statutory rights tend to remain gendered in ownership and use.

Gender-neutral parental leave entitlements - gendered use

“The potential for change entailed in parenthood policies – in fact, allowing for the universal carer model of the parents – is far from fully developed or utilised. Legislation offers parents much more scope in the sharing of childcare than is actually used” (Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006: 47).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, not only has the daddy quota become ‘incorporated’ into the Norwegian culture, an aspect of the parental leave that is ‘taken for granted’, ‘matter of fact’ and ‘natural’ (Brandth and Kvande, 2019: 1159), there is also a *normative expectation* of men to take these earmarked weeks (Brandth and Kvande 2003; Halrynjo and Kitterød, 2016). Since fathers’ use of the daddy-weeks has become an established part of what constitutes ‘good fatherhood’ in Norway as well as representing a substantial part of the overall parental leave package, men feel *entitled* to

this time at home caring for their children. Lewis maintains that ‘for work-family needs to be translated into demands for and take up of supportive policies there has to be a sense of entitlement’ (Lewis, 1997: 15 in Brandth and Kvande, 2020: 23). Whilst men in Norway feel they have a right as well as an obligation to use their daddy-quota, this sense of entitlement does not extend to the gender-neutral parental leave. In Norway, the normative climate and cultural traditions surrounding the mother-baby and the father-baby relationship are still profoundly gendered (Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006). Caring for young children continues to be an all-important part of what constitutes ‘good motherhood’ whereas ideas about ‘good fatherhood’ emphasise this element to a lesser degree. Culturally, the shared leave is largely perceived as ‘mothers’ entitlement and there are normative expectations of mothers to stay at home with the baby for notably longer than fathers (Brandth and Kvande, 2019).

In the UK, a vastly different welfare regime and a latecomer in introducing policies inviting a more egalitarian division of care work, there is a striking similarity in how the shared leave entitlements are perceived and used. While there has been a common assumption that the main obstacle to a more equal sharing of the total parental leave package has been fathers’ unwillingness to take time away from the workplace, it seems, however, that many mothers consider the gender-neutral element of the parental leave entitlements as *their* entitlement and privilege (Kaufman, 2018). Although some fathers may also wish to be given the opportunity to step back from working life and care for their child for longer than their 2 weeks of paternity leave, British mothers, act as ‘gatekeepers’ and ‘owners’ of this leave period. In the UK, being the primary carer for young children is a vital part of what constitutes ‘good motherhood’ whereas ‘good

fatherhood' continues to be closely linked to being the financial provider and protector.

As argued by Kaufman (2018: 314):

"While 'intensive mothering' discourse has shifted towards intensive parenting British fathers are still more likely to express anxiety around financial provision more than hands-on caregiving (Shirani, Henwood and Coltart, 2012). Popular media, including parenting guides, still portray British fathers as secondary (Gregory and Milner, 2011b).

It should be mentioned that in Norway, fathers are to a lesser degree portrayed as 'secondary' and their role as financial providers is less prominent. That said, the idea that mothers should take long periods of leave after the birth of their baby and fathers should support and enable the wishes of their partners, is a shared perception amongst parents in the two welfare states. Even though the notion of 'caring masculinities' (Johansson and Klinth in Kaufman, 2018), has taken hold in the UK, and there is indeed a growing expectation for father involvement, both men and women put a greater weight on mothers' needs and wishes regarding parental leave (Kaufman and Almqvist, 2017; Moss and Deven, 2015). This suggests, as maintained by Gregory and Milner (2011) that mothers are viewed as the primary caregivers and fathers as the secondary parent. Although the Ministry of Children and Equality in 2009 stated that encouraging fathers to share gender-neutral parental leave with their female partner was a 'crucial policy issue' (Ministry of Children and Equality, 2009 in Naz, 2010: 314), the majority of UK mothers (89%) take between 39 and 52 weeks of leave (Chanfreau *et al.*, 2011 in O'Brien and Twamley, 2017) whereas the dad rarely spend more than their allocated 2-week paternity leave at home with their baby (O'Brien and Twamley, 2017).

Irrespective of the political rhetoric of 'shared parenting', UK governments have in succession adopted leave designs based on maternal transfer which reinforces the

mothers as the primary carer and discourages paternal uptake (Mitchell, 2023; Moss and Deven, 2006).

Wage replacement also plays an important role in a couple's leave-taking decisions. Norwegian men who became fathers in 2011, the year the initial interviews for this study commenced, were entitled to 12 weeks of daddy quota. The total length of the parental leave at the time was 47 weeks with 100% pay or 57 weeks with 80% pay. In 2013, the daddy weeks were increased from 12 to 14 weeks. The overall leave package was expanded as well to 49 or 59 weeks with either 100%- or 80%-income replacement up to a relatively high ceiling. The pay is called 'parental money' or 'benefit' and represents financial compensation for the loss of wages during the time that parents are at home caring for their baby. According to Haas and Rostgaard (2011), a highly compensated parental leave scheme sends a strong message that care is socially valued, a prerequisite for the establishment of gender equality in society. Without reducing, if not fully eliminating, financial penalties for staying at home caring for young children, research shows that men are less likely than women to take the shared leave as they tend to be the higher-earner parents and time away from work would therefore be economically irrational for the family (Moss, 2008; Rostgaard, 2002 in Haas and Rostgaard, 2011).

While Norwegian parents can enjoy limited, if any financial penalties for taking time away from work to care for their baby, this is not the situation in Britain. In 2011 when the APL was introduced, the total number of maternity leave weeks was 52. Mothers were paid 90% of their income for their first 6 weeks at home. After this time, and for the next 20 weeks, they were paid at a flat rate of £128.88 per week. The earliest fathers could commence their APL was 20 weeks after the birth of their baby. At the time when

men were able to take APL, they could therefore receive either a small stipend which was part of the maternity leave package, or no income replacement at all, depending on what point chose to go on leave. As British men on average earn more than women (World Economic Forum, 2014) a father taking leave will generally be more costly for the parents in forgone income (O'Brien and Twamley, 2017). That said, Miller (2010) maintains that financial provisions are often used as a way of rationalising leave decisions. This is supported by Kaufman (2018) who found that even when the mother has a higher income than the father, men continue to take less time off compared to their female partner. Kaufman argues that leave decisions are more about gendered ideology and expectations than a result of economic calculations. Given the fact that the gender-neutral leave period in Norway comes with zero or limited economic loss but is still rarely taken by the father, it seems financial considerations play a less significant role in couples' negotiations around who stays at home and for how long.

The role of biological motherhood in parental leave use

The *gendered ownership* of parental leave weeks (which are in fact *gender neutral* in design) is often also justified by referencing biological motherhood; women's need to recuperate after childbirth and their role in breastfeeding the baby. This is an especially strong argument in Norway where the official breastfeeding guidelines follow the World Health Organisation (WHO) declaration of 2001 announcing that children should be given mother's milk for the first year of their life as a minimum (Andrews and Knaak, 2013). The recommendations continue by stating that babies ought to be exclusively breastfed for the first six months (Statens Råd for Ernæring, 2001 in Andrews and Knaak, 2013; Norwegian Directorate of Health, 2012 in Hvatum and Glavin, 2016)). According to Andrews and Knaak (2013), breastfeeding is, in this national context

'presumed to be the only option, unless the mother for certain extraneous reasons' (Andrews and Knaak, 2013: 93) is unable to do so. In their study exploring infant feeding practices and experiences of women in Norway and in Canada, they reveal what they describe as 'a broader culture of pressure, competition, judgement and surveillance regarding breastfeeding' (Andrews and Knaak, 2013: 88). Similar findings are presented by Hvatum and Glavin (2016). From their research into mothers who go against the normative pressure of breastfeeding their children, they conclude that as breastfeeding represents a fundamental social value in Norwegian society. The broader discourse on motherhood considers breastfeeding to be a 'normal' and 'natural' practice as well as a socially desirable and taken-for-granted mothering behaviour. The women who for a variety of reasons chose to replace mother's milk with formula, hence, often experience guilt and a sense of failure. A wide range of literature has pointed to the issue of the moral burden which has been placed on mothers to breastfeed (see for example Carter, 1995; Law, 2000; Lee and Bristow, 2009; Wall 2001 in Andrews and Knaak, 2013). Whereas for mothers in Norway, breastfeeding represents an essential part of what constitutes 'good mothering', for men, 'good fathering' involves accommodating and supporting their partner in this feeding practice. Given that the official guidelines in Norway clearly state that mothers should prolong breastfeeding until the baby is one year old, *fathers'* moral burden translates into limiting their time at home on parental leave to the specified non-transferable daddy-weeks. Mothers and fathers in Norway, their journey of parenthood, is therefore coloured by paradoxical normative expectations. On the one hand, they are expected to engage in egalitarian sharing practices in paid and unpaid work. On the other hand, the mother-baby dyad should be protected and extended breastfeeding practices shall be adhered to.

In the UK, breastfeeding has also been used 'to leverage maternal gatekeeping and fed into cultural norms about the idea of a "good mother" (Birkett and Forbes, 2019: 216). The emphasis on breastfeeding, like in Norway, serves to support the idea that women spending long periods at home caring for their baby is more important than the presence of men in the early stages of a child's life (McKay and Doucet, 2010). Several campaigns have been developed, debatably establishing a moral imperative for mothers to at the very minimum attempt to breastfeed their babies in the early post-partum period (Dykes, 2005; Crossley, 2009). That said, despite breastfeeding being routinely promoted and advocated as 'trouble-free' and natural, it is still constructed as a 'shameful act' if it is performed in public spaces (Williamson *et al.*, 2012). British mothers therefore often feel embarrassment and anxiety around breastfeeding in public (Scott and Mostyn, 2003). This is reflected in feeding practices where only 34% of babies in the UK receive any breast milk when they reach 4 months of age (Williamson *et al.*, 2012). It could be argued then that even though there is pressure in both welfare states to feed babies the 'natural way', the prolonged breastfeeding practices in Norway represent more of an obstacle for a more egalitarian sharing of parental leave entitlements than is the case in the UK.

Gendered organisations

Although in Norway breastfeeding has been used as an argument against the expansion of leave for fathers within the existing leave arrangements (Brandth and Kvande, 2020, Morgan, 2008), the daddy quota has over the last 30 years developed into a well-established and almost unquestioned entitlement for men when they become parents. Whereas the shared parental leave, being gender-neutral in its design, is to some degree open to *negotiations* in the couple, the earmarked daddy-weeks, are not. The same is the case for men in the workplace. A study by Brandth and Kvande (2017) found that

fathers felt that having the quota gave them as employees, 'an unconditional strength in relation to work' (Brandth and Kvande, 2017 in Brandth and Kvande, 2019: 1160).

None of the fathers interviewed reported having encountered any significant resistance from their employers when they had communicated their intention of using their allocated leave. Similar findings were reported by Haas and Rostgaard (2011), Halrynjo and Kitterød (2016) and Naz (2010), all studies concluding that workplaces in Norway had limited negative effect on fathers taking their quota and that such practices had become normalised. The same support and encouragement, described concerning the use of the daddy-weeks, however, did not extend to the shared parental leave where the general assumption is that men do not take time beyond the weeks reserved for them.

Similar patterns are found in the UK. Although with the introduction of APL and subsequently SPL, couples could share the time at home caring for their baby, this yearlong leave continues to be viewed as 'mother's time' by managers and colleagues. Whereas employers are aware of and follow the maternity leave policy, making it uncomplicated for female employees to take extensive periods away from the labour market, this is not the experience for British fathers (Kaufman and Almqvist, 2017). As argued by Kaufman and Almqvist (2017), British employers have come to *expect* and *plan for* female staff to take a year of maternity leave while asking their male employees to ensure they have everything in place ahead of their two weeks of paternity leave. From a work absence perspective, men's use of their allocated and limited leave is viewed as the equivalent of a holiday. Sometimes, resistance from managers to men's leave-taking may not be communicated explicitly, but a *perceived* disinclination to accept male employees as both carers, as well as earners, still encourages men to take shorter leave periods (Bygren and Duvander, 2006; McKay and Doucet, 2010). A survey

of UK doctors found that whereas the majority took paternity leave, only 3% reported taking APL (Gordon and Szram, 2013 in O'Brien and Twamley, 2017). The fathers who did not take APL said they were concerned about negative reactions from their workplaces and the potential impact such leave-taking could have on their career progression. Organisations, therefore, as argued by Gregory and Milner (2010 in Kaufman and Almqvist, 2017), mediate the potency of parental leave policies. Work organisations, British and Norwegian ones, have rules, expectations and cultures that can have a considerable impact on the attitudes and behaviour of employees in both the 'public' and 'private' domains (Naz, 2010).

Because mothers in Norway continue to take a substantially larger proportion of parental leave than their male partners and they spend considerably more time away from the workplace than men, some scholars have recently argued that the generous family-friendly policies have been counterproductive in achieving one of their main goals: gender equality (see for example Hakim, 2000, 2005 and Mandel *et al.*, 2006). Instead, the gender-neutral entitlements have had what Rønsen and Kitterød (2015) described as a 'boomerang' effect on women's position in the Norwegian labour market. Long periods away from paid work, can lead to poorer earnings and career prospects as well as lower lifetime earnings and pension disbursement (see for example Evertsson and Duvander, 2011). Rønsen and Kitterød (2015) point to the persistent gender wage gap in Norway, a highly gender-segregated labour market, the sparsity of women in top positions in industry and commerce and the high proportion of women in part-time jobs (Rønsen and Kitterød, 2015). Although long working hours are less common in Norway, fathers with small children generally work full-time, whereas close to 50 per cent of women with children aged between 0 and 15 years are employed in part-time positions

(Brandth and Kvande, 2020). Reduced hours are easily available in Norway and parents have a 'statutory right to part-time work unless this puts the interest of the company seriously at risk' (Rønsen and Kitterød, 2015: 62). Given that 8 out of 10 part-time workers in Norway are female, it seems the widespread adaptation strategy for couples in their attempt to reconcile the competing demands of earning and caring, is for the mother to adjust her employment commitment to the needs of the family (Brandth and Kvande, 2020; Ellingsæter, 2003). Kitterød and Pettersen (2006) also argue that where women continue in time-demanding careers after they have children, the couple often compensates for the mother's absence by relying on state-subsidised *external childcare*, not by the father increasing his domestic contributions.

The tendency for women to reduce their labour market attachment when they become mothers is even stronger in Britain than it is in Norway. According to the Resolution Foundation (2012 in Atkinson, 2017), less than 20% of mothers in the UK work full-time. There is also a noteworthy proportion of British mothers who leave paid work completely for prolonged periods of time only to return when their children are older (Chung and Horst, 2018; Días *et al.*, 2020). Whereas British mothers have interrupted career patterns, frequently working shorter hours or part-time, fathers, tend to have *uninterrupted* career patterns with relatively long hours (Cousins and Tang, 2004; O'Brien and Shemilt, 2003). The result is often an unequal division of labour (Dermott, 2008) and a significant gender pay gap (Días *et al.*, 2020). The clustering of mothers into jobs that are easier to combine with parenthood responsibilities while their male partner takes on the main breadwinner role frequently leads to a widening gap in pay, career opportunities and career progression in the couple. Men on average earn more than women in the UK (World Economic Forum, 2014). While Norway has implemented

legislation ensuring working hours are largely compatible with caring responsibilities, 'the UK maintains minimal legislation to protect employees from working long hours' (Chatzitheochari and Arber, 2009: 31). In fact when Britain was still part of the EU, it was the only member state to preserve the right for an exemption from the 1993 European Working Time Directive that had established a weekly limit of 48 hours of paid labour (Chatzitheochari and Arber, 2009). Consequently, the UK is renowned for its long working hour culture, a feature of this liberal welfare regime that makes caring responsibilities challenging to combine with full-time employment. British employees also face low levels of instrumental support from their managers and colleagues for work-life balance (Kaufman, 2018). These factors combined with, as will be debated next, the limited availability of affordable and high-quality formal childcare places, could arguably set the scene for gendered earning and caring roles.

Caring for young children – a responsibility for the family or the state?

The Norwegian state's interest and involvement in childcare services emerged relatively late compared to the other Nordic countries (Korsvold, 1998 in Ellingsæter, 2018). In the mid-1970s, a mere 6 % of children between the ages of 3 and 6 and only 3 % of under-3s had a place in childcare services. The dominant political perception was still at the time that the care and education of young children should remain the responsibility of the family and not the state (Ellingsæter, 2018). During the 1980s, however, women's employment continued to rise and the employment rates amongst mothers with pre-school children was the demographic group whose employment rate increased the most (Ellingsæter, 2018). The need for a more comprehensive care policy including better access to childcare services was identified to support gender equality and work-family reconciliation. It should be noted, though, that there was still what Ellingsæter (2018) called a 'moral undercurrent' in the time deficit debate criticising parents (mothers) for

not dedicating enough hours in the week to their children. In the 1990s, this moral undercurrent came to the surface and the social policy climate shifted away from gender equality as a value and emphasis and instead embraced a broader parental choice discourse (Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006). Whereas *choice* in family policy had previously been associated with the rights of women to choose both motherhood *and* having an active role, in the world of paid work, the *choice* was now transformed to entail the right for mothers to opt for more time at home with their children as their preferred lifestyle. The non-interference of the state in how parents decided to care for their children, was the dominant rhetoric. In 1998, the political promotion of 'free choice' found its expression in what was labelled the 'cash for care' reform (CFC). The purpose of the scheme, which was introduced after a heated public debate, was to 'give parents more flexibility in their work and childcare choices and distribute public transfers more equally between users and non-users of subsidised childcare' (Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, 1998 in Rønsen and Kitterød, 2015: 62). All parents of children aged between 1 and 2 years who did not attend state-sponsored childcare, were entitled to the monthly cash benefit which was about 3000 NOK at the time (Ellingsæter, 2003 in Ellingsæter, 2018). The political parties on the left perceived the reform to be an attack on equal opportunities and argued that *choice* in this context meant that women were encouraged to choose between work and family. Described as a 'gift by the state to the traditional father' (Andenæs, 1997 in Leira, 2006: 42), the reform did indeed stop the trend of employment growth amongst mothers of young children (Ellingsæter, 2018) as it served to disincentivise mothers' involvement in the labour market by embracing more traditional family set-ups (Bjørnholt and Stefansen, 2019).

In 1999, the year after the scheme was introduced, 'cash for care' was disbursed to 73 % of the parents with children between the ages of 1 and 2 (Rønsen and Kitterød, 2015). Its popularity, however, was mainly due to the limited supply of subsidised childcare (Duvander, *et al.*, 2010). The waiting list for nurseries was long and the cash benefit reform filled the noticeable gap in this 'care squeeze' (Ellingsæter, 2018). Despite the political 'free choice' rhetoric and the promotion at the time by the minority government of a more traditional family structure, attitudes in the population towards working mothers were becoming more liberalised from the mid-1990s onwards. Ellingsæter (2018) argues that the historically underdeveloped childcare services are 'an important indication of Norway remaining traditional and 'different' from the other Nordic countries' (Ellingsæter, 2018: 381). Notwithstanding the political 'free choice' rhetoric, however, and the promotion at the time by the minority government of a more traditional family structure, attitudes in the wider population towards working mothers were changing and the demand for affordable and high-quality childcare grew rapidly. Whereas this change in viewpoint and belief system happened across the class spectrum, the more pronounced change took place amongst mothers with lower educational attainments (Bjørnholt and Stefansen, 2019). In 2004, in response to the newly emerging normative climate, a legal obligation on municipalities to provide enough nursery places was imposed. The public subsidies to these childcare services were to be significantly increased and would cover 80 per cent of its running costs. A maximum fee was also introduced, ensuring that external childcare was a service all families could afford. Then finally, in 2009, following years of political commitment to 'full coverage' where large funds had been allocated to finance the rapid expansion of nursery spots, all parents with children between 1 and 5 years old were given the right to a place in subsidised day-care services. Universal childcare was now an important

part of the Norwegian welfare state's family policies and the 'childcare gap' belonged to the past. The expansion of subsidised childcare resulted in a fundamental re-organisation of care for young children in Norway from more informal to institutionalised care.

Today, compared with the other Nordic countries, the current coverage rates for children between the ages of 3 and 5 years old in Norway are as high as in neighbouring Sweden, Denmark and Finland (Ellingsæter, 2018). As for the rates for the 1- and 2-year-olds, only Denmark can show a higher proportion in daycare. The maximum price nurseries are allowed to charge parents is set to 2730 NOK per month. This constitutes less than 5% of the median monthly net income of families where the youngest child is under school age (Statistics Norway 2015b from Hardoy *et al.*, 2017: 126). The cash-for-care benefits which were widely used after its introduction, play only a minor role today in couples' work-family adaptations (Egge-Hoveid, 2014 in Bjørnholt and Stefansen, 2019). That said, although the wider population in Norway has moved from informal and gendered childcare in the home to institutionalised, external solutions, 45 % of children below the age of 2 years old from migrant origins still received the benefits in 2015 (Bjørnholt and Stefansen, 2019).

Childcare provisions in the UK were up until the late 1990s relatively underdeveloped (Taylor-Gooby *et al.*, 2020). When Labour came to power in 1997, this welfare state was almost at the bottom of the EU childcare provision league table (Lewis, 2009). The majority of non-parental childcare was supplied either by childminders or informally. Free institutional provisions were earmarked 'children at risk' and were otherwise a costly option for parents in need of external care options (Lewis, 2009). The limited public expenditure on childcare mirrored dominant cultural perceptions that a

maternal presence was the most suitable care alternative for preschool children. Formal care, delivered by staff in an institution, had up until this point received limited government funding. As part of New Labour's 'new social-investment agenda' (Naumann, 2011: 37), however, ideas about universal early childhood education became a dominant theme in policy reforms. In 1998, Labour published the National Childcare Strategy, its first major policy initiative in the field of work-family balance (Lewis, 2009). This document set out, according to Lewis (2009), 'an ambitious plan for funding 'early-years learning' for both three- and four-year olds' (Lewis, 2009: 154). The 1998 childcare strategy emphasised the two goals these reforms were trying to reach: a better start for children growing up in disadvantaged areas and to increase labour market participation. Whereas the promotion of the dual-earner/dual-carer family model was the rationale behind the expansion of institutionalised childcare in Norway, gender equality and work-family reconciliation did not represent expressed political objectives. Instead, the financial investment into formal childcare was based on the ambition to encourage women, and especially single mothers, to be gainfully employed, have an income, and therefore provide a better life for their children. By enabling these mothers to work outside of the home, the hope was that child poverty would be reduced. With the central focus on low-income or unemployed parents and their children, Naumann argues that 'the New Labour Government remained committed to their Conservative predecessor's focus on reducing welfare dependency, albeit with a more active role of the state' (Naumann, 2011: 46).

Three years after the publication of the National Childcare Strategy, in 2001, in its manifesto, Labour committed to creating 1.6 million new childcare places. In 2004 the British government presented a 10-year plan for the development of extensive childcare

services. This policy framework became formalised in the 2006 Childcare Act (Naumann, 2011). With the expansion proposal though, New Labour continued to reinforce its reliance on the private sector for provision (Lewis, 2009). This reliance has been criticised for not managing to offer parents affordable childcare, for limiting the success in adequately targeting poor families, for not ensuring a high quality of care is offered and for not paying enough attention to more holistic approaches to childcare (see for example Lewis, 2009; Moss and Deven, 2006; Naumann, 2011). Although the government initiated several 'supply-side measures of 'pump priming' and start-up funding' (Naumann, 2011: 46) which led to private providers setting up various childcare provisions, it did not significantly increase the state funding for these services. As childcare in the UK has historically been considered a private responsibility, the importance of 'parental choice' was also emphasised. In 2003 Childcare tax Credits were introduced subsidising the demand-side of the 'equation' where the state covered up to 80% of working parents' childcare costs. This financial support decreased drastically though if the family income increased and hence served to continue New Labour's commitment to limit public-service supply and plurality through market mechanisms (Neuman, 2011). In 2004, Himmerlweit and Sigala commented:

"The UK is unique among European countries in the way its youngest children are looked after. There are practically no state provisions of childcare, and childcare fees are particularly high" (Himmerlweit and Sigala, 2004: 455).

Although childcare provisions remained weak, in 2008, a right to part-time childcare for 3-year-olds was established and further extended in 2017 from 15 to 30 hours per week. This came to also include 2-year-olds for families in need (Taylor-Gooby *et al.*, 2020). That said, today, the UK has one of the costliest childcare systems for parents in

the OECD (OECD, 2016 in Taylor-Gooby *et al.*, 2020) with the average *weekly* fee being £230 which is only slightly below the average *monthly* price for a full-time place in Norway. Moreover, the official childcare coverage has not improved since 2005 it was reduced between 2008 and 2016 (Eurostat, 2018 in Taylor-Gooby *et al.*, 2020). In her study of family policies and fertility in Europe, Neyer (2006) emphasised the significance of the symbolic meaning of policies, concluding that a lack of childcare provision signals to women that it may be hard or even impossible to combine paid work and motherhood (Neyer, 2006 in Lewis, 2009: 69). In the UK, formal childcare remains unaffordable to many parents, largely inaccessible and of uneven quality (Harding and Cottell, 2018; Lloyd, 2018). The current system, De Henau (2022) argues, consists of tax breaks for families, direct subsidies to providers and cash support for low-income households. The contributions from the state which are required for childcare systems to be viable remain too limited or insufficient (Chatzitheochari and Arber, 2009; Harding and Cottell, 2018). Whereas childcare has been ‘outsourced’ to the state in Norway, in Britain, childcare arrangements consist of a patchwork of maternal care, kindergartens and help from friends and family (Kaufman and Grönlund, 2021).

Concluding remarks

At the turn of this century Ellingsæter and Leira (2006) asked the following question: Does the politicising of fatherhood alter gender relations in infant care? From the discussion above, it seems the politicising of fatherhood in Norway largely has changed how heterosexual couples share the care for both *infants* and *children*. There is still a persistence, however, of gendered sharing patterns of the gender-neutral parental leave entitlements where mothers, fathers and workplaces continue to perceive these weeks as belonging to the female in the couple. Consequently, it is still the norm in today’s Norway for mothers to take significantly longer periods away from the labour market

than it is for men. That said, the introduction of the daddy quota thirty years ago, the ‘gentle force’ by the state, succeeded in what the shared rights did not: making men into present and hands-on fathers. Haas and Rostgaard (2011) identify this non-transferable entitlement as the main factor in improving the take-up of leave by men in the Nordic countries. Norway, along with Sweden and Iceland, have all introduced quotas and have witnessed most fathers take the period of leave available to them (Atkinson, 2017). Even though the daddy quota represents a significant amount of time away from the labour market, the resistance from supervisors and colleagues seems to be minimal. As Norwegian mothers are *expected* to utilise the shared parental leave, fathers are *expected* to make full use of their reserved weeks. Although Norway has been celebrated for being at the forefront of encouraging egalitarian caring as well as earning practices, and for being the country that pioneered in establishing earmarked ‘daddy weeks’, the gender-neutral leave entitlements remain gendered. Norway also has a persistent wage gap and a highly gender-segregated labour market. Moreover, there continues to be a shortage of women in top positions and an overrepresentation of females in part-time roles (Rønsen and Kitterød, 2015). Ellingsæter therefore argued:

“Gender equality is a matter of dispute and a project constantly in the making. The Nordic welfare states are strategic cases for examining these enduring struggles, contributing important knowledge about the persistence of gender norms in the shaping of gender inequality, and how norms are reshaped themselves” (Ellingsæter, 2010: 269).

What is it that contributes to the ‘persistence of gender norms in the shaping of gender inequality’ in Norway? Furthermore, how and why are norms being ‘reshaped’ and new practices emerging? In this thesis, these questions are also explored in the British context, a country where coherent and meaningful family policies were introduced two decades after Norway’s expressed commitment to caring fatherhood and working

motherhood. In the UK, 'individual entitlements to paid paternity leave are still minimal in duration and lacking in generosity in terms of income replacement' (O'Brien and Twamley, 2017: 178). The maternity leave, however, is one of the longest maternity leaves in Europe. While the first 6 weeks are comparatively well remunerated, the remaining 39 weeks are paid at a low level compared to Norway's generous income replacement scheme. In this societal context, the fathers interviewed for this study were only able to take extended leave through a recent policy titled Additional Paternity Leave, which allowed mothers to *transfer* maternity leave to their partners (O'Brien and Twamley, 2017: 178). The introduction of transferable maternity leave seems to have had a limited impact on couples' sharing practices and has been criticised for failing to challenge gender inequality. As mothers are the only ones who are entitled to this leave and fathers' rights are wholly dependent on both the eligibility of their female partner as well as on her consent to transfer this right, mothers' caring role will be prioritised and hence falls short in altering normative ideas about men and women's responsibilities in the family (Mitchell, 2023). Even though a norm of caring fatherhood is increasingly advocated in British culture, so is the expectation of work commitment, reinforced by somewhat weak institutional support when men become parents and paternal working hours incompatible with family life (Connolly *et al.*, 2013 in O'Brien and Twamley, 2017). As in Norway, but arguably more so, British men and women navigate their transition to parenthood in a national context featuring gendered organisations and gendered careers where the arrival of a baby often leads to women reducing their labour market attachment and men increasing it.

Chapter 4: Methodology

According to Cronbach (1975), 'the special task of the social scientist in each generation is to pin down the contemporary facts. Beyond that, he shares with the humanistic scholar and the artist in the effort to gain insight into contemporary relationships' (Cronbach, 1975: 126). This research project aims to do exactly that, although the 'facts' being 'pinned down' in the thesis at hand are not objective and measurable facts. Instead, the data collected, analysed and presented are *subjective facts*, they are the *lived experiences* of a group of men and women, in Norway and Britain, who go through their journey of parenthood, both as couples and as individuals. The stories they told, their views, their values, their expressed emotions, and their decisions, are what the study is all about. In this chapter, my *own* decision, as a researcher, to use a qualitative methodology to adequately answer the research question and to 'gain insight' into the 'contemporary relationships' which my project aims to explore, will be reflected upon and explained. In doing so, the strengths and the limitations of this study will be discussed and my role in the data gathering, and analysis process will be deliberated. This chapter will also look in some detail at my sampling strategy, the qualitative interviews and how research findings and conclusions emerged from the data collected. While the *thesis* explores the journey of parenthood in Norway and Britain, this *chapter* explores the journey of designing and carrying out the research. In the same way as the ideas, plans and views of the men and women who took part in this study changed as they went from being a 'pregnant couple' to being parents, so did my research design as I was gradually gaining a deeper knowledge of the topic, the dynamics and the relationships I had set out to study. There were surprises along the way, both in the form of unforeseen challenges as well as patterns in the data I had not expected. *What* I thought I would find as I started the research process and *how* I thought I would find it

was not always the conclusions and the strategy I ended up with. This chapter will explore why this was the case and how it was managed.

Below I intend to emphasise the 'emergent nature' of my qualitative research, how it was shaped and re-shaped by my findings and why this flexible approach is the appropriate or indeed the *necessary* method to ensure the research question is adequately answered. Before diving into my chosen methodology, I would first like to revisit the purpose of my study and remind the reader of my research question.

What do I want to find out?

This research aims to achieve a greater understanding of *how* and *why* heterosexual couples often, but not always, develop a more pronounced gender asymmetry in their employment and household roles and responsibilities when they become mothers and fathers. It will compare the journey of parenthood in Norway and Britain, two welfare regimes with vastly different features, although with one important entitlement in common: the right for men and women to share the period of parental leave. More specifically, my study was designed to answer the following research questions:

How do couples in Norway and Britain adapt to parenthood in ways that establish, modify or reject a traditional gender split in family roles and responsibilities? Why do these patterns emerge? How do the stories of first-time parents differ in the two countries both before and after the period of parental leave?

As was discussed in Chapter 2, the transition to parenthood is a particularly critical juncture in the life course of couples as many mothers and fathers adopt more traditional family roles (Cowan and Cowan, 1992; Sanchez and Thomson, 1997). The concept of *traditional family roles* refers to an unequal sharing of earning and caring responsibilities where the woman carries out most of the domestic work while the man invests time and energy in earning a wage and supporting his family financially. This

study wishes to find out *why* this traditional breadwinner/homemaker dichotomy in family roles often emerges when heterosexual couples become parents. Equally important, the study wished to understand the reasons why some couples do *not* follow this trend, where the traditional split in family roles and responsibilities is *rejected* rather than *established* as they are welcoming their first son or daughter. While some couples embrace the traditional gender split in family roles and responsibilities and others reject it, there are also mothers and fathers, perhaps the majority, who chose a 'middle ground' or a *modified* version of the male breadwinner/female homemaker model in the transition to parenthood. These men and women make earning and caring decisions and share the related workload in ways that both adhere to traditionalist as well as egalitarian principles. As with all the couples in my study, they negotiate their own family-work strategy in a web of social policies, informal and formal cultures in the workplace, economic and institutional structures, cultural norms and historic trajectories, their individual preferences and values. This study will look at this negotiation, it will explore how couples 'do parenthood' and why they choose to do it this way.

Although *becoming* a mother or a father is an 'event' in the sense that a baby is born, this study conceptualises the transition to parenthood as more of a *process*. This process commences long before the arrival of the infant as the future parents start the preparations, both practically and mentally, at a time when motherhood and fatherhood are still a vague and theoretical idea. How couples imagine parenthood, how they plan for it, the decisions they have already made and the decisions they think they *will* make in the future and why, are all part of the journey of parenthood which this research aims to capture. Moreover, gaining insight into the situation before the baby arrives, when

parenthood is still an abstract perception, allows for a comparison of the situation once parenthood has become a lived reality. My study therefore follows a longitudinal design where couples are interviewed both at the time when they are pregnant with their first child as well as when the period of parental leave has come to an end and both mother and father have returned to paid employment, or they have decided on other family-work strategies. Although it of course would be possible to collect the information retrospectively, I fear that the accuracy and the richness of this data would decrease as people do not always remember all the thoughts and feelings they had at a specific point in time or what plans they had for the future many months back.

Whereas the research will compare the situation 'before' and situation 'after' couples become parents, it will also compare the nature of the journey for the Norwegian men and women with the experiences of the British participants. The analysis will hence concentrate on both the process in each couple as well as national trends while simultaneously contrasting these findings with the same data collected in the other country.

Quantitative or qualitative research methodology?

As was mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, my study does not set out to 'measure' objective facts. Instead, it aims to tell the story of first-time parents, exploring their journey from being a 'pregnant couple' to life as mothers and fathers. The various situations they find themselves in, the choices they make, the challenges they face combining earning and caring responsibilities, and how they make sense of their reality as parents, all form part of this research. The study is therefore seeking deep as well as complex knowledge and understanding which a quantitative research methodology cannot capture. Although a quantitative approach provides valuable comparative data

on the overall gender gap in paid and unpaid work hours and the related inequalities in the labour market, 'conclusions are drawn based on correlational analysis of predefined indicators' (Grunow, 2016: 62) whereas the individuals' voice, their explanations, their thoughts and feelings are rarely heard (Neale, 2015). While quantitative research methodology is useful for answering 'what' questions, qualitative studies are more appropriate if 'why' and 'how' questions are to be explored (Marshall, 1996). As the research question this study aims to answer involves both a 'why' and a 'how' in addition to wanting to compare the *stories* of first-time parents from Norway and the UK, a qualitative inquiry is most appropriate. Not only does this study seek to investigate the beliefs, attitudes and values of the participants, which according to Marshall 'form the core of qualitative investigation' (Marshall, 1996: 523). It also attempts to understand complex human behaviour in a context-specific setting which statistical analysis are not designed to recognise.

As this research commenced, I had some ideas of what I might find, but following the principles of grounded theory, I let the themes from the stories that were told emerge. This inductive, as opposed to deductive method, which quantitative methodologies adhere to, gives flexibility and allows for new concepts and theories to be formed.

How was the data collected?

The data was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. Before exploring these interviews further, however, this section will first look at *who* was selected to take part in this study and *why* these participants were appropriate subjects to speak to.

Maximum variation sampling

I followed a maximum variation sampling strategy for my study. According to Patton (1990), this sampling approach

“[...] aims at capturing and describing the central themes or principal outcomes that cut across a great deal of participants or program variation. For small samples, a great deal of heterogeneity can be a problem because individual cases are so different from each other. The maximum variation sampling strategy turns that apparent weakness into a strength by applying the following logic: Any common pattern that emerges from great variation is of particular interest and value in capturing core experiences and central, shared aspects of the impacts of a program” (Patton, 1990: 172).

By sampling following the principle of maximum variation, my purpose was not only to maximise the depth and the richness of the data collected but also to capture *core* experiences, and *central* and *shared* patterns that cut across the diversity of my cases. A study by Sanchez and Thomson found that education, race/ethnicity and gender attitudes were associated with how couples share responsibilities for housework and childrearing (Sanchez and Thomson, 1997). This research also maintained that the division of labour already existing in the marriage before the arrival of the baby had an impact on the subsequent arrangements. Further variables influencing how couples divide unpaid and paid work were identified in a study by Bianchi *et al.*, (2000) where they concluded that time availability and relative resources were important predictors of the gap between men's and women's involvement in unpaid labour. Yet other factors were found by Crompton and Brockman (2006) who argued that specific working conditions, and especially the presence or absence of flexibility in their job, had an impact on how couples shared domestic work. The effect of working conditions on a couple's family-work strategies was also documented by Duncan and Pettigrew (2012), although they highlighted how autonomy and flexibility at work have more of an impact on women's participation in the labour market and in domestic duties than is the case for men.

While my initial sampling frame included variables such as race/ethnicity, education, social class, relative income to their partner and working hours, as the interviews commenced, and new knowledge emerged, subsequent categories were added.

Who were the participants in this study?

As I wished to study the transition to parenthood, I only interviewed couples who were expecting and subsequently were welcoming their *first* child. During the first set of interviews, all the women were between 5 and 9 months pregnant. Apart from one couple who were expecting twins, they were all single pregnancies. Due to the tendency, which is especially strong in the UK, for mothers to reduce their labour force participation once they become parents while men increase it (Grunow, 2019; Kaufman, 2018), I wanted to only speak to people who were in full-time employment. Finally, as I aimed to study the journey of parenthood in Norway and Britain, I set as a criterion that the participants had to hold passports from the country they lived in. Apart from these characteristics which the interviewees had in common, I succeeded in recruiting couples with a wide variety of features. My sample includes scientists and professors with doctorate degrees, lawyers and bankers with higher education from elite universities. I also interviewed a janitor, a car mechanic, a taxi driver and a waitress. I visited council estates in London, and I met with participants in mansion houses in the most exclusive addresses in Oslo. The participants from the UK lived mainly in the southeast of the country, but I also met with couples residing in the middle of England the Northeast. In Norway, the interviewees were also mainly located in the Southeast, but in a variety of different towns, cities and villages. Some parents-to-be lived in the heart of the capital, others on small islands or in the countryside. During my data collection, I spoke to people who worked 35 hours per week, and I spoke to people who considered taking a 5-hour break from the office to go home and sleep to be a luxury.

Some interviewees worked shifts, some had rigid and inflexible hours, and others were free to manage their time themselves. In most couples, the man was the main earner, but there were also parents where the mother brought back the largest pay cheque. Sometimes the difference in earnings was minimal, sometimes it was substantial. The ages of the participants ranged from early 20s to late 40s. Most of the British couples were married while most of the Norwegians were not. Some of the interviewees considered themselves religious, others not.

For the study, I recruited 18 couples in the UK and 20 in Norway. In the end, I used the material from 16 couples in Norway and 15 couples in the UK. An appropriate sample size for a qualitative study is one that adequately answers the research question (Marshall, 1996). Whereas in Norway new themes and explanations stopped emerging from the data at a surprisingly early stage, both during the first and the second set of interviews, much more diversity was found amongst the British participants. That said, the 'surprise elements' from the stories of the mothers and fathers from the UK were rapidly declining as the data-gathering process was concluding, and I feel the material obtained is sufficient to answer the research questions at hand.

For an overview of the participants, please see Appendix 1.

Recruitment of participants – challenges and resolutions

As I started the process of recruiting couples for my study, I came to realise that I had been incredibly naïve in terms of how easy it was going to be to find parents-to-be who were willing to take part in this research. In the end, I used a whole range of methods to find the participants. This included putting an advertisement for the study on Facebook asking friends and acquaintances to help me 'spread the word'. I also obtained permission from various Doctor's surgeries and hospitals to leave leaflets with

information about the research in their waiting rooms. The same leaflets were left in mother-and-baby shops, pregnancy yoga studios, churches, libraries, coffee shops, gyms and independent pharmacies. My recruitment methods also included consciously starting conversations with women who were visibly pregnant on the bus, on the train, in the supermarket, in my Pilates class, in restaurants and cafes, at the playground and in the park. One year into my research project I became pregnant myself. While this news involved certain complications as far as the progress of my thesis was concerned, it also opened additional doors for me. I signed up for two different pre-natal classes and three pre-natal yoga classes. Through these classes, five in total, I managed to recruit three couples.

Although I had initially decided to avoid snowballing as a recruitment method, the difficulties in gaining access to relevant parents-to-be, led me to eventually ask some of my interviewees for help. While snowballing almost always will increase the number of respondents as 'people become more receptive to a researcher when the latter has been vouched for by a friend as trustworthy' (Small, 2009:14), it also carries the danger that my interviewees will share many of the same characteristics and therefore will come to represent a relatively homogenous group. Moreover, according to Small (2009), the final participants are then more likely to know each other and therefore constitute a social network. A social network can be more 'biased' than a group of participants selected at random. I therefore attempted to avoid couples who had similar characteristics to the one making the introduction.

Up until now, I have emphasised the variation in my sample. Even though the men and women in this study were *all* in heterosexual, dual-earner relationships when they were first interviewed, they were *all* expecting their first child and they were either

Norwegian or British passport holders, there was nevertheless a great diversity in other characteristics. That said, it is important to be conscious of the less 'visible' similarities among the participants arising from the simple fact that they *all volunteered* to be interviewed for this project. Having a researcher come to ask in-depth questions about intimate aspects of their lives, not only on one occasion but on two, firstly requires a willingness to give somebody hours from their day. Secondly, it involves allowing a 'stranger' into their private worlds. Halfway through the initial set of interviews, I came to reflect on this exact point. I realised that, even though none of the men and women I had met with were 'perfect' as couples nor as individuals, they still conformed in multiple ways to the normative vision and discourse of the 'good' mother and the 'good' father. They were also generally well-spoken, reflected, unafraid of sharing their thoughts and feelings, comfortable in their role as future parents and happy with their partner. The homes I walked into were rather harmonious, settled and organised. Although the second interview uncovered more conflict and chaos, the parents who volunteered for this project were still generally confident, happy adults in rewarding partnerships. For these men and women, opening their homes and allowing a researcher in will feel less threatening than for people with less of a 'rose-tinted' reality. The project will hence only tell the story of the people who *themselves* chose to tell it. The self-selection which occurred in the recruitment process means that the research will not capture the journey of parenthood for mothers and fathers whose reality is less picture-perfect or the experiences of couples who for reasons this study did not uncover decided *against* participating.

The in-depth interviews

The data was collected through in-depth interviews. The interviews were all recorded, with the permission of the person I was speaking to. I decided to interview the man and

the woman in *separate* sessions unless this design created a situation they felt uncomfortable with, in which case I spoke to the parents-to-be *together*. Out of the thirty couples who took part in this study, only one couple wished to be interviewed with their partner present. The question of whether members of a household should be interviewed together or apart is a much-debated area in family research. I will return to this topic shortly.

According to Valentine (1999), the in-depth interview is a 'collaborative process, constructed through the unique interaction between the interviewer and the respondent' (Valentine, 1999: 67). While in quantitative studies, the researcher plays a more distant and neutral role in the data collection process, in qualitative enquiries, the individual involved in gathering the information will himself or herself have an impact on the material obtained. Previous generations of social scientists engaging in qualitative research strived to be as objective as possible in the interview setting to avoid influencing the answers the participants gave (Rapley, 2007). Today, however, it is common practice to instead regard the interview as a social situation where the interviewer and the interviewee together construct a common understanding of reality (Holstein and Gubrium 1995; Rapley 2007). Before talking about the interviews and the topics covered, I, therefore, feel it is necessary to first reflect on my role as a researcher and the social reality that was created in the interaction between myself and the subjects I interviewed.

Going back to the couple briefly mentioned above who expressed a wish to be interviewed with their partner next to them, they were also the only ones who initially wanted to avoid meeting me in their home. Although I came to learn from my first meeting with this couple that their life situation and their background were far removed

from my own, it was not until I was invited to their flat for the second interview that I truly felt the differences between us. As I walked into their council estate, I saw myself in the way that they had probably seen me all along: a white, middle-class, educated Norwegian woman. While I felt I had been conscious of my characteristics and the potential impact it had on the interviews I had never been as acutely aware of it as I was then. I realised how intimidating I could seem to them, and how they may feel judged. In the end, the interviews with this mother and father turned out to be amongst the most informative. The goal of the interviewer is according to DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree to get the interviewee 'to share as much information as possible, unselfconsciously and in his or her words' (2006: 317). It took 'emotional effort' to rapidly develop a positive relationship with the person I was going to speak to. Sometimes, establishing a safe and relaxed environment where the interviewee felt respected and comfortable was relatively easy, other times it proved much more of a challenge. Often, it was the female in the relationship who had initially agreed on behalf of the couple to take part in the study whereas the man was 'dragged along'. Before the interview commenced, I always emphasised to the participants that being interviewed for this study was their own decision and that they were free to walk away at any time. None of the men refused to speak to me, however, but their attitudes were at times reserved at the start of the interview and their answers short. With the majority of these fathers-to-be, I managed to develop a rapport quickly, and in the end, they shared feelings and experiences with an openness and a trust I had not expected to see at the start. With some men, though, this connection was never established. Although I felt there were certain female participants with whom I had a better 'chemistry' than others, there was not this variation in my ability to establish a positive relationship with them. The interviews

with the women normally lasted around an hour. With the men, on the other hand, there was a range from 20 minutes to two hours.

While developing a rapport with the interviewees, especially when the topic at hand involves personal and even sensitive areas, is essential to obtain the rich data required to answer the research questions, there is also a fine line between getting too close to the subjects participating in the study and remaining too distant. Although it is my responsibility as a researcher to listen carefully and empathetically, to attempt to understand what is being expressed, I sometimes had to remind myself that I was not there in the capacity of a psychologist or couple's therapist. Neither was I there as a friend. Some of the interviewees told me about experiences or feelings they had up until that time only shared with their husbands. There were stories of grief, trauma, conflict and depression that I felt honoured to be told about but that I also held a responsibility to treat with caution and respect. The closeness that at times developed between the interviewee and myself and the insights I was given raised multiple ethical issues which will be discussed later.

On the topic of closeness to the participants, although my aim was not to be an objective collector of data, I nevertheless had to be aware of my political convictions and values. I was a mother, and I was a Norwegian living in the UK. I was both an insider and an outsider in both national contexts. While I feel my dual role as both a mother and a researcher, my Norwegian identity and British residency enabled me to better understand the worlds of the subjects I was interviewing and aided more openness from the participants as they saw how my comprehension of what they were telling me was real, I still had to be conscious of the fact that it was *their* stories I was listening to, not my own. Their journeys were different, their circumstances, their partners, their

decisions, their disappointments and their joys. I was there to let their voices be heard, not to judge or to put words in their mouths. To aid my listening, I developed an interview schedule. According to Hoepfl (1997), interview guides ensure efficient use of limited interview time, they help keep interaction focused and make the data-collecting process more systematic and comprehensive. That said, I sometimes departed from the planned sequence of questions as the participants reflected on aspects of their lives which were not exactly inside the subject area I had intended to bring them to. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006: 316) argue that these 'digressions can be very productive as they follow the interviewees' interest and knowledge'. Giving the individuals who had volunteered for this research the freedom to speak without a rigid interview structure minimized the extent to which these participants had to 'translate their world into my boxes' (LaRossa, 1977: 24). I found that the best interviews were often with the individuals who departed from the schedule the most and who spoke without much guidance. This flexible data collection approach also allowed new themes to emerge during the dialogue. I later incorporated new questions into the interview guide to allow these areas to be explored further going forward. Likewise, questions which turned out to be unproductive for the overall aim of my study were excluded or altered as I learned more about the topic I was researching. Hoepfl (1997) maintains that qualitative research has an emergent as opposed to predetermined design and the focus should be on this emergent process itself, not only the outcomes or the product of the study.

In the first set of interviews, I started by asking 'easy' questions about their age, ethnicity, religion, their civil status and their due date. I then moved on to enquire about their job, their working conditions and their plans as far as paid employment was

concerned once motherhood or fatherhood was a lived reality and the period of parental leave had come to an end. This initial interview also explored aspects such as the current sharing arrangements of domestic tasks in the couple, finances and gender ideologies. Moreover, this first dialogue with mothers and fathers-to-be focused on achieving an understanding of their planned use of their parental leave entitlements. Although the same topics were covered in each interview, due to the differences in entitlements both between mothers and fathers and between the two welfare states, four separate interview guides were developed (Norwegian women, Norwegian men, British women, and British men). For a complete interview schedule pre-birth, please see Appendix 2, 3, 4, 5.

The second set of interviews took place after the parental leave period had ended and the mother and/or the father had either returned to work on a full-time basis or chosen alternative arrangements. In my *original* research design, the idea was to meet with the participants during the first few months of their baby's life too. In addition to gaining an understanding of how the volunteers were 'doing parenthood' in this early stage of motherhood and fatherhood, this interview would have been a good way of keeping in contact with the couples and building further trust and closeness with them.

Unfortunately, as I fell pregnant myself, these interviews had to be removed from the project. As a further consequence of welcoming my son, the final set of interviews, post parental leave, were for some couples carried out when their first child was 18 months old while for others up to 36 months had passed since the birth of their baby. Ideally, I would have met with the Norwegian and British mothers and the fathers at the same 'stage' of parenthood, but practically this was not possible.

In the second and final set of interviews, many of the topics explored in my initial meetings with the participants were revisited. The purpose of this was to see how the couple's sharing of earning responsibilities and distribution of domestic labour had changed. The interviews also sought to understand how and why these patterns had emerged and what thoughts and feelings the mothers and fathers had about the roles that had developed. For a complete interview schedule post parental leave, please see Appendix 6. The 'harmony' I had found to exist in most couples when I initially met them had now been challenged by the increased workload in the household. It was especially in the second set of interviews that I at times found myself in the 'grey' zone between a researcher and a therapist. During these final conversations, conflicts, disappointments, fears and frustrations were articulated. It gave some of the participants a channel through which they could ventilate negative emotions, and it provided the study with valuable insights.

Interviewing couples apart or together?

Traditionally, qualitative research on the family has tended to be based on interviews with women (Valentine, 1999). This historic exclusion of men from in-depth studies concerning the 'domestic sphere' has not only led to male voices not being heard but also brought about incomplete knowledge and understanding regarding the gendered patterns in paid labour, caregiving and housework. How can gendered roles and responsibilities be studied if only the stories, views and sentiments of one person in the heterosexual couple are given attention? Numerous studies suggest that there is often a widespread disparity between the account given by the husband and the one offered by the wife on a range of topics (see for example Bittman and Lovejoy, 1993). Giving both men and women a voice may therefore ensure a more nuanced and complex

understanding of gender relations in the transition to parenthood and better expose the contested and negotiated nature of household relationships (Valentine, 1999).

Once I had decided that I wanted to hear the voices of both women and men, the next question I had to answer was: should I interview them together as a couple or apart?

According to Valentine, one strength of conducting a joint interview is that 'a process of negotiation and mediation takes place between couples in the production of a single collaborative account for the interviewer, which can provide material or insights into the dynamics of the household that would be difficult to identify in a one-to-one interview' (Valentine, 1999: 68). Couples can corroborate each other's stories, they can add details to the account of the one who is speaking, they can help the other person remember, and throw in new themes which then can be discussed. The dynamics in the joint interview can therefore encourage spontaneous conversations or debates and provide information-rich and validated accounts compared to those generated by interviews with individuals on their own (Valentine, 1999). Sometimes, couples do not validate each other's accounts, however, and instead, stories are challenged or corrected. These instances, Valentine (1999) argues, are especially illuminating as the interviewer is then given an insight into how the relationship functions.

Although the practice of interviewing couples together can provide knowledge and understanding not easily available in dialogue only between the researcher and the participant, Hertz (1995) maintains that the former approach tends to produce little more than an 'official' account as one partner tends to speak more. The complex and multiple version that joint interviews are claimed to produce often does not materialise.

When I met with the couples who had volunteered to take part in this study, in the interaction and the conversations I had with them before and after the interviews

themselves, I saw this tendency clearly. The woman was often more talkative, and more comfortable with my presence and she was normally 'in charge' of the situation. It was only when I was alone with the man during the interview with him, that he really opened up and I was able to better understand his world. With him and me alone in the room, there was nobody else there to tell the story on his behalf. There was also nobody there to judge him for what he said, to correct him or take offence. The same was of course the case for the women. As mentioned briefly earlier, during the first set of interviews, most couples seemed in relative harmony with each other. They were expecting a child with their partner and in all cases, except for one, the pregnancy was planned and wished for. At the time of the second interview, on the other hand, this harmony had been 'tested' by the lived realities of parenthood. The individuals' conversation with me then became an opportunity to 'vent' negative emotions, many about their husband or wife, which they may not have articulated with the other person present in the room. Interviewing couples separately from each other appeared to provide me with rich information. Sometimes wives had vastly different perceptions compared to their husbands, and the other way around, or they had views or feelings about a topic which their partner did not share. I was not given the 'official' account, I was given their personal account. Moreover, because they knew I would be speaking to them both, it seemed the 'politically correct' answer was given less frequently. Men, knowing I would hear the version of their female partner as well, were often surprisingly honest and at times self-critical about their contribution in unpaid labour. Some fathers started a sentence by saying 'As you have probably already heard from my wife', or 'As my wife will tell you', followed by an admittance of limited contributions as far as childcare or housework were concerned. Although the honesty encouraged by interviewing separately provides valuable insights, it should also be acknowledged that

this method has the potential to generate anxiety amongst couples as the ability to manage or control the information given to the researcher is removed from both individuals. The man and the woman can therefore easily feel rather 'naked' as at times I get to see more than they would have liked a researcher to obtain knowledge about. The potential emotional harm to the participants moves the discussion to the next topic this chapter will address: the ethical issues of the research.

Ethical issues

Conducting in-depth interviews means the researcher is entering potentially highly sensitive and profoundly intimate aspects of people's lives. The participants could feel they have been 'tricked into' a process in which they did not wish to take part and left with feelings of sadness, anger or grief once the interview is over as well as perceptions of one's integrity having been violated. Although all the volunteers, as part of the recruitment process, were informed in detail about the nature of this study as well as given a thorough overview of how the interviews would be carried out and how the material would be used, I verbally repeated these points when I met the participants in person for our first conversation. I also made sure to stress that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw their involvement at any time.

While many of the interviews were certainly emotional, I did not walk away from any dialogue feeling I had caused harm to the person I had spoken to or to the couple. The first set of interviews appeared to allow mothers and fathers-to-be to think through aspects of parenthood before the baby arrived and encouraged conversations between the man and the woman in the couple that, according to some participants, had helped reduce conflicts and misunderstandings. Sometimes, I received emails or text messages afterwards from the participants thanking me for letting them put aspects into words.

One Norwegian father felt that taking part in this research had been such a positive experience he asked me for the transcripts, so he could incorporate the content into his wedding speech to his future wife. Although he had no bad intentions behind this request, sending this father the transcripts of the interviews of both him and his partner, however, would violate the 'contract' I had made with the volunteers. This moves the discussion to another area which had to be carefully managed: sharing and storing of data. All the interviews were transcribed verbatim, but names have been anonymised. The volunteers were offered the transcript of their own interview, but their *own* solely. Other than myself, only my supervisors have been given access to the complete set of transcript documents. Even though the participants have been anonymised, due to the small number of interviewees, it may still be possible for some couples to recognise themselves and the stories of their partners. This could cause some conflict in the couple.

The data analysis process

As mentioned earlier, there were 15 couples in the UK and 15 couples in Norway taking part in this study. Because every individual in the couple was interviewed separately, the total number of volunteers amounted to 60. The mother and father were interviewed on two occasions, except for one male interviewee who had left the family house and did not wish to be contacted by me. The total number of interviews was hence 119. Some transcribed conversations barely stretched to 10 pages while others were 25. In the end, I was sitting with more than 2000 pages of interview transcripts. It is easy to get 'lost' with this amount of data and the expression 'not seeing the wood for the trees' springs to mind. The feeling of being in the middle of a large 'data forest', unable to see paths through it or the overall shape of the wood, was indeed a frequent sensation. To get more of an overview of my material, I wrote short summaries of each

interview. These brief descriptions allowed me to compare one person's account before and after the period of parental leave, compare it to that of their partner, to other participants in the same country and finally to the experiences articulated by the mothers and fathers in the other welfare state. I also created an Excel spreadsheet with basic information about each subject taking part in the research to further 'boil down' the data and achieve a much less detailed outline of the material collected.

Simultaneously, I read through every interview several times and over a period of many months, highlighting quotes that seemed relevant, writing down thoughts, emphasising contradictions or questions that came to me, and noting down patterns and themes that emerged from the text. Sometimes extracts from the transcripts were given an abstract label, other times it was simply a description of the content highlighted. I was conscious of being open to all possible meanings of the data and the potential relationships between concepts. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), the data analysis process starts with the identification of themes which emerge from the raw data. This method is sometimes referred to as 'open coding'. During my 'open coding', I identified and tentatively named and/or highlighted words, events, experiences, feelings, opinions, decisions and phrases that were then grouped into categorised. I also incorporated my findings into subsequent interviews and made relevant changes to the interview schedule as new themes emerged which I felt needed to be explored further. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) maintain that

"Qualitative data analysis ideally occurs concurrently with data collection so that investigators can generate an emerging understanding about research questions, which in turn informs both the sampling and the questions being asked" (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006: 318).

As additional data was collected, and more analysis work was conducted, my codes were modified or replaced, one category became three separate ones and others were

merged into a single group. Sometimes I found that one extract from the data belonged to more than one category or that it instead represented a subcode. I started to copy and paste extracts from the interviews into a separate document where the quotes were organised under a variety of themes. This document continued to be under continuous modification until I felt the raw data had been grouped in a logical and meaningful manner where I saw patterns emerging, relationships between various concepts developing and a rather complex story evolving. This process was not straightforward. Instead, it involved a lot of going back and forth where interview extracts were grouped and regrouped, and connections between the various themes were made and later disconnected only to then be connected again days later. It was 'messy' and organised at the same time. It required creativity and structure, discipline and patience. The story that eventually emerged consisted of patterns of behaviour, ways of thinking and feeling, relationships between concepts, contradictions and differences and similarities between various groups of interviewees.

As I followed a 'grounded' approach, I had no predetermined codes, my findings were entirely data-driven. The data, however, could have been understood in multiple ways. The codes I chose for the reoccurring themes may not have been the same as the labels a different researcher would have given them. How I analysed the data, and the patterns I identified, were all part of my way of seeing the world. Some parts of the interview transcript were highlighted, cut out from the text and given a part in my emerging story. Other pieces I felt were irrelevant and were hence left out of the final analysis. What a qualitative researcher hears, chooses to include and the findings that are eventually presented are all part of an ongoing subjective analysis process.

While many researchers use a software program to help with the data analysis process, my experience was that this technical aid created a distance between myself and the material I was working with and limited my creativity and 'freedom' when extracting themes and identifying patterns. The time I spent 'manually' highlighting, cutting and pasting, organising data and breaking it down into manageable units, would arguably have been reduced if I had chosen to use technical help. Nevertheless, it was the right approach for me to ensure the stories of first-time parents in the UK and Norway were heard and presented in the best possible way.

Limitations

While both strengths and weaknesses of the study have been emphasised throughout this chapter as part of the general discussion, there are still three specific limitations not yet addressed, two of which came to me in the final stages of the research. Firstly, as I met with mothers and fathers after the period of parental leave had come to an end, I became increasingly aware of how my study, although providing valuable insight limited itself to capture the lived experiences of men and women expecting and subsequently sharing the responsibility for *one* child only. While it should be stated that one of the couples interviewed did have twins, the study was not designed to understand the challenges of having multiple children. Many of the British women told me how they had managed to find ways of juggling the demands of paid work and motherhood, but that this already stretched, and barely functioning, setup would fall apart with the arrival of a second baby. It seems the gendered journey of parenthood may be *increasingly gendered* the larger the family becomes. Unfortunately, this research limits itself to studying the gendered effect of a couple's first child, not their second or third which also should be explored.

The second limitation that should be emphasised concerns itself with the difference between *described* and *actual* behaviour, thoughts and feelings. What the interviewees told me may not be entirely 'true'. Instead, it could be coloured by a wish to state what they thought I wanted to hear. The men taking part in this study, for example, may have wished to let the female researcher know that they embraced and shared the ideals of being involved fathers and supportive husbands. When it comes to the female interviewees, the answers they provided and the rationale they gave for their actions, can all have been influenced by their suspicions that the Scandinavian interviewer probably favoured egalitarian sharing practices. Whether another researcher with different characteristics to mine would have been told other stories is a possibility. Moreover, if the design of this study had also incorporated extensive observation of the couples, more insight would have been obtained about *actual*, not merely *described* behaviour. Such a design would also enable the collection of information about the dynamics in the couple which this project only partially captures.

The third and final limitation concerns itself with the generalisability of the research findings. While the aim of this study was never to collect data and extract findings that claimed to represent a certain population, the topic of generalisability, or lack of, in qualitative research is nevertheless an area I wish to address. I was aware from the onset of this project that under no statistical definition of generalisability could the responses of 15 Norwegian and 15 British couples be considered to reflect reliably the journey of parenthood in these two welfare states. The number of participants was simply too low to make any confident predictions about complex relationships in the population of the parents interviewed. Moreover, my sample has an inbuilt bias as I only interviewed the men and women who were willing to talk to me and extraverted

enough to share their views and stories. These people may have systematically different attitudes about gender, work, motherhood, fatherhood and parental leave than the ones who did not volunteer for this study. Since I know nothing about the ones who did not want to be interviewed, I have no way of adjusting the inferences I obtained from the 30 couples. My own bias in the data collection process and the analysis is an additional issue. So, if my findings cannot be generalised to a larger population, what value does it have other than portraying the journey of parenthood for these specific couples? As I chose to follow a maximum variation sampling strategy and hence achieved a great diversity amongst the participants, the common patterns that emerged, despite the differences in characteristics, are, as Patton (1990) argues, of special interest and value. Core experiences were captured in this study and shared aspects of motherhood and fatherhood were discovered. Even though this research cannot claim to speak 'on behalf of' mothers and fathers in Norway and in the UK, it still provides an in-depth insight into the journey of parenthood for a larger population than merely for the volunteers taking part in this project.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I have talked about my research journey. I have explained and reflected on the decisions I made along the way, highlighting the strengths of the study as well as its limitations. As I started this process, I was aware of the emergent nature of qualitative research. However, a real understanding of what this aspect of my chosen methodology entailed only developed once the data collection had commenced and the 'messy' reality I had set out to understand appeared. The knowledge I had expected to find was not always what I obtained and the approach I had planned on taking had to be continuously adjusted. In many ways, this is what makes qualitative research so frustrating, emotionally draining and time-consuming. Simultaneously, it is also what

makes this kind of study exciting as new and often surprising patterns, themes and dynamics are discovered. Life is 'messy' and hence so are people's narratives. The interviews are filled with contradictions, initial plans that did not materialise, feelings of joy, enthusiasm and anticipation, but also anger, disappointment, fear and confusion. From this 'immense forest of data', a complex yet orderly and clear storyline emerged. The findings presented in the subsequent chapters are not objective facts. Instead, the data on which the analysis is based was collected in the unique interaction between the respondents and me, two subjects together constructing a common understanding of reality. Although my intention as a researcher was never to play a distant and neutral role in the data-gathering process nor was it my goal to analyse the material objectively, it is vital to be conscious of and reflect on your impact on the material obtained as well as on which patterns and themes are identified. This chapter has strived to do exactly that.

The interactional and 'human' aspect of the information collection method also required me to reflect on the ethical issues involved in this kind of research. While the longitudinal component of the study, capturing the fluidity of a transitional life process, invited a more relaxed research relationship to become established, the information shared was of a personal and sometimes sensitive nature. Throughout this research process I have taken steps to ensure any potential damage to the participants has been kept to a minimum, treating both interviewees and the data with caution and respect while also being honest in terms of what discoveries were made.

I started this chapter with a quote by Cronbach (1975) stating that the job of the social scientist is to 'pin down the contemporary facts'. The 'facts' are both subjective and

'messy', but the methodology adopted for this research allowed for the voices of British and Norwegian men and women to be heard and for their stories to be told.

Chapter 5: The gendered use of parental leave entitlements

Up until April 2011, fathers in the UK were merely given two weeks of voluntary parental leave after the birth of their baby whereas mothers were entitled to 52 weeks. This social system mirrored the gendered assumptions that mothers were the main caregivers and fathers the breadwinners and the more distant 'helpers'. As was outlined in detail in Chapter 3 of this thesis *The British and Norwegian Context*, the changes to the maternity leave provisions which were implemented in 2011 made it possible for parents to *share* the latter half of the leave period. In sharp contrast to the late introduction of policies in the UK allowing fathers to be involved in the early stages of their baby's life, Norway, as part of a profound political commitment to gender equality, gave parents the right to share parental leave as early as in 1978. The Norwegian state further pioneered the transformation of baby care as a responsibility for fathers as well as for mothers when a 4-week daddy quota was established in 1993. In 2011, the same year as the changes to maternity leave took place in the UK, the daddy quota was increased by two weeks from the existing 10 to 12 weeks. Two years later, in 2013, the daddy quota was again extended by two further weeks, entitling dads to 14 weeks of paid parental leave.

On a less progressive note, however, studies show that even though Norwegian parents have been entitled to share the leave period for decades, most of the time taken by fathers is the period *reserved* for them. It seems then that the Norwegian welfare state's promotion of the caring father as the companion parent of the working mother is more a political ideal than a widespread lived reality. As far as the UK is concerned, data published by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, show that less than 1% in the year when APL came into effect and approximately 1.4% of eligible fathers

between 2012 and 2013 made use of their newly introduced family entitlements (O'Brien and Twamley, 2017). While fathers in both Norway and the UK to various degrees have an opportunity to stay at home during the first year of their baby's life, the sharing of parental leave continues in both countries to be a marginal phenomenon. This chapter will now turn to the stories of the Norwegian and British couples, looking at how they negotiated who would take the leave, when, for how long and what factors guided these decisions. While most of the couples interviewed for this study did indeed follow the traditional gendered pattern of leave use, the research also found examples of mums and dads who were sharing their time with their babies in ways that go against the established norms of leave-taking in significant ways.

Awareness of the existing maternity and paternity leave entitlements

During the first interview with the British and Norwegian couples, every mum and dad-to-be was asked questions about their knowledge of the current maternity and paternity leave provisions. As the changes to these entitlements in the UK had been implemented relatively recently at the time of the first interview, it was important to understand to what extent the right for parents to share the leave had become a knowledge base from which couples negotiated a distribution of time at home with their baby. If the parents-to-be were not aware of the right to share, how could they then even consider it as an option? A conversation about maternity and paternity leave entitlements can also reveal differences between the mother and the father-to-be when it comes to their knowledge about the benefits they have as future parents. A study by Bass (2015) found a clear trend of gendered anticipation of parenthood where the planning work and the processing of information related to the future arrival of a baby were all part of mental labour which generally was conducted by women, not men, showing gendered expectations of caretaking responsibilities. According to Bass, the

gendered mental work occurring before women and men become mothers and fathers is caused by 'socially constructed gender expectations surrounding parenthood' (Bass, 2015: 369) where women are given primary responsibility for children. For couples where both partners had a similar level of awareness around their leave entitlements, how these rights are described, what is emphasised and what is being omitted can provide valuable insights into what details are considered important and relevant and what parts of the benefits are perceived to have less value or be of reduced applicability for the parents-to-be.

Norway - detailed knowledge

*"We belong to a generation who have become aware of our rights"
(Emrik, Norwegian).*

Amongst the Norwegian couples, every single individual apart from one father-to-be had detailed knowledge about their parental leave benefits. This knowledge included the exact level of wage compensation, the number of weeks available for one of the parents to stay at home with the baby, the period reserved for the mum and the time earmarked for the dad. The Norwegian parents-to-be also explicitly mentioned the opportunity for the couple to *choose* how to divide the leave period, excluding the specific weeks which belonged to each of the parents. The concept of 'sharing' and 'choice' was repeatedly referred to and both men and women emphasised, without being asked about this directly, how the parental leave was organised in a way which allowed parents to decide who was going to stay at home with the baby and for how long. This level of knowledge and the emphasis given to the sharing of leave is captured in the interview with a mum-to-be below.

“In relation to the birth itself, the dad is entitled to 2 weeks' leave, but it's up to the employer if this is paid or not. And then he's entitled to those 12 weeks later, and this period is paid. And then the mum and the dad decide whether they want 80 or 100% salary for, what is it 47 or 57 weeks? And then the common practice is for the mum to take more of the weeks in between than the dad, but that is the choice for the parents themselves (Mari, Norwegian).”

When the couples were describing the various parts of the parental leave entitlements, it was talked about in gender-neutral terms, as a package of benefits which belonged to the couple. The ‘owners’ of the shared weeks were both mum *and* dad and the decision on how to use them was portrayed as a shared one. The interviews with the Norwegian couples, in addition to discovering a conscious awareness of the shared weeks and the possibility of distributing this time more equally, also revealed how knowledge about the entitlements is not gendered.

UK - patchy and gendered knowledge

The level of knowledge held by both mums and dads-to-be in Norway represents a rather sharp contrast to the pattern found amongst British couples. While most British mums had a good insight into their maternity leave entitlements, *none* of them mentioned the changes that had been implemented where the couple could now share the latter half of the maternity leave. The dads generally had limited awareness about maternity and paternity leave provisions. When they were asked to describe both their partner's entitlements as a mother and their entitlements as a dad, many of the men wanted those questions to be directed to their wife or girlfriend as it was not ‘their area of expertise’. While the majority *did* know they had the right to have two weeks of leave after the arrival of their baby, few held much information about what was often labelled ‘their wife's entitlements’. This shows not only gendered ownership of the leave period but also an assumption that the responsibility for the early stages of their child's life

belonged to the mother and was hence not considered to be an area the fathers were expected to be involved in. There was one exception to this gendered knowledge pattern, however, with one couple having allocated the work of obtaining information about maternity and paternity leave benefits to the man. This father-to-be had conducted extensive research on their entitlement and was able to provide more detailed information than most of the women interviewed for this study. That said, while his knowledge exceeded the general level found amongst the British participants, he made no mention of the recently implemented possibility of sharing the leave period. Although none of the British mums and dads-to-be made any reference to the couple's right to share the latter half of the maternity leave, once they were asked *directly* whether they had heard anything about these changes, a small proportion of the participants did have some insight.

"I knew there was something coming in, I didn't know it was already in effect, where parents can sort of ask? So, is it that like one parent, you can swap it or something like that, is that right so for example if I went back after 6 months, he could have the second half or something like that? I didn't know if that was already enforced" (Sally, British).

"Last April eh, it rings a bell, but I wouldn't be able to describe it at all" (Preston, British).

The knowledge concerning the recent legal changes to the maternity leave provisions was rather vague, however, apart from two mothers-to-be, nobody knew the implementations of these new rights had taken place. If changes to maternity and paternity entitlements are to lead to any social change, if it is to encourage and set in motion processes whereby mothers and fathers are sharing more equally the care for their baby, these policy developments need to be communicated to the population it is made for. While the sharing of time at home with their child may not be a solution the

British couples in this study would have chosen anyway – a topic which will be explored further on in the chapter - unless there is an awareness of this possibility, how can it even be considered as an option? The fact that there was such a difference in how informed the British and Norwegian couples were about their maternity and paternity leave provisions, especially between the fathers-to-be from the two national contexts, raises questions about how these insights came about. Why are the Norwegian couples so much more knowledgeable than the British men and women and why is the concept of *sharing* uniformly present in the minds of Norwegian parents-to-be while it is such an absent piece of information amongst the British? The next section will look at *how* the participants obtained insights about their leave entitlements and *what* sources of information they used.

Parental leave – sources of information

In Norway, many of the participants referred to the daddy-quota as being a ‘hot topic’ in the media with constant debates taking place in the newspapers, on the radio and on television. Social media also seemed to play a role in raising awareness and generating discussions around fathers and their rights to paid leave with their babies. The daddy quota especially, but also the couple’s right to share the time with their infant was talked about by the participants as something ‘everybody’ was aware of. It was considered ‘common knowledge’ which one did not have to make a conscious effort to obtain, knowledge people ‘just had’ as members of the Norwegian society. Many of the participants therefore did not even know for sure where they had obtained this awareness from. Fathers’ right to paid time at home with their baby was an aspect of the parental leave provisions that were taken for granted, a natural part of the lived experiences of early parenthood in Norway.

The remaining details of the parental leave entitlements like the exact number of weeks and the level of income compensation, on the other hand, required a more active process of information gathering, although this information was easily available and often given without much work. The majority of the mums and dads-to-be talked about having visited the website of the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) where they found all the details they needed about the parental leave provisions available to them as well as an explanation for how these rights were to be used. More information was given in brochures distributed at the hospital, verbally transmitted by midwives they had met at various pre-natal check-ups and during pre-natal seminars which both parents-to-be attended. These sources seemed also to all have emphasised the right to share the period of parental leave, apart from the weeks reserved specifically for the mum and the dad. Other channels of information included friends, colleagues, managers and the Human Resources Department in the organisations where they worked. Again, the topic of father care and the sharing of the leave period was often highlighted. Some of the fathers-to-be talked about how their line managers, in a conversation about parental leave, had actively encouraged them to take more time at home with their baby than the earmarked daddy weeks.

“I do remember that he encouraged me to take as much leave as possible. And he told me that with his first baby, he hadn’t taken as much leave as he had done with the last one and he said that with the first one, he took 3 months and he talked about how he felt that he had not even managed to get into the routine properly until his leave was over. But with the second baby, he took 6 months, and he told me he felt that then he had really had time with the child, but that towards the end it had started to get a bit boring” (Henning, Norwegian).

Although the level of awareness around the possibility for dads to take long periods away from work to care for their baby in the UK was limited compared to the insights found amongst the Norwegian couples, the British media also seemed to be a central

communication channel for the policy shift towards father-care. The mums and dads-to-be in the UK who had heard about the changes to the maternity and paternity provisions, or at least who were aware of it being discussed as a potential legal alteration to the existing provisions, referred to newspapers, radio or television as the source of this knowledge.

“Uh, I did read in the newspapers about it being floated as a possibility, but I think I just thought it was just policy being discussed. I don’t think I picked up on the fact that they had actually introduced it” (Marcus, British).

“No, I don't actually. I think I saw various headlines about stuff that was going to happen, but I didn't read properly and thought that there had been proposals for dads to be able to share more of the leave but that it was then revoked, that politics went the other way again. I don't know exactly what changed” (Daphne, British).

As mentioned above, however, the awareness of the legal changes to the maternity leave provisions, which some of the participants had, was vague and incomplete. Whereas in Norway, dads’ right to stay at home with their baby was perceived to be ‘common knowledge’, in the UK, the new provisions for father care during the first year of a child’s life, although it had been addressed in the media, the headlines went almost unnoticed, the content underneath largely forgotten.

Like the parents-to-be in Norway, apart from the information transmitted via the media, British men and women obtained details about maternity and paternity leave entitlements from their managers, Human Resources Departments and friends and family. These conversations, though, never seemed to involve any discussions about the opportunity now available to parents where the dad could take part in the maternity leave. The one father-to-be who had taken the main responsibility of researching his and his wife’s leave entitlements was so surprised when he heard about the recently

implemented changes to the maternity provisions, he asked to be sent the web addresses with information about this so he could read it for himself. In addition to having spoken to both his line manager as well as to the Human Resources Department in his company, he felt he had conducted a wide-ranging search on the internet but still had learnt nothing about his new rights as a father. The difficulty of obtaining information about the right to share the leave was expressed by Leo:

*"I don't think anybody knows about it, for a start. It is like a kept secret"
(Leo, British).*

While Leo described the changes to the maternity leave as a 'kept secret', James, whose wife was pregnant with twins at the time of the first interview described the new provisions as 'a token gesture':

"Um, it's sort of uh, I'm not going to say a token gesture but when you look into the practicalities... Okay, so I think it probably is a token gesture without much thought on how it fits into practical life..." (James, British).

The next section will explore how the mums and dads-to-be both *planned* but also *ended up* using the existing maternity and paternity leave provisions. The focus will be on the negotiation of the leave entitlements within the couple as well as looking at how these negotiations take place in a wider cultural and structural context. If, as James rightly indicates, social policies are to be more than just a 'token gesture', the opportunities they provide need to fit into practical life. These policies also must largely be in line with dominant ideologies about motherhood and fatherhood as well as cultural ideas and expectations about the roles and responsibilities of men and women for them to have any practical impact on the way in which couples organise their transition to parenthood. The sections below will therefore explore the thoughts the participants had

about their parental leave entitlements, especially around their right to share time at home with the baby and the way these provisions were designed. The remainder of the chapter will also look at the process of decision-making and point to facilitating and hindering factors of a more equal sharing of the leave period between mothers and fathers in the UK and Norway.

The right to share – negotiations and outcome

As was mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, although couples in both Norway and the UK have the right to share a large proportion of the parental leave period, statistics show that only a small minority of mums and dads choose to utilise this entitlement. Consistent with these national trends, the interviews with Norwegian and British couples for this study revealed a gendered pattern in mothers' and fathers' use of the leave available for sharing. Amongst the British couples, there were no examples at all of men taking any part of the leave provisions except for the two weeks of leave that are given to dads straight after the birth of their baby. In Norway, although there were signs of a transition to a slightly less gendered uptake of parental leave entitlements, dads spending time at home with their infant beyond their reserved weeks was far from the overall trend. In the case of the British parents, the fact that many of the participants were not even aware of the possibility of sharing the latter part of the leave makes it impossible to know for certain the extent to which this lack of insight played a role in their gendered allocation of time at home. That said, for the Norwegian men and women, the contrast between the couples' *awareness* of the possibility of giving a large proportion of the leave period to the father and their *gendered use* of these provisions, points to other explanatory factors than ignorance of entitlements for this traditional split in roles and responsibilities during the early stages of parenthood. Amongst the Norwegian parents-to-be, a small number of the couples

interviewed were *open* to a more equal distribution of time at home with the baby, and during the first interview talked about sharing the leave period as an option they were seriously considering, only *one* father ended up taking part of the leave provisions which theoretically belonged to both parents. This couple, although from the onset were planning for the father to take more leave than his earmarked 'daddy-weeks' decided to swap roles earlier than planned as the mother was starting to feel 'restless' and 'bored' and therefore did not mind *giving* these months to her husband.

"I changed it because I wanted to go back a little bit earlier [to work], and then he got some of the shared leave. He had really always wanted as much leave as possible, so for his sake, or both of our sakes, it was really very okay. I wanted a shorter leave, and he wanted a longer one" (Synne, Norwegian).

As was evident from the first interview with this couple, although the father expressed a wish to have a large proportion of the shared leave weeks, the distribution of this time was the mother's decision. When the mother felt ready to return to her career sooner than was initially planned, the rest of the leave period could then be *given* to the father, but only because *she* no longer wanted it. The gendered 'ownership' of the parental leave was also evident in the conversation with another Norwegian couple who initially planned a 50-50 sharing of the time at home, but as parenthood became a lived reality, the mother and father instead opted for the 'normal solution'.

"We went for the normal solution, where I had 12 weeks. I guess it was because Sissel liked being at home, really, and I don't remember discussing that too much, or the exact reasons why it turned out that way. When she started her maternity leave she was in a sort of baby bubble" (Åge, Norwegian).

While in many of the interviews, Norwegian men expressed how they would have liked more time at home with their baby, this wish never carried more weight than the wish

of their partner to take these weeks of leave herself. It seems Norwegian fathers' use of the shared parental leave period is to some extent dependent on the mother 'allowing' the man to have this time away from work. As one mother-to-be said:

"If I had told him I wanted to stay home for 6 months only, he would happily have taken the remaining months" (Ingrid, Norwegian).

This chapter will now turn to the gendered ownership of the parental leave period. It will explore how it is the mother, in both national contexts, who is the final decision-maker on the sharing of the time caring for the baby and why these gender differences in power, roles and in responsibilities become naturalised in the transition to parenthood.

The absence of a conversation

"I asked her [his partner] just now. I asked, 'Do you remember how we agreed that this was the way we were going to do it?' And she said 'No, I don't remember'. And then I said (laughing) 'Do you know why you don't remember that? That is because you just decided it'. So, I had no say in that decision, but I would have said something if I had not agreed" (Øystein, Norwegian).

Initially, when this study was planned and designed, the aim was to reveal and subsequently describe the *process of negotiation* that takes place in a couple around how the parental leave entitlements were to be used. It was therefore quite a surprise to then discover, once the interviews had commenced, an almost complete absence of a conversation regarding who should take the time at home with the baby, for how long and why. In Norway, all the participants were aware of the right to share, but this possibility was rarely discussed. Many of the men also expressed in the interview a clear wish to have more time at home than what they were going to have, but this was hardly ever brought up with their partner. When the Norwegian participants were asked about

how they had agreed to use the parental leave entitlements in the way that they had, most of the couples could not remember a specific conversation about it. The feeling that there was already a 'common understanding' between the mother and the father-to-be in terms of who should stay at home during the shared weeks of parental leave was often referred to in the interviews. This 'common understanding' in the couple involved a taken-for-granted assumption that while the fathers in Norway were entitled to their weeks of daddy quota, the rest of the leave belonged to the mother.

"Ehm, yes, how did we do that...? I don't know if there ever really was a discussion or if I, most likely, have just taken it for granted" (Siri, Norwegian).

"Well, there were no big discussion about it, but if we would have had a discussion about it I think I would have had the last word. I think it would have turned out the way that I wanted it to" (Annelise, Norwegian).

The assumption that the shared weeks belong to the mother, that she will have the final say in how these weeks are distributed in the couple, seems to prevent any discussion ever taking place. This gendered ownership of the parental leave is captured in the interview with a mother-to-be where she is describing the shared weeks as a time she felt was 'rightfully hers'.

"[...] it all comes back to what we talked about that I most likely would have fought tooth and nail for what I feel is rightfully mine" (Siri, Norwegian).

Few Norwegian couples had ever reflected on these gendered practices and most of the time they were not even aware that a conversation never took place until the topic was brought up in the interview. When the questions were asked, however, the mothers-to-be often expressed a degree of embarrassment over the gender-traditional roles they

had decided to adopt in the transition to parenthood and a surprise that their taken-for-granted gendered sharing of the parental leave had not been a topic for discussion.

“Yeah, no for me, I probably take it a bit for granted that I’m the one who is going to be at home with this child. Yes, and Per is also taking this for granted. We have just fallen bang into a traditional gender role pattern (laughing). We’re clearly following old traditions here” (Tonje, Norwegian).

Many of the women admitted that their assumed ownership of the parental leave period went against their values which they felt embraced gender equality and fairness. It also represented a contrast to how their domestic life was generally organised with their partner where housework was distributed along the 50-50 sharing principle. As will be explored further on in the thesis, the principle of ‘50-50 sharing’ shapes most aspects of Norwegian couples’ work and family strategies. The decision on who stays home from work with a sick child, how housework is distributed in the couple, picking up and dropping off at nursery as well as bedtime routines and morning routines are all guided by the overall aim of achieving an equal distribution of tasks and responsibilities. *Fairness* and *equality* are concepts referred to throughout the interviews with the Norwegian couples. These expressed values, however, while they are shaping the couple’s sharing practices both *before* the baby is born and *after* the period of parental leave, the paid weeks at home with their baby seem somehow ‘exempt’ from the idea of the 50-50 principle.

Although the overall pattern amongst the Norwegian couples was one of a complete absence of a conversation or a limited discussion about the use of parental leave, in a handful of the Norwegian couples, however, the topic of how to share the time at home with the baby *was* brought up.

“So, Snorre said that he thinks it’s more than enough with those three months [daddy-quota], but I have told him that if he wants more... Because it’s really important to me that it is a choice, so if he had wanted more, up to 50-50, he could have had that” (Hedda, Norwegian).

The principle of 50-50 sharing is present in the mind of this mother-to-be and is an important force behind a conversation being initiated and the option of sharing the leave being discussed. The same participant emphasises further in the interview the value of gender equality in the distribution of time at home caring for their infant.

“I would have liked to take more [time on leave], but I think it should be equal” (Hedda, Norwegian).

The fact that a conversation *did* take place and that the possibility of distributing the time at home more equally *was* discussed could be taken as examples of interactive processes of change where slowly it becomes more normal to at least actively and consciously *consider* the sharing of the parental leave in less gender-traditional ways.

Another Norwegian couple seemed to have had rather long and numerous conversations about how they envisioned sharing parental leave entitlements. These discussions covered aspects such as breastfeeding, the physical and emotional health of the mother after having given birth and the close bond between mother and baby. As is clear from the interviews with both the husband and the wife, the idea of sharing the parental leave time between them represents a starting point for the conversation.

“We talked a bit back and forth about it and I think Mari, to start with, imagined staying home for a shorter amount of time and then we talked a bit about the whole breastfeeding thing and how important that was or not important and then it was a bit about how she was going to feel, what I thought she would be feeling as a mother and I said I thought that maybe the mother feeling perhaps would hit her harder than what she was imagining and then just to come to some kind of an agreement I said ‘Why don’t we just go for the standardised package’ and then potentially do things differently when we have number 2?” (Henning, Norwegian).

As with the Norwegian couples, the general absence of a conversation and the assumed gendered ownership of the leave period after the birth of their baby was a clear trend found amongst British mothers and fathers-to-be. The woman decided the use of their leave entitlements, this conclusion was then communicated to their partner who had no say in the matter and who would not question the plan.

"I've never really discussed it with Dominic, I just told him, and he didn't ever question it or talk about it" (Kelly, British).

"No. Um, it's not something we discussed very much cos I think Cathy has been desperate to step off the treadmill for some time anyway (laughs), so I don't think there was any debate, she wants to get the maximum allowance" (Marcus, British).

One of the mothers-to-be reflected during the interview on this absence of a discussion. In her marriage, she said, every big decision was always talked about at length. The use of the parental leave period, on the other hand, although representing a choice that impacts both her and her husband, somehow had not been much of a topic of conversation.

My leave with my babies – gendered ownership of parental leave

During the second interview with a British mother exploring their current life situation but also reflecting on their use of maternity and paternity leave entitlements, she was asked why they had not considered her husband ever taking any of the shared weeks at home with their baby. At this time, the couple had already had their second child and it had been decided that the father was not going to take any leave now either except for his allocated 14 days. The answer given to the question of why they had again opted for this gendered use of the entitlements included:

“Because I said he wasn’t having any, because it was mine, my time with my babies” (Cathy, British).

Although few participants in the UK and in Norway would express the mother’s ownership of the entire parental leave period, excluding the weeks reserved for the father, in such direct ways, the sentiments captured in the interview with this British mother represent a red thread in terms of how most couples thought about the use of the maternity and paternity leave. Despite a large proportion of the period at home could theoretically be shared, these weeks were still in both Norway and Britain referred to as ‘the mother’s time’.

“But yeah, I mean she wouldn’t begrudge me spending more time, but I think she would be a little bit gutted that she would give up some of her time” (Derek, British).

“Ehm, we just followed the package that you get, but I have also done that consciously, ehm, it all comes back to what we talked about, that I most likely would have fought tooth and nail for what I feel is rightfully mine” (Siri, Norwegian).

The willingness expressed by Siri above to fight for what she feels ‘belongs’ to her as a mother, is also articulated by several of the female participants in both countries.

“Well, I know that you can share it, you can, I don’t know that much about it, but you can go half-half basically and that’s as far I’ve gone because I wasn’t entertaining it because he made a joke and said he will take half and I can take half and I said ‘Whatever, not on your life. I am having the time. I carry the baby and it’s going to want me and that’s what we do and it’s the tradition and that’s how it goes, and I wouldn’t, and he just laughed. So, he spoke about it for two seconds, we didn’t discuss it” (Kelly, British).

The gendered ownership of the parental leave entitlements therefore leads to this time generally being arranged according to the mother’s wishes. Her opinion carries more weight, and she will have the final say.

“I feel that Inga has more of a say than me” (Erik, Norwegian).

“I wouldn’t give mine up for him (laughing), just because, I don’t know, maybe I’m a bit old fashioned like that and I think that I’m the mummy and I would like to have it that way” (Susan, British).

Many of the Norwegian participants also referred to the sharing of parental leave as a solution that would feel ‘morally wrong’ and therefore not an arrangement they would consider unless they had no other choice. Studies by McKay and Doucet (2010) as well as by Kaufman (2018) pointed to it going against the culturally created definition of the ‘good father’ to take leave *away* from the mother. It seems similar ideas are held by several of the Norwegian parents-to-be. While there were mainly fathers who talked about the perception of it being ‘unethical’ to take some of the time available for both parents to use, mothers also expressed similar sentiments.

“I don’t know, I think this really would have affected our relationship if he would have asked for more time ... maybe it’s a maternal instinct? It feels so wrong to give away that time” (Siri, Norwegian).

“I am aware that there is a joint parental leave which can be split however one would like, but it feels ‘morally wrong’ to cut down on the mother’s part” (Sivert, Norwegian).

When the Norwegian mothers and fathers were asked to explain in more detail what they meant by the term ‘morally wrong’ or ‘unethical’, the answers were at times rather vague. Other times, however, the reasons given involved the role of ‘nature’ and how it was more natural for the mother to take the main responsibility for the baby during the early stages of parenthood. Taking leave from the mother hence felt like going against a ‘natural order’ which had always existed, and which was beyond the realm of social policies. This chapter will now turn to the influence of ‘nature’ in generating a gendered sharing pattern of parental leave benefits exploring how ideas about the mother-baby

bond, maternal instincts, breastfeeding and women's naturally caring characteristics impact on couple's earning and caring decisions.

The role of 'nature' in couples' decision making

"I have a respect for the closeness and the bond between the mother and the baby that is there naturally, the baby is inside of me, it hears my heart, my voice, he's together with me now, and something is happening between us, so he is probably now more connected to me due to this and that, I don't think it's healthy to change this just because we're thinking that the dad should be as important as the mum, there are certain things where nature has decided that we are different" (Mari, Norwegian).

As was previously discussed in this chapter, the possibility of sharing a large proportion of the parental leave period is an aspect of the entitlement package which all Norwegian couples are aware of that exists. The ear-market daddy quota has also served to frame father care as a practice that is 'normal' and highly acceptable in this society. The well-established family policies in Norway which are both enabling as well as gently pushing men to take on more family work coupled with widespread ideas of fairness and equality are hard to merge with the much more traditional and gendered use of parental leave benefits. While, as will be explored later, the British couples often pointed to economic rationale, lack of knowledge and discriminating workplaces as reasons for the couple to not share the time at home with their baby, the Norwegian mums and dads tended to emphasise the role of 'nature' and how it was more *natural* for the mother to be mainly responsible for the infant during the early stages of parenthood. In contrast to the British parents-to-be, for the Norwegian participants, external constraints like the financial implications of taking leave and gendered organisational practices, have been largely, but not completely removed, leaving them with nature as an explanatory factor for gendered choices. Stating that a behaviour or a practice is 'natural' will limit or even

remove critical questions being asked. It becomes a decision that is 'right', a way of 'doing parenthood' which is expected and culturally accepted.

"I think it's a bit indoctrinated in the way of thinking that mothers are supposed to stay home on parental leave. That is something I grew up with and I feel that's very natural, important and right" (Sunniva, Norwegian).

"Yes, it just feels natural, really, even though for us, more damage is done to her career by being on leave than would have been the case for me" (Torstein, Norwegian).

For the woman to take the leave period afterwards was talked about as a natural extension of the biological differences that exist between the sexes where the baby came from the mother's body and not the father's.

"It's not because dad isn't important, but because that's just how it is. It has to do with the breastfeeding and hormonal release and that whole connection" (Karianne, Norwegian).

"I think that the father is as good at being home with the baby as the mother, but I think it's even more natural for the mother to stay at home than it is for the dad. But when it comes to giving love and taking care of the baby, I think the dad is as good as the mother. But it may feel more natural for the mother as it's you who has been pregnant, it's you who has given birth and it's you who must breastfeed so it may be a closer relationship in that way, at least right in the beginning" (Annelise, Norwegian).

As is evident from the parts of the interviews quoted above, a central reason for it being more 'natural' for women to stay at home during the period of shared leave than it is for men is the mother's ability to breastfeed. While fathers may be as competent as mothers in caring for the baby, the biological fact that men cannot breastfeed excludes them from the role of the main carer during the first months of a child's life. Although breastfeeding was mentioned by several British couples too, as will be discussed below,

this argument was more frequently put forward by Norwegian mothers and fathers-to-be.

Breastfeeding

In Norway, many of the women interviewed talked about the immense pressure to breastfeed their baby. Breastfeeding in Norway seems to form part of what it means to be a 'good mother'. Women who struggled or failed to feed their babies the 'natural way' often felt they had failed in their mother role as well.

"I have felt tremendous pressure to be able to succeed with breastfeeding and I also felt a lot of pressure to not do anything wrong, so I tried to avoid bottle-feeding for example. I was also under the impression that all children were the same and that there was one correct way of doing it and that I was unable to do that. As I am used to being able to do things correctly, this was an odd experience. In addition, Sigrid did not grow or put on weight 'properly', and I felt that this was a catastrophe which was entirely created by me, so all in all I felt that I had failed the one task I had in life" (Sunniva, Norwegian).

Mothers' indispensable role in feeding their babies in the natural and 'right' way meant that plans around the sharing of parental leave had to accommodate women being present on a regular basis in the daily routine of their infant. The logical distribution of the available paid time at home therefore involved the mother taking most or all the shared leave allowing the breastfeeding to happen uninterrupted and over as many months as the guidelines dictated.

"I feel that because I would like to breastfeed, you have so much good stuff in the breast milk, then it would be more natural for me to stay at home in the beginning because she will probably be fed by me many times per day, right? So yes, it has become the natural solution for us that I'm the one who is at home in the beginning" (Tonje, Norwegian).

The normative pressure on mothers to exclusively breastfeed their babies for six months and to continue giving their children breastmilk until their first birthday

represents an almost 'schizophrenic' contrast to the Government's promotion of father care and a more egalitarian distribution of the available paid leave. Although Norwegian women who return to work while their baby is still breastfeeding are given a daily two-hour break to accommodate the continuation of this natural way of nurturing their child, the official breastfeeding guidelines and the Government's aim of moving couples towards a less traditional sharing of the time at home with their baby is quite the paradox.

In the UK, breastfeeding was also mentioned as a complicating factor when it comes to sharing parental leave, but it was more of an *afterthought* or a *reflection looking back* when mothers and fathers were interviewed for a second time after the period of maternity leave had come to an end. Some of the Norwegian couples, on the other hand, felt that if breastfeeding was removed from the equation, there was no reason why they could not have swapped roles and have the father at home on leave instead of the mother.

"Then I don't have any good reason anymore [if breastfeeding is taken out as a reason for her to stay at home]. But I would still have liked to, but that's a different thing, really. No, there's not really a good reason"
(Helena, Norwegian).

Others, however, pointed to other 'natural' reasons for why they thought the mother should be the main carer during the early stages of parenthood in addition to breastfeeding. The next section will look at the perception of there being a unique mother-baby bond and the existence of a maternal instinct as further reasons for a gendered use of the parental leave period.

Maternal instinct and the mother-baby bond

“I think it’s a little bit sad that he always says “mummy” and wants to go to her, that kind of stuff. It is better now, but I think that’s completely natural. A man must earn that place, to a higher degree than the woman has to” (Emrik, Norwegian).

Both in the first set of interviews as well as in the second, most Norwegian and British parents had a clear perception of there being a unique bond between the mother and the baby. This special relationship was unlike the one the baby had with their dad. The mother, because she had carried the child for 9 months, had a natural closeness.

Mothers knew their babies in an entirely different way compared to their partners and would ‘instinctively’ understand them.

“I just think that instinctively moms know their children because they have carried them, and you know, nobody knows the child like the mom would. Yes, I think that’s very real, actually” (Valerie, British).

“I’m not saying the father can’t do a good job, but I just think that bond is probably closer with the mother in the early stages” (Samuel, British).

“There are very few I can think of who have the same strong relationship with their dad. So perhaps the special bond with the mum is true. It might be that you have the experience of the pregnancy and shared more time with the child. Perhaps if the maternity and paternity leaves get more evenly divided, this may eventually change if both participate to an equal extent in the life of the child, but I don’t know. I must admit, at the present, it looks as if the mother bond is the strongest” (Ingrid, Norwegian).

Because of this close bond between the mother and the baby and the woman’s perceived inborn ability to understand and connect with her infant, a more egalitarian distribution of the time at home on leave feels to both Norwegian and British participants like going against what nature intended. The mum is perceived to be the best possible carer for the baby and the baby therefore needs the mother. Government policies, although perhaps with ‘noble’ intentions of encouraging more involvement from fathers in their child’s life and family-work in general, will have limited impact on

the actual distribution of leave in a couple if sharing of the time at home is perceived to go against the basic needs of the baby.

"I think I would be interested in how many people go for it [the sharing of the parental leave], it just doesn't feel logical. I just don't think mums are going to go for that and I don't think that kids are going to go for it either. It's all right what you want, but nobody ever thinks about what they want, they want their mum" (Kelly, British).

As is expressed by Dave, who was expecting his first child at the time of the first interview, the baby needing his mother, in the beginning, is such a *given* it does not even 'need to be explained'.

"I think men are less maternal/paternal, whatever you want to call it. And coming from a male-dominated society has absolutely nothing to do with it, that's just, at the end of the day, the child is going to need his mother more than he needs his father at that stage. It's that simple, it doesn't really need to be explained more" (Didrik, British).

While most of the Norwegian and British couples felt there was a special bond between the mother and the baby, there were also a significant number of participants who were more critical of the assumption that the relationship between the mother and the baby was necessarily naturally strong and unique. Rather than there being this natural mother-baby bond some argued that the father could be an equally important and competent carer. The relationship a parent had with his or her child, they maintained, did not depend on that person's gender but instead was shaped by the amount of time mothers and fathers invested in building an emotional connection and closeness to their baby.

"The way it works is maybe that the one who spends the most time at home gets the closest bond" (Sindre, Norwegian).

“Yes, I think that bond can be transferred to dad and baby. It’s the one that they spend the most time with whom they get the strongest connection to” (Rasmus, Norwegian).

“No, I don't think there's anything special about the mother. I think what's the special bond, is between the main caregiver and the child” (Rachel, British).

Other parents pointed to how the mother and the father, while each having equally strong bonds to their child, that these relationships were different. The mum and dad are two separate individuals and therefore will have their unique connection with the baby: dissimilar relationships, but not dissimilar in terms of importance, depth or value.

Assumptions About Intrinsic Differences Between Men and Women

Amongst the British couples, many held assumptions about men and women’s intrinsic characteristics. These inborn differences between the sexes, they argued, made mothers more suited to stay at home with the baby. A number of the participants referred to gendered ‘inbuilt’ characteristics and ‘psychological’ traits in women which made them better prepared than men to deal with the pain of the labour, the sleepless nights and the never-ending routines of feeding the baby and changing nappies.

“I think you know it’s this nature-nurture thing where they always say women have something inbuilt in them, don’t they, that they can, you know, get through labour, they always say a man could never go through labour, whereas women are built for it, you know, psychologically, the sleepless nights, women just get through it and there’s something within them that just kicks in” (Georgina, British).

What exactly this ‘something within’ women that ‘just kicks in’ is, however, remains rather vague as does the reasons precisely for *why* it is that mothers ‘cope with’ the work associated with having a young baby better than the father.

“I think the baby and the nurturing stage, you know the feeding, the changing, the sleeping I think women definitely cope with that better than men, and I’m not sure why” (Georgina, British).

In Norway, the idea that women naturally had certain psychological traits which prepared them for the pain of childbirth, and which made them better suited to care for the baby during the initial months of its life were not at all widely held perceptions amongst the participants. One of the dads interviewed, however, who was sharing the leave period almost down the middle with his wife, was surprised and perplexed by the fact that some of his colleagues, trained psychologists, as well as some of his friends, viewed mothers as better equipped to handle the work involved in the early stages of parenthood.

“There were a lot of people though who thought it was strange [for him to take some of the shared leave], and that surprised me too, I mean, psychologists and other people who said: ‘No, but aren’t the ladies supposed to do that? They have a higher tolerance for staying up at night than men do’. And these are psychologists, walking around Oslo” (Lars, Norwegian).

While this line of thinking was absent from the interviews with Norwegian couples who took part in this research, the fact that these gendered attitudes were expressed around them indicates that such assumptions about the natural traits of men and women are still prevalent in this society.

In addition to women’s assumed inborn ability to deal with sleepless nights as well as constant feeding and nappy changing, many British mothers and fathers talked about women’s natural tendency to have more ‘patience’, ‘sensitivity’ and ‘empathy’ than what men normally have. Women were thought to have an ‘instinct’ which enabled them to better ‘understand’ and therefore better care for their babies.

“Take, take away the physical aspects of breastfeeding where women can and men can’t, but uh, you know I think there’s generally still a perception that the male is still the ‘going out and getting’ and the mother or the female is the person that stays at home and nurtures and has the sensitivity. Or being able to have the patience and sensitivity. Um, the caring side, you know, the empathy. Whereas men tend to be a bit less on that side, they’re slightly heavier on the stronger traits of personalities which don’t always fit well with looking after children” (James, British).

“Perhaps when they’re children, and they’re running around and they’re talking, the man can take on a lot more, but I still think the woman, this is very biased, but they have more instincts to handle a baby, and they maybe understand the baby a bit more than a man” (Sharon, British).

The focus in this section has been on the role that ‘nature’ plays in couples’ decisions around the sharing of the parental leave period. In Norway, women’s natural ability to breastfeed, an unquestionable difference between the sexes, coupled with official pressure to breastfeed over longer periods has a significant impact on how time at home with the baby is distributed between the mother and the father. While breastfeeding is given less emphasis as a rationale for a traditional earning-caring role allocation in the UK, assumptions about mothers’ natural closeness to their infant and women’s caring, patient and sensitive nature are encouraging gendered choices to be made around family responsibilities. In Norway, although there is less tendency to view women’s psychologies as intrinsically different from that of men as far as their suitability as a carer for their babies is concerned, the interviews still disclosed widely held perceptions about a special and close bond between a mother and her infant making it a natural conclusion for the mum to take most of the leave period.

The role of finances in determining the use of parental leave

In the UK, the level of financial compensation offered during the parental leave period is limited in comparison to the generous package Norwegian parents are given. While some of the British mothers and fathers-to-be expressed an ideological commitment to

a more 'modern' sharing of the leave period, the fact that the man was the breadwinner in the relationship complicated such egalitarian practices.

"[...] but in this particular case, yeah, the financial incentive is very strong for Daphne to take her time and not me. And that again has been a guide to what we have done and probably the most important one"
(Preston, British).

"Well, it's one of these things that I would love to do just to sort of be modern, but really, in theory, it was really never going to work because he's the breadwinner" (Sally, British).

Amongst the British couples, however, several women earned more than their male partner, in some cases even substantially more. Following the logic of finances, this situation would then dictate a less traditional sharing of the parental leave entitlements as the family would lose out more by the mother staying at home than if the couple had to get by without the income of the father. Despite the awareness of the mother being the main breadwinner none of these couples had discussed the option of the man taking some or all the weeks of leave available for sharing.

"So yeah, it probably would make sense and financial sense, but the reality is, I don't know what, why it is, but I think, she's so much happier when she's with them, so it's kind of a compromise you make" (Dominic, British).

"[...] previously where before the children came along, Georgina's contract was earning more money into us than my contract was so on a financial decision basis it would have been me staying at home" (James, British).

The reduced pay mothers receive during the first half of their maternity leave and the absence of an income during the latter half caused financial worries in most British couples. Some parents-to-be talked about how they had saved money before they started to try for a baby for them to afford for the mother to stay at home. Many women

also expressed discomfort or 'guilt' about not earning anything while they were home looking after the baby and how this lack of income made them feel financially dependent on their husbands.

"That's the hardest thing about being off this year is, I've worked since I was 16 be it you know, weekend jobs or whatever, to not have a salary now for a year is going to be, and not have my own money that I've earned, is going to be a big thing for me. I'm very independent, I don't like living off anybody, really" (Carol, British).

For Norwegian couples, finances had much less of an impact on how mothers and fathers-to-be decided to share the parental leave benefits between them. The state offers either 80% or 100% wage compensation during the time that parents are at home, depending on the length of the leave people choose to take. While this replacement of income only covers up to a certain salary level (6G), all the Norwegian participants worked for companies where the gap between the compensation by the state and their normal wage is paid by their employer to ensure that mothers and fathers are not penalised financially by staying home on leave. Mothers therefore do not lose their financial independence while caring for their baby as they continue to receive *all or a significant percentage* of their normal salary.

"Yes, I have a higher salary than the 6G which is the state's limit, and my employer covers the difference, so I get full salary throughout my leave. So, the arrangement is not that I get money from the state and from my employer, but I get my normal salary from my employer and then my employer then requests the money back from the state directly" (Annelise, Norwegian).

"I work in a place where they wish to attract young people and they compete with a lot of other companies, and these are one of those things [to pay employees their normal salary while on leave] that has become standard for this business sector" (Øystein, Norwegian).

The level of compensation Norwegian parents are offered during the weeks at home caring for their baby removes the financial obstacles for the main breadwinner to share the parental leave period with his or her partner. As the one earning the most in a couple tends to be the man this means there are few financial reasons why fathers should not take more of the shared leave.

Negotiations with communities and workplaces - gender ideologies and societal norms

Amongst the British men and women, there was great diversity in how they viewed the new policy allowing couples to share the latter half of the maternity leave provisions. Some of the participants welcomed this change in the maternity and paternity leave entitlements saying how it was legally a step in the 'right direction' which was in tune with 'new attitudes to parenting' as well as serving to send a signal that father-care was both acceptable.

"I don't know I mean it sounds like a step in the right direction to me anyway and I suppose with all these things any kind of government policy is kind of like baby steps anyway, you know you're never going to get a massive radical change overnight because it's all about attitudes and stuff" (Sally, British).

"That seems to me to be in tune with new attitudes to parenting and so, if it is a step longer that way, which it feels like, good, let's get on with it a bit faster (Preston, British).

Other parents-to-be, however, although not *against* the principle of a more equal sharing of time and responsibility for the baby between the mother and the father, felt that culturally, British society was not ready yet for a policy allowing a more equal distribution of time at home with their infant. Some believed, though, that a societal shift towards father-care being more socially accepted was indeed happening, but because more traditional or 'backward' gender role ideologies were deeply embedded

in the culture, they would take time to change. The implemented policy reform was, therefore, many felt, going to have a limited impact on actual practices.

*“Yeah, I think, I think it's a great idea, I think if you're unable to do it and you want to do it, then that's a great thing, I think. Guys are keen to be at home and look after the baby then, I mean they should be allowed to. I think attitudes in Britain are still a bit backward and I think it's still the rarity and I think, I think most guys would be worried about how the world would see it and whether it would affect their career, but I think it's definitely a good thing and I think things are changing, like guys didn't use to take the paternity leave, you know it's a relatively recent thing that you are allowed 2 weeks off. So, I think things are changing, more people will do it, but I think it will probably take a little bit of time”
(Andrew, British).*

The fact that sharing the parental leave period felt for some of the British participants as ‘a bit strange’ and how men might see being home with the baby for longer periods as ‘being less of a man’ is not necessarily that hard to understand given the right to share the latter half of the maternity leave was still a new policy that the minority of the mothers and fathers-to-be were even aware of, never mind having seriously considered using. In Norway, on the other hand, the right to share parental leave was implemented more than a generation ago, although as has been pointed out repeatedly in this chapter, this entitlement is seldom used. Leaving couples’ actual distribution of the paid time at home with the baby aside, it seems there is an acceptance for fathers in Norway spending long periods away from work caring for their children. Expressions like ‘perfectly natural’ and ‘commonly accepted’ capture widely held perceptions concerning dads’ use of the shared parental leave weeks.

“I think people would have found that perfectly natural [for her partner to have taken more leave]. I don't think they would have found that odd at all, absolutely not” (Vivian, Norwegian).

*"You see it changes and gets more commonly accepted [dads taking leave in addition to their daddy quota]. People don't see it as a bad thing"
(Hedda, Norwegian).*

In line with the expressed social acceptance of fathers taking leave in addition to their reserved daddy quota weeks, most of the Norwegian parents-to-be also felt that workplaces were generally accommodating and non-judgemental of such practices. Men taking time from the shared weeks could even be viewed by the employer as 'something really positive'. No eyebrows would have been lifted and no objections would have been made.

*"What I think is great is that I now see a lot of the men at my workplace, who have children, stay at home for much longer. A lot of them are gone for half a year. It's not perceived as a disadvantage to have children"
(Hedda, Norwegian).*

"I don't think anyone would have lifted an eyebrow, but they might have thought "Wow, okay a father that is taking half of the parental leave", as that is not so common, but I do not think they would have interfered or would have said "No, you can't do that" or "Think about us" (Sivert, Norwegian).

The seemingly accepting attitudes towards dads spending time at home with their babies found in Norwegian workplaces represent quite a contrast to the reaction British mothers and fathers-to-be expected to have been met with had they decided to share the period of parental leave more equally. While some of the Norwegian men had sat down with their managers and discussed the length of the leave they were planning to take, directly addressing the topic of shared leave, the supervisors in the British workplaces never asked fathers-to-be questions about any leave intentions apart from their entitled two weeks at home supporting the mother. This absence of a conversation is not surprising considering most of the British couples themselves did not have the changes to the parental leave present in their mind. However, it does again signal an

assumption that the leave provisions are for the mother to take. Any deviation from these normative expectations around leave-taking, many felt, would harm the man's career and cause problems for them in their workplace.

"So, I think that they would let me do it but, if it made things really difficult for everybody else, then they'd probably tell me that it was going to make it difficult for everybody else and I should probably think about how that may reflect in the future". (Andrew, British).

"[...] my boss wouldn't be impressed [if he took additional leave] because he couldn't, he couldn't cope with that situation for sure, he wouldn't be able to deal with it" (Damien, British).

Damien, who in the first interview expressed a wish to be a present and involved dad and who decided once his son was born to change his career to better accommodate fatherhood, continued by saying,

"[...] but again, if a man was to take 6 months off, I think that would be very unusual and it would be outside of the flexibility that they normally are willing to do" (Damien, British).

While the British fathers believed they would have been judged by society if they had taken more time away from work than their allocated two weeks of paternity leave, a couple of mothers who chose to return to work quicker than what they perceived to be the socially acceptable length of time women should spend at home with their baby, talked about how they felt they had to 'justify' their decision to not dedicate a full year to motherhood. These women said they suspected people around them were talking behind their backs, labelling their actions as 'not the normal' and wondering why they had children in the first place if they were just going to be 'shoving them into nursery' or 'abandoning' them at such an early stage.

“I think yes sometimes you do feel you have to justify that, which seems a bit stupid but because it’s not normal and I think, I don’t, I think, even though I know I’m not abandoning her, I do think people see it a bit like that, so I do feel that I need to justify that you know I am not abandoning her” (Cora, British).

Cora, who was the main breadwinner in the couple had agreed with her husband to ‘swap roles’ where he would stop working and become a stay-at-home dad while she would return to her career three months after their baby was born. Even though their child would be staying with the father on a full-time basis, having parental presence ‘the whole time’, the fact that this parental presence was the dad and not the mum was, Cora felt, perceived by society as a bit ‘wrong’.

“Cause some, I think a little bit like people see it as like, you know ‘Well, why are you having a baby if you are going back to work three months later?’ and I am ‘Well, for me, having a child is not about the amount of time you get to be off to work, it’s about spending time, the rest of the time’ and Patrick is going to be here the whole time anyway, but I think some people find it a bit wrong to have a child and then go straight back to work (Cora, British).

While there is a gendered ‘ownership’ of the parental leave benefits where women feel they are entitled to this time away from work caring for their infant, there is also a moral assumption that these months are to be taken by the mother. Although parental leave provisions represent a ‘right’ it also has become an ‘obligation’. Women who are challenging this mother-child dyad in the first year of parenting feel they are held accountable to these socially constructed expectations and therefore judged for their actions.

The cementing of gendered family roles

Amongst the British couples, there were no examples of fathers taking any leave in addition to their 2-week entitlements straight after the birth of their baby. In contrast to the Norwegian mothers and fathers, as will be explored in later chapters, how these

men and women had organised earning and caring responsibilities between them *after* the parental leave period had come to an end, was generally rather traditional. During the second set of interviews with the British parents, it became evident that the mother tended to be the one in charge of the domestic sphere while the dad, although in most families being a willing ‘helper’, had since the arrival of their baby taken on the responsibility of supporting his partner and his child financially. As in many of these couples, the sharing of domestic work and responsibilities had been divided along much more egalitarian lines *before* parenthood, British mothers and fathers reflected on this development of gendered family roles, pondering how and why this traditional way of organising their life had emerged. While the gendered journey of parenthood is shaped by several forces operating on individual, interactional and institutional levels, the period of leave itself, the first few months of being mothers and fathers, *this* time and *how* it is distributed in the couple, seems to have lasting effects on how family life operates going forward. Routines become ‘established’ it was argued and gendered roles become ‘entrenched’ in both ‘habits’ and ‘expectations’ where the mother is the ‘authority’ and the father is the ‘inputter’. These gendered family roles are not necessarily the result of explicit conversations but instead have emerged while the mother was at home alone with the baby on her maternity leave.

“[...] because you would’ve established a routine, not directly talking about who does what, it’s gone into what you might term ‘the man has gone out to go and get the full-time job, the more money’ and it’s not a thing about who gets what money because it’s all coming into the family pot, and Georgina has fallen into the more local aspect” (James).

Preston, a management consultant whose fiancé was at home on maternity leave with their second child at the time of this last interview, expanded further on how difficult it

is to change the gendered roles that have developed in a couple during the first few months of a baby's life.

“So over that time it just becomes entrenched that Daphne knows what the kids do and I sort of follow along and work it out and then when, even if we were both working 5 days a week or even if her job was much more well paid than mine then I still think that when we went back we would have had such entrenched habits of how things are done it would be quite difficult to flick from that to ‘Oh, now you do more of the cleaning and cooking and now you know more about the kids and spend a lot more time than I do with them’. A year, and especially the first year is quite a while in which to consciously and unconsciously get those habits really quite nailed in. And the kids expect them as well. Although I think, I suspect the kids are more flexible than we are” (Preston, British).

Similar sentiments are expressed by Sally, a civil servant, who describes in her second interview how maternity leave makes women accustomed to ‘doing all the childcare all day’ and how it therefore becomes hard to suddenly be ‘letting go of it and gradually letting other people step in’.

In Norway, while mothers also take on the role of the main carer during the initial stages of the baby's life and become responsible for ‘all the childcare all day’, this gendered pattern is challenged when their partners start their daddy quota.

Daddy quota – challenging gendered family roles

All the Norwegian fathers interviewed for this research used their full daddy-quota entitlements, apart from one dad who only took about half of the weeks reserved for him due to being in the process of a career change and therefore did not see it as the right time to go on a long leave. With the period of parental leave organised on a use-or-lose basis, how did these fathers feel about being ‘pushed’ to stay at home with their baby? What effect does the fact that these weeks are reserved for the dad have on

societal views on father care? Finally, what happens to the dynamics in the family when the mum and dad swap roles – he stays at home with the baby, and she returns to work?

Daddy quota – the gentle force making father care socially acceptable

“I am very, very happy with being forced to stay at home. Not because I am forced, well, actually, yes, precisely because I am forced to, because I would not have been at home for a single day if I had not been forced, so I am very happy with being forced. If it had not been compulsory, if we had not lost freedom on this as a family it would not have been accepted to be away and I would then not have been away on leave. I am very happy with force in relation to this” (Øystein, Norwegian).

Norwegian fathers generally felt ‘happy’ about being ‘forced to stay at home’ and regarded this way of organising the period of parental leave as a great ‘opportunity’ for them to have time away from work caring for their baby which nobody could take away from them. The daddy quota, the participants believed, served to ‘legitimise’ their weeks at home and removed normative and practical obstacles to father care. It also gave men a ‘kick in the butt’ as far as taking on more responsibility at home was concerned, encouraging male presence in children’s lives while also ‘defeating’ traditional gender role attitudes.

“It legitimises my time at home, nobody can have any objections to this” (Ole, Norwegian).

“It probably has to do with the fact, that in general, if men hadn’t received such a strong message, a lot fewer would have done it. I think it is perfectly fine that it is done this way, in order to guarantee that all children have a dad that spends some time at home with them. I remember reading in Dagbladet that one of these men who compete in terrain bicycle races across the mountains was bragging about the fact that he had not eaten dinner with his family for 5 years because he had to be out training. So it is that sort of attitude this requirement will help defeat” (Emrik, Norwegian).

Although not all the Norwegian mothers and fathers-to-be necessarily agreed with the principle of the government removing or limiting a couple’s ability to decide how to

share the period of parental leave, every single participant had a full understanding of and was in complete agreement with the goal this policy attempted to achieve. While they were not all 'fans' of the state micromanaging people's lives, it was widely regarded as 'necessary for it to become more normal for fathers to stay at home'.

Generally speaking, I perhaps think that it's good to have a choice, but you have to make the minimum adjustments. You kind of must be forced to take it, to some degree, because if not it would have been very easy for the dads to just stay at work and make money. It also, of course, has something to do with giving the men a kick in the butt but also prevents employers from exploiting parental leave. It would have been very difficult to get paternity leave if it wasn't applied by law, I think" (Sivert, Norwegian).

The fact that the parental leave consisted of a period which the couples would lose unless the father used it, also, many felt, generated an 'acceptance' amongst employers for men to spend time at home with their baby.

"Doing it this way, that you lose those weeks of leave as a family unless the daddy takes it, it's a really good way of forcing it to happen, forcing dads to stay at home. It's a bit of the same way of thinking as the quota in boardrooms and the government, and then they figure out that they actually like it a lot and the employers realise this, or they accept it, and the acceptance with the employer is totally different when it's forced" (Mari, Norwegian).

"I think that's quite super, really, both because I would like to and because it creates an acceptance, it becomes more acceptable in our society and amongst employers that I take the leave. If it had been totally uncommon and the legal framework did not encourage it, I think it would have been regarded as more, yes, I don't think the employer would have been as happy if I had taken x number of months, so I'm quite thankful that the law is helping me" (Torstein, Norwegian).

The Norwegian fathers in this study were therefore not concerned about how their use of the daddy quota would affect their career or how this time at home would be regarded by their supervisors and colleagues. Fathers staying at home during their allocated daddy weeks has become part of the normative climate in Norway and is

consequently not questioned by anybody. As has been discussed previously in this chapter, both men and women feel that the part of the parental leave which can in theory be shared in the couple, belongs to the mother, the weeks reserved for the father are also perceived to be 'owned' by him.

"I think there are two sides to this when it comes to reserving stuff for fathers, one side is that it in a way gets more, how can I put it, acceptable to take these weeks. At the same time the mother can't say, 'No, that time is mine'. So, I think both, well it just makes more dads take this leave. I have spoken to several women, and they have said things like 'No, he'll get his weeks, but nothing more, the rest is mine'" (Henning, Norwegian).

From 'Helper' to 'Expert'

During the second set of interviews, the Norwegian couples reflected on the time the father had spent at home on leave. A theme that quickly emerged was the feeling that these weeks of father-care had improved the relationship between the parents as the dad by taking on the role previously held by the mum came to 'understand' the work and the stress involved in caring for a baby. This 'insight', many believed, cannot be gained without the man taking on the daily tasks and the overall responsibility for the home and the child. Several of the fathers expressed how they had been so ignorant of the labour this role entailed, wondering 'How difficult could it be?'. The mum is home the whole day, why does she not get more done?

"I have to admit that when Mari was home with Sindre and I was working I was thinking 'Why don't you manage to get more stuff done in a day?'. She didn't have time; I didn't understand it. She was home the whole day; how difficult could it be? That is until you sit there yourself. You follow the time, 'Right, now he's sleeping, I have half an hour to eat, to have a shower'. And then he bloody wakes up 10 minutes before he's supposed to, and you haven't had a chance to have a shower yet. What do you do then? You take him into the bathroom with you in his nappy and have a shower while he's there. Yeah, so you get a pretty good insight into what life is like for the one who stays at home. That was one of the good things about it. It does something to the relationship with your

partner, it's not only about the child, but it does also something to the relationship, you get more understanding' (Henning, Norwegian).

"Well, I discovered what it's like to have children. What it takes, both in the practical sense and how to build a relationship. I got an understanding for what Hedda had been through as well" (Snorre, Norwegian).

The time at home on daddy leave also allows a closer 'bond' between the father and the child to be created. Many of the men talked about how a different 'connection' to their baby emerged during their weeks on leave, they became the 'primary caretaker' and the one who was familiar with the child's 'whole routine'.

"Yes, and afterwards, when both of you are going back to work, you both know what it's like to be home. I think it's good for the relationship, and I think it's really good for your connection to the child because when Mari was at home with Sindre, I became no 2, it was Mari who knew when is he going to have a nap, when is he going to eat, what does he eat, his whole routine, and how far he was development-wise, like now he does that and now he does this. When I was home with him it was me who knew the routine, right, I knew it all" (Henning, Norwegian).

"I gained a lot and I hope Sigrid did as well, by her feeling safer and more comfortable with me and that I was not just a substitute, but I also became the primary caretaker" (Sivert, Norwegian).

The dad becoming the primary carer and the 'expert' on the baby's development and routine as well as taking on the overall responsibility for the running of the household seems to re-establish 'the balance' in the relationship, distributing the 'burden' of parenthood more evenly between the mother and the father. The traditional gendered family roles which emerge during the first few months of parental leave when the woman is home with the baby are challenged when the man temporarily takes her place. The daddy quota, therefore, many feel, ensures a 'more similar perception of reality' between the parents and gets the couple 'back on track' in terms of an equal sharing of family work.

“I’ve thought a lot about [...] as an extra thing, which is good when daddy, or Henning, is at home, is that we get the balance back in the relationship, so that he can be the one who takes care of the cooking and I am the one who comes home to dinner, and he’ll do the laundry while he is at home. He’s the one who notices that the house is dirty, now we have a lot of dust bunnies, now we must vacuum because he walks around and steps in it. So, he comes back on track a bit because it gets a bit imbalanced when I’m the one who’s at home and does those things. And then there’s the question of how you come out the other end. It is possible that he has different standards, or wishes regarding how it’s going to be, what is okay and not okay, than the ones I have. But at least we’ll get a more even balance on the housework and get a bit more similar perceptions of reality. Then we can agree, in the end, when everyday life begins again, how we wish to do it. And then we have a similar, or both of us will have experienced it and felt it ourselves” (Mari, Norwegian).

Although all the Norwegian fathers spoke about their time at home with the baby on leave in positive terms, emphasising the establishment of a close bond with their child, the gaining of valuable insights and becoming a more confident and capable parent, some of the men also referred to these weeks as a lonely period. While the mothers often had friends on maternity leave whom they could spend time with or women they had met at various pre-natal classes, the fathers, because their leave period was shorter, did not have this social set-up. The participants of the organised activities for parents on leave like coffee mornings, playgroups and exercise groups tended to be mainly mothers which made the men feel like outsiders or even intruders.

“I think it’s a little bit different to men as well because we have meet-ups and stuff like that. It’s set out to accommodate mothers. Even though he had looked forward to it and loves being at home I know that he got bored a little bit more often than I did. I know that I get up to more fun” (Siri, Norwegian).

“I think it takes quite a lot for a man to run around with a buggy at a group workout, for instance. If 12 out of 15 are women, or 14 out of 15. It’s a different kind of offer but working out with children would probably turn out fine. Hedda went to SATS and Mini-SATS, and I tried to do the same, but when I got there, I was alone [the only man]” (Snorre, Norwegian).

The loneliness of the daddy's leave led some of the couples to arrange this time differently when their second child arrived. Instead of the father staying at home alone with the baby, the mother in some cases decided to take out her holiday during these weeks and occasionally even went on unpaid leave. This way of using the parental leave benefits, although not removing the opportunity for dads to experience being the primary carer and in charge of the household, mothers sharing some of these weeks with the father, reduces the period of role reversal and hence serves to limit the balancing out of gendered family practices. Staying at home *with* the mother, her time caring for the baby overlapping with the time of the father represents more of a continuation of roles and responsibilities rather than a decisive break from the gendered journey of parenthood which all couples *start* and most couples *continue*.

Concluding remarks

The months that new mothers often spend at home following the birth of their baby, in the relative absence of other adults, free of work obligations, is the time when what is colloquially referred to as 'maternal instinct' is created (Oakley, 1979). During this early stage of parenthood, women develop a sense of responsibility that comes from being the primary carer. They learn cues, understand needs, establish close emotional bonds with their baby, know their routines and build confidence as a parent (Walzer, 1998).

Fathers, in most families, do not have this time with their infants. In important ways, this period serves to cement gendered parenting patterns that are both difficult to undo and hard to discern as they become naturalised as time passes. The fact that in both Norway and the UK, couples are allowed to share a large proportion of the parental leave means that the initial creation of these traditional family roles is not necessarily a path which mothers and fathers have to follow. Instead, these parental leave provisions allowing fathers to stay at home caring for the baby while the mother returns to paid

work, open new ways of 'doing parenthood', giving men and women the option of organising earning and caring roles and responsibilities along more egalitarian lines.

As is evident both from national statistics and from this study, however, couples deciding to use their sharing entitlements and opting for an equal distribution of the leave period is far from the norm. While most scholars believe policies can indeed induce men to share in the leave time they have been divided over the influence of culture and institutions on caring decisions. Institutional approaches have long dominated this debate (see for example Gornick and Meyers, 2008, 2009; Lewis, 2009), yet many have maintained that these family policies are mediated through cultural values. Through the interviews with Norwegian and British couples, listening to and analysing the views, experiences and stories of not only mothers but also fathers, it became clear that there are multiple factors shaping the gendered use of parental leave benefits. These factors should not be regarded as 'competing' explanations for why couples tend to adopt more gender-traditional family roles in the transition to parenthood. Instead, as this chapter has shown, there are complex interconnections between individuals' gendered selves, gendered cultural expectations and gendered social institutions which together are guiding interactional patterns in a couple and their decisions around earning and caring roles and responsibilities. The 'doing of gender' or the 'doing of parenthood' in gender-traditional ways, however, is not, as is evident from this research, unavoidable as the couples interviewed did not all follow a uniform path. Although structures do indeed mould individual choice and social interaction, the participants in this study also respond to the structures of opportunities and constraints, sometimes in conforming ways, sometimes actively rebelling against what they consciously knew was expected of them as men and women, mothers and

fathers. That said, while there are encouraging signs including a cultural acceptance of father-care in Norway and a growing positive reception for policies allowing dads to spend time at home with the baby in the UK, the overall trend was nevertheless one of gendered use and gendered ownership of parental leave period, excluding the weeks reserved for the man.

According to Risman, 'We need to understand when and how inequality is constructed and reproduced to deconstruct it' (Risman, 2004: 445). The aim of this chapter has been exactly that. Why is it that when given the legal opportunity to share the parental leave period in a more egalitarian way do couples continue to follow gender-traditional paths? Even in Norway, when the right to share the leave was introduced more than a generation ago, why do today's mothers still take the vast majority of this time at home with the baby? While the answers to these questions are not simple, the in-depth interviews with the couples for this study nevertheless provided insights into the individual, the institutional and the interactional dimensions which all need to be included in the explanations for these gendered practices and outcomes. Although Norwegian parents and Norwegian society have both legally and culturally embraced equality between men and women to a greater extent than is the case for the more gender-traditional UK, the early stage of parenthood seems to, even in a country known for its promotion of the caring father as the companion of the working mother, include practices particularly resistant to change. As was the case in the UK, assumptions about the 'natural' connection between the mother and the baby and ideas about it being 'natural' for the woman to be the main carer during the early stages of parenthood prevail in both societies leading to the gendered ownership of the parental leave seldom being questioned or a more egalitarian distribution of this time often not being

considered. In the UK, the almost complete absence of any thought given to the possibility of transferring some of the maternity leave to the father is hardly a surprise, however, seeing that many of these parents-to-be were not even aware of the recent legal amendments to the policy. If any change is going to happen in how parents distribute the time at home with the baby, the very minimum for such development to take place is knowledge about the options available.

McKay and Doucet stated that 'research that focuses on gendered constraints on fathers who do not take leave would help deepen our understanding of gender processes at work in households, workplaces and communities' (McKay and Doucet, 2010: 317). This study has indeed focused on the gendered constraints on fathers who did *not* take leave, but it has also explored the experiences of men who *did* take time away from work to care for their baby, even if these weeks at home in most cases were the result of a 'gentle push' by the Norwegian state in the form of the daddy-quota. Nevertheless, this specific policy design has succeeded in achieving what the introduction of the shared weeks has failed to do: making fathers stay at home on parental leave.

Chapter 6: Norway – a gender equality utopia in the making?

Working motherhood and caring fatherhood

In the previous chapter, attention was drawn to the gendered family practices in the initial stages of parenthood. The decision amongst British couples to distribute the parental leave period along more traditional lines may not be a surprising trend given the fact that the right to share these entitlements was a newly introduced social policy which appeared to have been inadequately communicated to the public. The gendered ownership of the parental leave period and the traditional sharing practises amongst Norwegian couples, on the other hand, represents more of a ‘puzzle’ (Sainsbury, 2001: 113) given this country’s profound and long-running political commitment to gender equality and to father-care. This chapter will therefore look at whether the traditionalism evident in the *use* and *ownership* of what is essentially equality-promoting parental leave entitlements continues to feature in the stories of first-time mothers and fathers as their journey of parenthood continues. Research indicates that there is a tendency amongst Norwegian mothers to work full-time, yet spend fewer hours in the labour market, earn less and care more for their children than their male partners do (Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006). Part-time work is, according to Kitterød and Pettersen (2006), still a female option in Norway, whereas long-hour employment arrangements are mostly found among fathers. As far as housework and childcare are concerned, the resistance to embracing equal sharing practices is well documented (see for example Kitterød and Lappegård, 2012).

Bearing in mind the gendered journey of parenthood highlighted in the literature, and the traditional pattern seen in couples’ decisions around the sharing of parental leave entitlements, the question that arises is this: will the largely unequal distribution of

market work and family work established during the first months of motherhood and fatherhood continue, or will a more egalitarian trend emerge? Although the Norwegian mothers in this study spent a considerably longer time at home with their baby, there was still a radical alteration in the dynamics of most couples when the father started his paternity leave and replaced his partner as the primary carer as she returned to paid work. While the period when the Norwegian men went from 'helpers' to 'experts' was relatively short, as was emphasised in Chapter 5, these weeks nevertheless seemed in many couples to re-establish 'the balance' in the relationship and a more egalitarian earning and caring pattern was to some degree temporarily restored. The extent to which this 'shake up' in gendered family roles is then followed by permanent egalitarian parenting practices and housework sharing, however, remains to be seen. This chapter will explore whether the gendered ways of 'doing parenthood' will emerge as the overriding trend amongst mothers and fathers or whether the couples will instead break with the traditional roles adopted during their baby's first months and embrace the dual-carer/dual-earner family model promoted by the Norwegian state. Building on the voices of both female and male interviewees, this chapter aims to answer the questions of *how* and *why* men and women decided on their existing distribution of caring and earning roles and responsibilities. It will look at the adjustments they made to both their *domestic* as well as their *working* lives, how they feel about these alterations and what the consequences of these choices are. This will involve an analysis of the reproduction, the dismantling and the undoing of gender taking place as men and women go from a life as a couple to that of a family. Individual, relational and institutional factors will be included as mothers' and fathers' experiences, both at home and at work, are explored. The red thread running through this chapter is egalitarianism but also inequality, untraditional sharing patterns, as well as traditional set-ups.

Returning to work after maternity leave

The well-documented tendency for women to either 'scale back' on their employment commitments or leave the labour market completely when they become mothers, was not a trend found amongst the Norwegian participants. At the time of the second interview, all the women were back in full-time positions. The women's earnings were the same as it had been before the start of their maternity leave, or higher, and they were holding jobs with either similar or more advanced seniority. For many of the interviewees, however, the idea of returning to work after an extensive period at home with their baby was a transition that had caused much stress. Karianne described her maternity leave as a 'bubble of poo, lack of sleep, feeding and all the rest' where her existence had exclusively revolved around the baby and his needs. When she was coming to the end of this 'bubble' she feared her 'head' was no longer up for the challenges of working life. The sentiment that the months at home had somehow reduced one's ability to perform at work, was found in the stories of several Norwegian mothers. The gendered use of parental leave benefits discussed in the previous chapter meant that the women had spent much longer periods away from the labour market than their male partners and that their transition back into their jobs was a more complicated process. The stress and anxiety several mothers felt as their return to work was approaching, however, seemed to have been unfounded. Although it should be mentioned that one mother told the story of how her old office had been given to somebody else while she was on leave, the experience of going back to job roles, meeting colleagues again, settling back into work routines and employment demands, generally went much better than expected. The women found that their heads still 'worked surprisingly well' and they were able to be 'back on track again' quicker than they had feared. Co-workers were understanding, helpful and welcoming. None of the

women felt they were regarded differently in the office now that they were mothers, and no areas of responsibility had been taken away from them.

*“I dreaded it a bit, really, but it went beyond my expectations. It has been nice, socially as well as professionally, so yes, it has really been good”
(Siri, Norwegian).*

The relatively unproblematic transition from maternity leave back to full-time paid work was also aided by the fact that most women returned to their jobs when their partner was on leave. This temporary reorganisation of roles in the couple meant that the father for a few weeks shouldered the main responsibilities for the house chores while the mothers settled back into working life. Many mothers told stories about how they during this time were often returning from the office in the afternoon to a home where dinner had already been cooked, and grocery shopping had already been done.

When talking about women’s return to full-time work, it should be mentioned as well that a handful of mothers were still breastfeeding their babies at the time when they went back to their jobs. To continue this practice, these women utilised their right to *breastfeeding breaks* of two hours per day where they either, depending on their child’s routine, started their working day later and finished earlier, or they left the office around lunchtime and returned in the afternoon.

*“It was super. I didn’t feel like it was stressful, it just felt good to be able to see Nina [her daughter] in the middle of the day. It was really nice”
(Siri, Norwegian).*

While this section has painted a rather ‘rosy’ picture of the Norwegian women’s reintegration into the labour market, it is vital to bear in mind that these mothers had a rather ‘soft’ landing back into their jobs as the unpaid domestic work was mainly shouldered by their partner. The next part of this chapter will move beyond the initial

experiences of combining motherhood with full-time employment. It will look at the driving forces behind the dual-earner family patterns, why the female interviewees all decided to return to paid work, the experiences of combining earning and caring for both men and women and the adjustments that were made.

The dual-earner family model – political ideal and reality

“I think that I have the perception that I have to work, be out amongst other people, learn and contribute to society” (Sunniva, Norwegian).

The perception that every adult member of society ‘has to work’, the idea that both the man and the woman, the father and the mother in a household, should contribute financially to the home and society at large, was a family model every Norwegian couple taking part in this study expressively supported, both *before* and *after* the arrival of the baby. Mothers as well as fathers took it for granted that their partner would continue working on a full-time basis, regardless of parenthood. That was the set-up men and women *wanted* and *expected* of each other and of themselves. It was also the pattern they saw amongst their friends, siblings and colleagues.

“The way I know Helena, she would like to work, and I would like that too” (Ole, Norwegian).

“That [working] is what I expect of myself, and, I suppose, others expect of me” (Vivian, Norwegian).

While some of the mothers vocalised how a reduced working week could potentially decrease stress and pressure, allow more time with their children and generally serve to achieve a better work-life balance, making alterations to their employment commitment, involving either going down to a part-time position or leaving their job altogether, were not options any of the women had seriously considered or had spoken

to their partner about. As Annelise, a district judge, answered when she was asked whether changing her working commitment had ever been a topic of conversation with her husband:

“No, that is something that has never crossed my mind or been up for discussion” (Annelise, Norwegian).

Working reduced hours or being a stay-at-home mother was associated with a way of life belonging to foreign countries and cultures encouraging a more traditional split in family roles. Having said that, going back only one generation, the male breadwinner/female homemaker model was indeed a common arrangement in Norwegian society. While none of the couples interviewed for this study deviated from the dual-earner family model, many of them had themselves grown up with a mother who had either a reduced attachment to the labour market or no involvement in paid work at all. This traditional distribution of roles and responsibilities between husband and wife, however, was generally considered by the interviewees as damaging to women and hence not a model they had any wish to repeat. Some of the interviewees reflected on how their mothers had chosen a path where they ended up depending on ‘a man’s money’ and where they did not develop their ‘potential’.

“She is a clever lady and she probably sees what she would have liked to have done, I think she would have liked to develop some of her potential, also in the world of work, not least in order to earn her own money and not to depend on a man’s money, not that my dad is tight or anything like that, and they have a very open and tidy relationship with regards to money, but I do think that she would have liked to have done that, and if she could go back in time I think she would have made different choices” (Pål, Norwegian).

A family arrangement where the woman has limited or no attachment to the world of paid work was also considered by some of the interviewees to be a 'luxury set-up' that normal people simply could not afford.

"I mean, there are lots of other things I can think of that I would like to do if I had the opportunity to stay at home for several years with the children, I do think that that would have been, it sounds nice, to be able to be together with the child and to do other things, but that is a luxury set-up" (Helena, Norwegian).

The lifestyle enjoyed by the Norwegian couples, both before and after they had become parents, depended on a dual income. As Tonje, an Administration Assistant, said,

"[...] we depend on having two incomes, that's just the reality" (Tonje, Norwegian).

Because mothers and fathers as equal contributors to family finances have become an established normative ideal as well as a dominant lived reality amongst Norwegian parents, being home, some argued, would not only lead to reduced economic resources, it would also be a rather 'boring lifestyle' due to the absence of other women and children at home. Who would they socialise with if there were 'nobody else who stays at home'? The themes of *boredom* and *loneliness* were mentioned by several of the interviewees when they talked about what a life with either reduced or no connections to the labour market would entail for them or their partner.

"[...] I think it would be quite a boring lifestyle, as there is nobody else who stays at home and I also think it is good for Sigrid to go to nursery, especially as there are no other children that are at home in the daytime. If this had been in the 50s, it would have been different, as there would have been more of a social community with other mothers and children, whereas now it would have been just the two of us in a flat. So, I would not like to stay at home, I need to work, and she needs to go to nursery" (Sunniva, Norwegian).

Mari, a PR Consultant, imagined being a stay-at-home mum and the lack of adult interaction associated with this life choice would eventually lead to her start 'talking to the wall'. In addition to work providing a social environment, Mari also pointed out how being employed enables her to use her education, learn new skills and allows her to engage in areas of work that she is passionate about.

"It's important to me to work. And I learn things and I use my education and do those things that I'm passionate about. And not least the environment and to be with people, not only staying home and talk to the wall" (Mari, Norwegian).

Mari emphasised how 'passionate' she was about the area of work she was involved in. Similar sentiments were found in the interview with Saga, a dance instructor. To Saga, leaving her current job, a job she described as her 'life project', would entail losing part of who she was and would therefore not be beneficial to herself or to her daughter. While Saga *did* continue working full-time after the period of parental leave, she was still one of two women among the Norwegian mothers interviewed for this study, whose journey of parenthood became a deeply gendered experience. For Saga, motherhood and how she and her husband shared domestic responsibilities, made it difficult for her to continue with the same level of commitment to her job after they had become parents. Their story, however, will form part of the discussions later in this chapter.

Paid work seemed for many, if not for all, of the Norwegian women to represent a significant part of their identity. The feeling that their job provided them with self-worth, stimuli and opportunities for learning and growth meant that a life without these intrinsic rewards and structure was not particularly appealing. While it was a common consensus that becoming a stay-at-home mother would be damaging to themselves as

individuals, this life choice, some women argued, would also indirectly hurt their children as it would lead them to become ‘frustrated’, ‘grumpy’, ‘self-centred’ and ‘not the person’ that they really are.

“Work for me is very... you work because you like what you do. You contribute to something. You have good colleagues. You learn and challenge yourself. After taking up higher education, I think that for my part it would be a disappointment not to be able to use it. Then you would have had to find something else to use your brain for. I don’t think I would have been a very good mother if I had to stay at home full-time. I think I would have been a bit frustrated” (Hedda, Norwegian).

Although there were parts of their job that the women interviewed for this study liked more than others, work was generally described with words like ‘fun’, ‘exciting’, ‘enjoyable’ and ‘interesting’.

“...with my job, it’s so fantastic that I haven’t really got any other hobbies, the work that I do is my hobby, kind of” (Saga, Norwegian).

“For me, it is not a good option to be a stay-at-home mum, neither is the option of working part-time. I really like to work given that I have a type of job like the one I have now, which is exciting and enjoyable, but does not take up all my time” (Annelise, Norwegian).

Whereas the normative climate in Norway seems to encourage both mothers and fathers to continue working on a full-time basis, what ‘full-time’ means in actual hours spent on their job, however, will vary. In the interview with Annelise quoted above, she says she finds her job as a district judge both ‘exciting’ and ‘enjoyable’ but simultaneously points out that her work ‘does not take up all of my time’. In Annelise’s case, she is in a position where she can pursue her career in the legal profession while also having time for herself outside of work. For Annelise, and, as will be discussed below, for the vast majority of the Norwegian parents interviewed for this study, deciding to remain in full-time employment does not mean they are choosing *away* a life

where they see their children. Parenthood and a full attachment to the labour market do not appear to collide. This chapter will now turn to the family-friendly workplace exploring how organisational cultures and practices enable the dual-income family model to not only be a reality but also to be a reality in which both women and men feel they are active and involved mothers and fathers who successfully combine the roles of earning and caring.

The family-friendly workplace

“I feel that my workplace is pretty accommodating to our family lives, they have accepted the consequences of the fact that a lot of their employees are young people who are having children” (Sivert, Norwegian).

During their interviews, most of the Norwegian men and women spoke about how their jobs and the culture of their organisation allowed for a combination of parenthood and full-time employment. While there were indeed exceptions to this trend which will be discussed later in this chapter, overall, the workplaces of most of the interviewees were described in positive and family-friendly terms. This sentiment was expressed by individuals who were employed in female-dominated industries as well as male-dominated ones, in highly skilled professions as well as in low-skilled vocations, for large multinational organisations as well as for small businesses, in private corporations as well as in the public sector. Having a family was considered by many of the Norwegian participants to be a natural part of life and a reality which companies had to adjust to. While this ‘accommodating’ workplace that has ‘accepted the consequences’ of their employees having domestic responsibilities may not have been the type of corporation previous generations of Norwegian wage earners always encountered, the family-friendly organisation was often considered part of the ‘expectations of modern

life'. Corporations were *expected* to operate in ways that were compatible with the caring responsibilities of their employees instead of mothers and fathers being asked to adjust their family and working life to the needs of the company.

"So, I think we are developing a much healthier culture and healthier balance, it is the realisation that times are changing, and this is a modern firm, and we have to fit in with the expectations of modern life" (Synne, Norwegian).

There was a general feeling amongst the Norwegian couples that organisations failing to make accommodations for a healthy work-life balance would lose young talent. Greedy employers complicating their ability to combine earning and caring could simply be exchanged for careers or jobs in places where such conflicts between the demands of one's private life and that of paid work were less prevalent. Although the interviewees were aware that the family-friendly working conditions many of them enjoyed were not the cultures always found in workplaces outside of Norway, the possibility of combining earning and caring responsibilities has become the 'new normal', and to a large degree a *taken for granted* aspect of a full-time job.

"It's a workplace that would like to have young leaders and that would like for it to be possible to combine work and family time. People here normally leave the office early, and there's a culture where that is acceptable" (Mari, Norwegian).

An accommodating and flexible workplace where people 'adjust' and 'work around' their own and others' family responsibilities, where the presence of children is not regarded as an obstacle to employees' job performance or leading to questions being asked about their career commitment, are cultural qualities being reinforced by the presence of good role models in the organisation. Several of the interviewees talk about how their managers are not only showing flexibility and understanding but also how

they lead the way by working around their domestic responsibilities. This was the case for male as well as female managers.

“There are a lot of fathers in the office. My boss, for example, is all the time home with ill children. Even though it’s a very male-dominated work environment there’s no problem with this. I think it’s just regarded as a positive thing that you have children because they would like to have happy employees with a stable private life. I think that’s the attitude, that everything is just going to be fine” (Erik, Norwegian).

“I spoke to my boss just before I left [today] and he is a person who is coming from PVC, he is used to working a hell of a lot, he’s a very clever guy who is consequent that ‘No, it’s 3.30 pm and I have to go and pick up the kids from nursery now’. And he is our second most senior boss in the company and that I think shows that there are very good role models” (Kari, Norwegian).

The ‘good role models’, however, have in some organisations only started to appear recently. Synne, an HR manager, talked about how there has been a ‘turnover in senior management’ in her corporation and how this change in leadership has generated a more family-friendly working culture.

“There has been an active movement towards better maternity leave arrangements. There has also been a turnover of senior management, and the new managers appear to be more liberal on this issue, so it is a result of a change in leadership” (Synne, Norwegian).

In her interview, Synne referred to how there has been ‘an active movement towards better maternity leave arrangements’ in her company. She also mentioned how conscious efforts are being made to encourage female employees to return to full-time positions after their leave has come to an end and how there was a culture of ‘tolerant attitudes about expectations’ allowing an easier integration of earning and caring responsibilities. The recently established culture of encouraging women to not only *return* to the organisation after their maternity leave but to return on a *full-time basis* also entailed, according to Synne, giving employees, male and female, a certain degree of

freedom to adjust their working hours as well as the flexibility to occasionally work from home. The next section will explore the themes of flexibility and autonomy. It will analyse how organisations, where workers are given high levels of independence and trust, are more successful in creating an environment which allows parenthood and paid labour to be combined.

Flexibility and autonomy

"I have very flexible working hours. I can really come and go as I, well, no, I can't come and go totally as I would like, but I do to a large extent regulate my own hours. My boss is very much a mother of small children, yes. It's very flexible, I would claim" (Kari, Norwegian).

In addition to feeling they received a warm welcome on their return to work after the end of their maternity leave, as was discussed above, many of the Norwegian mothers also came back to job roles with great flexibility. The freedom to largely regulate their hours allowed for an easier adjustment to full-time employment. For these women, work hours can then be distributed 'over the course of one day' in a way that works best for them, and instead of being required to be present in the office 'for a certain amount of time', tasks which have yet to be completed can be brought back home and done in the evening once the child is asleep and the house is quiet.

The flexibility enjoyed by many of the Norwegian mothers did not only concern *which* hours and the *number* of hours they worked. It also included the possibility to sometimes decide *where* they wanted to sit down and concentrate on job tasks. The option of working from home gave flexibility and provided employees with the opportunity to step out of the busy office and focus without too many interruptions.

"The time I have available to do my job, that part is the difficult aspect. But with the flexibility my manager is giving me, when I need it I can sit

at home and work and make sure I'm on top of things" (Guro, Norwegian).

While flexibility and autonomy eased the merger between the dual responsibilities of employment and motherhood, women were not the only ones who had a large degree of independence in their job roles. Several men were employed in organisations which specified 'core hours' when they were expected to be present in the office. The rest of their working day they were free to 'adjust' themselves.

"My core hours are from 9 until 2 or half 2, apart from that I have the opportunity to adjust it in both directions" (Sivert, Norwegian).

"The overall hours are 8 to 4. Between 9 o'clock and 2 o'clock, I must be present at work, but the remaining hours are more flexible. I can work a bit longer, or a bit shorter if I need to. The working week is 37 ½ hours during the winter, and then I have a 30-hour week during the summer" (Torstein Norwegian).

As will be discussed further in this chapter, Norwegian couples generally *shared* the job of dropping their children off at nursery in the morning and picking them up again in the afternoon. In couples where both parents or one of them had a certain level of flexibility at work, this made the daily family logistics easier to manage and the dual-earner family model possible to sustain. While some Norwegian nurseries stayed open until 5 p.m., most of them closed at 4.30 p.m. Employees required to stay in the office until past nursery opening hours would therefore struggle to combine parenthood with a full-time job.

"[...] it makes things a lot easier when you have a flexible employer and a flexible job situation. Both of you can't have the same working hours. If we both had worked from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. it wouldn't have worked in relation to the nursery" (Guro, Norwegian).

While the independence and trust given to many of the Norwegian employees made the practical aspects of juggling earning and caring responsibilities easier to manage, the fact that not only are their working hours *flexible*, but hours also relatively *short*, serves to further support the dual-income model of the family. As will be illustrated below, the full-time weekly hours of the couples interviewed for this study were generally well within the range of what would be compatible with their roles as parents. The exceptions to this trend as well as the career changes made by the interviewees who were not in jobs with family-compatible working hours, will be discussed later.

Working hours

As was highlighted earlier in this chapter, all the Norwegian men and women interviewed for this study embraced the dual-earner/dual-carer family model. This setup was aided by working hours designed around the assumption that the standard employee, both male employees as well as female, were required to fulfil, domestic responsibilities. The men and women taking part in this study were hence generally in jobs and careers which had moved away from the 'male model' of full-time employment and instead embraced the 'parent' or 'carer model' of labour market participation. Amongst the couples interviewed, the normal working week usually consisted of around 37.5 hours. Most men and women started their jobs somewhere between 8 and 9 a.m. and finished between 4 and 5 p.m., with a 30-minute break in the middle.

"You arrive in the office 8 or 9 in the morning and you're off again 4 or 5 in the afternoon, this is the normal working hours in Norway and if I work a couple of hours a couple of times a week, it's not that bad, really. That's totally fine" (Henning, Norwegian).

"It's pretty empty [in the office] at 4 p.m." (Mari).

The notion that working 8 am until 4 pm is what ‘everybody else does’ holds largely true amongst the Norwegian interviewees who lived in either small towns or rural areas. While there were occasions when these men and women had been asked to stay at work for longer than their normal day, this overtime had been compensated for either by providing extra pay or additional vacation. The *acceptance* for employees to not work beyond their contractual weekly hours was sometimes also an *expectation* where ‘people will look at you in a strange way’ if the 8-4 pattern is deviated from.

“So, yeah, 7 and a half hours working day and people will look at you in a strange way if you work longer than that” (Anders, Norwegian).

Amongst the couples with these short working weeks, few expressed any real worry about how they were going to combine their jobs with parenthood during their initial interview. Their earning responsibilities were not perceived to complicate their future caring role and hence no significant alterations to their daily routines were planned post parental leave.

“No, I really don’t think my job and the position I have will cause difficulties for my role as a father in any significant way” (Emrik, Norwegian).

While the relatively short working week was the norm for *most* of the Norwegian interviewees, it was not the reality for *all*. Men and women who held jobs in the capital city of Oslo often dedicated more hours to paid employment. Although for some it was only a case of an hour or two more per day compared to how people in less urban areas worked, for others their labour market participation meant they had little if any time for their private lives. Saga, a manager of a ballet school owned by her husband’s family, who had only had 2 sick days in 8 years, said she dedicated all her awake hours to her job.

"[...] I'm working from when I wake up until I go to bed. It's my ballet school and it has been my baby until now. So, I answer the phone, emails, text messages, Facebook messages from 8.15 a.m. until 11 p.m." (Saga, Norwegian).

Whereas the working hours described by Saga are far from the trend amongst employees in Oslo, there were several examples of men and women staying in the office considerably longer than the typical Norwegian employees do. Snorre, a product development manager said he worked 'at least 12 hours on average' per day. A similarly time-greedy position was held by Annelise, a lawyer working for a large law firm. At the time of the first interview, Annelise was on secondment working as a district judge for half a year, but she described her normal daily office hours ranging between 9 and 18 hours.

"I used to arrive around 9 a.m., yeah... 9.. and then I left for the day rarely before 6 p.m. and rarely after midnight." (Annelise, Norwegian).

In stark contrast to all the other Norwegian mothers and fathers-to-be, Annelise was the only interviewee who had observed how other women in her company often decided to resign from the law firm when they returned to work after their maternity leave. The long-hour culture made earning and caring 'too difficult to combine' and the company ended up with a gendered organisational hierarchy where women were mainly employed at the bottom of the corporate pyramid.

"And at the bottom, there are mainly women, perhaps 70% are women, you lose them along the way, and it's typical that you lose them after they come back from leave, they work there for a while and then they realise it's too difficult to combine. They feel guilty about not being at home and then they feel guilty about not working enough. Because work measures everything you do in the number of hours you bill, and there's this chase for enough time, so you feel guilty if there's too little to do at work because then you'll get too few hours and then if there's too much to do you are then too little at home" (Annelise, Norwegian).

Although Annelise was indeed conscious of the fact that her future role as a mother may not be compatible with her job in the law firm, she felt comfortable there would be other good positions with equally good opportunities' elsewhere that she could pursue post-maternity leave. As will be discussed more later, Annelise *did* indeed end up leaving her law firm and Snorre, the product development manager, also eventually decided to hand in his resignation. Having said that, from their stories, they did not feel they had compromised their *career*. Instead, according to themselves, they had chosen equally interesting paths in jobs requiring fewer hours. Saga's journey, on the other hand, was *all* about compromises and her experiences. Both her domestic and her work life will be explored in detail below.

The fear of not having 'enough time to work enough hours', was not only a feeling expressed by men and women having time greedy careers. Even participants working more 'normal' hours were aware that they may feel stretched. Many interviewees were therefore open to the possibility of either finding a new position or they were planning adjustments to their working schedule like being 'stricter' with their hours or removing certain aspects of their job.

"[...] I have a goal to arrive at work at 8 every day and come home as early as possible. And to be strict" (Sunniva, Norwegian).

"I think I will leave for work earlier to then get back home earlier. And I think, I mean I see how the other guys are working, they do exactly that, they arrive early to the office and then they leave earlier and then maybe they work a small hour in the evening" (Henning, Norwegian).

The anticipated changes to their working life were not alterations *only* or even *mainly* planned by mothers-to-be. Men with job demands they or their partner felt could be difficult to combine with their role as a father, were equally prepared to take the necessary steps to achieve a balance between their responsibilities as wage earners and

as parents. Ole, an investment manager, talked in his first interview about how it was more important to him 'to be present with children than being a hard-working finance cliché'. Similar views were articulated by Per, an estate agent, who said he would 'rather earn less and be with the kid than earn more and not seeing the kid, not be there'. While the interviewees expected the two-income family model to involve 'daily challenges', the point at which these daily challenges became a 'constant conflict', then changes would be made. The willingness to carry out these job adjustments was voiced as much by male participants as they were expressed by females.

"I can see there being daily challenges, yes, [combining fatherhood with work] I do, but not as a constant conflict. And if it gets to that point, I'll just have to change my job. People change jobs all the time" (Øystein, Norwegian).

Although there were no gendered patterns found amongst the parents-to-be as far as *planned* job changes were concerned, foreseeing and being 'open to' possible career modifications is, however, different from *making* these adjustments if the situation so requires. What decisions *were* made once parenthood was a lived reality and the daily challenge of combining motherhood and fatherhood with full-time work was no longer merely a theoretical balancing act? Does the gender equality found in couples' *anticipation* of parenthood translate into gender equality in the *actual modifications* they ended up making to their labour market participation? Overall, amongst the women and men taking part in this research, limited change to working hours seemed to have happened post-parental leave. Due to the short working week, most interviewees had before they became mothers and fathers, no significant alterations were called for.

“I think I work about the same, really. I don’t think I work anymore or any less than I did [before children]” (Åge, Norwegian).

For the parents whose labour market attachment demanded further time commitment than the standard Norwegian working day, on the other hand, changes *had* been implemented by both mothers as well as fathers to ease the combination of their dual role responsibilities. Annelise had decided to take the job as a district judge permanently, spending much less time working than she had done in her law firm while Snorre, the product development manager who used to work 12 hours daily in the office, moved to a different position with a more manageable schedule and no requirements to give up his weekends.

“The goal I had when I changed jobs was to get my family life and everything else to add up, and I believe I’m able to make it work now” (Snorre, Norwegian).

The ‘goal’ of moving to a job that enabled a better balance between the role of a wage earner and that of a parent, was also articulated by Øystein, a transaction support manager, who explained how in his job search after he had become a dad, he excluded positions which he felt would make his home life suffer more than he perceived to be necessary. Corporate cultures where employees worked long hours while enjoying limited flexibility were in Øystein’s mind not compatible with his domestic responsibilities and hence considered a ‘no-deal’. In his new job, he stayed the standard 8-4 hours and was able to work from home when required.

While, as illustrated above, there were examples of job or even career changes amongst the Norwegian parents, generally the strategy chosen, however, involved a slight reduction of working hours. Men and women had started to limit the time they dedicated to their jobs by consciously ensuring they did not exceed their contractual

weekly hours. Meetings in the afternoon were scheduled earlier in the day and were often conducted in a time-efficient way. Helena, a health, environment and security manager, who was travelling extensively with her job, had started to request shorter meetings as well as more convenient meeting locations after she became a mum. Being 'strict' with one's time and 'setting limits' to ensure a balance between work and family responsibilities was a common approach.

"I try to leave, I try to be stricter in terms of when I must go, limit meetings, conversations and stuff to make sure I leave on time. It has been a big challenge as I work with a lot of people from other countries who live in different time zones and the window when we can talk and meet and discuss is not too big, so you must try and be very efficient. So, you must try and set limits in that respect. That has not been so easy always" (Erik, Norwegian).

As voiced by Erik, a civil engineer, who is working with both Japan and the US and who therefore has a limited window for when conference calls could be arranged, trying to 'set limits' and leave at 4 p.m. promptly had 'not always been so easy. Erik's unwillingness to extend his time in the office, however, was met with understanding from his co-workers and managers even though his short office hours were making meetings more difficult to organise. A generally 'positive attitude' and an organisational willingness to adjust working hours, tasks and pressure to achieve a better balance, were common experiences amongst the Norwegian parents.

Parenthood – an obstacle to career advancement?

The positivity and the overall contentment expressed by most of the interviewees were not found in everybody's account of their journey to parenthood, however. For certain men and women, fatherhood and motherhood came at a price to their working lives, and for some participants, that price was higher than it was for others.

“I do work full-time, but I say ‘No’ to lots of things that I feel I should have done if I had been doing my job well” (Saga, Norwegian).

In her first interview, Saga described her job as her ‘life project’ and the dance school as her ‘baby’. Saga’s work was her passion and she dedicated most of her awake hours to the daily running of the school as well as teaching dance classes herself. Becoming a mother meant that the time she was able to give to her professional life was significantly reduced and she no longer felt like she was living up to the performance standard set by herself or meeting the expectations of her clients. While Saga returned to her position on a full-time basis, she said she did not feel she did her ‘job completely’. The dance school was losing pupils and Saga aspirations of expanding the business had for now been put on hold. In her interview, Saga expressed sadness, anger and surprise over the price of motherhood.

Compared to the other Norwegian interviewees, becoming a parent for Saga seemed to have had a significantly more detrimental impact on her professional performance and future career prospects. Having said that, she was not alone in experiencing a slowing down of professional development and opportunities as parenthood became a lived reality. Some of the mothers and fathers reflected on how they would have ‘done a better job’ without their caring responsibilities. Being a parent meant they were not as willing or as able to dedicate the same number of hours as they had given to their job before, and with their reduced commitment, they saw how ‘opportunities’ and ‘responsibilities’ contracted.

“In principle no, but I am inclined to think that if I had put in more hours at work, given that I used to work more before I became a father, and if I had continued to do so there might have been other opportunities available or I could have taken on more responsibility” (Sivert, Norwegian).

The conscious decision to focus attention and time on the family and therefore temporarily limit or slow down professional growth did not only involve a reduction of the number of hours spent on waged labour. After becoming parents, a small number of mothers also decided to refrain from pursuing higher positions with 'more responsibility and higher salary'. While nobody had directly discouraged them from applying to suitable and more senior roles, they enjoyed the 'safety' and the 'flexibility' of their current job, and they felt the familiarity they had with their managers and with the tasks involved enabled a work-life balance that might be put at risk with a promotion. It should be highlighted here that there were no men in the study who had consciously stopped themselves from seeking career advancement after they became fathers.

"[...] I still sit in the same office and none of my responsibilities have been taken away from me, nothing like that. I haven't really taken a hit, but I think it's more about the fact that I don't have the same progression. The natural step for me to take now would perhaps be to apply for a different role with a larger area of responsibility. If I was to think about my own development, in my career, that's what I should have done. But I do want a lot of flexibility and safety, and to be able to spend time with my children, and I have plenty of goodwill with the guy I report to, so that's a lot more important" (Synne, Norwegian).

A slowing down of career progression was not, however, a dominant feature in most Norwegian men and women's journey to parenthood. While for the majority of the interviewees, their professional development had been largely *unaffected* by the arrival of their baby, some mothers and fathers had, since becoming parents, been offered new and more senior job opportunities with higher salaries and extended areas of responsibilities. Stories of being promoted after their return from parental leave were especially notable amongst the Norwegian mothers rather than amongst the fathers.

The fact that they were *mothers* did not seem to hinder these women's career progression.

"I got that project manager job, which I started in January last year. How old was Ellen then? 2 and a half. Then they were completely aware of the fact that I had a small child. But I was given that opportunity" (Guro, Norwegian).

For some of the women, like Guro above, opportunities for career advancement presented themselves once they had settled back into their jobs after their period of maternity leave. Other mothers were offered new roles either while they were away on leave or, in Helena's case, when she was 5 months pregnant with her second child.

"I was surprised that I got a new job and advanced both in terms of the career ladder and salary-wise while I was 5 months pregnant" (Helena, Norwegian).

The promotions offered to the female interviewees did in certain cases involve longer working hours, as well as more job-related travelling. The increased work pressure was in these instances solved by the father taking on more of the caring responsibilities, either on a short-term or on a more permanent basis. This sometimes meant the man was required to shorten the time he spent in the office and bring his computer home with him to complete tasks once the child was sleeping. It also involved the dad periodically being the sole carer when his partner was experiencing periods of more intense workload. While, as has been discussed above, the Norwegian participants generally enjoyed employment conditions with few disincentives against gender equality, the dual-earner family model is also supported by couples sharing the caring responsibilities between themselves in a way that allows both the mother and the father to reconcile the often-competing demands from their private and working lives.

Working together as a team, solving family-related logistical challenges and allocating

childcare tasks equally between themselves, were dominant themes in the stories told by the Norwegian parents taking part in this study. The next section will explore how mothers and fathers have organised their family work, why this pattern has emerged and how the interviewees feel about it. It will look at how the couples share the childcare responsibilities, but also the distribution of housework as well as the overall management of the domestic sphere.

‘Your turn, my turn’ – a conscious 50-50 sharing of childcare responsibilities

“We have taken turns. It’s like ‘Today it’s your turn’. And ‘your turn’ starts from children’s TV until he goes to bed. And then it could happen that he screams, and he wants mummy to come and sing a song or he wants daddy to come and read a book. And sometimes we let him have his way and other times we don’t. And you then take the fight with him, or you don’t. But the way we do it is ‘your turn, my turn’” (Øystein, Norwegian).

Amongst the Norwegian parents, the responsibility for the children was generally, although not without exception, described as being equally shared between the mother and the father. While *describing* childcare as being equally shared may not be the practical reality of how men and women distribute care work between them when the Norwegian couples gave detailed accounts of exactly how the responsibility was allocated, the verbal portrayal given seemed to match the daily routines followed. In most families the parents used the ‘your turn, my turn’ principle where the man and the woman were each given a set of responsibilities, often involving either the evening or the morning routine with the child. This meant that the mother, for example, would oversee the bedtime activities one evening, while the next day this task was given to the father. Sometimes, instead of allocating a whole morning or the entire night routine to one parent, the man and the woman took turns carrying out smaller jobs like

toothbrushing or nappy changing, which were jobs neither of them were eager to do. Other couples had decided to assign specific childcare tasks to one parent only where for example daddy was always the one who read the goodnight stories and mummy always sang the lullabies, or daddy made the packed lunches and mummy made sure the green vegetables had been eaten. The parents also did activities *together* and worked as a *team* where both engaged in the same task. Regardless of how the Norwegian mothers and fathers had decided to share the responsibility for childcare, the aim as well as the resulting practice was one of equal parenting.

"[...] so, I'm the one who wakes her up and gets her ready. After that, she goes into the living room, sits down, eats a little bit and watches TV. At that time Rasmus is the one who sorts out her food and drink for her and me. He is the one who makes my packed lunch and who gets my coffee ready" (Guro, Norwegian).

"[...] one brushes her teeth and puts on her pyjamas, whereas the other one puts her to bed" (Sivert, Norwegian).

The concept of 50-50 sharing was frequently referred to when the men and women described the parenting arrangements they had with their partners. Few mothers felt they carried the larger burden in terms of the children-related work and there seemed to be an almost complete absence of gendered childcare responsibilities. The key term here though is 'almost' and the exceptions will be explored later in this section.

"I sometimes pick the clothes, but he is also good at picking out clothes for her. So, I think we share 50-50 but we still have different roles, although the responsibility is completely shared" (Sunniva, Norwegian).

"It has been 50-50. We normally wake up together and then it's a bit like 'Right, so he goes with you when I take a shower, and I'll look after him when I'm downstairs'. Then maybe she'll look after him while I make him his lunch pack, and then I leave, and she walks him to the nursery" (Øystein, Norwegian).

As with the expectation that both parents should work full-time and contribute financially on an equal basis, there is also an expectation that both the mother and the father would each carry half of the caregiving burden. Amongst the interviewees, there is a *conscious awareness* that a 50-50 sharing of childcare responsibilities is the culturally established standard parents should commit to following. Men and women therefore actively resist falling into a gendered parenting pattern, 'determined' to not 'give in' when the circumstances put their equal sharing arrangements to the test. Fathers' involvement and ability to contribute to the caring aspect of their child's upbringing, are protected and encouraged. In this process, by deliberately ensuring a 50-50 sharing, the cultural idea that both men and women are equally important and capable of playing an active role as parents, is passed on to their children.

"We have this arrangement that one of us does the evening routine and the other one does the singing and the putting to bed. We take turns. We have been quite aware of this, we don't want a situation where only one of us does it, it's important that sometimes daddy also puts to bed"
(Karianne, Norwegian).

A handful of the Norwegian couples had already welcomed their second baby by the time the final interview was conducted. The way in which the mother and the father divided the caring responsibilities for the *two* children, however, followed the same principle of equal sharing and taking turns as described above. Again, *consciousness* and *awareness* were guiding the introduction and the continuation of these sharing practices.

"We usually get the children every other time, or at least now we've become aware of doing it every other time because it's been a period where this has come naturally. Of course, when I breastfed, I always put Vegar to bed and Anders always took Nina to bed, I didn't want Nina to be all about her dad, he is nice, but I tried to be a bit conscious about the

fact that we do it every other time now that Vegar has stopped breastfeeding" (Siri, Norwegian)."

The shared caring practices and the feelings of fairness and equality that these arrangements generated meant that mothers and fathers seldom expressed any disappointment in their partner's contributions as a parent. Mothers and fathers were *co-parenting*. There was also a focus on giving both grown-ups in the family unit enough 'space' to take care of their own needs and wants existing independently of their role as a parent. In the same way as the mothers and fathers 'took turns' caring for the children, they also often took turns having time away from these responsibilities, either outside or inside of the house. While this sometimes involved a specific evening in the week when each person was free to see friends, watch a film or go to the gym, it also meant that when the father was in charge of the bedtime routine, the mother could take a step back and breathe, even if she was at home.

While shared parenting practices where both mothers and fathers enjoy 'sufficient space' was a common experience amongst the interviewees, there were examples in the study of women whose journey to parenthood had involved less 'space' and more 'sacrifice'. Saga was especially vocal on the topic of self-sacrifice and motherhood. In her interview she expressed sadness, anger and surprise over how the birth of her daughter has led to a loss of 'me-time', of 'friends', and of 'all the enjoyments' in her life. As part of a small minority of women taking part in this research whose path to motherhood involved a more traditional split in gender roles, Saga felt she had sacrificed 'all those things she liked to do' whereas her husband's private as well as professional life remained unaffected.

"I feel I have sacrificed a lot of me. I have sacrificed a lot of friends. I have lost many friends to such an extent that when I do have the opportunity,

like when I get to borrow my brother-in-law's cabin for the weekend, I have nobody to invite to come with me. And when we go there, Tage can go skiing with his mates and stuff, he still has them, but I don't have anybody to hang out with anymore. And I had before. I have sacrificed that. And that can still make me angry. I still have some anger in relation to that because it was never my intention and I thought I was going to be able to keep this, I thought, I know we agreed that we were going to make sure that even though we were going to become parents, we were going to continue being 'us'. And we haven't managed that, and the sides of 'us' that we haven't managed to keep is the side that has to do with me" (Saga, Norwegian).

In pretty sharp contrast to the domestic arrangement found amongst most of the other couples in the study, Saga held the main responsibility for the daily activities with her daughter including bathing, putting her to bed, comforting her when she was ill, when she had hurt herself or when she was awake at night. A similar pattern was found in the interview with Vivian, who was responsible for the morning as well as the evening routine with her son, while her husband was mainly a spectator or acted as an occasional helper if his wife was ill or required to attend a late work meeting. The husband, Pål, admitted that he 'may not look very good according to Norwegian standards' but explained that their son only 'wants mummy to put on the pyjama and he is quite strict on that'. While there is an awareness amongst the couples with a more traditional split in gender roles that they are deviating from the 50-50 sharing of the childcare responsibilities, limited active resistance to this gendered parenting pattern was being demonstrated. The determination to establish equal sharing arrangements seemed in these couples to either be absent from both the man's and the woman's minds, or the mother was alone in her attempt to create a more egalitarian allocation of parenting responsibilities and failed without the support of her partner. In none of the couples with a more traditional distribution of childcare involvement were these gendered caring patterns consciously planned or even anticipated. In her first interview, Vivian talked about the future logistical challenge of dropping off and picking up from

nursery once the period of parental leave had come to an end. As they both held positions as daily managers of two separate pharmacies and therefore worked inflexible hours, Vivian was of the firm opinion that the only fair solution was for her and her husband to take turns and share the burden to ensure that one person's job was not 'more affected' than the other.

"Yes, we need to share, since we are both in the same sort of job. I feel my job shouldn't be more affected by this than his job" (Vivian, Norwegian).

Although the 50-50 sharing of nursery pick-up and drop-off was certainly the explicitly agreed system, at the time of the final interview, Vivian's husband had been offered a promotion and with his longer working hours and frequent travel, the responsibility for nursery logistics had mainly been taken on by her. Similar experiences were found in the second interview with Saga who also had envisioned an equal allocation of kindergarten duties but instead found herself in a deeply gendered sharing arrangement.

"I think he has dropped off at the nursery 4 times since she [their daughter] was born" (Saga, Norwegian)

As will be discussed in the subsequent section, while there were examples in the study of less egalitarian couples as far as the responsibilities for nursery logistics were concerned, generally, the dominant trend was one of 50-50 sharing, both in terms of anticipation and the lived experiences of parenthood.

Nursery logistics – working in shifts

In sharp contrast to the absence of a conversation between the mothers and the fathers-to-be around the sharing of the parental leave entitlements, which was discussed in the previous chapter, the sharing arrangements of the kindergarten logistics had been

explicitly addressed by every couple taking part in this study. The underlying assumption guiding these dialogues was the idea that the job of picking up and dropping off from nursery would be equally allocated between the man and the woman. Again, following the 50-50 sharing principle, mothers and fathers both envisioned one parent doing the morning 'shift' and the other doing the collection in the afternoon, depending on preferences and working schedules.

"We have thought all along that one is going to pick up and one is going to drop off. That way one person can get there early and the other can leave early. Then we can work in shifts quite a bit [...]" (Hedda, Norwegian).

There was an awareness amongst the interviewees that unless this was shared, one of the parents would then be limited in their ability to do their job well as nursery logistics would take up significant parts of their day. Applying the 'your turn, my turn' principle was therefore considered both practical and fair. While as was the case for a small number of women, the intentions of equalitarian arrangements articulated in the first interview did not materialise, for most of the couples, their plans of a 50-50 sharing of dropping off and picking up from kindergarten, was an established pattern at the time of the second interview.

"We have always done it every other time, both with picking up and dropping off. So, we have shared it evenly" (Mari, Norwegian).

"The way it usually is, I take him to the nursery. I pack lunches and take care of all that, and then I take him to the nursery. And then Karianne goes to pick him up" (Emrik, Norwegian).

In the same way that Norwegian mothers and fathers took the dual-income family model for granted and therefore expected both their partner and them to hold full-time positions, the participants in this study also presumed the children would be looked

after by a nursery once the period of parental leave had come to an end. Both parents working and the child attending kindergarten are described by Rasmus, a car mechanic, as simply 'how society is built up'. The use of nurseries seemed to be the universal childcare solution amongst the Norwegian interviewees. It represented one of the many building blocks in the foundation constructed by the state *allowing* and *encouraging* both men and women to continue their labour market attachment when they became parents. The nursery was described by Mari, a PR consultant as 'the unquestioned option' and few parents had considered any other day-care alternatives. By the time the second and final interview was carried out, every single couple had chosen to send their child to kindergarten on a full-time basis.

"[...] we haven't spoken about other alternatives" (Snorre, Norwegian).

"I haven't really considered any other solution than to send the child to nursery, really" (Tonje, Norwegian).

While there appeared to be 'an expectation from society' to send children to nursery, this normative pressure is reinforced by the Norwegian welfare state by ensuring that kindergarten spaces are available and affordable. All children in Norway have the right to attend nursery after their first birthday, an entitlement introduced in 2009, and the maximum monthly costs of these places are regulated to ensure low-income families are not discriminated against. According to Korpi (2000), access to publicly funded childcare services for children under the age of three is the 'litmus test of a modern family policy directed at the dual-earner family' (Korpi in Ellingsæter, 2006: 123).

In addition to the universality of Norwegian kindergartens in terms of their availability and affordability, this state-sponsored day-care solution is perceived by the interviewees to be of great benefit for their children's 'social development' by teaching

them how to interact with others, 'follow instructions' as well as providing them with 'educational stimuli'. Descriptions of the nursery experience as 'good' and 'healthy' were opinions expressed by most, if not all, mothers and fathers.

"But the main thing is that nursery contributes enormously to their social development, and it is very important for them to attend" (Karianne, Norwegian).

The perceived quality of Norwegian nurseries meant that outsourcing childcare became an attractive arrangement for the parents. Instead of mothers and fathers feeling guilty for sending their children away from their care in the daytime, it is perceived to be a win-win situation where the nursery is associated with fun and learning and the adults are free to continue their professional lives. Nurseries are described by Per, as the place where children 'meet the world' and taking that opportunity away from them is depriving them of personal growth and essential societal skills.

While nurseries are considered a vital part of the dual-family income model as well as being an important provider of invaluable cognitive and social skills, many parents were talking about how this institution was also the 'culprit' in the sometimes-unremitting illnesses their toddlers came home with. The first year in nursery was described as especially bad when children's 'meeting with the world' also involved a meeting with viruses and bacteria they had previously been more protected from. The next section will explore how couples share the responsibilities for ill children when fever or tummy upset prevents nursery attendance and one parent is required to put work on hold and take on unplanned caring duties at home.

Staying home with ill children

“And especially the first year in the nursery, I mean before he started there he had never even had a fever, and the minute he started nursery, yeah. So those 10 days that you get, they were quickly used up, for both of us” (Karianne, Norwegian).

In Norway, each parent is entitled to stay at home for 10 days every year with their sick child. These days are given per child and are fully paid. Most of the couples interviewed for this study expressed surprise by how often their children had become ill after they were sent to daycare, and ‘especially the first year in nursery’ was bad. These sick days, however, did not seem to have caused any significant stress, they were considered simply ‘how it is’ when you have children.

“That’s perceived completely okay. I just call the central office, and they don’t get involved with it. Nobody ever calls me at home, so it’s completely okay. Nobody asks any questions and says it’s a bad thing because that’s how it is” (Ingrid, Norwegian).

The flexible and accommodating attitudes shown by managers and co-workers discussed above is also found in relation to how employees suddenly having to stay at home with their sick child is dealt with. Again, these organisational practices and cultures allow a balance between the demands of employees’ domestic responsibilities and the pressure from their jobs. The interviewees use words like ‘sympathetic’, ‘understanding’ and ‘inclusive’ when they describe their workplace and the reactions, they either had gotten themselves or they had observed colleagues having received when days at home caring for an ill child had been taken.

“There’s a lot of understanding, a lot of people have children and there’s an acceptance of staying at home if the child is ill, you can take days off if you have days you haven’t used and you can ask for unpaid leave if you need that. And it’s an inclusive workplace so if you have any kind of problems, they will accommodate for it” (Anders, Norwegian).

The Norwegian men and women experienced no guilt when they informed their managers that their little one was sick and that they therefore would not be coming to the office. There was no fear of the negative consequences of such caring practices and no perceptions of being judged. Although the mothers and fathers acknowledged that their workplace did indeed ease the complications of combining two full-time jobs with parenthood, the Norwegian participants also largely took the family-friendly organisation for granted and considered being able to stay at home with a sick child as a given.

While flexibility and understanding around employees' domestic responsibilities was widespread practice amongst the organisations the mothers and fathers taking part in this research were employed by, unplanned and sudden time off work can still represent a significant challenge. Meetings are often cancelled, deadlines are missed, and tasks are left unfinished. If a child is ill a lot this could have a serious impact on performance. How do Norwegian parents share this inconvenience? From the interviews, it was evident that the same principle of 'my turn, your turn' or 50-50 distribution of childcare responsibilities was applied. Again, the explicit conversation couples had around nursery logistics was also found in the decision-making process about who would be staying home caring for the sick child. The responsibility did not seem to belong to the mother more than it belonged to the father and an agreement was reached fairly. While the trend amongst the couples was that of 50-50 sharing, there were times when one parent had a particularly heavy workload or had meetings scheduled that were difficult to move. The focus on equality was then replaced by pragmatism and care for the other person's job situation, and the parent who had the

least busy day would stay at home. Practicalities and fairness seemed to guide the discussions around whose turn it was to care for a sick child.

"It's really hard to say. I do feel that it's a normal trend to share it 50-50, but I don't know. It depends on what you have on the agenda on that day. Like if one of us has a deadline or things that absolutely need to be done, then between us, we cover each other's backs. We are there for each other" (Kari, Norwegian).

Brandt and Kvande (2003) argue that men showing an active involvement with their children constitutes a central part of the new father role and has become a cultural ideal among Norwegian fathers. Most of the fathers interviewed for this study seemed to live up to this new fatherhood ideal acting as co-parents and participating in every aspect of the childcare. This father model, however, does not comprise routine housework which, according to Brandt and Kvande, is considered by men to be boring and frequently causes conflict between the parents. While childcare is regarded as being compatible with this new masculine identity, housework is still classified as a woman's domain. This chapter will hence now turn to a discussion around domestic work, exploring how couples share house chores both before and after the arrival of the baby. Up until now, the research findings have emphasised the egalitarianism generally existing in Norwegian couples' earning and caring patterns. Does the same 50-50 sharing principle guide how men and women allocate household tasks as well?

Housework

"We are two people living here and we're both supposed to contribute 50%" (Tonje, Norwegian).

Amongst the Norwegian men and women taking part in this study, there was an explicit awareness of the normative expectations to each carry half of the housework burden. Tonje, an office administrator, referred in her first interview to how she and her partner

were 'both supposed to contribute 50%' to the daily domestic chores. This awareness of how housework *should* be a joint venture had also for the majority of the couples translated into equalitarian sharing practices. Sometimes distinct tasks had been allocated to one person where the man for example was responsible for putting on a washing machine while his partner's job was to fold the clothes. Other times they worked more as a team, both carrying out various small and big tasks involved in the general running of the household. Dinner was cooked by the person who came back from work first and the one who had prepared the meal was not the one to tidy up afterwards. Few participants felt when they were interviewed before the arrival of the baby that they did more unpaid domestic work than their partner. The overall experience was one of 50-50 sharing, teamwork and co-operation.

"I do the laundry, she folds the clothes, we clean the house together"
(Øystein, Norwegian).

"We share it really equally. There I would absolutely say it's 50-50" (Mari
Norwegian).

"I think we are precisely on 50-50" (Snorre).

In the case of Tonje and her partner, Per, the 50-50 sharing principle had been implemented with a prominent level of accuracy. Although they were living in the same house and sharing one washing machine, they each had their own laundry basket and were each responsible for washing, folding and putting away their own clothes. Tension sometimes arose around whose responsibility it was to take care of the common bed linen with both having the perception that it frequently ended up in *their* laundry basket.

"I do the floors and Tonje does the dusting. And in relation to laundry, I do my laundry and she does hers and then we do, depending on the

situation, depending on where the bed linen is lying, and it's often lying in my laundry basket. We each have our own basket" (Per, Norwegian).

There were, however, exceptions to the overall trend of egalitarian practices around the distribution of household chores. In a handful of couples, laundry, cleaning and cooking were shared in a more 'traditional' way where the woman carried a substantially heavier burden than her male partner. Although it should be mentioned that the study uncovered a home where the husband did most of the housework, for the remaining couples where a deviation from the 50-50 principle was found in their responsibilities for domestic tasks, a more gendered pattern existed. This unequal sharing was often acknowledged by both the man and the woman and while the husband tended to feel embarrassed about his limited contributions, the wife expressed frustration, but also at times resignation.

"It's definitely me who complains the most when it is messy and say that we have to do some washing and cleaning. As far as housework goes, I must admit it is me who does most of the work" (Ingrid, Norwegian).

"I think I will say that I do 80% and he does 20%. And then I calculate in the cleaning as well as it's me who tidies everything before the cleaners arrive and it's me who co-ordinate with the cleaners and it's me who pays the cleaners" (Saga, Norwegian).

Although Saga and her husband had a cleaner every second week, there were still multiple daily household chores that needed to be done and that were unevenly divided between the two of them. As Saga pointed out in her second interview, these domestic tasks increase when a child arrives. In couples with a more traditional division of labour, the gap between the unpaid contributions of the man and that of the woman hence widens further when their baby is born as her workload intensifies while the man continues as before.

“After we had Pernille, I’m a bit... I have complained to him many times that with having her, all these things [housework] have become more, more work, and he was always the one who really wanted to have her [their daughter] and he imagined a life with children” (Saga, Norwegian).

While the men in relationships with a gendered division of labour were often involved and active fathers, their role as a parents did not embrace the housework associated with taking care of a child. Whereas their version of ‘doing parenthood’ involved being the ‘super-cool daddy’ who was playful and fun, the mother’s parenting role also included less enjoyable tasks of cleaning and cooking for the new member of the family who is ‘running around with fish and ketchup on her fingers’. These findings support those of Brandt and Kvande (2006) discussed above, where an active involvement with their offspring is part of the new ideal of fatherhood while housework lingers on as a woman’s area of responsibility. The fathers who left the burden of domestic chores to their partners, however, only represent a small number of the men taking part in this study. Most of the couples interviewed continued with their egalitarian sharing practices where both the mother and the father contributed equally to the household chores. Some parents, though, had decided to outsource some of the domestic chores by hiring a cleaner, and therefore eased some of the increased workload this way.

“Yes, I think we are pretty good at doing what needs to be done and we then do it and after that, we sit down together. It’s not like one of us is scrubbing the floor and the other one sits on the sofa relaxing” (Inga, Norwegian).

With a few exceptions, the general trend amongst Norwegian couples was one of 50-50 sharing as far as the actual carrying out of housework is concerned, both before and after the arrival of the baby. Having said that, what became evident from the interviews was the difference between the *ungendered* distribution of domestic chores and the

clearly *gendered* initiative-taking as well as overall responsibility for the running of the household. Although men seemed more than willing to participate in domestic work, the job of 'seeing' when it is time to bring out the wash bucket, taking initiative in these tasks, ensuring the cleaner has been paid and the right cleaning products have been bought as well as planning ahead and organising the home, kids' activities and carnival costumes, all appeared to be owned by women. The next section will explore the less visible gendered 'mental' work of being the one in charge and ultimately responsible for the household and the children's lives and their wellbeing.

The mental workload – initiative and overall responsibility

"I'm the project manager, but he's always happy to do it" (Mari, Norwegian).

While most of the couples interviewed for this study were committed both in ideology and practice to a 50-50 sharing of household chores and childcare, this egalitarian distribution of unpaid family work did not seem to include the mental effort of seeing, planning and taking initiative. Female participants were often described as 'the project manager', 'the one who runs the show', 'the organiser of the family', 'the one who has the overview' or 'the one with the overall responsibility'. Even though few women felt they were met with resistance from their male partner when *help* with housework or the children was requested, the fact that a 'manager-helper dynamic' (Gerson, 1997) had been established, indicates the existence of a gendered ownership as far as the final accountability for the domestic sphere was concerned. This gendered ownership of overall responsibility was found in every Norwegian couple taking part in this research.

"I'm the one who takes initiative. He can talk about it for several days, but I'm the one who starts doing it [cleaning]" (Hedda, Norwegian).

"[...] she's the one who's, yes, she's running the show" (Tage, Norwegian).

"I am the organiser of the family" (Annelise, Norwegian).

"I do more of the daily running of things, I'm the one who has the overview at home" (Sissel, Norwegian).

Couples often took turns making dinner for the family and trips to the supermarket were equally shared, but the decision of *what* was going to be cooked that day and the *preparing* of the shopping list was often the woman's responsibility. The man was 'happy' to contribute his fair part of the household work, but there was a tendency for the father to be told *what* to do and *when* to do it. Instead of engaging in the mental work of planning and organising himself, he followed the instructions given to him by his female partner. Torstein, a corporate lawyer, referred to himself as the 'support function', explaining that his wife was 'sort of the manager of the house' while he was responsible for carrying out many of the practical tasks in the home such as laundry and the preparation of everybody's lunch boxes.

"Annelise takes care of most of the organising, so she is sort of the manager of the house, she plans grocery shopping, cooks and prepares all the clothes for the children to wear the next day. I am more of a support function, who takes care of laundry, dishwashing and prepares the lunch boxes" (Torstein, Norwegian).

Torstein's account of the dynamics in the couple and the gendered division of the mental workload is vindicated by his wife Annelise. In her second interview, Annelise articulates clearly how 'responsibility' and 'overview' are gendered whereas 'all the related tasks are split equally' between herself and her husband.

"I feel that we have a 50-50 split in terms of chores on a day-to-day basis. However, I feel that I have the overall responsibility in terms of having an overview of everything, making things happen and all the planning. I am the one who plans for everyone and keeps track of what the children

need to bring to nursery etc., but I feel that all the related tasks are split equally between the two of us" (Annelise, Norwegian).

While many female and male participants expressed an awareness of the unequal split in 'making things happen', 'keeping track' and 'planning' family life, in sharp contrast to the focus on an expectation of a 50-50 sharing of childcare and housework, this female ownership of overall accountability was hardly challenged. As was demonstrated earlier in this chapter, couples who deviated from the egalitarian distribution of household chores expressed feelings of embarrassment, frustration and anger. The unequal division of the 'mental labour', on the other hand, was met with limited resistance and did not appear to cause much conflict in the relationship. Whereas it was often acknowledged that having the overall control involved 'work', the existing consciousness around the ideal of equal sharing practices as far as the 'doing' of childcare and housework was concerned did not seem to have developed to the 'thinking' aspect of domestic labour. Emrik, a family therapist, described his partner's tendency to be the one in charge at home and the one to notice 'all those little things' as 'typically female' characteristics. Similar sentiments were expressed by Synne, an HR manager, who in her final interview expressed how it was 'very typical in most couples' for women to carry overall responsibility for the family due to women being generally 'better at organising and remembering' all the logistical details involved in the daily running of a household.

"What I think is very typical in most couples is that as a woman you're often better at organising and remembering all these things like a Santa party at the nursery, costumes, buying new clothes and all the things that you may not just see and that aren't really the biggest tasks" (Synne, Norwegian).

The largely unchallenged perception of women as ‘better’ organisers, walks hand in hand with the ideas about the desirable, appropriate and acceptable practices of a ‘good mother’ that emerged as a theme in the second set of interviews. Through the narratives of the participants, it became clear that there was a cultural expectation of mothers to be the one ultimately in charge of the house and of their children’s wellbeing. Women spoke about how they felt the responsibility as a mother ‘in a completely different way’ compared to how men felt their responsibility as a father. While dads could bring the child to nursery in the morning, it was the mother’s job to remember to check that two sets of extra outfits had been packed. The father could drop the child at a birthday party, but the mother should have ensured a birthday present had been bought. Women who failed to live up to their role as the family organiser felt they had failed in their performance as mothers. Other mothers would then judge them for their failed delivery of the behaviour expected of them. As Synne describes below, forgetting to buy a birthday present would not reflect badly on the dad, while for the mother she would be perceived by others as not having her family life ‘under control’.

“I think it has something to do with the expectations you have of your surroundings and your role as a mother, and if you forget to buy a birthday present or something like that it’s not like the dads stand there and shake their heads, but other mothers are like: ‘Really, did you forget to bring a birthday present?’. They think that you don’t have it under control, then, your family and your life” (Synne, Norwegian).

The internalised expectations women had of themselves as mothers, their awareness of the societal norms around the responsibilities they were supposed to own and the ideas about how domestic control and organisational skills were predominantly female traits, all seemed to generate a deeply gendered pattern as far as the division of the mental labour was concerned. Throughout this chapter, there has been an emphasis on how Norwegian couples organise their family and working lives around the assumption that

the man and the woman, the mother and the father, represent two equal contributors in terms of both unpaid and paid labour. Although exceptions were found to exist amongst the couples taking part in this research, the overall trend was nevertheless one of egalitarian earning and caring practices. As is evident from the gendered mental workload, though, it can be argued that the project of creating a 'gender equality utopia' may well be in the *making* in Norway, but it is still *ongoing* as gender inequality continues to persist, albeit often in less visible forms. While the gender asymmetry in men and women's employment and household roles which frequently develops when they become parents was not the dominant family pattern amongst the couples taking part in this study, the clear tendency of a manager-helper dynamic between the mothers and the fathers indicates, however, that a *modification* of traditional gender roles has taken place, not a complete *rejection* of it.

Concluding remarks

Gornick and Meyers (2008) described the Real Utopia as 'a society in which men and women engage symmetrically in employment and caregiving' (Gornick and Meyers, 2008: 314). Building on the voices of both men and women, exploring their journey to parenthood, it appears this utopian society has yet to be fully built. The gendered overall responsibility for the home sphere, both in terms of housework and childcare, reveals deep-seated normative assumptions about the domestic roles of men and women. Although both sexes may 'engage symmetrically in employment and caregiving', as was the case for most of the couples interviewed in this study, the inequality existed in the more *invisible* aspect of family work. Organising, initiating and planning, work that requires mental energy and control continued to be largely carried out by the female adult of the household. Additionally, it must be again emphasised that while the overriding pattern amongst the Norwegian couples was one of equality in

terms of their earning, caring and housework responsibilities, there were definite exceptions to this egalitarian trend. The Norwegian society and Scandinavia in general have therefore appropriately been characterised as a situation of 'gender equality light' (Rønsen and Skrede, 2006: 69). While the gender equality project has made rapid and valuable advancement, it is still an ongoing process. Having said all this, though it is vital to draw awareness to less visible inequality sustaining forces and to the still-existing traditional practices endorsed by some heterosexual couples, it is also important to acknowledge the fundamental changes in men's and women's labour market participation and involvement in the domestic sphere that has taken place in a relatively short space of time. The principle of 50-50 sharing of childcare and housework as well as the now-established expectation that both the man and the woman, the father and the mother, should both engage in full-time employment, seem to represent the starting point in couples' negotiations. The fact that the men in this study were generally active in all areas of childcare and housework marks a significant step away from the traditional male breadwinner-female homemaker model of the family. According to Ruddick, 'the most revolutionary change we can make in the institution of motherhood is to include men in every aspect of childcare' (Ruddick, 1983 in Doucet, 2010: 11). Leaving aside the mental workload as well as the gendered ownership of the parental leave period, which was discussed in the previous chapter, this revolutionary change has to a large degree been established in the daily sharing of earning and caring responsibilities of men and women in the couples. While the fathers have taken a significantly more dynamic role at home than the one they saw *their* dad have, the women in this study have a labour market attachment often not seen in their mother's biographies. All the women interviewed continued to be employed in full-time positions after the period of parental leave had come to an end. While there were examples of

mothers slightly reducing the number of hours they spent at work or altering their schedules, this pattern was also found amongst the dads. Overall, the cost of parenthood did not seem to be any higher for the female participants than it was for the male. The journey from being a 'pregnant couple' to adopting the roles of a mum and a dad was less gendered than literature would indicate. Instead of adopting traditional family roles, the couples often found strategies which challenged a gendered division of labour and established sharing practices mainly in line with the Norwegian egalitarian ideal. It should be pointed out though that the decisions made, the norms and values guiding these negotiations and the lived experiences of motherhood and fatherhood generally fitted into a remarkably similar pattern. As will be demonstrated in the next chapter, in sharp contrast to the lives of the British couples, the journey to parenthood amongst the Norwegian participants followed a narrow and uniform path. There was limited diversity in both the anticipations and in the lived realities of parenthood.

Although women's full-time employment has been helped by egalitarian sharing practices of housework and childcare, men's presence at home is not the only factor enabling a combination of the roles of a mother and an employee. Policies giving workers the right to stay home for a substantial number of days per year with their sick child without any deduction in their pay, and the availability of affordable and high-quality nursery spaces coupled with organisational cultures accepting of and accommodating to the caring responsibilities of their staff, further supports the dual-income family model. The fact that these family-friendly policies and organisational practices are taken for granted is an indication of how entrenched such entitlements have become in the mentality of Norwegian parents. The workplace, instead of being largely structured according to the male-breadwinner model assuming employees do

not have substantial family responsibilities (Moen and Han 2001), it appears to be organised according to the dual-income model of the family, presuming both men and women have equal caring duties. Spain and Bianchi (1996) argue that

“[w]omen juggle a variety of roles out of preference and necessity. They will become more successful at it the closer society gets to defining the balancing act as a “family” rather than a “women’s issue””(Spain and Bianchi, 1996: 198-199).

From the interviews with the Norwegian couples, following them on their journey to parenthood, it seems this Nordic society has come a long way in its redefinition of the difficulties of combining the role of a parent with that of a worker. Juggling earning and caring responsibilities are to a large extent now perceived to be a ‘family’ rather than a ‘women’s issue’. The two parents being treated as equals in their rights and their obligations. In addition to reducing the gendered aspect of this dual role challenge, the stories of the Norwegian men and women also revealed a society that had institutional and cultural structures which eased the struggles of fulfilling these at times competing demands. Negotiating the transition to parenthood and the lived experiences of combining family and employment is therefore done in a ‘climate’ *allowing for* and *encouraging* equal sharing of breadwinning and caring. The next chapter will explore the same journey of parenthood in Britain, a country with different policies, economic structures, cultural norms and historical trajectories. How will the stories of the British first-time parents compare to those of Norwegian men and women? Both stark contrasts as well as astonishing similarities in choices, values and in the couples’ sharing patterns will be highlighted.

Chapter 7: The gendered and diverse journeys of parenthood in the UK

The previous chapter explored the journey of parenthood for a group of first-time mothers and fathers in Norway. The research discovered a situation of ‘gender equality light’ where the overall responsibility for the home sphere continued to be owned by women, but where the principle of 50-50 sharing of childcare, housework and earning was nevertheless guiding the negotiation in the couple and egalitarian sharing practices was the norm. Fathers played an active and involved role in their children’s lives and domestic chores were, in most cases, but not in all, distributed equally between the man and the woman. The traditionalism evident in the use and in the ownership of the leave entitlement and hence also in the temporary allocation of market work and family work did largely, but not completely, cease to feature in their stories of Norwegian mothers and fathers at the time when full-time parental care was replaced by external day-care arrangements. All the Norwegian couples embraced the dual-earner, dual-career family model where both the mother and the father returned to full-time employment once the period of parental leave had come to an end. The journey from being a ‘pregnant couple’ to taking on the roles of mum and dad was hence less gendered than research often indicates.

In this chapter, the same journey of parenthood among *British* mothers and fathers will be described and analysed. While making comparisons to the stories told by the Norwegian interviewees, the chapter aims to explore whether the gendered ways of ‘doing parenthood’ which was also established during the parental leave period amongst the British couples, continued in their earning and caring roles and responsibilities post their child’s first birthday. Studies show that the arrival of children

continues to be a vital factor associated with British women's exit from the labour market and compared to other European countries, the difference between the employment rates for mothers and non-mothers is particularly prominent in the UK (Lewis, 2009). According to The Resolution Foundation, less than 20% of mothers in the UK work full-time (The Resolution Foundation, 2012 in Atkinson, 2017). There is also a noteworthy proportion of British mothers who leave the labour market completely for long periods (Chung and Horst, 2018; Días *et al.*, 2020). While the hours men dedicate to paid work after they become fathers rise, women's attachment to the labour market decreases (Gornick and Meyers, 2005). The gender asymmetry in their employment and household roles and responsibilities established during the period of parental leave often continues.

As was emphasised in Chapter 5, amongst the Norwegian couples, men's use of the 'daddy-quota' resulted in radical alterations in the dynamics of the parents as the fathers went from 'helpers' to 'experts'. By the time the man and the woman were back at work, they claimed a 'balance' in their domestic responsibilities had been restored. No such 'shake up' in the gendered family roles, however, took place in the UK. Although the recent changes to the maternity leave provisions have made it possible for British men and women to share parts of the leave period, this policy advocating 'choice' rather than exercising 'gentle force', led to a gendered use of these provisions. According to Ellingsæter and Leira (2006):

"[...] gender-neutral family policies advocating 'choice' with respect to care for children have gendered effects. In the everyday life of families with young children, 'choice' usually means women making the choices, that is, between paid employment and childcare" (Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006: 271).

This chapter will explore to what extent it *continued* to be women who made these 'choices' between 'paid employment and childcare' post the period of parental leave. If that was the case, why did these choices have a gendered ownership and why did mothers feel that a choice between work and care had to be made? As for the Norwegian parents, earning and caring decisions took place in a cultural and legal context. Choices are shaped by structures of opportunities and constraints. While all the Norwegian women who participated in this research decided to return to the labour market on a full-time basis, this choice was encouraged and supported by the egalitarian sharing practices in the couples, the established normative expectations that both parents contribute equally to paid and unpaid work as well as family-friendly social policies and corporate cultures. The British parents operated within different social and legal structures and their choices were shaped accordingly. These structural forces and their impact will be investigated in this chapter. Special focus will be given to organisational cultures and practices, the availability and affordability of childcare and dominant ideologies, all of which are part of the context moulding the earning and caring decisions made in the couple. As was the intention in the previous chapter, the aim here is to answer the questions of *how* and *why* British men and women arrive at their current arrangement and the extent to which these mothers and fathers adapted to parenthood in ways that established, modified or rejected a traditional split in family roles and responsibilities.

Returning to work after maternity leave

As was the case for the Norwegian mothers, apart from *one* female interviewee who decided to leave her job as a waitress and instead become a full-time mother, all the British women returned to the labour market after the maternity leave had come to an end. In sharp contrast to the Norwegian participants, however, where full-time

employment was the norm, the British mothers often resumed their labour market attachment on a part-time basis. While the gendered tendency to 'scale back' on employment commitments in the UK will be discussed in detail later in this chapter, how the British women felt about coming back to work as well as their treatment by managers and colleagues, also represent a fundamental disparity in the journey of parenthood in these two welfare states. Whereas the Norwegian mothers told stories of how they settled back into their jobs with relative ease, a process aided by welcoming, helpful and accommodating workplaces, many British female participants generally described their return to paid labour as 'really, really stressful' and 'completely exhausting'. Several women talked about the guilt they felt about leaving their children in nurseries or with childminders, the difficulties of 'switching off from being a mummy to being back at work' and the challenges of 'squeezing it all in', of meeting their 'own standards' professionally while also meeting their domestic responsibilities.

"And I think I threw myself at it for a few months to get on top of it, to get on top of things, but it was completely exhausting. So, I was up all night as well for a few months" (Daphne, British).

In addition to the stress and exhaustion experienced by numerous British mothers on their return to the labour market, some also told stories of areas of responsibilities having been taken away from them and 'given to other people' in their company. Instead of coming back to their old jobs, key tasks had been 'redistributed', their contacts had been removed and projects were managed by other team members. Cathy, a senior lecturer in law, explained how she 'came back to the same job' but not 'back to doing the same things'. Similar sentiments were voiced by Maureen, a social policy researcher, who said she felt 'forced' to look for a new job elsewhere as her maternity cover had been offered a permanent contract and her role in the team continued to be

performed by *him* after she came back from her leave. On Maureen's return, she was left trying to find new tasks and new areas of responsibility that she could take on, feeling side-lined and eventually 'squeezed out'.

"Going back to work was, I didn't like it. So, they kept my maternity cover and he was still doing my job, so that was one of the reasons I left as well, because they kind of, so I had to find different things to do and I did but when I first went back, I was pretty annoyed about it, which was why I thought to start looking for something else" (Maureen, British).

Although most of the British mothers had considerably less 'rosy' experiences of their return to the labour market compared to the stories told by the Norwegian women, there were exceptions to this trend. Susan, a clinical researcher who decided to continue working on a full-time basis after her period of maternity leave came to an end, talked about the support, flexibility and understanding she had received from her manager when she resumed her position. While Susan pointed to the fact that she had to work 'really hard' during the hours she spent in the laboratory as her role as a mother meant the hours available to dedicate to her professional life had been reduced, the accommodating attitude of the man she reported into eased her reintegration into her job.

"They were great. My attitude was the same. I worked really hard during the hours that I was there. Obviously, you can't really, you have that schedule, and you have to fit it all in, but I think my boss very much recognised that and he's got two kids, so I almost think that he knew what I was going to go through this year more than I did. So, you know, all those emails he was getting to say, 'Lara is sick, I have to work from home'. He never bats an eyelid. He was really good, really supportive, and that really helped" (Susan, British).

With the stress and exhaustion generally associated with a return to the labour market as well as the feelings of being side-lined or squeezed out, why did most of the British women choose to remain employed?

Reasons for returning to the labour market

For a minority of the British women taking part in this study, returning to the labour market was purely a financial decision. Rachel, a primary school teacher who had reduced her working week to two days after becoming a mother, described being home on a full-time basis looking after her boys as the 'dream', but as her husband did not earn enough to sustain this family model, she had no choice but to go back to her profession. Similar sentiments were expressed by Carol, a personal assistant, who felt it would have been 'fantastic' to leave paid work altogether and instead dedicate her time to motherhood, but the financial situation required her to work on a part-time basis. The vast majority of the British mothers interviewed, however, expressed a clear desire to remain employed. Although this decision was not primarily driven by the financial incentives of holding a job, returning to work nevertheless provided them with some level of economic independence and meant that they would avoid having to ask their husbands for 'pocket money'. Sally, a civil servant, who had gone back to a 3-day working week after the arrival of her first baby, told the story about a friend of hers who had chosen to leave her profession to become a stay-at-home mother, now had the humiliating experience of having to ask her partner for money every time she needed to buy petrol for the family car. For Sally, it reminded her of the kind of relationship girls had with their fathers when they were teenagers. Now as a grown-up woman, this was not the kind of affiliation she wanted to have with her husband.

Whereas for most families, the mothers returning to paid work, either on a full-time or a part-time basis, resulted in a better overall financial situation, for Georgina and James, a couple who both worked as HR consultants, Georgina's decision to return to her career after the arrival of their twins had limited impact on their economic position. Sending

both children to the nursery four days per week came at the price of £2000 every month. While the cost of childcare in the UK will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, with these monthly expenses of day care, Georgina's income just about covered the invoices from the kindergarten. For Georgina, her decision to go back to her job was entirely unconnected to finances. Although her original plan before the arrival of the twins involved having a career break, taking a step back from her professional life and spending a few years at home focusing on her children, the lived 'reality' of motherhood just was not as she had imagined. Georgina explained how she had this 'I need to go back to work' feeling. Leaving the labour market, in Georgina's case, involved leaving a part of her identity, and the stimulation the sense of self-worth that she got through her profession was missing in her role as a full-time mother.

"Erm, so I went back to work in April when the twins were seven months old, three days a week and yeah it was, it was great. It worked really well so it wasn't, it wasn't financial at all, the reason. It was purely, I just missed being me and yeah. I felt quite sad about that, how I depicted I would be as a mother, having five years off with my children. That wasn't the reality" (Georgina, British).

Work as a central part of one's 'identify' and as a source of 'self-worth' was also clearly articulated by Jessica, an accountant, who resumed her position earlier than she had originally envisioned, but on a part-time basis. As for Georgina, Jessica missed the professional side of herself and returning to the office felt like coming back to a 'safe place' where she was appreciated and valued. Jessica found motherhood to be emotionally draining, and physically exhausting and struggled to reconcile her identity as a mother with her professional self.

"And the thing is, work is a big part of my identity so it was kind of, I suppose I felt I was getting back to normal or a safe place where you know, it's the familiarity that I liked that a lot, that self-worth from work,

I think I was trying to get that back, when my life isn't normal then, you know, you run away to somewhere that I knew" (Jessica, British).

While involvement in the labour market seemed to be especially essential for Jessica and Georgina to sustain their feelings of self-worth and their definition of themselves, paid work as a source of *identity*, as an activity providing '*intellectual stimulation*' and as a way of ensuring a life outside of their role as a mother is maintained, were aspects referred to by several of the British women. The importance given to, and the wish to keep their individuality separate from their responsibilities as parents, were common themes in the stories told by the Norwegian mothers as well and frequently referred to in their reasoning for returning to the labour force. The fear of boredom and intellectual 'decay' if completely removed from professional life, as was voiced by several Norwegian women, were also concerns expressed by many of the female participants in the UK.

"So, I went back to work, and I actually really enjoyed it. For me, the 3 days a week, that was a really good balance, you know having the days home with him and then also being able to get out in the world and do something with your own mind and being in that environment again where it's not just 'The wheels on the bus' and 'Clap your hands'" (Sally).

In the extract with Sally above, there is a direct reference to how part-time work allows a 'balance' between earning and caring. While this topic will not be explored any further here, it will form part of the discussion later in the chapter.

As it seemed important for mothers to have an identity which was *separate* from their parental responsibilities, for many women, their ideas of how their children should be raised and the values and norms they wanted to convey, also *included* precisely an active preservation of this separate and professional identity. By continuing their labour market attachment, numerous female interviewees felt that they were setting an

example for their sons and daughters, showing them that ‘mummy doesn’t only clean the house or mummy doesn’t just bake cakes’. The wish to instil in their children the perception that mothers can have professional responsibilities, they can have a career and take care of their material wellbeing, was for several British women a vital part of the motivation behind their return to paid work.

*“I think it is really important, especially for a girl to see her mum going out to work and having responsibility. Obviously, looking after her is really important, and having fun with her but just to see that actually everybody goes out to work and does things and I think that's important”
(Maureen, British).*

Most of the participants had been raised by mothers who had temporarily or permanently stepped away from the labour market when they had babies, and although some talked about how this arrangement had given them a childhood filled with support, love and maternal presence, it was rarely perceived to be a family model which was beneficial for women in the long-term. As was the case amongst many of the Norwegian interviewees, the stories some of the interviewees told about their mothers and their decision to give up paid work when the children arrived, often made references to bitterness, loneliness and an absence of self-esteem and financial independence. Although there was a tendency amongst the British women to consciously *avoid* following in the footsteps of the previous generation, as will be explored further on in the chapter, motherhood nevertheless came at a price. While some of the British interviewees wished to show their sons and daughters that that women could ‘have it all’, their experiences indicated that that was rarely the case.

“I guess because I had a stay-at-home mum who wasn't very happy and obviously should have gone back to work sooner, and then when we were really grown up enough not to need her, I think she just sort of didn't quite see how to go back to work, didn't have the confidence, she would

have had to go back to teaching and didn't have the experience in something else and you know, basically didn't do it and should have done and was really unhappy" (Daphne, British).

While the women taking part in this study were often raised by mothers without extensive professional qualifications, most of the female participants from the UK had invested time and money going to university and training for their specific vocations. Discontinuing their careers therefore felt like they were wasting these qualifications. Moreover, because several of the mothers had obtained education in subject areas they were passionate about and the jobs they had chosen allowed them to work precisely within the areas they had taken exams in, their employment was associated with 'fun', 'fulfilment' and 'enjoyment'. Similar sentiments were found amongst the Norwegian women.

"Oh, love it. Absolutely love it. I mean certainly for us; I like the nature of project work because I like the variation. I like meeting different people, I like challenges and the work that we do is absolutely cut out for that" (Georgina, British).

"So, at the moment I absolutely love my job. I love going to work every day. I don't ever have that feeling in the morning when you wake up and go 'Groan'. I never had that. I love going to work" (Sharon, British).

In the quote by Sharon above, an interview conducted before the arrival of her first child, she talked about how she 'loves going to work' and how she 'loves' her job. Sharon spent 9 years training to become a child psychologist, and in her second interview, Sharon expressed how she still takes great enjoyment from her vocation and how working as a child psychologist is still a job she desires to continue doing. Working on a full-time basis, however, she felt was no longer an option for her while a part-time position gave her the possibility of pursuing a career while also having time to be a mother. The sentiment that full-time work ceased to be a realistic option once

motherhood was a lived reality, was a perception shared by the majority of the British women as well as the British men interviewed for this study. Why did so many of the participants from the UK feel that the dual-earner family model, which is embraced in Norway, was both an unachievable as well as undesirable setup? Furthermore, in couples where one of the partners reduced their labour market attachment, why did this alteration almost always involve the mother moving to a less time-demanding position and not the father? This chapter will now turn to the gendered choice of working part-time and the rationale as well as the consequences of this trend.

From dual-earner couple to one-and-a-half income family model

While a rather uniform tendency amongst the Norwegian women was identified where mothers returned to full-time positions at the end of their maternity leave, most of the British female interviewees decided to reduce their labour market involvement and instead came back to paid work on a part-time basis. Being employed part-time meant for some mothers working two days per week whereas for others it involved working for four. Although there was one example of a father who had requested a reduction in his working hours after his son had arrived, this decision was, he admitted, not related to parenthood but rather driven by a wish to have more time outside of the office. For the women, on the other hand, limiting the amount of time they dedicated to paid work was a direct response to their new role and responsibilities as mothers. Some of the female interviewees had hoped that they would be able to continue in their full-time jobs after the maternity leave had come to an end, but as the realities of combining earning and caring presented themselves, these women felt such plans lacked appeal. Holding full-time positions, many argued, would entail *not* seeing your children during the week. While the dual-income family model embraced by the Norwegian interviewees was of course an accessible set-up for the British participants as well, the

fact that working full-time often meant accepting that ‘for each day during the week’ the children would be ‘in the care of somebody else’, encouraged many couples from the UK to choose alternative arrangements which ensured a parental presence.

*“Well, it can be done [two full-time jobs] but the thing is what you want to do really. It depends on how much time you wish to spend with children. I suppose yeah, cause if obviously, both parents work full-time, you accept the fact that for each day during the week, you are not gonna see your children and they are gonna be in the care of somebody else”
(Patrick, British).*

“I couldn’t cope with those kinds of hours and not seeing my children during the week. I think they used to be known as ‘latchkey kids’, I think it was. I don’t know whether you’ve heard that phrase before?” (Georgina, British).

When Georgina in the quote above talks about ‘those kinds of hours’, the working hours she is referring to, and the working hours she used to have before she became a mother, varied between 11 and 12 hours per day, excluding commute. While these office hours were almost, but not completely, unheard of amongst the Norwegian participants, for the British interviewees they represent more the norm than the exception. The discussion will now turn to the long, inflexible and family-unfriendly working hours in the UK.

Working hours – long and inflexible

Although many of the British participants had employment contracts where the typical 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. were the formally agreed working hours, the majority of the men and women dedicated substantially more time than this to their professional lives before they became parents. The ‘normal’ working week in Norway of around 37.5 hours was not the reality for any of the British interviewees.

“Um, so I’ll generally leave home at half six in the morning and get home probably around 8 o’clock every night” (James, British).

"I get into work between 6.30 and 7 and I leave between 6.30 and 7"
(Rachel, British).

Amongst the British interviewees, spending between 50 and 60 hours per week at work was considered 'standard' as well as being a prerequisite to holding an interesting position with responsibilities and prospects of professional growth. While the Norwegian participants *expected* organisations to operate in ways that allowed their employees to have a private life and hence to offer working hours that were compatible with caring responsibilities, jobs with family-friendly working hours were the exception rather than the rule for British men and women. Kelly, a paralegal, talked in her first interview about how 'lucky' she felt, and how 'amazing' her manager was, for allowing her to work from 9 a.m. until 5.30 p.m. Although the time Kelly spent in the office is slightly longer than the 8-4 working days most Norwegians enjoyed, only a few of the British participants were in jobs with similarly short days. Having what Kelly referred to as a 'good job' and being able to work these hours, seemed to be a rarity. In the words of Daphne, a journalist, having a 'nice, interesting job where you do something that you're good at and people thank you for it' will generally come with long days. Her own professional position, to which she dedicated between 9 and 10 hours daily, was considered by Daphne to be 'one of the best jobs you can get for not working crazy hours'.

While it was not the norm amongst the interviewees, there were numerous examples of men and women who *did* work the 'crazy hours' Daphne felt she avoided. Preston, for example, Daphne's partner, said in his first interview that he worked '13 hours a day, 14 hours a day' in his job as a management consultant. Similar hours were given by Valerie, a corporate lawyer, although in her case, the 13 or 14-hour days were the 'minimum'. Valerie explained that if she was 'in the middle of a large transaction, that number could

go up to 16/17/18 hours a day and then weekends'. During these periods of intense work pressure, sleep became a luxury and a private life non-existent.

"And I mean, you don't really sleep. There are times when I get 3-4 hours of sleep every night consistently for a long period. It completely takes over all areas of your life, to the point where you don't make plans on the weekend because you'll probably have to cancel them. So, it's very hard to have any kind of normal existence" (Valerie, British).

Although Valerie's contractual hours were only from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m., the time she was expected to dedicate to her work far exceeded the indicated 8 hours per day. When Valerie was asked what the consequences would be if she worked merely her contractual hours, the answer she gave was:

"I wouldn't be promoted again, I don't think".

As will be discussed in more detail below, Valerie did *not* move to a part-time position after her daughter arrived. She did, however, resign from her law firm and instead found a position elsewhere with more manageable working hours, accepting a reduction both in seniority and in remuneration.

Valerie's husband, Dominic, also in the legal profession, explained that in 'the type of work' which he and his wife were employed to do, the hours were dictated by the projects they were engaged in. In periods of tight deadlines and heavy work pressure, their private life simply had to be put aside. Similar experiences and reasoning were found in the interview with Preston where he explained how being in a 'client service organisation', meant as an employee you 'do what it takes to deliver whatever the client wants'.

"So, there are exceptions to the general rule but there is still a culture of being a client service organisation, meaning you, you know, you do what

it takes to deliver whatever the client wants, which is pretty much what it comes down to or what they need I think would be, probably what would be better, means that you are on call and that you put their interests beyond your own in many very different circumstances” (Preston, British).

The expectation described by Preston above that as an employee you should place the needs of a work project or the needs of the organisation ‘beyond your own’ does not only describe the culture of large law firms or management consulting corporations. Similar tendencies seemed to also exist in journalism where according to Daphne, who was working for one of the largest newspapers in the UK, explained that ‘people will expect you to drop everything on a Saturday after a story breaks’, regardless of whether you were supposed to be on duty that day or not. Daphne decided to leave her full-time position as a journalist after her maternity leave came to an end and instead took a part-time job in editing.

While the long and sometimes unpredictable working hours described above made the two-income family model a difficult set-up to embrace for British couples, the absence of *flexibility* further complicated the combination of earning and caring. Whereas Norwegian men and women described the freedom they had to largely regulate their own working time, the autonomy they enjoyed in their job role and the trust given to them by their supervisors, the stories by the British interviewees, on the other hand, portrayed a working environment with a more rigid approach to office hours and management of people. Arriving at the office *later* or leaving *earlier* than the organisational culture would dictate, was rarely viewed favourably by colleagues or by management. This absence of flexibility coupled with the long working hours meant that for the British couples, dropping their children off at various childcare providers, be it childminders, nurseries or grandparents, and picking them up in the afternoon,

became a logistical challenge. Nursery opening hours, although much longer than what was offered by the Norwegian nurseries, were nevertheless often too short to allow parents on full-time schedules to comfortably drop off and pick up their children before and after their working day. For the Norwegian couples, the freedom they were generally given to manage their own time meant that one parent could do the morning routine, bring them to kindergarten and start their day in the office late while the other was responsible for collection and would therefore leave the workplace early. The logistics of dropping off and picking up were solved, the parents operated as a team, they shared the responsibility equally between them, nobody's job suffered, and the child avoided unpleasantly long days in childcare. James spoke in his first interview about how earning and caring would have been much easier to combine if his wife Georgina and he had both been allowed to 'split' their hours of work in the same way as was the norm for the Norwegian couples. After they became parents, Georgina decided to reduce her labour market commitment and was working on a part-time basis while only taking assignments with local clients who agreed to let her leave for nursery pick-up every day no later than 4.30 p.m.

"Um, and I think it would be easier if we had the ability to split our hours of work so one would start slightly later, one would finish slightly earlier so you could uh...one would drop off and one would pick up from nursery school, rather than you both starting and finishing at the same time"
(James, British).

As was discussed in the previous chapter, the flexibility enjoyed by many of the Norwegian mothers and fathers did not only concern *which* hours they spent on paid labour but also the possibility to at times decide *where* they preferred to work. Even

though 'working from home' was often an option which could be requested, it seemed to rarely be granted.

"[...] so I mean for example the girl who came back into our team from maternity leave, she asked to go to work one day a week from a different office, closer to her house which I thought was quite a reasonable request and I don't see a huge need for us all to be sitting in our office at the same time because our work isn't dominated by meetings or, you know we always kind of work on our own stuff and on our own computers all day so I don't really see why that couldn't have been accommodated, but it wasn't" (Sally, British).

While the British interviewees seldom held positions offering flexible hours or the option of working from home, there were some exceptions to this trend. Marcus, a senior lecturer in law, described the culture at the university where he was employed as 'fairly flexible' and as an organisation not 'enforcing a sort of strict 9-5 at your desk type of culture'. Similarly, Keira, a study manager working for a large pharmaceutical company, regularly had days working from her living room and talked about how she had a manager who did not engage in 'clock-watching' and instead 'empowered' her to spend her working days in the way that she wanted if she achieved what was expected of her. Keira's relatively short working hours as well as the flexibility and the autonomy that she enjoyed in her position, a position she kept on a full-time basis after her maternity leave came to an end, gave her the ability to achieve a 'balance' between her professional and private life. The family-friendly organisational culture where Keira was employed resembled the working conditions for most of the Norwegian mothers and fathers where the challenge of combining earning and caring responsibilities was eased by accommodating practices and attitudes. As most of the British parents were not in jobs offering this 'balance', however, a balance was instead attained by the woman 'scaling back' on her work commitments, freeing up more time for childcare and the increased amount of housework which tended to accompany parenthood. This

chapter will now turn to part-time employment as a way of easing the conflict between women's role as a mother and that of a worker, between the wish to retain an income and professional identity and the wish to be present in their children's lives.

Finding a 'balance' by adopting traditional family roles

"So, I thought 2 and a half days is the perfect balance, it's half a week at work and half a week with him [her son], plus weekends altogether. So, it just felt right" (Sharon, British).

With the long working hours discussed above and the consequential situation that full-time employment for many of the British interviewees would entail limited, if any, time with their children during the week, going down to a part-time position represented for several women a way of exerting 'some kind of control' over how much time they dedicated to their jobs. By moving to a one-and-a-half income family model, the participants often felt that they were able to give their sons and daughters the parental presence they needed while the mother continued to keep one foot in the 'adult world'. As explained by Sally, who after the arrival of her son only worked 3 days per week, although she wished to remain employed, she also wanted to 'be able to do the school run, be at the school gate'. In the words of Sharon quoted above, working on a part-time basis provided the 'perfect balance'.

*"[...] it's about trying to achieve a work-life balance and exert some kind of control over how much of my life is kind of centred on work [...]"
(Cathy, British).*

While the majority of the Norwegian interviewees took it largely for granted that their jobs would be accommodating to their parental responsibilities, most of the British mothers and fathers presumed the exact opposite. Women moving to part-time positions was therefore not only a *common family strategy* to establish a balance

between earning and caring, but many also perceived it as a 'given' that career compromises had to be made if an active presence in one's children's lives was to be achieved. Although a handful of Norwegian mothers and fathers adjusted their working schedules after they had welcomed their first child, few felt that these changes entailed actual *compromises* to their careers and even fewer thought that making compromises was a 'given' if a comfortable combination of their role as a parent and their role as an employee was to be maintained.

I want to be a mum as well, so I may have to compromise on my career for that, and that's a given' (Georgina, British).

Amongst the British couples, the person bringing home the largest pay cheque was normally the man. In these circumstances, following economic logic, it would therefore make sense that the woman was the one to reduce her labour market involvement as this would have less impact on the family's finances than if her male partner limited his work attachment. In the case of Georgina, however, quoted above, before she became a mother, Georgina was earning considerably more money than her husband did. From a financial perspective, the family would therefore have been in a better economic situation if they had decided for James to reduce his employment commitment instead of his wife. The same reasoning held true for Rachel and Derek where Rachel earned in two days the same as Derek earned in a week. Nevertheless, it was Rachel who moved to a part-time position as did Georgina. Derek explained that although he would happily consider limiting his working hours and stepping in as the main carer for their children, it was his wife who had firmly requested a move to a part-time position. As a partner and as a father, he felt that being accepting of and accommodating to his partner's wish for a reduced labour market involvement was 'the right thing to do'. Similar sentiments were voiced by numerous British fathers. Keeping their wife 'happy' and doing their

best to ensure their children were given sufficient maternal love and care appeared to constitute an important part of their role and their duty as the male adults in the family.

"I don't know. It's the whole motherly thing, isn't it? And they're gonna love their mum but I don't know, it seems the right thing" (Dominic, British).

The decision to move to a one-and-a-half income family model involving a reduction in labour market attachment for the mother seemed to be a conclusion *made* by the woman and *supported* by her male partner. It was not a decision driven by economic rationality but rather by adhering to the cultural idea that young children benefit from maternal presence and that such a presence should be enabled and encouraged. While Norwegian men wanted and expected their partners to return to full-time work after their maternity leave came to an end, British fathers perceived it as their responsibility to accommodate their wives' wish to spend less time in paid labour and more time being a mother, even though this would result in less overall income for the family. This chapter will now turn to the normative pressure many British women face when they have children to reduce their employment commitments in order to focus on 'the most important job' in their 'whole life': motherhood

The mother as the primary caregiver

"I mean, for me personally, being a mother is the most important job you do in your whole life." (Valerie, British).

The benefits for children having their mother as their primary carer during the early stages of their lives as well as women's duty to place their responsibilities as the main parent above the demands from paid labour or their desire for a career, were reoccurring themes amongst the British interviewees. Being there for your children, regularly, if not constantly, was commonly perceived to be a 'mother's job'.

"[...] it's a mother's job really as well to look after their kids" (Daisy, British).

"Ideally moms should stay at home until the child is at school-going age" (Valerie, British).

Although Cathy felt her decision to take a step back in her career when she became a mother was entirely her own choice, she was at the same time certain that her husband would have reacted disapprovingly if she had wanted to continue working on a full-time basis. Her husband, Marcus, later verified his wife's assumptions, stating:

"No, I like her [his wife] to spend less time at work and have family time" (Marcus, British).

While Cathy had a wish to work part-time after she became a mother, Jessica, who had gone down to a 4-day position after the arrival of her daughter, explained that her continuing as a full-time employee would probably have been her preferred option, but once motherhood was a lived reality, cutting her office hours 'felt like the right thing to do'.

"I don't know, really, I suppose it felt like the right thing to do, it felt that I did want to spend time with her, I just didn't enjoy it when I was there" (Jessica, British).

While many women saw it as their responsibility to de-prioritise their labour market attachment after they became mothers, fathers often perceived it as their responsibility to support their partner morally and financially in this decision. Failing to do so as parents could even lead to, several of the interviewees argued, suffering for the children. Some of the British participants made a distinction, however, between the mothers who were in full-time jobs because the 'economic circumstances' dictated it and who therefore worked 'out of necessity', and those women whose positions were

too 'important' for them to give it up. Although the situation would be 'harmful' for the children regardless, the two situations were judged differently.

"I think possibly not good [for the mother to work full-time] unless it's unavoidable. I'm from a generation that benefitted from not being passed around from pillow to post all the time, having tea when you got home, so you know, I can see the benefit for the child of having at least some days of the week when there's someone at home but, you know, obviously, it's economic circumstances that can demand otherwise" (Marcus, British).

"I think it would be harmful if you're both full-time but if one is full-time and one either part-time or doesn't work at all then I think it would be a happy household personally" (Derek, British).

The idea that, as voiced by Daphne, that her young son was 'better off at that age having more time with his mother' was a dominant theme in the interviews with the British men and women. It should be emphasised, though, that some participants did use more gender-neutral language when talking about children's need for parental presence during their early years. Sharon, for example, while explaining that working full-time would not 'sit well' with her 'conscience', she also voiced how children needed 'their parents' until school age and how 'the security with mum and dad' was vital for their emotional, social and cognitive development. Derek, although expressing in his interview a moral duty to support his wife's wish to reduce her employment commitments, still felt that as long as there was one parent at home with the children, either on a full-time or a part-time basis, it did not 'matter' whether it was the mother or if it was the father. Similar sentiments were voiced by Damien, stating how the 'dream' would be for 'one set of parents to experience the first few years with the child'.

"Both our mothers stayed at home until we reached school age. And that's obviously the dream, that would be perfect, for one set of parents to experience the first few years with the child, and also to be there as a

role model, as a carer, rather than handing the child over to third parties, who also do, hopefully do a good job, but are not the parents, so if, if there was no financial implication or career threat, missing out on the career, um up to school age would be perfect” (Damien, British).

“Erm, well as long as there was one parent at home, I don't think they would suffer. I don't think it matters who it is” (Derek, British)

Although some of the interviewees did indeed describe mothers and fathers as equally important parents, questions should be asked, however, whether this more gender-neutral way of talking about the role of each of the parents is driven by political correctness or by an actual conviction that dads are equally capable and valuable adults in their children's lives. From the stories told by the British participants, the references made to the mother-child dyad and the nurturing and caring nature of the female sex, it seems the idea that women are naturally the best-suited parent to ensure the needs of the child are met and therefore the one to selflessly put the needs of her sons and daughters above her own need for work-related stimuli and self-development, continue to dominate. There were no men in the study who felt they 'should' go down to a part-time position, whose partner or family would disapprove if they did not do so or who talked about working full-time as a choice which would go against their morality. While it was often perceived to be natural for a mother to take a step, big or small, away from the labour market, the opposite seemed to be the case for the father. As Robert, a sales representative, who was unemployed at the time of the second interview stated:

“There's that general assumption that it's okay for a woman to be at home with the kids but it's not... it's unnatural for a guy to” (Robert, British).

While there was a clear gendered tendency amongst the British participants to move to part-time positions once the period of parental leave came to an end, there were

nevertheless several fathers who made significant changes to their working schedules and to the direction of their careers to better combine the responsibilities of paid work with that of parenthood. Their stories will be explored later in this chapter.

In the quotes above from the interview with Derek and Damien, where they stress the benefits for children to have either their mother or their father present in their daily lives, references are also made to nurseries and child-minders. While both fathers acknowledge that these 'third parties' can 'do a good job', the emphasis is still on how these day-care options are not places that will give children their 'undivided attention', nor are they run by people who will 'love' them the most. Whereas the Norwegian mothers and fathers thought of the state-sponsored nurseries as institutions offering excellent pedagogical stimuli and high-quality care, kindergartens in the UK were generally not considered by the British participants as care options they wished to use more than necessary. There appeared to be a clear distinction between what the interviewees would label childcare provided by 'family' with the mother representing the absolute best option, and childcare provided by 'strangers' or 'other people'. The chapter will now turn to externalised daycare and the ideological as well as the practical barriers to childminders and nurseries being widely utilised childcare options.

"I don't really want a stranger looking after my kids" (Daisy, British).

In Norway, the children of every single couple taking part in this research were sent to nursery once the parental leave had come to an end. Although there was a slight variation in the age of the children when full-time nursery attendance was introduced, the babies were generally between 12 and 15 months old. Amongst the British interviewees, however, only a small minority of the parents chose to send their child to either kindergarten or a child-minder on a full-time basis. Using the services of external

care providers, especially when the child was under 2 years old, was often spoken about in negative terms and references were made to the staff in these institutions as 'strangers'. As mothers were generally seen as the ideal carers, sending children to 'third parties' felt for many as a decision which deprived their sons and daughters of the maternal love and attention they needed. There were therefore sometimes feelings of guilt expressed by the mothers and fathers when their work schedules left them with no other choice but to send their young ones to be 'looked after by other people'.

"We don't feel good about the amount of time they are looked after by other people" (Patrick, British).

"Eh, I don't know, it's just best with family rather than strangers at the early age I feel" (Dominic, British)

As a way of limiting the time spent at nurseries or at child-minders, but also as a strategy for limiting the cost of day-care, an aspect of external childcare in the UK which will be discussed shortly, many British participants engaged their parents to look after their children while they were at work. The unpaid help given by grandparents, and sometimes also aunts, seemed to play a vital role in many families. Although the care offered by 'grandma and grandad' was inferior to the maternal presence which was regarded as the best option, they were not 'strangers', they were 'family'. The guilt associated with sending children to care institutions did not seem to exist concerning sending them to spend time with their grandparents. Instead, it was perceived to be a financially sound solution and an arrangement which was 'nice' for all parties involved.

As Maureen stated:

"Financially is good, it is nice for them, and it is nice for her [her daughter] as well" (Maureen, British).

While grandparents often took on a large share of the caring work, they were rarely able or willing to take responsibility for the children for more than one or two days per week. Most couples therefore established a patchwork of various childcare solutions where time with the mother and with immediate family was combined with days at nursery or with a childminder. Many British mothers and fathers did see the 'benefits' that kindergartens could potentially provide but felt uncomfortable with their children spending the whole or most of the week there as these institutions would then become 'sort of like the main carer'.

"In an ideal world, yeah, you have the parent at home with the child. I mean I do think there are benefits to nurseries because you know there is the social aspect that they promote and also the resources and stuff that they can provide you can't necessarily, but I don't like the thought of them being sort of like the main carer" (Rachel, British).

Marcus therefore felt that his daughter spending 2 days per week at nursery and the rest of the time at home was a good balance and a set-up that did not make her 'too tired'. Similar sentiments were expressed by Sally:

"2 full days at the nursery, I think it's good for him, but I think that's enough. I would hate to have him in there for 5 days a week" (Sally, British).

For some of the interviewees, however, the idea of kindergarten, a more institutionalised setting where a relatively large group of children were cared for, was not an arrangement they felt comfortable with. In the absence of the mother or the grandparents, some felt a child-minder was a better solution as they 'come close to the idea' of family. Childminders would give the children similar experiences to those offered by the grandparents, ensuring their individual needs were met, being cared for in a 'family home'.

“Family or a childminder, because I feel that child-minders are family because, they just come close to the idea of it, you know, they're regarding of your child, and you get the same experience with your child as you would having grandma or grandpa around” (Carol, British).

Although in the minority, there were indeed examples of parents who were advocates of nurseries and who felt this day-care option was ‘good’ for children, for ‘their social skills and their learning’. Some of these parents had themselves been to kindergartens growing up and had positive memories of this experience.

“I think that for children to be with other children in a daycare setting is actually quite good for them, for their social skills and their learning and that kind of thing. And as long as they're in a safe environment with people going to the same kind of place every day and people, they know then I think that's good for them. And it's not like you're not spending any time with them at all” (Maureen, British).

In the case of Maureen, quoted above, and her partner Samuel, they felt their earnings were simply not high enough to pay for a full-time nursery space. To lower their monthly kindergarten fees, they decided to move closer to Samuel's family when their daughter was born for the grandparents to help with childcare. The involvement of Samuel's mother and father was an arrangement driven mainly by financial considerations, not ideological. A similar story was told by Keira. Although she said they would have loved for their son to spend more time at nursery and less time with the grandparents, it was simply too expensive.

“We can only afford for Oscar to be at the nursery for two days a week”.

This chapter will now explore childcare costs and the role they play in couples' earning and caring decisions.

Childcare costs

“There is little doubt that working parents with preschool children will continue to face difficulties combining work with childrearing as long as the cost of private nursery provision remains prohibitive and out of reach for many middle-and low-income earners” (Hyman, et al., 2005: 144).

The contrast in the cost of childcare between Norway and the UK is astonishing. Although the monthly fee of a full-time nursery space in Norway certainly represents a considerable sum of money, especially for families with multiple children, the kindergartens are state-sponsored and the maximum price a day-care centre can charge is regulated to ensure the possibility of universal attendance. For British parents, on the other hand, the fee charged by nurseries was described as the same as ‘one person’s wage’ or ‘the single most significant cost after the mortgage’. Rachel, a primary school teacher who only worked two days per week after she became a mother, said the price for a space at the local kindergarten was so high that even on a full-time wage she ‘might not cover them’.

*“Two nursery spaces are almost exactly what I take home in pay”
(Daphne, British)*

“[...] it was basically on one person's wage, so it didn't seem worth it. So, it just made sense for one to stay at home” (Matthew, British).

For Daphne, quoted above, the decision to return to work 4 days per week was based on her wish to keep a career she found interesting, although exhausting, now that she was a mother. Daphne feared she would struggle to get back into a similar position if she left her job completely and stayed at home for a few years caring for her young children. Her income, however, was *just enough* to cover the nursery fees. Although Daphne’s decision to remain employed did not entail an economic loss for her family, it did not yield any financial gain either.

While Daphne at least had sufficient earnings to pay for her two sons to attend kindergarten on the days that she was working, this was not the case for many of the other women who took part in this research. For some couples, as a way of making sure the family could 'afford' for the mother to return to her job, the grandparents stepped in as part-time carers. Several mothers and fathers said that although they could stretch their family finances to be able to pay for *one* nursery space, once a sibling arrived and two children needed daycare, the cost became too high. Maureen, a social policy researcher who in her previous role was involved in a project around child poverty explained the effect that childcare costs had on the labour market participation for women on lower wages and how these mothers could simply not afford to work. The idea that the dual-income family model was not 'affordable' without the unpaid childcare provided by grandparents and other immediate family members, was an alien concept to the Norwegian couples.

Maureen had herself decided to reduce her labour market commitments after she became a mother. Although her initial decision to move to a part-time position was not driven by the costs of childcare or her inability to 'afford' more time at work, Maureen felt that her original plan of limiting her working week by only one day made no financial sense and instead reduced her position in social policy research by an additional day. With the nursery fees and her salary Maureen calculated the monetary benefits of a 4-day versus a 3-day week were so minor it was not worth sacrificing the time with her daughter for. A similar rationale was given by Cathy who labelled her move to a part-time position as a 'no brainer' after she had calculated that, with the childcare expenses, the family would have 'no more money in the bank' if she returned to her job on a full-time basis. This gendered 'no brainer' decision then, to limit the

hours dedicated to paid labour, a set-up providing a better balance between earning and caring responsibilities, ensuring the children have a more acceptable level of maternal presence while also allowing women to keep a foot in the labour market and retaining a professional identity, does it come at a career cost? Or do women in part-time jobs 'have it all'?

Having it all?

*"I want to be there, but I also want to have something that is for me, I want to have a career. I want everything. I want to have my job and career, but I do want to be an active mum and be there to do stuff"
(Cathy, British).*

As was discussed earlier in this chapter, women's decision to reduce their labour market involvement after they became mothers was for the majority of the female interviewees driven by a wish to have time with their children, be 'active' mums while also keeping a professional identity and being part of the 'adult world'. In the words of Cathy quoted above, she wanted to have 'everything'. For most of the women who went to part-time positions, however, feelings of having 'everything' were rarely expressed in the stories that they told. Instead, many of the mothers talked about how a decrease in their office hours had 'compromised' or 'changed' the way they were 'seen' by co-workers and managers and what they were perceived to be 'able to do'. The reduction in *time* dedicated to paid labour seemed to also be taken as an indication of a reduction in *commitment* to their work. Numerous women hence felt that going part-time had damaged their career progression and were now regarded as somebody 'just passing time' and 'turning up for the pay cheque'.

"But I also think it changes what you're perceived as being able to do, so in terms of career progression, I mean one thing that was said to me was, and it was in connection with the promotion of this full-time colleague of

mine and someone turned around and said to me 'Oh, one day, Cathy, you too will want to progress your career'. And I just thought 'What am I doing here? Am I just here marking time?' Cause actually, if that is all it is, then the price is too high, you know, if I'm going to be working then I do want to get on and I appreciate that being part-time means things take longer because the kind of time you're doing it is more spread out. But I am still doing the same thing as I was doing before. You know, it's not enough to think 'Well, I'm part-time and I have children, I'm just passing time and I'm just turning up for the pay cheque'" (Cathy, British).

While Cathy talked about how her position in the department where she worked was fundamentally altered when she decided to work 3-days per week instead of 5, her husband, Marcus, who held the *same* type of job in the *same* academic department, had no inkling that his reduction in working hours had caused any change in how his colleagues and management regarded him whatsoever. Marcus, who went down to a 4-day week after the birth of his son, a decision made independently of fatherhood, felt that this move had been completely unproblematic and well-received in the office.

As Marcus was the only father amongst the British participants who chose to move to a part-time position, limited conclusions can be drawn from the different experiences between male and female interviewees. The sharp contrast in how the mothers felt that they were viewed and treated after going part-time and how Marcus perceived his reduced time commitment to his job was received and the career consequences of this, is nevertheless worth mentioning. Moreover, as will be explored later, the gendered responsibility for the domestic sphere means that men's involvement in the labour market, whether it is on a full-time or a part-time basis, tends to be less interrupted as ill children, day-care logistics and the overall management of house and home are taken care their female partner. The male participants, Marcus included, were therefore often in a position where they could exclusively focus on their job during the time they spent in the office without having to suddenly leave a meeting or an unfinished email as the

nursery called to let them know their child had a fever or start their day late as they were on kindergarten drop-off duty that day. Parenthood therefore had less of an impact on Marcus' ability to deliver at work compared to his wife Cathy. They were both employed in the same profession, and they had both gone to part-time positions, but unequal sharing of responsibilities for the children meant Cathy's working days were shorter and constantly broken up by various emergencies and appointments related to her son. Cathy described how she was 'juggling frantically' the demands from motherhood and those from her professional life, a sentiment not found in the interview with her husband.

Leaving aside for now the sharing of domestic work amongst British couples, many mothers also talked about how the decision to reduce their labour market involvement did not necessarily lead to a reduction in their workload. Sally explained how she had returned to her job on a 3-days per week basis but struggled to 'squeeze it all in' as 'nobody else was picking up on the two days' when she was not present in the office. The experience of being paid a part-time salary, but doing a full-time job was a familiar one for many women in the study. Some therefore felt that although they were able to do their job 'adequately enough' in their reduced working week, they did not have enough time to 'do it well'.

"It was that kind of, it was like, I could do my job adequately enough in 4 days a week, but I couldn't do it well" (Daphne, British).

"They never said, 'You're only here for 3 days but we expect you do to the same', but the way that things go in the office, nobody else was picking up on the two days that wasn't there so you eventually try to squeeze it all in" (Sally, British).

Rachel who worked 2 days per week as a primary school teacher, although she did share the workload of a full-time post a colleague, nevertheless stated that it was

'harder to work part-time than full-time' as the time she had available to do her job was so limited and nothing could be postponed. Furthermore, the time effort involved in 'handing over to the next teacher', updating her on issues, activities and education plans, meant Rachel worked 'from 7 on a Monday morning until like 11 [p.m.] on a Tuesday, constantly, apart from sleeping'. With Rachel's husband working full-time, the 'care gap' was filled by the grandparents who looked after the children on the days when their mother was teaching.

So far in this chapter, the focus has been on the reduction in labour market involvement made by women to better achieve a 'balance' between the demands from their private and their professional lives. While none of the male participants went to part-time positions to better accommodate to their new caring responsibilities, there were nevertheless several examples of men making career sacrifices or limiting working hours, taking pay cuts or leaving their jobs in their transition to parenthood to ensure sufficient time was available for their role as a father. Although the overall trend amongst the British men was undoubtedly one of uninterrupted continuation of working commitments and working schedules, the instances where less traditional career or earning decisions were made by the male interviewees as they became fathers should be highlighted.

Men's work adjustments in the transition to parenthood

As has been discussed above, working full-time in the UK often means having limited time for caring responsibilities during the week. Although in most couples the 'caring deficit' created by this long-hour culture was frequently solved by the mothers, either temporarily or permanently, weakening their ties to the labour market, for some men, however, the wish to be a present father led them to adjust their working lives. As

Preston, a management consultant who since becoming a father had resigned from his highly pressured and well-paid position with one of the leading consultancy firms in the UK explained:

*“So, yes the role at Accenture is too consuming, too pressured and too long to be compatible with my idea of what being a father should be”
(Preston, British).*

Preston had anticipated this resignation already in his first interview when his fiancé was pregnant with their first child. The hours he had dedicated to a role which he labelled ‘hard-core’ and ‘pressured’ were too long for him to be able to see his son much at all, and the stresses that came with the job left him with little energy to give to his family. Preston stated in his second interview that he had ‘given up various bits of ambition and money to have ‘sort of a balance’. In his new job, Preston was able to pick his son up from nursery in the late afternoon on the days when his partner was working, and he felt he played a more active part as a parent than his previous role would have allowed him to. A similar story was told by Damien who decided to leave his job when he became a father and after a period of unemployment found a position that he felt was compatible with his domestic responsibilities. In his former position, Damien worked 70 hours per week, excluding commute. His new job required a weekly input of between 50 and 60 hours, allowed him to be permanently based at home and offered flexibility. Damien therefore felt he was involved in both the morning and the evening routine with his son, it gave him the opportunity to be available in emergencies as well as generally being more present.

*“I’ve got the flexibility of just taking a 3-hour lunch break, so we go somewhere, to a farm, 3 hours and then I work to midnight, you know”
(Desmond, British).*

The wish to have a working schedule which made it possible to spend time with their children during the week was also expressed by Samuel.

"I want to enjoy seeing her grow up, basically. I don't want to go when she's asleep and come back when she's asleep" (Samuel, British)

After the birth of his daughter, Samuel, who used to work a 12-hour day, reduced the time he spent on his job to ensure he was home for bath time and dinner. Samuel also often arrived at the office later than he had done before becoming a dad as the nursery drop-off was normally his responsibility. The same alteration to work schedules was made by Dominic, a corporate lawyer and Andrew, a project manager, who both took their children to daycare in the morning and therefore started their day later than what had been the norm before their daughters were born.

While the examples above of fathers altering their working lives in the transition to parenthood to ensure they have a more active presence in their children's lives may be viewed as choices merely resulting in a slight modification of the 'male earning - female carer' model of the family, there were other dads taking part in this study whose decisions concerning their involvement in paid labour do not represent a *modification* of such a model, but a *complete rejection* of it. In the case of Robert, once his first child arrived, he started to question the time he spent in the office and how his working hours deprived him of time at home with his family. A few months after the birth of his son, he concluded that he wanted to leave the labour market together and stay at home with his wife Daisy who had already resigned from her job as a waitress. Daisy explained how Robert's position left him with almost no time during the week to be a dad as it was already bedtime by the time he came back from work.

“He did by the time he even got home it was like sort of 6.30 coming 7 o'clock they go to bed around that time so he's kind of missed out on an entire day with them. He may see them briefly in the morning and then he would be gone so then it's just the only time he would really see them was on his days off” (Daisy, British).

Although Daisy and Robert seemed comfortable with the decision of them both being full-time parents, a decision they appeared to have arrived at together, Robert still felt judged by society for having left his position in telesales. While it was in his mind ‘natural’ for mothers to take on the role of full-time carers, as a father he felt he constantly had to defend himself to friends and family as well as to himself.

“And in a way, if I’m honest I suppose I feel..., I feel guilty for being at home” (Robert, British).

The feelings of guilt and of being judged were sentiments that appeared to be rather distant for Patrick, a taxi driver, who had also left his job shortly after the birth of his first child. For Patrick and his wife Cora, a financial controller, it was simply ‘common sense’ that he was the one to stay at home as a full-time carer while Cora continued to pursue her career.

“Eh, well the decision was just a common sense one. I mean Cora has a career and I don't. So, it is just common sense from that point of view” (Patrick).

Cora was the main breadwinner by far and expressed a clear desire to dedicate more time to her professional role than to her role as a mother. She openly admitted that she would ‘really struggle at home’ and be ‘miserable as hell’ whereas Patrick found the prospect of becoming a stay-at-home father rather appealing. They both had the impression that their families did not find this ‘untraditional’ set-up unacceptable. Instead, Cora said, they would have had ‘more objections’ if they were ‘both going back to work’ and sending their daughter to a childminder or nursery at an early age. In the

case of Cora and Patrick, it seems the idea that young children should stay in the care of family rather than being looked after by ‘strangers’ sits deeper as a norm than perceptions about what earning and caring roles should be adopted by each sex.

“I think as well, they [their immediate family] would have a lot more objections if we were both going back to work, we were sending the baby off to a childminder or off to a nursery very young, whereas because one of the parents is staying at home, that is more acceptable” (Cora, British).

Cora was amongst the minority of women taking part in this study who returned to work on a full-time basis after they became mothers. While Cora’s 12-hour working days meant she rarely spent time with her daughter during the week, the constant presence of her husband at home gave their child the parental care they felt she should have. Cora described how as a couple they were ‘equal in most things we do, share most tasks’ and while this role reversal would not work in more ‘traditional relationships’, for them having already established a more egalitarian distribution of domestic tasks, the decision for Patrick to be the stay-at-home parent was in their situation the best solution. In most couples where the mother returned to full-time employment, however, her male partner did not take on the homemaker role and instead continued his work commitments. Leaving aside the discussion around the sharing of domestic responsibilities for now, a topic which will be explored later, this chapter will not turn to the stories of the female interviewees who chose to maintain their full-time position in the labour market.

Combining motherhood with full-time employment

“But no, I don’t feel like I have had to take a step back. I’ve gone back straight in. Same level. I would say same level, but I’ve managed to secure a role where I can probably move up faster” (Keira, British).

As in the case of Cora, when Keira came back to work after her maternity leave, she felt she went 'straight back' into her career. While Cora had long days in the office and travelled extensively, Keira was not required to dedicate the same amount of time to her job, and she had a manager who allowed her to regulate her hours as well as give her the option of frequently working from home. Susan, a clinical researcher, also spoke about her return to her professional life in positive terms. Having received valuable support from her supervisor she was of the impression that her career had not been damaged by her new role as a mother and she continued to enjoy the challenges of her position. Although Susan mentioned being stretched in her attempt to give enough time to her job as well as to her family, she still talked about how a balance had been established and how she had continued to progress in her field after she became a mother. The expressed dedication to her career and the wish to continue as a *full-time employee* were sentiments also found in the stories told by Cora and Keira, both before and after her period of parental leave. Other mothers, however, although they decided to return to the labour market on a full-time basis, felt that if they had been given the option, a *reduced working week* would have been the preferred lifestyle. Valerie, a corporate lawyer, had been in negotiation with the firm she was employed by during her maternity leave, trying to reach an agreement where she could move to a 4-day week. Although her manager had been willing to 'perhaps do it on a trial basis', the company made it clear to Valerie that she would be 'expected to be available' on her weekly day off if her presence and input were needed. Moreover, there would be no time given 'in lieu of it' nor extra holiday or remuneration. If Valerie were having to work on the day she was supposed to spend with her daughter, that was 'tough luck'. At the end of the trial period of 3 months, if her supervisor found this arrangement too difficult to manage, Valerie was told she should then 'consider going back to a 5-day

week'. In the end, Valerie decided to resign from her position at the law firm and instead found a job in an investment bank where she could utilise her legal training, but where the hours fitted better with her domestic responsibilities. Valerie had originally asked her new managers to work on a part-time basis, but unfortunately, this was not accommodated. According to Valerie, a 4-day week in a new role is rarely given. It had to be 'earned'.

"I work for two women, again, one has children, and one doesn't. I came in on the reason, and I told them upfront, that, first of all, I asked for a 4-day week, and they said they couldn't accommodate it. Because I think it's very hard to get a four-day week in a new role. You can earn a 4-day week" (Valerie, British).

Although Valerie in her new role continued to be the main breadwinner, this position with its more manageable working hours nevertheless involved a reduction in remuneration as well as in seniority. The 'career cost' Valerie paid for parenthood was not a cost paid by her husband Dominic.

The wish to move to a part-time position once the period of parental leave had come to an end was also expressed by Kelly. Kelly, a paralegal, decided, however, to remain in full-time employment as she knew her family depended on her income. She was also aware that her company would most likely not agree to her continuing in the same job if part-time hours were requested. In her second interview, Kelly spoke in length about how the absence of part-time roles in her chosen career made her 'really angry and upset' and how there was a 'lot more flexibility that can be given' which would ease the combination of earning and caring responsibilities for employees with children.

"That I would have to change my... it makes me really cross, it does make me really angry and upset because I don't see why they can't have more part-time roles for any type of career, I don't, you know, flexibility in your working and possibly working from home or maybe even working,

shifting your hours to working hours, I think there's a lot more flexibility than can be given" (Kelly, British).

Although it was not a formally approved working schedule, Kelly had managed to reach what she labelled an 'under the radar' agreement with her line manager which allowed her to leave the office at 4 p.m. so she could pick up from nursery. Kelly would then log on again and work for additional hours once her son was in bed. The 'big boss' was not informed about this system, however, and as Kelly felt certain he would not have accepted these flexible working hours, she felt 'guilty' and uncomfortable leaving at 4 p.m. as well as being acutely aware that her unofficial arrangement was fragile and could change at any moment.

Maureen, a social policy researcher, who initially returned to work on a part-time basis decided to accept a new full-time role with a different organisation a few months after her maternity leave came to an end. Her request to work reduced hours was declined so Maureen agreed to a 5-day week. While Maureen spoke about her career with excitement and passion, she would have preferred to dedicate fewer hours to her job and argued a 4-day week would have made her 'feel better' as her daughter then would have received 'enough attention'.

"Eh, sometimes if I am quite stressed with work, I feel that I am not giving Bea enough attention because I'm home and I'm worrying about work, then I do. I think if I worked 4 days a week, it would probably make me feel better about it but, yeah it is difficult" (Maureen, British).

While Kelly felt 'guilty' about leaving work early enough to pick her son up from nursery, Maureen felt 'guilty' about working every day of the week.

Even though Valerie moved to a position with more manageable working hours after she became a mother, the time she spent away from home still left her 'heartbroken'.

Valerie was already on her way to the office by the time her daughter woke up and the evenings together were much shorter than she would have liked.

"I try to leave at 7 or quarter past 7. So, I often leave before she is awake, which is horrible. I hate it. And then I don't see her until the evening, and on the odd occasion when I'm stuck at work Dominic will pick her up if he can. Some of those days I won't have seen her for the whole day. It breaks my heart" (Valerie, British).

The guilt and the heartache described by some of the British mothers did not feature in the stories told by the British fathers. It was a *gendered* guilt about not seeing their children enough, not being there as a mother. This guilt was not a theme in the interviews with the Norwegian participants either, male or female. While the long-hours culture in the UK does indeed limit the time mothers and fathers in full-time jobs have available to spend with their children, it is nevertheless interesting how it is, if not exclusively, then primarily women, who suffer from feelings of guilt over their absence in their sons and daughters' daily lives. This ties in with the tendency for British mothers to move to part-time positions, a move which to some degree frees them of this motherly guilt as they have taken a step back in their careers to make sure their children are given a childhood with maternal presence. When Valerie in her first interview stated that she did not believe 'you can do both parenting and full-time jobs brilliantly', questions should be asked whether this commonly accepted view amongst the British participants refers to both motherhood *and* fatherhood being hard to combine with a 5-day working week or whether it only implies the former. While 'putting your family first' seems to represent the dominant normative guidelines for the British mother, fathers appear to face different cultural expectations. Being a 'good' father does not collide with full-time working commitments whereas the dominant ideas about what constitutes a 'good' mother appear to do just that. Most of the women

who returned to full-time positions after the end of their maternity leave were of the firm opinion that if they were to have a second child, their 5-day working week would simply not be sustainable anymore.

"[...] if you're working full time they say, 'Oh you're not kind of, you're not putting your family first' and that kind of thing, whereas they wouldn't say that about men. (pause) Erm, so... But I think, I think a lot of it comes from women themselves as well, kind of judging each other' (Maureen, British).

For a small handful of the women who decided to remain in full-time employment, however, although they were aware of the perception that mothers should ideally prioritise time with their children overtime at work, nevertheless felt comfortable with the choice they had made about their career. Keira stated in her second interview, that she was 'probably a better mum' when she worked full-time because she was 'happier' being able to dedicate these hours to a job that she enjoyed. As discussed above, though, Keira's working hours were both relatively short and flexible which was not a common experience amongst the British interviewees. Moreover, for Keira, combining motherhood with a full-time job was made easier by her husband, Matthew, having taken on the role of the main carer. In Cora's case, her husband's permanent presence at home meant that she was free to focus on her career. Having a partner who either volunteered to take on most of the caring work or where the job situation dictated an untraditional sharing of time with the children, was not the norm, however. For the majority of the British women taking part in this study, the fathers of their children worked full-time. This chapter will now turn to the sharing of responsibility for childcare, exploring both traditional patterns as well as more egalitarian trends. In doing so, special attention will be given to the differences between couples where the

mother returned to full-time employment and couples where the one-and-a-half-income model was embraced.

Responsibility for childcare – traditional sharing patterns and signs of change

“I think we are quite 50-50. We've got kind of a routine, Samuel sorts her out in the morning and then in the evening I usually kind of do the bath time and I get her to bed, which feels like a big effort at the end of the day, but it's my time with her. So, I quite like that” (Maureen, British).

Although Maureen is the only one amongst the British interviewees who explicitly uses the term '50-50' when referring to how she shares the childcare with her husband, an expression commonly found amongst Norwegian parents, the dual-earner couples from the UK all seem to have established a 'routine' which ensures a large degree of egalitarianism in the distribution of responsibilities for their sons and daughters. Like the arrangements most Norwegian mothers and fathers had agreed on, the interviews with the British men and women found that it was widespread practice to allocate the morning routine to one parent while the other was in charge of the evening. Expressions like 'really well shared', 'tag team' and 'pretty equal' were used by individuals in dual-earner couples to describe how they shared childcare responsibilities.

“It's really shared, actually, really well shared. He does the mornings and I do the evenings. I'm actually doing two things during the week at the moment, so he looks after her on those evenings as well, so he takes a lot of responsibility” (Susan, British).

“So, we tag team, he does morning and I do evening. It means that we don't really see each other” (Valerie, British).

As previously stated, only a small minority of British parents had decided to send their children to kindergarten on a full-time basis. While the dropping-off and the picking-up

therefore was from a variety of places including the home of the grandparents, from childminders or from nurseries, it was nevertheless equally shared between the man and the woman in dual-earner families. The only exception to this pattern amongst the British parents where both the mother and the father worked a 5-day week, was Samuel and Maureen where Samuel worked closer to the nursery and therefore did most of the logistics.

The responsibilities for the nights were also shared equally amongst the dual-income couples. The mothers and the fathers either took turns calming down their child who woke up from a nightmare or who needed water or cuddles, or they dealt with the situation together as a team.

"We both do. I think because it's so hard to sleep when he wakes up that we just both go to him. So, yeah, we both get up and we both get on with it and then we're both really tired" (Kelly, British).

The pattern of an egalitarian allocation of care responsibilities amongst dual-earner couples continued in their sharing of time at home when their child was ill. While Norwegian parents enjoyed paid leave in these circumstances, British mothers and fathers were not given such entitlements. The acceptance and understanding shown by co-workers, managers and clients to workers who were absent from the office due to a sick child also appeared to be generally limited. Taking time off work in these situations therefore led to considerable stress and worry about the potential negative consequences on career development, bonus allocation and overall compensation. Holidays and unpaid leave were often used. The British dual-income couples nevertheless seemed to follow the same principle of 'my turn, your turn' as the Norwegian parents were committed to. Valerie described the sharing arrangements with her husband Dominic when their daughter was ill as 'day on, day off' where she

would stay home one day and the day after Dominic would take over. While Valerie and Dominic had no grandparents around to help, other couples frequently referred to assistance given by their families to ease the caring burden in times of illness.

*“I took all of my holidays, and she took all of her holidays and we just worked it out and my parents were here sometimes, but not much”
(Andrew, British).*

*“It’s, oh God, so hard when she’s ill, because we have no one to help, and no one to come in and keep an eye on her, so (sighs). Last year when I was in Bank of Britain, we took it in turns. If she was sick one day, I would do one day and he would do the next day, so day on, day off”
(Valerie, British).*

In the case of Valerie and Dominic, both corporate lawyers, as they had decided that she would leave her position at the law firm where she was previously employed and instead find a job with more ‘family-friendly’ hours, they had also agreed, on Valerie’s insistence, that the main responsibility for their daughter when she was ill would be *temporarily* carried by him until she became ‘more entrenched in the business’. Dominic was therefore the only man in a dual-earner couple who at the time of the second interview spent more time at home than his partner when their child was poorly.

For the Norwegian couples, there seemed to be a consciousness around a 50-50 split in childcare responsibilities. Amongst the British parents, their sharing of morning and afternoon routines, how they ‘took turns’ in staying at home when their child was ill, appeared to be driven by a practical necessity rather than an active resistance to traditional family roles and a focus on equality and fairness. Once the decision had been made that both individuals in the couple were to continue in full-time positions, with the generally long working hours, the lack of flexibility and the family-unfriendly working culture coupled with a wish for children to have limited time in day-care

institutions, the logical solution was then to 'tag team'. While equal parenting then often became the established practice in dual-earner families, equality was the *outcome* rather than the initial *goal*.

Although *gender equality* was not the guiding principle for Daisy and Robert either, both having left the labour market once parenthood was a lived reality, *fairness* certainly was. By the time the second interview was carried out, Daisy and Robert already had two children and were expecting a third. On the wall in their living room hung an A3 piece of paper with carefully drawn-out rows and columns outlining who was responsible for what for each day of the week. Daisy explained that they had agreed the fairest way of organising the daily care of their children was for them each to have a baby that they 'concentrate on'. So, when Robert had a 'Megan-day', Daisy had an 'Evelyn-day' which involved everything from nappy changing to feeding and bath-time. Half-way through their 'Megan-day' or their 'Evelyn-day', they 'switched' around to make sure both children had time with both parents. The schedule for who was responsible for what daughter on which morning and which afternoon was written out on the A3 poster to avoid confusion.

The egalitarian way of sharing responsibilities for childcare in couples where the mother and the father were both in *full-time employment* as well as in the case of Daisy and Robert where they were *full-time parents* together, represent quite a contrast to the overall pattern found amongst the one-and-a-half earner families. While there were certainly exceptions to this trend, exceptions which will be highlighted, the general picture was nevertheless one of more traditional caring roles. James who runs an HR consultancy firm together with his wife Georgina, said in his second interview, that as they had gone through the process of the pregnancy, they had 'fallen into these roles'

where he had become the main provider and Georgina had taken on the home-maker responsibilities while continuing to work 4-days per week. Georgina who once had been the main earner in the relationship was now in charge of the children and James 'tried' to be back home before bedtime. While James continued working for clients in London, Georgina accepted assignments with local businesses only. Before signing any contracts Georgina always requested relatively short hours which allowed her enough time to drop the twins off at nursery in the morning and pick them up again in the afternoon. Any piece of work which Georgina had not been able to complete in that set time frame, she would then finish once their children were sleeping. In James's case, he could stay in the office for as long as his job demanded. For Georgina, on the other hand, '9 till half 4' was the 'non-negotiable' working hours she had to organise her responsibilities around.

"That's the thing, I do 9 till half 4, so I drop everything and sometimes I say to James, 'Stop working'. 'Oh, I can't I've got to do this'. 'No! I cannot say that. That is the cut off'. And then you know, I might have to go online later when the twins are in bed, but it's non-negotiable, half four, boom"
(Georgina, British).

Georgina stated in her second interview that she often felt like a 'single parent'. While her husband was free to leave for work early in the morning and return home according to his own schedule, Georgina carried the childcare burden almost entirely on her own at the same time as she also went to the office most days of the week. Similar patterns were found in the interviews with several other British women who had scaled back on their employment commitments after becoming mothers. Sally was telling the story of how she was 'running to nursery' with her son in the morning, 'running to the train' and into her office and then 'at the end of the day, running back to the nursery' while her husband leisurely biked to work and enjoyed a free breakfast in peace before his office job commenced.

The juggling of earning and caring responsibilities seemed to be almost entirely carried out by the part-time employed women whereas their male partners continued as before. These mothers told of stressful mornings, stressful working days as they attempted to pack as much into the available hours as possible, and stressful afternoons and evenings.

“So, he would wake up in the morning really early, ‘Bye’, and I would be up getting ready for work, getting Arthur ready for nursery, and the buggy, ‘Right, let’s go’ running to nursery, running to the train. And then at the end of the day, running back to the nursery, trying to run out of the door. And then after a few months I was like ‘This is not great’, I mean, why am I doing this when we are both working on those 3 days, we are both on an equal footing here, ‘I’m getting paid, I’m at work, you’re getting paid you’re at work so why am I doing all the pick-ups and the drop-offs?’” (Sally, British)

Feelings of being stretched and permanently exhausted were found in the narratives of most of the women working part-time. Achieving a ‘balance’ by working part time, ‘having it all’, also meant often being responsible for all the childcare. This gendered allocation of caring duties not only resulted in fatigue but also had a damaging effect on their careers as the daily time-window women in part-time positions had available to dedicate to their professional lives had been significantly reduced. While Sally, for example, spoke about how she had become ‘one of those people’ in the office who said ‘no’ because she always had to leave early, Cathy pointed out how her role as a mother meant her work was often pushed to the side. Fatherhood did not appear to have the same effect on their partners as their schedule was more shaped by the demands of the job than the demands of parenthood.

“Suddenly you are one of those people who says ‘No, sorry I have to go, I have to get that train, so I’m going, bye’. So maybe it makes you stick out more in that sense” (Sally, British).

“Yes, you can’t, you know. In the old days, I could dedicate myself, if I had to do something I could just work until I dropped and now everything is in little compartments like ‘I have until 4 o’clock and then I need to go and pick up’, and then it might be another 5 days before I can look at that again” (Cathy, British).

Both Georgina and Sally spoke in their interviews about how they had eventually confronted their husbands about what they perceived to be a ‘raw deal’ as far as childcare responsibilities were concerned. Up until that point, in their relationships, as well as in most of the other one-and-a-half income model families, there has been an unspoken agreement, an *assumption*, that dropping off and picking up from various day-care solutions, was mainly the task of the mother.

“[...] I think, you know, rightly or wrongly I think James had assumed, and maybe we’d never really talked about it” (Georgina, British).

“Yeah, at some point I just said ‘I’m getting a raw deal here because you’re getting to do your full day at work unchanged because I’m running in last thing in the morning running for a train and then at the end of the day I’m trying to run out of the door as quickly as I can but still fulfil the contractual hours that I have to work while you just hop on our bike for 20 minutes, go and get a free breakfast because that’s what they give you and go and have a shower and go and do your full day and then you’re just coming home, you know at 6 or 7 o’clock or whatever and I have picked up from nursery and started a bath and all that stuff. Yeah, I think I said to him at some point, ‘That’s not right’. So then, and he did make more of an effort after that to pick him up” (Sally, British).

As shown above, Sally felt that Max ‘made more of an effort’ to collect their son from nursery after she had explained to him how unfair the situation was. Further into the interview, however, it transpired that, although Max along with other dads may have been making ‘an effort’ to share the morning and the afternoon routine, this effort merely involved *helping* when they *could*. Agreeing to *help* when the situation so required, unless it collided with their working schedules, is not the same as the 50-50

sharing principle found in almost every Norwegian couple as well as in most British dual-income families.

The largely taken-for-granted arrangement that mothers in part-time jobs would take care of day-care logistics and adjust their working hours accordingly was also an assumption when it came to the care of ill children. Like the gendered responsibility for dropping off and picking up, and in sharp contrast to the Norwegian as well as the British dual-earner couples, there was seldom any *spoken* agreement between the mother and the father about which one of them should stay at home when their son or daughter was ill. As Jessica stated in her second interview:

“I think it was perceived to be my job” (Jessica, British).

Similar views and experiences were voiced by several British mothers whose interviews highlighted the unarticulated and generally unchallenged nature of this sharing pattern.

“There was always, bless, the assumption that it would be me” (Georgina, British).

“We never had a conversation about it, it was just a given that I would go, and I would stay at home and actually it remains the case that childcare is kind of my responsibility” (Cathy, British).

The ‘your turn, my turn, principle guiding the allocation of caring responsibilities amongst British as well as Norwegian couples where both the man and the woman were in full-time employment, did not appear to apply here. Instead, the role of the mother as the primary carer and the ‘naturally’ most suitable parent to provide love and to nurse an unwell child were emphasised. ‘Daddy’ might be ‘all right at dealing with things when it’s all plain sailing’ but dealing with illness was perceived to be a ‘mummy thing’. While some of the mothers in part-time positions reflected on their assumptions, questioning

whether the idea of mothers being the naturally superior carers in times of fever and tummy bugs, others were of the firm opinion that looking after their unwell child was simply part of their 'job' and their 'role'.

"I don't know really, well, I think it's because when they are ill, they want their mummy and partly because daddy is all right at dealing with things when it's all plain sailing, but when there's pressure then, you know, it's a mummy thing. But also, I think, I don't know whether subconsciously you are kind of reverting to what the social norms are perceived to be which is you know husband goes out to work and mothers stay at home and look after the children" (Cathy, British).

"I suppose it has just taken me a long time to realise that I am a mother, I am the primary carer, it is my job, it's just taken me a long, a while to get to that point because again I was fighting against my old self and your old lifestyle and your old [...] So yeah, I think I was just fighting against the, I kind of thought at the beginning that it should be 50-50 or as near to 50-50 as you could possibly get. I now don't think that I think differently, but it has just taken me a while to get there" (Jessica, British).

Jessica, quoted above, explained how she had first found motherhood immensely challenging due to her initial perception that parental responsibilities should be shared 50-50 with her partner, Leo. At the time of the second interview, Jessica and Leo had separated, and Jessica felt that their break-up had made her reflect on her life and she had now come to the realisation that being a mother also involved carrying the main responsibility for their daughter. Although Jessica said she had been 'resentful' that she had always been the one who had to leave the office and collect when the nursery rang and told her their child was ill, Jessica now claimed she was 'fine about that' and that it simply had taken her a 'long time' to come 'to terms with being a mum, a mum's role, a dad's role, just how it all works'.

"I think it's just that I went into it thinking everything is going to be 50-50, 'You'll do some of the night shifts, blabla', but it's just how it, it just doesn't work like that and it just took me a long time to fight against

that, coming to terms with being a mum, a mum's role, a dad's role, just how it all works, really" (Jessica, British).

The way 'it all works', however, with Jessica carrying the main responsibility for their daughter led to her reputation in the office and her industry being negatively affected. As a mother, Jessica became, by her admission, regarded as less reliable and more likely to cancel a meeting or a business dinner last minute due to her child being ill.

In this section, the sharing of responsibilities for childcare amongst British couples has been explored. Although there were exceptions to the overall trend, the interviews nevertheless revealed rather traditional roles amongst the one-and-a-half income families while a more egalitarian arrangement was embraced by the couples where both the mother and the father had returned to the labour market on a full-time basis after the period of parental leave came to an end. The question now is whether the teamwork and the egalitarian sharing patterns in dual-income couples in relation to caring were also found in their distribution of housework. The section below will explore how men and women, mothers and fathers distribute domestic tasks between themselves, comparing the dual-income and the one-and-a-half-income couples as well as exploring the overall changes in sharing patterns which have developed in their journey to parenthood.

Housework

When the British couples were interviewed for the first time, when parenthood was a theoretical concept rather than a lived reality, and when all the mothers and the fathers-to-be were in full-time employment, housework appeared to generally be divided along egalitarian lines. Most of the cleaning was done together at the weekend as the long working hours did not leave much time for domestic chores during the week.

Sometimes the stated distribution was 50-50, other times it was 40-60, but the overall

picture seemed to be one of *equal* rather than *unequal* sharing pre-children. It should be stressed, however, that there were indeed couples taking part in this study where a more traditional gender role allocation had been established. Jessica, for example, did most of the housework and admitted to ironing her partner's shirts every Sunday. Daphne, a journalist, and her fiancé Preston, a management consultant, also had an uneven division of responsibilities for 'domestic stuff' before they welcomed their first son. Daphne's description of her partner as being 'rubbish' at housework was found in the interview with Daisy as well, a waitress, where she claimed the only contribution her husband made in terms of domestic tasks was hoovering. While there were a limited number of Norwegian couples where the woman carried the larger housework burden, amongst the British participants, such traditional roles were less uncommon.

Nevertheless, the *dominant* trend appeared to resemble the 50-50 arrangements found amongst Norwegian couples where the parents-to-be either did housework together or they had agreed on a system where specific tasks had been allocated to one person. While the man was often responsible for the hoovering, the woman took care of the cleaning and the dusting. Cooking was frequently done together or in some couples, there was one individual who was particularly passionate about this chore.

While most of the parents-to-be felt that cooking, cleaning, hoovering, laundry and grocery shopping was, in the words of Georgina, an HR consultant, 'divided straight down the middle', once the women and men became mothers and fathers, this egalitarian arrangement was in many couples, but not in all, exchanged by a much more traditional distribution of responsibilities for unpaid domestic work. With parenthood, a gendered division of labour often emerged. The 'definitely joint' or '50-50' sharing pattern became in some couples more of a '20-80' distribution with the woman carrying

the larger burden of household chores. In families where an uneven distribution of domestic work had already been established before their first child arrived, this arrangement simply became further entrenched.

“So, I’m not, I’m not too good, so I’d say maybe 20% on my side and 80% on Sharon’s side” (Damien, British).

The gendered journey of parenthood as far as housework was concerned, however, was almost exclusively found amongst the parents who had embraced the one-an-a-half-earner family model. In the couples where both the mother and the father returned to the labour market on a full-time basis, an entirely different sharing arrangement was agreed on. As was discussed earlier in the chapter, dual *earning* seemed to come with dual *caring* to a much larger extent than was the case in couples where the mothers scaled back on their employment commitments. From the interviews with the British participants, it then appears that this egalitarian versus traditional pattern included *all* aspects of domestic labour, childcare as well as housework. While mothers with a reduced labour market attachment tended to be the main carers and the ones who carried out most of the chores in the house, the women who remained in full-time jobs not only shared the earning *and* the caring responsibilities with their male partners, but they also had a more egalitarian distribution of housework.

“It’s funny since we had her [their daughter], our roles have, our responsibilities have kind of, by themselves, they have naturally and organically kind of split in the sense that I tend to do all the washing and all the clothes, Dominic is very good at tidying up her toys. He, like, we have certain chores that he does, like he takes out the bins and all that kind of stuff, but it has become more equal because it had to become more equal” (Valerie, British).

In the case of Valerie and her husband, although neither of them thought they had a particularly unequal distribution of housework responsibilities before they became

parents, Valerie felt that their sharing arrangements had become *even more* equal after their daughter arrived. With them both working long hours, both holding demanding and stressful jobs, 'it became more equal because it had to become more equal'. In the same way as Dominic's involvement in childcare was in many ways a *practical necessity* to sustain the two-career family model that they had chosen to maintain, his sharing the responsibility for housework was also a practical requirement as there would not be enough hours in the day for Valerie to carry it all out on her own. With the arrival of a child, the amount of housework increases.

What Dominic and Valerie, did, however, along with most of the other dual-earner couples, was to hire a cleaner. While this trend was also found amongst the Norwegian interviewees after both parents had returned to full-time work, it was a more common solution in the UK with the competing demands from professional and domestic lives. The 'sharing' of housework' therefore, to a certain degree, meant sharing it 'by paying a cleaner', outsourcing tasks that have traditionally belonged to women. The egalitarian trend seen in the allocation of domestic chores, even after couples become parents and the work in the house intensifies, is therefore not necessarily driven by men's increased effort, but by the tendency to pay somebody else to carry part of the burden. Amongst the one-and-a-half-earner families, the hiring of cleaners was much less common.

"We, we share it by paying a cleaner" (Dominic, British)

"When I went back to work, we got a cleaner. She comes every two weeks and we recently have gotten her in every week" (Susan, British).

"I know that our marriage is a bit happier, just with a cleaner" (Keira, British)

Although the help of a cleaner certainly makes the running of a household more manageable, there is work involved in hiring a cleaner, ensuring the necessary cleaning products are available and that the house is tidy and ready to be dusted and vacuumed. From the interviews with the couples who had decided to employ a cleaner, it became clear that the organisation of this help and the person who is ultimately in charge of the domestic sphere tended to be the woman. While there are encouraging signs of British men, at least in dual-income families, taking on more of the household chores than they saw their father do, the relative equality in the 'doing' was not found in the 'thinking' aspect of domestic work. As will be argued in the section below, the gendered initiative-taking as well as overall responsibility for the running of house and home, was, as was also uniformly the case among the Norwegian couples, owned by the female interviewees. The research found that the 'mental workload' was carried out by women working part-time as well as full-time and even in families where the father stayed at home.

The mental workload – initiative and overall responsibility

“He doesn't see anything. In the sense that he won't realise that there is a wash that needs to be done, but if I say: 'Put a wash on' he will quite happily put a wash on. If I put a wash on and tell him to hang the washing up, he'll do it. If I say to clean the bathroom, he'll do it. He can Hoover. But he doesn't see it. He doesn't think about it. And I always think about what we're having for dinner, which, we have arguments about this because I plan in advance” (Keira, British).

In the same way as 'seeing', 'initiating', 'planning', 'thinking about' and 'organising', the mental aspect of unpaid domestic labour, was exclusively owned by the women in the Norwegian couples, the same pattern was found amongst the British. The men were 'happy' to carry out the chore they had been asked by their partner to do. The washing up would be done, the bathroom would be cleaned, and the floors would be hoovered,

without much resistance, but they were following instructions rather than themselves instigating it. While women *managed* the home and the children, the men *helped*. The same manager-helper dynamic identified amongst the Norwegian couples was indeed existing amongst the British as well.

"It's probably mostly me but if I ask him, he does it. But it would probably be me who takes the initiative and will say, 'We need to clean this out'"
(Sally, British).

"She usually tells me when to do it, I guess. 'Get the Hoover out, go on! Off you go'" (Samuel, British).

Corresponding to how the Norwegian men described their wives and girlfriends, the British fathers talked about their partners using labels like 'the matriarch', 'the decision-maker, the 'boss', the 'authority, and the 'organiser'. While in most relationships, this 'manager-helper' dynamic went unchallenged, there were examples of couples where this arrangement led to frustration and at times even anger, for both men and women. Matthew, a car mechanic, expressed in his second interview how the lack of 'freedom' and the feeling of being 'over-managed' had led to resentment and passiveness. Everything in the house, he said, had to be done according to *how* and *when* his wife wanted it. When he did chores in the house, it was never quite good enough, or it was simply done in the wrong way. His initiative-taking often backfired and now he had made the conscious decision to 'just sit back and let her do it'. Matthew was not alone in pointing out how the strict rules and the established standards set by their female partners removed their willingness to instigate jobs and take overall responsibility. Many women also admitted to almost preferring managing certain domestic tasks themselves, as their husbands did not do them 'quite as well' as they should be done.

“Marcus does the hoovering, I do all the other cleaning although he will, you know, he will do it but it’s just that he doesn’t do it quite as well as I want them to be done, so I do it” (Cathy, British).

“She doesn’t understand when you don’t need managing. She doesn’t understand when she’s not giving anybody else any freedom to do anything. Because you’ve over-managed it, but yes, then she’s going to complain that you’re not doing anything” (Matthew, British).

Although the level of frustration voiced by Matthew was rare to find amongst the British mothers and fathers, the gendered overall responsibility for the running of the household seemed to be the source of tension in couples more than what appeared to be the case for the Norwegian parents. Many women pointed to the ‘mental energy’ involved in managing the home and a handful of men complained about being ‘over-managed’. Comparing the stories of the British and the Norwegian participants, however, it looks as if the mothers from the UK ‘micro-managed’ their male partners to an extent hardly seen amongst the Norwegian couples. Whereas the Norwegian women were responsible for the ‘bigger picture’, most household chores had already been allocated between the man and the woman and these were often carried out without much prompting or detailed supervision, the British women were frequently the ones who not only had the overall responsibility but also instigated, managed and quality-checked even the *smallest* domestic chore. The mental workload carried by the women from the UK seemed therefore to be a *heavier* workload than the one owned by their Norwegian counterparts.

As for the Norwegian women, with parenthood, the responsibility of being the person ultimately in charge of the domestic sphere grew in scope and intensity. Sally described her daily life as being the one always ‘on the clock’. Motherhood, for her, involved ‘constant thinking the whole day’. Not a single man comparably described fatherhood.

"I feel like I'm always the one who's on the clock, like 'Do you need to sleep? Do you need to eat?'. You know, I feel like I'm the one who does, and that's one of the things when you have kids that I have never thought of before, I mean physically it's quite hard, but the mental energy is more, it's just always thinking 'Who needs to eat? Who needs their nappy changed? What are they doing? Has somebody hurt themselves? Is Ben safe or is Arthur about to whack him with something? It's always, you know, that constant thinking the whole day, like what is happening? What is happening next? What comes next? Who needs to nap? You know, in amongst the tantrums and tears and everything" (Sally, British).

Sally explained how the mental energy it takes to manage the house and the children is more draining than the physical aspects of this workload. Staying on top of the children's schedules, remembering doctor's appointments, planning meals, booking holidays, making sure nursery bags are packed with the necessary content and clothes in the right sizes are bought for the changing seasons, all require mental labour. In her interview, Georgina pointed out how Christmas in their house 'wouldn't have happened' unless she had organised it and Sally talked about how she sometimes wondered if her husband would even remember to feed their sons if she was not present. According to Sally, childcare 'is kind of my responsibility'. That holds for every British mother who took part in this study.

"Even last night he [her son] was unsettled and he [her husband] was going 'Do you think he needs his nappy changed?'. And I was like 'I don't know. I don't have any more qualifications that you've got. What do you think?'. And he goes 'I don't know, what do you think?'. And I often find myself saying that you know: 'I'm not the only person in the house who can decide'. And I also say 'What would you do if I wasn't here?'. Like, would they eat if I wasn't here?" (Sally, British).

"Shopping, I do all the shopping. All the bookings of holidays, all the activities. Christmas happened because of me, wouldn't have happened otherwise" (Georgina, British).

"Well, I thought that Matthew would have known Oscar's routine, but he said 'No'. He doesn't. And I'm like 'Well, he has a nap in the afternoon'. Well, now he just has a nap in the afternoon but back then it was a nap in the morning and a nap in the afternoon, he has his breakfast, then he has

lunch at about half 11 or 12, and then we feed him again at about half 3. I don't know whether he just switched off or didn't listen" (Keira, British).

In the case of Keira, quoted above, and her husband, Matthew who had been unemployed throughout her maternity leave. When Keira was due to return to her full-time job, she was surprised to discover that Matthew had still not learnt their son's daily routine although he had been physically present as much as she had been. While Keira had been the one with the overall responsibility, Matthew had 'helped' with their baby and in the house, as and when instructed by his wife. 'Switching off' and being unaware of children's schedules and daily lives appear to be a male privilege.

In the same way as the gendered overall responsibility for the domestic sphere was justified amongst the Norwegian participants, the British mothers and fathers, although it caused frustration and anger at times, considered it to be 'natural' for women to be the ones ultimately in charge of the home and of the children's wellbeing. Being a mother, and certainly a 'good mother', involved managing the household. While mums were thought to be 'more nurturing' and had the general overview, dads, it was argued, 'come in from work and they play'.

"I don't know, I think a dad's role is different, I think mums are more nurturing, more practical with the food and the 'I'll take the shopping in' and 'she's got this on this week', while dads are more, they come in from work and they play, you know" (Jessica, British).

"And yes, he doesn't have the dishes done when I come home from work and yes, a wash has not been put on, but he has had more fun with Oscar than I would have had if it was me, because Oscar would probably have been playing by himself while I was putting a wash on and while I was doing the dishes. So, it's just different styles of parenting, but probably Matthew does not think about it, because I do it" (Keira, British).

The 'different styles of parenting' referred to by Keira above, where one parent is organising, planning, initiating and managing while the other 'plays' and 'helps' out in

the daily running of the household, shows deeply gendered ownership of the overall responsibility for the domestic sphere. Although many of the British dads interviewed for this study had embraced a more active and involved father role than they had grown up with in addition to having taken on more of the housework burden than was customary for their sex only a generation ago, the mental aspect of this labour continues to be carried out by women.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has explored the journey of parenthood for 15 British couples. While the Norwegian men and women experienced this journey in rather *uniform* ways where similar decisions about earning and caring were made, and similar outcomes emerged, there was considerably more *diversity* in the choices made by the British interviewees and subsequently in how responsibilities for paid and unpaid work was distributed in the couple. In Norway, *every* man and *every* woman taking part in this study returned to the labour market on a full-time basis after the parental leave had come to an end, apart from one mother and one father who were in the process of applying for jobs. Their children *all* attended nursery 5-days per week and their professional lives largely continued as it had before the journey of parenthood had begun. Although a gendered overall responsibility for the domestic sphere was indeed uncovered amongst the Norwegian participants, both sexes seemed to engage symmetrically in employment, caregiving and in housework.

For the British participants, on the other hand, the arrival of their first baby brought about a 'wave' of major gendered changes. Moreover, men and women, both as individuals and as couples, adapted to their role as parents in a *variety* of ways rather than following a uniform pattern. With the long and inflexible hours most of the

interviewees had in addition to the cost of childcare and the cultural perception that 'good mothers' made career sacrifices to ensure their sons and daughters had sufficient maternal presence, there was a tendency amongst the couples to fundamentally 're-structure' their distribution of roles and responsibilities in the world of paid labour as well as in the home. This 're-structuring' involved for most of British women a reduction in their commitments to paid work as well as an adoption of a gendered sharing pattern in all aspects of unpaid domestic labour. For some mothers working part-time meant going down to a two-day week while others decided a four-day contract would be a more suitable schedule to achieve a 'balance' between their responsibilities as an employee and those as a mother. There were no examples of British fathers scaling back on their labour market involvement to ensure enough time was available for their parental role. That said, there were indeed men taking part in this study who significantly reduced the number of weekly hours they dedicated to their job after their baby arrived. Moreover, there were a small number of British fathers who chose to leave the labour market completely and become full-time carers. Nevertheless, the overall pattern was one of gendered career adjustments and traditional earning and caring arrangements.

While some of the one-and-a-half-earner couples did express a preference for following a traditional division of labour, the majority did not. Their choices instead followed what Risman (1998: 29) has labelled the 'logic of gendered choices' where the existing institutional and cultural arrangements made it practical to adopt these earning and caring roles. As many parents emphasised, working full-time meant not seeing your kids. Additionally, the price of childcare made numerous mothers and fathers question the real value of the dual-earner family model. According to Himmelweit and Sigala

(2004), the cost of motherhood can only be reduced by providing universal affordable childcare and ensuring parents can work hours that are compatible with their caring responsibilities. This is largely the case in Norway while it is not in the UK.

Even with the cost of childcare, the long working hours and the normative pressure on mothers to put the needs of their children above their desire for a career, there were nevertheless many women who chose to remain in full-time employment. For these women, a more *egalitarian* sharing pattern with their male partners emerged *both* in their distribution of household chores *and* in their allocation of childcare responsibilities. In the same way as the Norwegian participants, these men and women worked as a team, took turns and had specific tasks that they had ownership of.

Although gender equality and fairness rarely were the articulated or the conscious goals of this set-up, it was certainly the outcome, showing a decisive move away from and a firm rejection of the traditional gender split in family roles. Among the dual-earner British couples, the 'double shift' was a shift they shared between them. As was the case amongst all the Norwegian mothers and fathers, however, the overall responsibility for the domestic sphere, childcare as well as housework, was owned by the British women regardless of whether they held a part-time or a full-time job.

While the shared earning and caring responsibilities amongst the British dual-earner couples eased the challenges of combining parenthood with full-time jobs, many mothers admitted to having preferred a less time-demanding position. These women also articulated concerns about continuing with the same schedule if they chose to have a second child. Working full-time was already stressful enough and logistically difficult with a single child so if a sibling ever were to arrive, some women felt their current employment commitments were impossible to maintain and a part-time would be the

logical solution. No fathers expressed similar fears or talked about how an expansion of their family would potentially require them to take a step back in their careers. The stress, the pressure and the lack of time with partners and children as a result of full-time employment, also featured less frequently among the British fathers as well as being largely absent in the narratives told by the Norwegian parents. Valerie, a corporate lawyer described being a full-time 'working mum' as having to 'kill yourself' to get out of the office in time for nursery pick-up, not 'lifting' her head, not taking a lunch break, not going for coffees with colleagues, just working 'furiously'.

"But when I am in the office from 8 until half 5 I literally do not lift my head, I literally work furiously, and I think you have to because you don't take a lunch break, you don't go for coffees, you don't do any of that stuff, because you're a working mom, you have to get out of there at half 5 and you have to get your work done, so you just kill yourself to get out of there at half 5" (Valerie, British)

Reading Valerie's statement above, bearing in mind as well that she had already accepted a position with less remuneration, seniority and work pressure to free both time and energy for her role as a mother, the decision made by many British women to opt for part-time jobs is not difficult to comprehend. While the dual-earner, dual-carer model of the family was an option amongst the British participants, it came at a much higher price than it did for the Norwegian parents.

Chapter 8: Conclusions and reflections: continuity and change, conformity and resistance

“First childbirth has a capacity that other births do not have to brand reproduction with a lasting meaning for the mother, to influence all other reproductive experiences. And it is a turning point, a transition, a life crisis: a first baby turns a woman into a mother, and mothers’ lives are incurably affected by their motherhood; in one way or another the child will be a theme forever” (Oakley, 1979: 24).

Ann Oakley’s ground-breaking book, *From Here to Maternity*, was published more than a generation ago. Along with other feminist writings at the time (see for example Hartman, 1976; Meissner *et al.*, 1975; Rich, 1977; Vanek, 1974), it represented a firm shift in perspective away from a sociology still deeply steeped in functionalist theory (Parsons, 1949; Parsons and Bale, 1956) where the division of family roles by gender was mainly regarded as natural and unproblematic. Suddenly, perceptions of women’s inherently unselfish and nurturant character along with dominant ideas that a woman’s ‘true’ calling in life was only to be realised by marrying, raising children and tending to the home, were challenged and criticised. Whereas Rich (1977) described motherhood as an institution which has ‘withheld over one-half of the human species from the decisions affecting their lives’ (Rich, 1977: 13), Oakley (1979) argued that becoming a mother entails the confrontation of ‘the full reality of what it means to be a woman in our society’ (Oakley, 1979: 1). This ‘reality’ involved economic dependency, social isolation, and unequal distribution of power within the marriage. While men were exonerated from ‘fatherhood in any authentic sense’ (Rich, 1977: 13), for women motherhood was ‘a crisis in the life of a woman, a point of no return’ (Oakley, 1979: 1). Although so much in the lives of men and women, mothers and fathers, has changed over the last 40 years, research shows that the journey of parenthood still largely ‘wedges’ the ‘sexes apart’ (Oakley, 1979: 13). Oakley and Rich’s findings and theorising,

therefore, continues to have significant relevance today. Why does the transition to parenthood generate such a persistent gendered allocation of unpaid family-related work and care? This research set out to explore this well-documented gendered journey, to understand and explain *how* and *why* parenthood still appears to crystallize a gendered division of labour in heterosexual couples. While the study sets out to capture and comprehend the *continuity* of gendered transitions to parenthood, it also wanted to understand the *change* that is happening in earning and caring patterns in present-day couples. The specific research questions addressed in this thesis are:

How do couples in Norway and Britain adapt to parenthood in ways that establish, modify or reject a traditional gender split in family roles? Why do these patterns emerge? How do the stories of first-time parents differ in the two countries before, during, and after the period of parental leave?

Norway and Britain are two countries with fundamental differences in the macro-level gender ideologies and their institutional representations. The comparative approach allowed for individuals' and couples' journey of parenthood to be linked to the wider political and cultural context in which their choices are made, and their lived experiences are had. Although Sullivan (2004) described the change in the gendered distribution of earning and caring roles and responsibilities in heterosexual couples as 'slow' and 'piecemeal', if we were to compare some of the journeys of parenthood captured in this study to those of their parents, the change that has taken place could almost be described as 'rapid', 'profound' and 'revolutionary'. This holds especially true, but not exclusively so, for Norwegian mothers and fathers. While many men in this research were indeed exonerated from 'fatherhood in any authentic sense' (Rich, 1977: 13), participants revealed more active and involved fatherhood ideals, shared caring practices, and career sacrifices. As for the women interviewed, some narratives could

have been taken straight out of Oakley's writing, describing motherhood as a 'crisis' in their life, revealing marital conflict and power imbalance, a loss of self, a loss of career opportunities and a loss of financial independence. For other women, traditional 'motherhood scripts' were abandoned, and new ones were written.

This final chapter will tie together, summarise and compare *how* people in Norway and in Britain 'do parenthood', *why* they swam in one direction along the 'gendered river' and not the other, *how* they feel about it and the consequences of their family strategies. It will also discuss why these findings matter, limitations of the study and directions for future research.

The gendered anticipation and transition to parenthood

"I've never really discussed it with Didrik, I just told him, and he didn't even question it or talk about it" (Kelly, British).

"Yeah, no for me, I probably take it a bit for granted that I'm the one who is going to be at home with the child. Yes, and Per is also taking this for granted. We have just fallen bang into a traditional gender role pattern (laughing). We're clearly following old traditions here" (Tonje, Norwegian).

The introduction of Additional Paternity Leave (APL) in 2011 meant couples in the UK were for the first time allowed to share the latter half of the 52-week-long maternity leave (see Chapter 3). Although this leave period remained unpaid, the reform meant that the sharing of care for a small baby became an established legal right. In Norway, similar sharing entitlements had been in place since 1978 but due to the limited uptake by new fathers, the Norwegian state introduced a 4-week long 'daddy quota' in 1993, a period of leave which had been increased to 12 weeks by the time the interviews with the Norwegian participants were carried out. The opening up to or the encouraging of a more equal sharing of caring responsibilities during the first year of a baby's life, does

rarely, translate into fathers embracing the role of the primary parent. As illustrated in the quotes above, from a British mother and a Norwegian interviewee, the gender-neutral leave entitlements remain, in both countries, deeply gendered in ownership and use. The fact that parents-to-be seldom discuss how these weeks and months should be utilised reveals gendered assumptions around infant care and whose overall responsibility is to look after the baby (Bass, 2015). When this research was designed, the intention was to capture and analyse the *negotiations* taking place in the transition to parenthood but instead of negotiations, the research discovered an almost complete *absence of conversations* around the use of parental leave entitlements. McKay and Doucet (2010) reported similar patterns from their study of Canadian fathers' use of paid parental leave benefits, labelling the decision-making process as one of 'collaboration' where 'parents concurred that the mother would decide and the father would follow her wishes' (McKay and Doucet, 2010: 307). The interviews with the Norwegian and British participants pointed to a moral commitment for the fathers to allow the mother to 'own' the parental leave, to support her in her maternal duties and to facilitate what McKay and Doucet labelled the 'mother-child dyad' (McKay and Doucet, 2010: 308), in the first year of parenting. The Norwegian and British participants talked about the bond between the mother and the infant, how mothers 'instinctively' knew their children, how babies 'needed' their mother and how this special mother-baby relationship should be protected and encouraged. The strain on their woman's bodies caused by pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding also strongly influenced men's and women's perceptions about what is fair and 'natural'. Even when more damage was done to the mother's career than the father, or where it made no financial sense to adopt this family strategy, women being the ones at home on parental leave was generally advocated. It was considered a moral duty for the father to ensure

the mother had sufficient time at home with the baby, and it was the mother's obligation to take this time. Parental leave rights do not exist in what Brandth and Kvande (2020) call a 'contextual vacuum' and gendered expectations around how men and women should 'do parenthood' formed an important part of the context in which the participants in this research navigated their transition to motherhood and fatherhood.

The decision-making patterns of the couples interviewed took place within a context of norms, ideologies and networks of friends and extended family which held predominantly traditional ideas of parenthood. Whether or not fathers took leave, the duration of their time away from paid work and the timing of this leave was also clearly influenced by expressed or expected responses and judgement of managers and colleagues. This research therefore supports existing research on couples' leaving-taking decisions (see Fox, 2009, Brandth and Kvande, 2020; McKay and Doucet, 2010 and Twamley, 2021) where fathers have, at most, an ambivalent and tentative sense of entitlement regarding gender neutral parental leave. Legal rights alone are clearly not enough to create a sense of entitlement. Additionally, whereas some Norwegian couples, all of which had detailed knowledge about their individual as well as their family rights, expressed a sense of embarrassment that such traditional roles had been embraced in the transition to parenthood, the vast majority of the British men and women were not aware of the APL's existence. How can couples even *consider* a more equal sharing of the time at home with the baby if such possibilities are not part of the conscious landscape they operate and negotiate in? If the British Government is sincere in its attempt to encourage father care, and for these entitlements not to be what Leo described as a 'kept secret' and James labelled 'a token gesture without much thought', at the very least, such rights must be adequately communicated to the UK population.

In Britain, due to the recent focus on promoting men's performance of unpaid care (Mitchell, 2023), 'the legal barriers to fathers being accepted as legitimate primary carers are coming down' (Atkinson, 2017: 367). In Norway, a country that has been at the forefront of supporting egalitarian sharing practices, these barriers were largely removed more than a generation ago. Although this should encourage fathers in both welfare states to take extended leave, there is a 'divergence between widespread judicial acceptance of involved-fatherhood discourse and the reality of fathering practices in the UK' (Atkinson, 2017: 367). In Norway, the state's promotion of caring fatherhood seems to remain more of a political ideal than a common lived reality during the early stages of parenthood. Ellingsæter and Leira (2006) argue that 'in general, gender-neutral reforms that institute parental choice regarding childcare offer far more generous opportunities for fathercare and more equal sharing of childcare than is actually used' (Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006: 273). Similar views are put forward by Salmi and Lammi-Taskula (2015) who maintain that parental leave which is based on a 'free choice' rationale falls short in contributing to gender equality. What happens when 'free choice' is severely restricted and when the policy reserves a specific period for one parent on a lose-it-or-use-it basis?

Re-establishing the balance

While 'taking away' shared leave from the mother was considered 'unethical' and went against an ingrained 'good father ideology' in both countries, *not* taking the 'daddy quota' was also perceived by the Norwegian interviewees to be morally wrong. Whereas the Norwegian mothers 'owned' the gender-neutral parental leave, there was a clear sense of entitlement among the fathers to the 12 weeks earmarked for them. The daddy quota was strongly endorsed and even praised by every one of the Norwegian participants, and with one exception, all the men had decided to take this parental leave.

At the time of interviewing, the daddy quota had been an established part of the parental leave system for two decades. During these years, Brandth and Kvande (2017) argue that a 'normalisation process' has taken place of fathers as carers in Norwegian society. They further maintain that the implementation of this parental leave seems to have created 'a historical path dependency' where 'seeing fathers alone (without mothers) with prams in the middle of a normal workday has become a common picture in the Norwegian context' (Kvande and Brandth, 2017: 42). This study completely endorses their views and findings. The fathers' quota has helped support parental choices that were not self-evident at the time of its implementation and represents an example of how the state and society can make it clear that childcare is the responsibility of both genders. According to Olsen (2000), parental leave schemes can shape the social construction of fatherhood, motherhood and parenthood, they can establish new norms as to what it means to be a 'good father' and a 'good mother' which then create new earning and caring patterns. The Norwegian interviewees suggested that the daddy quota has become internalised as an entitlement and is firmly embedded in organisational cultures and practices in ways that support active fatherhood and contribute to gender equality in childcare. This, change in one generation has not been 'slow' and 'piecemeal' but rapid.

By comparing men's sense of entitlement to the gender-neutral shared leave and the earmarked 'daddy weeks', this analysis adds to previous research explaining why individual and non-transferable leave works better than shared rights when it comes to increasing fathers' involvement in unpaid care work. Moreover, comparing Norwegian participants, where all the fathers except one spent nearly 3 months as the primary carer, to the British participants where the fathers' time at home did not exceed their 2

weeks of paternity leave, gives valuable insight into how a reversal of roles in the couple, even if it is only temporary, serves to ‘undo’ the cementing of gendered family roles. During their time at home, caring for the baby alone, Norwegian dads reflected on how they had gone from ‘helper’ to ‘expert’, how ‘the balance’ had been restored in their relationship with their partner, how their confidence as a parent had grown and how a ‘bond’ and a ‘connection’ to their baby had been established. In contrast, the British fathers talked about how their partner’s maternity leave serves to ‘entrench’ traditional earning and caring roles, ‘establishing a routine’ where their wives were responsible for children and housework, and they focused more on their paid work. Although the father’s uptake of leave is only ‘one manifestation of the norm of equal parenting’ (Brandth and Kvande, 2020: 36), the short-term changing of roles had long-term effects on how couples ‘do parenthood’ after the period of parental leave.

This study has shown that Norwegian parental leave policies have had a positive impact in terms of father-child engagement. This continues into later years and includes a rather equal sharing of housework. A more gendered, but not uniformly so, continuation parenthood was discovered amongst the British parents.

Doing parenthood – adopting, modifying and rejecting traditional gender splits in family roles

“It continues to be the case that mothering and fathering are contingent and gendered practices but have been shown to be responsive to political and policy interventions as evidenced in Northern countries. Cultural and economic change has also led to an increased number of mothers in the workplace and men’s greater involvement as fathers in caring. But the gender equality ‘revolution’ awaits completion as institutional constraints persist.” (Pedulla and Thebaud, 2015: 116)

The Norwegian couples all started the journey of parenthood in a rather uniform and deeply gendered way (see Chapter 5). The *absence of conversation* and the *gendered*

ownership of the gender-neutral leave entitlements were striking findings in a country that has been at the forefront of encouraging egalitarian caring practices for more than a generation. Whilst the research discovered an initial adaptation to parenthood which very much *established* traditional splits in family roles, it also found a complete *rejection* of this gendered pattern once the fathers started their 'daddy months' and were suddenly in charge of both care and housework. This rejection of a traditional gender split in family roles persisted in the Norwegian parents' family strategies. These empirical findings somewhat counter Seierstad and Kirton's (2015), argument that

"Norwegian women's capacity to combine work and family is strengthened by the progressive national welfare regime and simultaneously weakened by the somewhat traditional gender culture/ideology within the workplace and wider society, where women are still perceived as the main family carers" (Seierstad and Kirton, 2015: 401).

It appears then that the normative climate and the cultural traditions in Norway surrounding the mother-child and the father-child relationship are changing rapidly and the dual-earner, dual-carer family model is becoming the norm. Following the '50-50' or the 'my turn, your turn' sharing principle, housework, childcare and earning were in fact in almost every Norwegian couple allocated with 'egalitarian precision'. When such sharing patterns were *not* found, there was an expressed awareness around the fact that such practices were not embraced and a voiced embarrassment that as a couple they had failed to live up to the normative expectations of equal workload in the 'private' and 'public' sphere. These interviewees articulated a high degree of 'gender consciousness' (Sullivan, 2004) where mothers and fathers as active agents consciously strived, and generally succeeded, to not fall into gendered roles. Sunniva expressed how she was 'a bit determined that even though she [her daughter] wants me, he [her husband] should not give in as he also needs to sing and put her to bed'. The equal

sharing practices involved everything from cooking, cleaning, nursery pick-up and drop-offs as well as staying home from work when the child was ill. Although many of the Norwegian men and women emphasised how the daddy quota had restored the 'egalitarian balance' in their earning and caring roles and responsibilities, the 're-writing' of 'traditional scripts' was also aided by a national context encouraging and supporting caring fatherhood and working motherhood. The institutional constraints referred to above by Pedulla and Thebaud, (2015), preventing the completion of what they called the 'gender equality 'revolution'', seems then to a significant degree to have been removed in this Scandinavian country.

Whereas all the Norwegian interviewees returned to full-time employment most of the British mothers did not. The cultural, financial, political and institutional context in which men and women in the UK navigated their journey of parenthood, meant that a rejection of gendered family set-ups required a much more forceful resistance. In Norway 'going with the flow' largely meant a *refusal* to swim down 'a sea of traditional cultural attitudes and gendered workforce realities' (Sanchez and Thomson, 1997: 99) when they become parents. In the UK, on the other hand, choosing to resist gendered earning and caring roles involved 'swimming against the tide'. Whereas in Norway there is not only a normative expectation of working motherhood and caring fatherhood, the dual-earning household was also supported by relatively short and flexible working hours, accommodating and family-oriented organisations as well as the availability of high quality, affordable nurseries, the British parents strived to find a 'balance' in a world where these equality-promoting culture, structures and institutions did not exist. As discussed in Chapter 7 of this thesis, most of the mothers in the UK chose to reduce their labour market commitment post-maternity leave. In these couples, there was a

dominant perception that combining two full-time jobs with parenthood was not 'realistic', nor was it 'desirable'. Many took it for granted that motherhood involved career sacrifices, it was 'a given', according to Georgina. In a national context with deeply rooted gender ideologies around the division of labour, time-greedy, inflexible organisations and a lack of state-funded childcare options, a significant number of couples therefore followed what Risman has labelled 'the logic of gendered choices' (Risman, 1998: 29) where existing institutional and cultural arrangements made it practical and 'natural' to adopt these earning and caring roles and responsibilities. Part of this gendered logic was also *financial logic*. The fact that most fathers earned more than their partner coupled with the high nursery costs meant that it often made economic sense for the mother to take a step back in her career. With the gendered decisions around earning also came gendered ownership of the entire domestic sphere. By the time the maternity leave had come to an end, the paths the mum and dad were on had indeed been 'wedged apart'. Previous egalitarian sharing arrangements had been replaced by gendered household roles. Although it is tempting to then argue that the overall trend amongst British parents was to adopt to parenthood in a way that *established* traditional gender split in family roles, this research would to some extent challenge such conclusions. Listening to the stories of new mothers and fathers in the UK, there is clear signs of alterations in both thinking and behaviour. Whilst a variety of gendered motherhood and fatherhood identities and practices were being constructed, the study identified critical reflection, questioning, frustration and even anger towards the forces at play in shaping the journey of parenthood in such gendered ways. The British women, both the ones who returned to full-time positions and the ones who reduced their labour market commitment post maternity leave, overwhelmingly expressed a wish to continue to have a foot firmly in the labour market, something that

was 'just for them', but also be a present parent. As voiced by Cathy, 'I want to be there, but I also want to have something that is for me, I want to have a career. I want everything'. For British fathers, the desire to have more time with their children, and to be active and involved parent, lead some of them to change career paths, often to the detriment of remuneration, future job opportunities and status. Doing fatherhood and doing motherhood *is* changing. This is also evident from the Deloitte Millennial Survey (2018) (from Sullivan, 2021: 349), which included responses from more than 10,000 millennials across 36 countries, where 7 out of 10 fathers in the UK said they would weigh up their child-care responsibilities before accepting a new job or a promotion. Sometimes welfare state policies react or adapt to changing conditions and other times they are proactive in their reforms (Kautto *et al.*, 2001 in Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006). In Norway, it can be concluded that the promotion of fatherhood 'at the policy and institutional level' (Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006: 79) has succeeded in producing 'more symmetrical definitions of women and men as parents' (Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006: 79), this proactive approach, designed to induce family change, is largely, both historically and at present, lacking in the UK. Nevertheless, despite cultural, institutional and political forces aiming at conserving gendered earning and caring patterns, contemporary British couples, as shown in this study, are negotiating new sharing strategies where working motherhood and involved fatherhood is increasingly expected and embraced. Sullivan (2021) maintains that progressive change should always be regarded as a long-term, uneven process and that large-scale changes are unlikely to occur over the course of just a few decades. Although some of the empirical findings presented in this thesis, would support such an argument, it also points to 'large-scale', and rapid alterations in parenting practices and identities. Where 'uneven', 'slow' and to some degree even 'non-existent' change had taken place, however, it was in the

gendered *ownership* of the domestic sphere. This chapter will now turn to the persistent gendered mental workload.

The gendered mental workload – ‘lagged adaptation’ or ‘stalled revolution’?

In the interview with Sally, a British mother, she described motherhood as ‘constant thinking the whole day’. Similar sentiments and experiences were shared by all the women, in both welfare states. Whereas the parents in Norway and the UK had rather *different* experiences of combining earning and caring responsibilities, the *similarity* in how the female participants talked about and reflected on the mental workload was a striking empirical finding. This gendered overall responsibility and accountability for the home sphere, both in terms of housework and childcare, point to deep-seated normative assumptions about the domestic role of women. Although both sexes may, as discovered in this research, symmetrically take part in caregiving and employment, inequality persists in the more *invisible* aspects of family labour. In every one of the couples interviewed, even the ones who had completely rejected a traditional gender split in family roles, women *managed* the home and the children and men *helped*. As Berk noted thirty years ago, there has been an ‘outstanding stability’ in mothers’ responsibility for the home (Berk, 1985: 195). The thesis therefore concludes that whereas a modification of traditional gender roles in the journey to parenthood can be documented, there has not been an outright rejection of it in *any* of the couples taking part in this research. The moral dimensions and the related scrutiny of parenting practices, how parenthood is ‘performed’, weigh much heavier on mothers, as maternal subjects, than the judgement and critical review fathers encounter today. Women are, according to Synne, ‘often better at organising all these things, like a Santa party at the nursery, costumes, buying new clothes and all the things you may not just see’. A failure

to live up to what Synne describes as ‘the expectations’ of ‘your role as a mother’ where you for example ‘forget to buy a birthday present or something like that’, would then be perceived as mothers not having their family and their life ‘under control’. Being a mother, and certainly a ‘good mother’ involved managing the household. Whilst fathers’ involvement in both caregiving and housework has in both nations increased and, masculinities and fatherhood, both as a theory and as a practice, are being redefined where ‘traditional, binary and oppositional patterns of gender’ (Miller, 2017; 152-153) is to some extent *discontinued*, gender inequality in parenthood is *continued* in less visible forms. The longitudinal, qualitative and comparative data collected helped to assert and explain the reasons why the overall responsibility concerning housework and caring for young children remains what Miller described as ‘a maternal act’ (Miller, 2017: 147) and how this shaped the journey of parenthood. Is this gendered responsibility a manifestation of ‘lagged adaptations’ (Gershuni *et al.*, 1994), or are we instead witnessing a ‘stalled revolution’ (Hochschild, 1990)? This study and the narratives told would point to a bit of both. Although gender relations are moving in new directions, Sullivan (2004) described this change as ‘slow and piecemeal’ (Sullivan, 2004: 209). For some couples, their journey of parenthood could arguably lend support to the stalled revolution thesis whereas for others the awareness of and the frustration or embarrassment around the gendered mental workload and/or more traditional ‘doing parenthood’ patterns, points to more of a lagged adaptation, where the practice has yet to catch up with gender consciousness and an egalitarian ideology. Having studied how individual behaviour and thinking are shaped by policies, institutional forces and cultural beliefs and how men and women themselves impact on and negotiate societal design and dominant discourse, it was fascinating to discover the at times disconnect, ‘lagged adaptation’ or even mismatch between agent and structure,

the 'macro' and the 'micro'. There were contrasts and contradictions, pushing and pulling mothers and fathers in a variety of different gendered ways. The men and women taking part in this study negotiated their roles and responsibilities in national landscapes where working motherhood and caring fatherhood were both advocated *and* restricted. On some levels, there was a push or even a 'gentle force' towards egalitarian sharing practices whereas on others symmetrical earning and caring roles were obstructed by gendered institutions, policies and ideologies. Given the diversity in how couples adapted to parenthood but also recognising the significant change that has taken place over the last generation, maybe the best way of describing the continuity and change, conformity and resistance found in this study, building on Sullivan's claim that change in the distribution of earning and caring roles and responsibilities in heterosexual couples are 'piecemeal', is by labelling it a *piecemeal revolution*?

So far, this final chapter has focused on drawing together, summarising and comparing the gendered journey of parenthood in Norway and Britain, pointing to the individual, interactional, institutional, political and cultural forces at play in shaping the decision-making and the lived experiences of couples as they become mothers and fathers in two different welfare states. The next section will discuss how these insights were obtained followed by what the policy implications of such empirical findings are.

Understanding the gendered journey of parenthood

Even though it has been clear for decades that parenthood tends to move heterosexual couples towards a more gender-traditional division of labour (see for example Grunow and Evertsson, 2016, 2019; Sanchez and Thomson, 1997), there has been surprisingly little research on parenthood by sociologists concerned with gender differences and gender inequality (Rehel, 2014). The transition to parenthood, is described by Yavorsky

et al., (2015) as ‘a significant shifting point for the gender dynamics of a relationship’ (Yavorsky, *et al.*, 2015: 664) and by Grunow (2019) as an adjustment altering ‘everyday practices and patterns of conduct in fundamental ways’ (Grunow, 2019: 9), continues to be inadequately researched and understood. The existing studies on gender inequalities in the division of paid and unpaid work that *do* exist are, according to Grunow (2016), mainly based on ‘quantitative analysis of the population or large statistically representative samples thereof’ (Grunow, 2016: 62). In these studies, she argues, ‘conclusions are drawn based on correlational analysis of pre-defined indicators’ (Grunow, 2016: 62) and the participants own stories, reflections, explanations and voiced emotions around the decisions they made and their lived experiences, are not heard (Neale, 2015). While a quantitative research methodology is indeed useful for answering ‘what’ questions, a qualitative design is more appropriate if the intention is to explore ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions (Marshall, 1996). That said, this study does indeed build on the existing quantitative body of knowledge and has strived to provide complimentary empirical data which can contribute to an enhanced understanding of how and why gender differences increase when couples become parents. This thesis intended to follow men's and women's journey of parenthood, listening to and analysing their narratives as they went from a life as a childless couple to life with a baby. The focus was on a small group of dual-earner couples in two welfare states, Norway and the UK, who were in a similar stage in their life course as they were about to become parents for the first time. The participants were able to discuss their own decision-making, both before and after the arrival of their infant, within the context of the relationship but also within the context of the ‘social world’ in which their journey of parenthood took place. Taking a longer view, Miller argues, ‘provides descriptions and narratives of change and continuities that, through their accumulation and layering,

come to tell stories which are different perhaps from those originally intended or sought' (Miller, 2017: 157). Miller goes on to say that this longitudinal approach also allows the researcher to 'look back across the twists and turns of lives and to document what might have changed and what remains embedded – and why' (Miller, 2017: 157). By listening to and analysing the stories of Norwegian and British men and women, stories of 'change' and 'continuities', of 'twists and turns' in their journey of parenthood, this study contributes to studies which emphasise the necessity to concentrate on the details and the almost invisible ways in which mothers and fathers reproduce, modify or undo gender in their everyday life (Fox, 2009; Miller, 2010; Risman, 2009). Sullivan (2021) argues that 'Qualitative longitudinal studies that trace the same individuals and couples through time' are 'likely to make increasing contributions to our understanding of the micro-processes involved in progressive change' (Sullivan, 2021: 350). Once an in-depth understanding of the 'micro processes', and the circumstances producing both inequality and equality, how and why such patterns emerge, there is a real opportunity to intervene (Risman, 2009). By comparing individual accounts of how and why men and women experience and subjectively frame their journey of parenthood, both within and across two different socio-economic and national contexts, this study hopes to have helped establish a more comprehensive knowledge base and appreciation for the mechanisms that so frequently leads to an adoption of a traditional gender split in family role when couples become parents. It also hopes to have provided new insights into how and why men and women at times *challenge* and *reject* such gendered earning and caring responsibilities along with an understanding of what their lived experiences of such 'untraditional' paths are.

Up until now, this chapter, but especially this section has emphasised the thesis' *empirical* contributions. The next aspect to consider is: given the findings in this research, what are the *policy implications* assuming future Governments wish to create a national context in which working motherhood and caring fatherhood are embraced and encouraged?

Policy implications

Parental Leave Policies

“The long period of maternity leave, supplemented by the substantively shorter two weeks of paternity leave, which is the only standalone entitlement available to fathers and co-parents, divides household labour and resources down traditional gendered divisions. It affirms the gendered expectation of ‘femininity’; women are natural caregivers and provide domestic labour. The two weeks of paternity leave reflects how ‘manliness’ is not associated with caring labour, and that their role is to be in the paid workforce” (Mitchell, 2023: 157)

The UK Women and Equalities Committee published a report in 2018, ‘Fathers in the Workplace’ where they recommended the UK Government repeal the transferable maternity leave and instead consider introducing a standalone entitlement of 12 weeks of paternity leave, comparable to the Norwegian ‘daddy quota’. The findings from this longitudinal and comparative study strongly support the policy recommendations outlined in the report. It was clear from the interviews with Norwegian and British mothers and fathers, that while gender-neutral leave entitlements had gendered ownership and use, the existence of *reserved* weeks designed on a use-it-or-lose-it basis, had created not only an *opportunity* for dads to spend a considerable amount of time at home caring for their baby, but a *normative expectation* of men to do so. The introduction of the daddy quota had in other words served to manifest an *obligation* for fathers to take leave and in doing so the policy had relatively swiftly managed to redefine cultural ideas of good fatherhood. Consequently, the vast majority of

Norwegian fathers do utilise the parental leave weeks which are reserved for them and as discovered in this research, the 'swapping of roles' that takes place during this time, when the mother returns to work and the dad takes care of home and baby, contribute to re-establish egalitarian earning and caring practice post the child's first birthday. In recommending an introduction in the UK of individual non-transferable leave rights as a way of enabling and encouraging a more equal sharing of responsibilities in the household, three additional elements should be considered.

The *first* factor has to do with the income replacement offered. While the Norwegian men in the study did not suffer any loss of wages while they were on paternity leave, for the British men, making use of the APL would involve a total absence of pay. According to Bruning and Plantega (1999) and Rostgaard (2002), the level of wage substitution to provisions is critical in influencing a father's take-up of leave entitlement. This is true not only for gender-neutral shared leave entitlements but also for individual rights. Largely due to the gender pay differentials in heterosexual couples, high-income replacement is required to incentivise men to temporarily step away from their paid jobs (Kilkey, 2006) and for the couple to be able to afford even short periods of 'untraditional' family strategies. In a study of 24 countries, O'Brien (2009) finds that men's rates of leave-taking are higher in countries with high wage replacement.

While earmarking periods of parental leave and designing these entitlements on a use-or-lose-it basis would strengthen fathers' positions in negotiations with their partner and their workplaces, the *second* factor that needs careful consideration is how these 'daddy weeks' should be added. Would an introduction of reserved, individual rights for fathers involve taking leave weeks *away from* the mother or would it *add to* the total leave available for the couple per child? Birkett and Forbes maintain that 'Almost

inevitably, the former scenario would be opposed by women's groups' (Birkett and Forbes, 2019: 218). The latter option, they claim, would be blocked by business groups and is therefore not a realistic option for any Government. When the quota for fathers was established in Norway, this month, was *added* to the existing leave period. Perhaps a gradual introduction of a British version of the daddy quota is the answer? The reform in Norway encountered minimal resistance and the reserved weeks now represent almost a third of the overall leave package. That said, Norwegian mothers continue to take most of the parental leave which does serve to reinforce a traditional division of labour in the *transition* to parenthood, albeit more seldom in its *continuation*.

The *final* aspect to be discussed here, although the points outlined do not in any way claim to represent an exhaustive list, is around whether non-transferable leave entitlements for fathers should be designed in a way that discourages or outright prevents mothers being present during the time their male partner is at home. In the interviews with the Norwegian participants, it became clear that although the men did indeed spend a substantial number of weeks *alone* on leave, there was also a tendency for their wives or girlfriends to take some time off work simultaneously. Whereas critical questions should be asked around the extent to which the state should go in and 'dictate' mothers and fathers sharing decisions, it is nevertheless the case that if the couple decides to use the earmarked weeks in a way that limits dad's time as the primary carer, the 'rebalancing' of family roles may not happen.

The availability of high-quality, affordable child-care facilities

As discussed in Chapter 7, the contrast in the childcare cost between Norway and the UK was astonishing. Even though the monthly fee for a full-time nursery space in Norway undoubtedly represents a considerable amount of money, all kindergartens are

sponsored by the state and the maximum price a child-care facility can charge is regulated to ensure the possibility of universal attendance. Every one of the Norwegian couples taking part in this study sent their child to a local nursery on a full-time basis after the period of parental leave had come to an end. For British parents, on the other hand, the fee charged by formal childcare providers was compared to 'one person's wage', leading many couples to conclude that the family's finances simply did not stretch far enough to send their child there. Only a few of the British used full-time external childcare provisions. The unaffordability of non-family care alternatives naturally also increased with the arrival of additional children. Whereas the parents may have been able to cover the fees of *one* nursery place, with the arrival of another baby, several mothers and fathers explained that financially it did not 'make sense' for the mother to return to work full-time. It should be mentioned, however, that many of the British participants did not have a favourable view of early child-care facilities, referring to the staff in these institutions as 'strangers' or 'other people' who would not give their sons and daughters the love and attention they needed. The idea that maternal presence was vital in the first few years of a child's life, was a commonly, yet not universally, held perception. That said, the absence of state-sponsored, high-quality kindergartens sends a strong signal to parents about what kind of care is considered 'good' and 'proper'. It serves to reinforce traditional views around women's role in society and hinders egalitarian earning and caring practices. According to Sullivan (2021), in terms of policy responses, there is a need for the Government to provide 'parents with easy access to high-quality, affordable early child-care facilities' (Sullivan, 2021: 349). Sullivan goes on to argue that 'making it easier for both parents to return to work after having a child, such measure can significantly enhance gender equality' (Sullivan, 2021: 349). The findings in this study support Sullivan's views. Additionally,

the research revealed that the opening hours of the nurseries also shaped family strategies. Whereas in Norway the opening hours of external childcare provisions tended to 'match' parents' working hours, for the British parents, their jobs often demanded more time than nurseries were offering. Although this study does highlight a need for policymakers to consider ensuring child-care facilities offer longer opening hours, the other and related issues found in this research point to time-greedy, inflexible and family-unfriendly organisations. This chapter will now turn to the necessity for more flexible working and shorter hours.

The need for flexible working and shorter hours

From the interviews with the British men and women, one of the main themes which emerged as a significant obstacle to combining earning and caring responsibilities was long, inflexible and family-unfriendly working hours. In Norway, the 'normal' working week was around 37.5 hours. In the UK, on the other hand, between 50 and 60 hours per week was perceived to be 'standard'. That said, several of the British interviewees dedicated considerably more time to their careers than this. Preston, a management consultant, said he worked between 13 and 14 hours per day whereas Valerie, a corporate lawyer, described 13 or 14 hours as the 'minimum'. Although an excerpt from the interview with Anders stating that 7 and a half hours working day was the norm and that 'people will look at you in a strange way if you work longer than that' captures the experiences of most Norwegians, greedy organisations do exist in this welfare state too. Some Norwegian mothers and fathers hence changed jobs and career paths in the transition to parenthood to better accommodate the new caring responsibilities. To quote Seierstad and Kirton: 'although Norway is among the more gender progressive

countries, it should not be idealized to the extent that it is held to be beyond criticism and improvement' (2015: 402).

The long working hours generally found in the UK but also featured in the stories of Norwegian parents were only one side of the issue though. For the British participants, their attempt to find a balance between their earning and caring roles was further obstructed by inflexible working hours as well as resistance from managers when caring responsibilities required work tasks to be completed remotely. Sullivan (2021) maintains that

"A business culture that allows parents to work shorter and more flexible hours, enabling them to take time off when their children are sick (assisting them to flexibly make up the hours lost, for example from home), would go a long way to help overcome some of the hurdles in the path of gender equality in the division of labour" (Sullivan, 2021: 350).

Building on Sullivan's argument as well as on the empirical findings in this study, it is clear that if a more equal distribution of earning and caring roles in contemporary couples is to be achieved, workplaces that are still dominated by what Sullivan calls a 'traditional, patriarchal management culture' (Sullivan, 2021: 350) need to, either through their own initiative or through Government imposed legal reforms, establish policies and practices that enables wage-earners to be both committed employees as well as present parents. In short, organisations where members of staff are expected to and rewarded for working long, inflexible hours in the office, being available round the clock and constantly prioritising their work commitments over their family responsibilities are not compatible with caring responsibilities and are likely to continue to shape men and women's journey of parenthood in gendered ways. The limited opportunities, as expressed in the interviews with many British participants, to work from home, and for their organisations to allow more hybrid working, have

fundamentally changed, however, with the unprecedented, recent and still ongoing global COVID pandemic. The pandemic completely interrupted labour markets and triggered an extensive and sudden succession of experimentations with flexible and remote work arrangements (Vyas, 2022). A 'new normal' was established, one that so far seems to largely remain. This new normal has 'challenged traditional relationships with employers and employees, work time and working hours, the work-life balance (WLB), and the relationship of individuals to work' (Vyas, 2022: 155). The question then is: do these novel work arrangements also challenge the traditional division of labour in heterosexual couples? This discussion will now move to the final part of this chapter where future research is debated and the limitations of this study are highlighted.

Limitations and future research

As part of the response to the global COVID pandemic, many Norwegian and British cohabiting parents began working from home. Three and a half years after the pandemic began, these flexible and hybrid ways of working have in many professions become established as a new normal. The interviews for this study were carried out in a pre-COVID world and therefore do not capture this novel organisation of work and the impact it has on couples' domestic and working lives. With both fathers and mothers, more present at home, the opportunity for them to share house and care work, is greatly increased (see for example Collins, *et al.*, 2021 and Garcia, 2021). Given how recent the pandemic is, limited research currently exists on the lived experiences of heterosexual couples when they become parents, and how and why earning and caring decisions are made in a post-pandemic society. Emerging findings (see for example Craig and Churchill, 2021 and Sevilla and Smith, 2020) indicate that whereas men participated more in housework and childcare during the lockdown, although not to an extent that overturned existing gendered sharing patterns, this temporary alteration

does not always lead to a permanent egalitarian shift. Future research, both quantitative and qualitative, should investigate the transition to parenthood today when working from home has become largely, (but by no means practically possible in all professions) accepted and often encouraged, where the space has been created to challenge and to renegotiate domestic roles. The British participants told stories about requests for flexible working having been denied and how the requirement of being present in the office was complicated and at times prevented them from being able to ‘juggle’ earning and caring responsibilities. How has that changed since the pandemic? Are we seeing more egalitarian sharing patterns in heterosexual couples or has the gendered division of labour persisted? As discovered in this longitudinal and comparative study, there were both change and continuity, resistance and conformity to gendered working and caring roles. Future research is likely to discover similar patterns, but the world in which individual and couple decisions are made has changed fundamentally since this thesis began. Building on the insights uncovered in this study, succeeding studies should explore the transition to parenthood post-pandemic.

Another aspect that needs further investigation, and an area where this study provides limited insight, is what happens when couples have subsequent children. The research presented in here captured the gendered journey of parenthood as men and women went from a two-individual family setup to a life with caring responsibilities. What happens when this journey *continues*, and additional care work is added to what seems to already for many couples be a ‘fragile balance’? Some of the British parents argued that the current arrangement was financially and logistically ‘just about’ functioning. If more demand was put on this ‘brittle family strategy’, the equation would no longer add up and different earning and caring roles may have to be renegotiated. Future research

should hence explore the gendered effects of *second* and *third* children and compare it to the choices and lived experiences of mothers and fathers once their *first* baby is born.

A concluding reflection on the limitation of this research and opportunities for future studies to fill this knowledge gap concerns itself with the fact that *only one* of the fathers interviewed utilised *any* of the parental leave entitlements that the couple have a right to share. Although the thesis has provided valuable insights into how and why these gendered sharing patterns emerged and could therefore speculate around the potential mechanisms shaping a more egalitarian division of the time at home with the baby, this does not mean that such knowledge and understanding has been established. Building on the findings in this study, future research should compare the journey of parenthood in couples where the use of the gender-neutral period remains gendered to the lived experiences of mothers and fathers where this common family strategy is challenged, and partners divide the parental leave entitlements on a more equal basis.

Final remark

In 1983, Ruddick stated that ‘the most revolutionary change we can make in the institution of motherhood is to include men in every aspect of childcare’ (Ruddick, 1983: 89 in Doucet, 2017: 11). Nearly half a century ago, the Norwegian state, with its introduction of gender-neutral leave entitlements, did slightly open the door to such inclusion. In the UK, more than 30 years would pass before a similar ‘invitation’ was given to British parents through the establishment of the APL policy reform. As shown in this thesis, fathers in today’s Norwegian and British society have yet to be included in ‘every aspect of childcare’ and the journey of parenthood remains gendered. That said, both the institution of motherhood and the institution of fatherhood are changing.

Whereas the persistence of the traditional division of household and market labour has

been remarkable so have the modifications and the resistance to this gendered family structure among heterosexual couples at present.

Appendices

Appendix 1

British Interviewees

Couple 1

| | | |
|-----------------------|--|--|
| Name | Kelly | Didrik |
| Age | 33 | 33 |
| Religion | None | Christian |
| Marital status | Married to Didrik | Married to Kelly |
| Profession | Paralegal | IT Accountant |
| Social class | Lower middle class | Lower middle class |
| Location | Rural. On the outskirts of a small village in Surrey | Rural. On the outskirts of a small village in Surrey |

Couple 2

| | | |
|-----------------------|--|--|
| Name | Susan | Andrew |
| Age | 31 | 35 |
| Religion | None | None |
| Marital status | Married to Andrew | Married to Susan |
| Profession | Clinical Researcher | Project Manager at a research organisation (biochemistry) |
| Social class | Middle class | Middle class |
| Location | Rural. On the outskirts of a small village in Cambridgeshire | Rural. On the outskirts of a small village in Cambridgeshire |

Couple 3

| | | |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| Name | Jessica | Leo |
| Age | 41 | 40 |
| Religion | None | None |
| Marital status | Co-habiting with Leo at the time of the first interview. Leo had moved out when the second interview was conducted. | Co-habiting with Jessica at the time of the first interview. Leo had moved out when the second interview was conducted |
| Profession | Accountant | Manager at a commercial refurbishment company |
| Social class | Middle Class | Middle Class |
| Location | Rural. On the outskirts of Birmingham. | Rural. On the outskirts of Birmingham |

Couple 4

| | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Name | Daphne | Preston |
| Age | 34 | 34 |
| Religion | Christian | None |
| Marital status | Engaged to Preston | Engaged to Daphne |
| Profession | Journalist | Management Consultant |
| Social class | Middle class | Middle class |
| Location | Urban. Central London | Urban. Central London |

Couple 5

| | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Name | Cora | Patrick |
| Age | 28 | 33 |
| Religion | Christian | None |
| Marital status | Married to Patrick | Married to Cora |
| Profession | Financial Controller | Taxi driver |
| Social class | Lower middle class | Working class |
| Location | Rural. Outskirts of Brighton | Rural. Outskirts of Brighton |

Couple 6

| | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Name | Daisy | Robert |
| Age | 21 | 32 |
| Religion | Catholic | Catholic |
| Marital status | Married to Robert | Married to Daisy |
| Profession | Waitress | Sales Representative (telesales) |
| Social class | Working class | Working class |
| Location | Urban. Central London | Urban. Central London |

Couple 7

| | | |
|-------------|-------|----------|
| Name | Carol | Lawrence |
|-------------|-------|----------|

| | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|---|
| Age | 30 | 33 |
| Religion | Non-practicing Christian | None |
| Marital status | Married to Lawrence | Married to Carol |
| Profession | Personal Assistant (PA) | Manager at a company importing and distributing hotel equipment |
| Social class | Lower middle class | Lower middle class |
| Location | Urban. Central London | Urban. Central London |

Couple 8

| | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Name | Cathy | Marcus |
| Age | 35 | 43 |
| Religion | Christian | Christian |
| Marital status | Married to Marcus | Married to Cathy |
| Profession | Senior Lecturer in Law | Senior Lecturer in Law |
| Social class | Middle class | Middle class |
| Location | Rural. On the outskirts of Reading | Rural. On the outskirts of Reading |

Couple 9

| | | |
|-------------|---------|-------|
| Name | Rebecca | Derek |
| Age | 31 | 33 |

| | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Religion | None | None |
| Marital status | Married to Derek | None |
| Profession | Primary School Teacher | Janitor |
| Social class | Lower middle class | Working class |
| Location | Rural. Outskirts of Southampton | Rural. Outskirts of Southampton |

Couple 10

| | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Name | Valerie | Dominic |
| Age | 33 | 33 |
| Religion | None | None |
| Marital status | Married to Dominic | Married to Valerie |
| Profession | Corporate Lawyer | Corporate Lawyer |
| Social class | Upper middle class | Upper middle class |
| Location | Urban. Central London | Urban. Central London |

Couple 11

| | | |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------|
| Name | Georgina | James |
| Age | 39 | 42 |
| Religion | Christian | Christian |

| | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Marital status | Married to James | Married to Georgina |
| Profession | HR Consultant | HR Consultant |
| Social class | Middle class | Middle class |
| Location | Rural. Outskirts of Brighton | Rural. Outskirts of Brighton |

Couple 12

| | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Name | Sally | Max |
| Age | 37 | 37 |
| Religion | Non-practicing catholic | Catholic |
| Marital status | Married to Max | Married to Sally |
| Profession | Civil Servant | IT Consultant |
| Social class | Lower middle class | Lower middle class |
| Location | Urban. London suburbs | Location. Urban. London suburbs |

Couple 13

| | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Name | Maureen | Samuel |
| Age | 30 | 38 |
| Religion | None | None |
| Marital status | Co-habiting with Samuel | Co-habiting with Maureen |

| | | |
|---------------------|--|---|
| Profession | Social Policy Researcher | Works for a digital and advertisement company |
| Social class | Middle class | Middle class |
| Location | Location. Rural. Small village in Surrey | Rural. Small village in Surrey |

Couple 14

| | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Name | Sharon | Desmond |
| Age | 31 | 30 |
| Religion | Christian | Christian |
| Marital status | Married to Desmond | Married to Sharon |
| Profession | Child Psychologist | Sales Manager |
| Social class | Middle class | Middle class |
| Location | Rural. Outskirts of Derby | Rural. Outskirts of Derby |

Couple 15

| | | |
|-----------------------|---|------------------|
| Name | Keira | Matthew |
| Age | 38 | 38 |
| Religion | None | None |
| Marital status | Engaged to Matthew | Engaged to Keira |
| Profession | Study Manager at a pharmaceutical company | Car Mechanic |

| | | |
|---------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Social class | Middle class | Working class |
| Location | Rural. Outskirts of Uxbridge | Rural. Outskirts of Uxbridge |

Norwegian Interviewees

Couple 1

| | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Name | Guro | Rasmus |
| Age | 36 | 33 |
| Religion | None | None |
| Marital status | Co-habiting with Rasmus | Co-habiting with Guro |
| Profession | Project Manager in oil company | Employee at a petrol station |
| Social class | Middle class | Working class |
| Location | Rural. Outskirts of Drøbak | Rural. Outskirts of Drøbak |

Couple 2

| | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Name | Annelise | Torstein |
| Age | 30 | 33 |
| Religion | None | None |
| Marital status | Engaged to Torstein | Engaged to Annelise |

| | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Profession | District Judge | Corporate Lawyer |
| Social class | Upper middle class | Upper middle class |
| Location | Urban. Central Oslo | Urban. Central Oslo |

Couple 3

| | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Name | Saga | Tage |
| Age | 32 | 38 |
| Religion | None | Humanist |
| Marital status | Married to Tage | Married to Saga |
| Profession | Dancer and Manager of a dance studio | Computer Engineer |
| Social class | Middle class | Middle class |
| Location | Urban. Central Oslo | Urban. Central Oslo |

Couple 4

| | | |
|-----------------|--------|------|
| Name | Sissel | Åge |
| Age | 31 | 32 |
| Religion | None | None |

| | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Marital status | Co-habiting with Åge | Co-habiting with Sissel |
| Profession | Communication Adviser | Works in sales in an IT company |
| Social class | Middle class | Middle class |
| Location | Rural. Island outside of Oslo | Rural. Island outside of Oslo |

Couple 5

| | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Name | Tonje | Per |
| Age | 34 | 31 |
| Religion | Christian | None |
| Marital status | Co-habiting with Per | Co-habiting with Tonje |
| Profession | Office Administrator | Estate Agent |
| Social class | Lower middle class | Middle class |
| Location | Rural. Outskirts of Tønsberg | Rural. Outskirts of Tønsberg |

Couple 6

| | | |
|-----------------|-----------|------|
| Name | Vivian | Pål |
| Age | 34 | 33 |
| Religion | Christian | None |

| | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Marital status | Married to Pål | Married to Vivian |
| Profession | Pharmacist | Pharmacist |
| Social class | Middle class | Middle class |
| Location | Rural. Outskirts of Tønsberg | Rural. Outskirts of Tønsberg |

Couple 7

| | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Name | Kari | Øystein |
| Age | 29 | 31 |
| Religion | None | None |
| Marital status | Co-habiting with Øystein | Co-habiting with Kari |
| Profession | Management Consultant | Transactional Support Manager |
| Social class | Middle class | Middle class |
| Location | Urban. Central Oslo | Urban. Central Oslo |

Couple 8

| | | |
|-----------------|------|--------|
| Name | Siri | Anders |
| Age | 28 | 28 |
| Religion | None | None |

| | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Marital status | Co-habiting with Anders | Co-habiting with Siri |
| Profession | Physiotherapist | Adviser in HELFO (Health and Economy Distribution) |
| Social class | Lower middle class | Lower middle class |
| Location | Rural. Outskirts of Fredrikstad | Rural. Outskirts of Fredrikstad |

Couple 9

| | | |
|-----------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| Name | Helena | Ole |
| Age | 29 | 33 |
| Religion | Christian | Christian |
| Marital status | Married to Ole | Married to Helena |
| Profession | Quality and HES (Health, Environment and Security) Manager | Operating Manager at IT company |
| Social class | Middle class | Middle class |
| Location | Rural. Island outside of Tønsberg | Rural. Island outside of Tønsberg |

Couple 10

| | | |
|-------------|-------|------|
| Name | Synne | Lars |
|-------------|-------|------|

| | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Age | 31 | 31 |
| Religion | None | None |
| Marital status | Married to Lars | Married to Synne |
| Profession | HR Manager | Psychiatrist |
| Social class | Middle class | Middle class |
| Location | Rural. Outskirts of Oslo | Rural. Outskirts of Oslo |

Couple 11

| | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Name | Sunniva | Sivert |
| Age | 28 | 28 |
| Religion | None | None |
| Marital status | Married to Sivert | Married to Sunniva |
| Profession | Civil Servant | Immigration Lawyer |
| Social class | Middle class | Middle class |
| Location | Urban. Central Oslo | Urban. Central Oslo |

Couple 12

| | | |
|-------------|--------|--------|
| Name | Ingrid | Sindre |
|-------------|--------|--------|

| | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Age | 30 | 31 |
| Religion | None | None |
| Marital status | Co-habiting with Sindre | Co-habiting with Ingrid |
| Profession | Physiotherapist | Purchasing Manager at a hospital |
| Social class | Lower middle class | Lower middle class |
| Location | Rural. Island outside of Tønsberg | Rural. Island outside of Tønsberg |

Couple 13

| | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Name | Inga | Erik |
| Age | 30 | 30 |
| Religion | None | None |
| Marital status | Married to Erik | Married to Inga |
| Profession | Lawyer in a shipping company | Civil Engineer |
| Social class | Middle class | Middle class |
| Location | Rural. Island outside of Tønsberg | Rural. Island outside of Tønsberg |

Couple 14

| | | |
|-------------|----------|-------|
| Name | Karianne | Emrik |
|-------------|----------|-------|

| | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Age | 29 | 44 |
| Religion | None | None |
| Marital status | Co-habiting with Emrik | Co-habiting with Karianne |
| Profession | Child Welfare Officer | Family Therapist |
| Social class | Middle class | Middle class |
| Location | Rural. Outskirts of Svarstad | Rural. Outskirts of Svarstad |

Couple 15

| | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Name | Hedda | Snorre |
| Age | 29 | 30 |
| Religion | Christian | None |
| Marital status | Co-habiting with Snorre | Co-habiting with Hedda |
| Profession | Business Controller | Product Development Manager |
| Social class | Middle class | Middle class |
| Location | Urban. Central Oslo | Urban. Central Oslo |

Couple 16

| | | |
|-------------|------|---------|
| Name | Mari | Henning |
|-------------|------|---------|

| | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Age | 34 | 40 |
| Religion | None | None |
| Marital status | Married to Henning | Married to Mari |
| Profession | PR Consultant | Telecom Engineer |
| Social class | Middle class | Middle class |
| Location | Urban. Central Oslo | Urban. Central Oslo |

Appendix 2: Interview Schedule

1st interview with mothers-to-be, Norway

General introduction to the study

Here I will introduce myself and my background, explain what the study involves, and how it will be carried out. I will assure each interviewee that their participation will be anonymous and confidential and that I therefore will not ask for any information that could reveal their personal identity (e.g. name, address). Moreover, in the cases where the father-to-be and the mother-to-be are interviewed separately I will ensure each participant that the information they give me will not later be shared with their partner unless they wish to do so themselves independently of the interview. I will also say that they are entitled to withdraw their participation at any time if they so wish. If there are particular questions they do not feel comfortable answering they can choose not to. Unless they have any objections I will be tape recording each interview and then later transcribe them. The interviewees will be asked whether they would like me to send them a copy of the interview once it has been transcribed. Apart from me, the transcribed interview will only be available to my supervisors and academic staff at the University of Oxford. Before the interview commences I will inform the participants that the interview is likely to last between 45-70 minutes.

All the information above will already have been given to the participants via email and/or conversations in person or over the phone prior to the interview taking place. From experience, however, not all participants will have read their emails carefully or listened attentively during conversations. Many details will hence have to be repeated. Moreover, sometimes only one person in the couple is fully informed about the study while the other (often the man) has accepted taking part in the study without really

enquiring about the process and intention. After having introduced my study and the terms and conditions it carries I will leave the room to let the couple together decide whether or not they still would like to take part. It is vital that both parties have been given a *real* and *informed* choice as far as participation is concerned. Interviewees who are not comfortable participating are less likely to speak openly and honestly with me and it is also to be expected that they decide to withdraw their participation before the second or the third and final round of interviews has commenced.

Introductory questions

Age: How old are you?

Ethnicity: If you don't mind, could you please tell me your ethnicity?

Religion: Do you belong to any religion?

Education: What is your highest level of educational attainment?

Are you married?

If yes: How long have you been married?

If no: How long have you been together as a couple?

When is the baby due?

Are you excited? Scared? A bit of both?

Family-friendly workplace?

Before we start talking about the parental leave you and your partner are entitled to I would first like to know a bit about your job and the environment you work in. Could you please tell me about what it is you do for a living?

Juggling work and family responsibilities is a constant struggle for many parents. In what ways do you feel your workplace is facilitating a better work-life balance and

enabling their employees to combine the demands of their jobs and the demands of family life?

In what way do you feel they are not accommodating?

How do female colleagues of yours combine a full-time job with being a parent?

How do male colleagues of yours combine a full-time job with being a parent?

Would you describe your workplace as female-dominated or male-dominated?

In what way, if any, do you think the baby may hinder your career progression?

Have you seen examples in your workplace of people's career suffering as a consequence of becoming a mother or a father? This could be as a consequence of taking parental leave or as a consequence of the difficulties of juggling parental responsibilities with work responsibilities, or alternatively both.

Working hours

How many hours would you say you normally work per week?

In a month, how often do you typically work in the evenings and at the weekends?

How do your working hours fit in with the other aspects of your life, say going to the gym, meeting friends, spending time with your partner, special hobbies you may have etc?

If the interviewee feels she doesn't have enough time outside of work:

So, you are saying that you don't feel you have enough time outside of work?

Does it bother you that you don't have a lot of free time outside of work or is that an aspect that you are prepared to put up with because of how important your job is to you, a necessary sacrifice if you like?

- Were you aware of the impact this job would have on your private life when you chose it?

What aspects of your life do you feel suffer the most by you working these long hours?

- What would your ideal working hours be?
- What is stopping you from working fewer hours?
- How does your partner feel about your working hours?

Working part-time or reduced hours

Do you think it would be possible for you to do the job you have now on a part-time basis or to reduce the number of hours you work?

If the interviewee says it would be possible:

Is that something you would consider after becoming a mother?

- Why is that/why not?
- Have you spoken to your partner about this?
- How does he feel about you considering/not considering working part-time or working reduced hours?
- What reactions do you think you would have had from your manager if you had requested part-time work or reduced working hours/What reactions did you have from your manager when you requested part-time work/reduced hours?
- What examples have you seen in your company of people in similar positions to yours having chosen to go from full-time to part-time working hours?

If the interviewee says it would not be possible:

- How do you know it would not be possible?
- What reactions do you think you would have had from your manager if you had requested part-time work or reduced working hours/What reactions did you have from your manager when you requested part-time work/reduced hours?

Travelling

To what extent is travelling a central part of your job?

If the interviewee feels travelling is a central part of his job:

- How frequently do you travel?
- How many nights are you usually away from home when you travel?
- To what extent can you regulate the frequency and the length of your travelling yourself?
- How are you planning to deal with the travelling aspect of your job after the baby is born?
- Have you spoken to your partner about this? If so, could you please tell me about that conversation/those conversations?
- How does he feel about your travelling?

Changes in behaviour and attitudes

In what way, if any, has your behaviour at work changed since you found out that you were going to become a mother?

In what way has your attitude towards your job changed?

After telling people at work, including your boss, that you were going to become a mum, how did their attitudes and/or behaviour change towards you?

Other changes

What changes, if any, (apart from going from full-time to part-time/reducing working hours and making changes to the frequency and/or duration of travelling if that has been mentioned above) are you planning to make to the way you work after returning from your maternity leave?

Why did you decide to make these changes/not to make any changes?

How does your partner feel about you making these changes/not making any changes?

What changes, if any, is your partner going to make to the way he works after the baby is born?

How do you feel about him making these changes/him not making any changes?

Dual-earners – dual-carers a realistic family model?

In your opinion, is it possible for a couple with children to combine 2 full-time jobs with parental responsibilities or is that just a political ambition? Follow-up question: How is that so?

How do you think this will work in your case?

What discussions have you had with your partner about the practical aspects of how you are going to combine parenthood with the demands of the jobs you both have?

Work orientations: home-centred, work-centred and adaptive

Would you say that you are the main breadwinner in the relationship or is your partner the main breadwinner?

If your partner earned enough for both of you and the baby to have a comfortable life, would you ever consider leaving your job and staying at home on a permanent basis while your child was young? Follow-up question: Why is that?

What were your reasons for choosing the job you are in now?

In your adult life, did you always know that you one day would want to have children? If so, in what way, if any, did the fact that you knew you one day wanted to have children impact on your choice of occupation?

Are you happy continuing in the job you're in now or would you like to move to something else in the future? Where do you dream of being in say 3-5 years from today?

Awareness of parental leave entitlements

As you know, I live in England and that is also where I had my daughter Sophia. Let's imagine that I know nothing about the leave entitlements you have in Norway; how

many weeks you and your partner can stay home with your baby, what the level of compensation is, how you and your partner can share the leave period, the 'daddy-quota' etc. With that in mind, could you please describe to me what rights you have as a couple and what specific rights you have as a mother?

How did you come to know about these rights?

Finances

Does your employer give you any benefits in addition to your statutory rights in term of compensation during the period you will be absent from on maternity leave?

Some parents complain that the level of compensation they receive while on parental leave is too low and that they lose out financially by staying at home with their baby. In what way does that apply to you and your partner's situation?

How did finances impact upon the plans you have made about how the maternity/parental leave period that you are entitled to will be used?

The sharing of parental leave entitlements

So we have spoken about your rights in terms of maternity leave, or parental leave as I know you like to call it in Norway. How much maternity/parental leave are you going to take?

How much parental leave is your partner going to take?

Communication and determining factors

Could you please walk me through how you came to this decision? Did you sit down one evening with a pen and paper? Did you talk about it during a chat you had when cooking dinner one evening? Was it a tacit agreement you had so no conversation was necessary? Did it happen so gradually that you can't quite remember how you decided to share the leave period?

How do you feel about the amount of parental leave you are planning to take?

If necessary to guide the answer: Would you have liked to take more/less?

If relevant from the answers above: What is stopping you from taking more leave/less leave?

What factors were in your mind important for how the parental leave period was divided between the two of you?

Do babies ‘belong’ with their mothers?

There has been much debate both in the media and in academia about whether or not the needs of babies are best met in the care of their mother or if the father is an equally important carer in the early stages of a child’s life. What are your thoughts on this debate?

If the interviewee is sympathetic to the idea that mothers are better suited to meet the needs of the baby:

- Up until what age do you feel the baby’s needs are best met by the mother and therefore should ideally be taken care of by her? Why is that?
- In what way did your view on this guide how you and your partner decided to share the parental leave?

If the interviewee believes the father is equally suited to meet the needs of the baby:

- In what way did your view on this guide how you and your partner decided to share the parental leave?

‘Ownership’ of the parental leave period

If you were to give me a number from 1-10 where 1=nothing and 10=everything, how much of a say do you feel you had in the decision on how the parental leave was to be shared compared to how much of a say you feel you partner had?

Do you think your partner is happy with the amount of leave you are planning to take or do you think he would have liked the leave to be shared in a different way? If so, in what way do you think he would have liked the leave to be shared differently?

What do you think will be the positive outcome of you taking maternity leave (for you, for the baby, for your partner, for the relationship)?

The ‘daddy-quota’

When the ‘daddy quota’ was introduced in 1993 Norway was the first country to have such an arrangement. How do you feel about your partner being ‘forced’ to take time off work to stay at home with your baby?

If the ‘daddy-quota’ was not organised on a ‘use-or-lose’ basis and he could transfer this leave to you instead, would you have liked him to take the 12 weeks or would you have liked to take this time or some of this time instead? Follow-up *question*: Please could explain to me the reasons for why you would have wanted him to still have taken the 12 weeks/why you would have wanted him to transfer the 12 weeks or some of this time to you?

How do you feel about the ambition of Jens Stoltenberg and Family Minister Andum Lysbakken of increasing the ‘daddy’-quota’ from 12-14 weeks by 2013?

Discussion/lack of discussion with manager

What discussions, if any, have you had with your manager about the maternity leave you planning to take?

When did it take place?

Could you briefly tell me the content of that discussion and how you feel it went?

Organisational culture and parental leave

What do you feel is the attitude of your manager towards employees getting pregnant and going out on maternity leave?

What do you feel your manager thinks about the prospects of *you* taking maternity leave?

Have you seen examples of colleagues who somehow damaged their career by taking maternity leave? If so, In what way?

Traditional and non-traditional domestic roles

Please talk me through how you and your partner share the housework.

In your view, percentage-wise, how much do you do in the house and how much does your partner do?

How do you share:

Cooking

Doing the dishes (or cleaning up after a meal, putting it into the dishwasher etc)

Laundry

Ironing

Grocery shopping

cleaning the house and general tidying up

Possible answers are:

- (1) Always her
- (2) Normally her

- (3) About the same
- (4) Normally him
- (5) Always him

How do you feel about how you share the housework?

If couples with children separate, in your opinion, who should be granted main custody of the children? The mum? The dad? Shared custody? Why?

Ideas about a ‘good mother’ and a ‘good father’

Could you please describe to me what it means, in your view, to be a ‘good mother’ during the child's early years?

Which ones of the criteria you just described to me do you think you’ll be able to fill?

Which ones do you think you will not be able to fill? Why not?

If not already answered above: What are your thoughts around managing to live up to your idea of being a ‘good mother’ and continuing to work in the same way as you do now? If you see a potential conflict, could you please describe this conflict to me?

Plans for childcare

What are your plans in terms of childcare after the parental leave period has ended?

How will those arrangements fit with your working hours and your partner’s working hours? (and travelling if applicable)?

In my case, due to my husband’s long working hours and frequent travelling, I’m the one who both brings Sophia to the nursery and the one who picks her up 99% of the time.

Have you and your partner spoken about who will do what in relation to childcare?

If you could choose freely, say in an 'ideal world', how would you have liked the childcare arrangements to look like (for example sending your child to a nursery on a full-time basis, hiring a nanny or an au pair, staying at home on a full-time or a part-time basis, your partner to stay at home on a full-time or a part-time basis)?

Why is that your preferred option?

Positive question regarding the future

What do you look forward to the most becoming a mother?

Additional comments and/or questions

Do you have any additional comments or remarks that you would like to add with regard to the topic we have discussed in this interview?

Are there any questions which I didn't ask but which you think I should have asked?

Do you have any questions for me that you would like me to answer before we end this interview?

Thank you very, very much for taking the time to speak to me. Please do contact me either on my phone or my email if there is anything you would like to talk to me about. I wish you all the very best for the birth and I will be in touch again in x number of months.

Appendix 3: Interview Schedule

1st interview with fathers-to-be, Norway

General introduction to the study

Here I will introduce myself and my background, explain what the study involves, and how it will be carried out. I will assure each interviewee that their participation will be anonymous and confidential and that I therefore will not ask for any information that could reveal their personal identity (e.g. name, address). Moreover, in the cases where the father-to-be and the mother-to-be are interviewed separately, I will ensure each participant that the information they give me will not later be shared with their partner unless they wish to do so independently of the interview. I will also say that they are entitled to withdraw their participation at any time if they so wish. If there are particular questions they do not feel comfortable answering they can choose not to. Unless they have any objections I will be tape recording each interview and then later transcribe them. The interviewees will be asked whether they would like me to send them a copy of the interview once it has been transcribed. Apart from me, the transcribed interview will only be available to my supervisors and academic staff at the University of Oxford. Before the interview commences I will inform the participants that the interview is likely to last between 45-70 minutes.

All the information above will already have been given to the participants via email and/or conversations in person or over the phone prior to the interview taking place. From experience, however, not all participants will have read their emails carefully or listened attentively during conversations. Many details will hence have to be repeated. Moreover, sometimes only one person in the couple is fully informed about the study while the other (often the man) has accepted taking part in the study without really

enquiring about the process and intention. After having introduced my study and the terms and conditions it carries I will leave the room to let the couple together decide whether or not they still would like to take part. It is vital that both parties have been given a *real* and *informed* choice as far as participation is concerned. Interviewees who are not comfortable participating are less likely to speak openly and honestly with me and it is also to be expected that they decide to withdraw their participation before the second or the third and final round of interviews has commenced.

Introductory questions

Age: How old are you?

Ethnicity: If you don't mind, could you please tell me your ethnicity?

Religion: Do you belong to any religion?

Education: What is your highest level of educational attainment?

Are you married?

If yes: How long have you been married?

If no: How long have you been together as a couple?

When is the baby due?

Are you excited? Scared? A bit of both?

Family-friendly workplace?

Before we start talking about the parental leave you and your partner are entitled to, I would first like to know a bit about your job and the environment you work in. Could you please tell me about what it is you do for a living?

Juggling work and family responsibilities is a constant struggle for many parents. In what ways do you feel your workplace is facilitating a better work-life balance and

enabling their employees to combine the demands of their jobs and the demands of family life?

In what way do you feel they are not accommodating?

How do male colleagues of yours combine a full-time job with being a parent?

How do female colleagues of yours combine a full-time job with being a parent?

Would you describe your workplace as female-dominated or male-dominated?

In what way, if any, do you think the baby may hinder your career progression?

Have you seen examples in your workplace of people's career suffering as a consequence of becoming a mother or a father? This could be as a consequence of taking parental leave or as a consequence of the difficulties of juggling parental responsibilities with work responsibilities, or alternatively both.

Working hours

How many hours would you say you normally work per week?

In a month, how often do you typically work in the evenings and at the weekends?

How do your working hours fit in with the other aspects of your life, say going to the gym, meeting friends, spending time with your partner, special hobbies you may have etc?

If the interviewee feels he doesn't have enough time outside of work:

- So, you are saying that you don't feel you have enough time outside of work?
- Does it bother you that you don't have a lot of free time outside of work or is that an aspect that you are prepared to put up with because of how important your job is to you, a necessary sacrifice if you like?

- Were you aware of the impact this job would have on your private life when you chose it?
- What aspects of your life do you feel suffer the most by you working these long hours?
- What would your ideal working hours be?
- What is stopping you from working fewer hours?
- How does your partner feel about your working hours?

Working part-time or reduced hours

Do you think it would be possible for you to do the job you have now on a part-time basis or to reduce the number of hours you work?

If the interviewee says it would be possible:

- Is that something you would consider after the baby is born?
- Why is that/why not?
- Have you spoken to your partner about this?
- How does she feel about you considering/not considering working part-time or working reduced hours?
- What reactions do you think you would have had from your manager if you had requested part-time work or reduced working hours/What reactions did you have from your manager when you requested part-time work/reduced hours?
- What examples have you seen in your company of people in similar positions to yours having chosen to go from full-time to part-time working hours?

If the interviewee says it would not be possible:

- How do you know it would not be possible?
- What reactions do you think you would have had from your manager if you had requested part-time work or reduced working hours/What reactions did you have from your manager when you requested part-time work/reduced hours?

Travelling

To what extent is travelling a central part of your job?

If the interviewee feels travelling is a central part of his job:

- How frequently do you travel?

- How many nights are you usually away from home when you travel?
- To what extent can you regulate the frequency and the length of your travelling yourself?
- How are you planning to deal with the travelling aspect of your job after the baby is born?
- Have you spoken to your partner about this? If so, could you please tell me about that conversation/those conversations?
- How does she feel about your travelling?

Changes in behaviour and attitudes

In what way, if any, has your behaviour at work changed since you found out that you were going to become a dad?

In what way has your attitude towards your job changed?

After telling people at work, including your boss, that you were going to be a dad, how did their attitudes and/or behaviour change towards you?

Other changes

What changes, if any, (apart from going from full-time to part-time/reducing working hours and making changes to the frequency and/or duration of travelling if that has been mentioned above) are you planning to make to the way you work after the baby is born?

Why did you decide to make these changes/not to make any changes?

How does your partner feel about you making these changes/not making any changes?

What changes, if any, is your partner going to make to the way she works after returning from maternity leave?

How do you feel about her making these changes/her not making any changes?

Dual-earners – dual-carers a realistic family model?

In your opinion, is it possible for a couple with children to combine 2 full-time jobs with parental responsibilities or is that just a political ambition? Follow-up question: How is that so?

How do you think this will work in your case?

What discussions have you had with your partner about the practical aspects of how you are going to combine parenthood with the demands of the jobs you both have?

Work orientation: Work-centred, home-centred and adaptive

Would you say that you are the main breadwinner in the relationship or is your partner the main breadwinner?

If your partner earned enough for both of you and the baby to have a comfortable life, would you ever consider leaving your job and staying at home on a permanent basis while your child was young? Follow-up question: Why is that?

In your adult life, did you always know that you one day would want to have children?

In your adult life, did you always know that you one day would want to have children? If so, in what way, if any, did the fact that you knew you one day wanted to have children impact on your choice of occupation?

Are you happy continuing in the job you're in now or would you like to move to something else in the future? Where do you dream of being say 3-5 years from today?

Awareness of parental leave entitlements

As you know, I live in England and that is also where I had my daughter Sophia. Let's imagine that I know nothing about the leave entitlements you have in Norway; how many weeks you and your partner can stay home with your baby, what the level of compensation is, how you and your partner can share the leave period, the 'daddy-quota' etc. With that in mind, could you please describe to me what rights you have as a couple and what specific rights you have as a father?

How did you come to know about these rights?

Finances

Does your employer give you any benefits in addition to your statutory rights in terms of compensation during the period you will be absent from work on paternity leave?

Some parents complain that the level of compensation they receive while on parental leave is too low and that they lose out financially by staying at home with their baby. In what way does that apply to you and your partner's situation?

How did finances impact the plans you have made about how the maternity/parental leave period that you are entitled to will be used?

The sharing of parental leave entitlements

So we have spoken about your rights in terms of paternity leave, or parental leave as I know you like to call it in Norway. How much parental leave are you going to take?

How much parental leave is your partner going to take?

Communication and determining factors

Could you please walk me through how you came to this decision? Did you sit down one evening with a pen and paper? Did you talk about it during a chat you had when cooking dinner one evening? Was it a tacit agreement you had so no conversation was

necessary? Did it happen so gradually that you can't quite remember how you decided to share the leave period?

How do you feel about the amount of parental leave you are planning to take?

If necessary to guide the answer: Would you have liked to take more/less?

If relevant from the answers above: What is stopping you from taking more leave/less leave?

What factors were in your mind important for how the parental leave period was divided between the two of you?

Do babies 'belong' with their mothers?

There has been much debate both in the media and in academia about whether or not the needs of babies are best met in the care of their mother or if the father is an equally important carer in the early stages of a child's life. What are your thoughts on this debate?

If the interviewee is sympathetic to the idea that mothers are better suited to meet the needs of the baby:

- Up until what age do you feel the baby's needs are best met by the mother and therefore should ideally be taken care of by her? Why is that?
- In what way did your view on this guide how you and your partner decided to share the parental leave?

If the interviewee believes the father is equally suited to meet the needs of the baby:

- In what way did your view on this guide how you and your partner decided to share the parental leave?

'Ownership' of the parental leave period

If you were to give me a number from 1-10 where 1=nothing and 10=everything, how much of a say do you feel you had in the decision on how the parental leave was to be shared compared to how much of a say you feel you partner had?

Do you think your partner is happy with the amount of leave you are planning to take or do you think she would have liked the leave to be shared in a different way? If so, in what way do you think she would have liked the leave to be shared differently?

What do you think will be the positive outcome of you taking paternity leave (for you, for the baby, for your partner for the relationship)?

The 'daddy-quota'

When the 'daddy quota' was introduced in 1993 Norway was the first country to have such an arrangement. How do you feel about fathers being 'forced' to take time off work to stay at home with their baby?

If the 'daddy quota' was not organised on a 'use-or-lose' basis and you could transfer this leave to your partner instead, would you still have taken the 12 weeks? Follow-up *question*: Please could explain to me the reasons for why you would still have taken the 12 weeks/why you would have transferred the 12 weeks to your partner?

How do you feel about the ambition of Jens Stoltenberg and Family Minister Andum Lysbakken of increasing the 'daddy'-quota' from 12-14 weeks by 2013?

Discussion/lack of discussion with the manager

What discussions, if any, have you had with your manager about any potential paternity leave you planning to take?

If a discussion has taken place:

- Who initiated this discussion?
- When did it take place?
- Could you briefly tell me the content of that discussion and how you feel it went?

If a discussion has not yet taken place:

- Would you have liked to have a discussion with your manager about this?
 - If yes, what is stopping you?
 - If no, why is that?

Organisational culture and parental leave

What do you feel is the attitude of your manager towards fathers taking paternity leave when it is limited to the 'daddy-quota'?

What do you feel is the attitude of your manager towards fathers taking paternity leave *exceeding* the 12-week 'daddy quota'?

What do you feel your manager thinks about the prospects of *you* taking paternity leave?

How normal is it for fathers in your workplace to take more paternity leave than the 12-week 'daddy quota'?

Have you seen examples of colleagues who somehow damaged their careers by taking more paternity leave than the 'daddy-quota'? In what way?

Have you seen examples of colleagues who damaged their careers by taking maternity leave? In what way?

Traditional and non-traditional domestic roles

Please talk me through how you and your partner share the housework.

In your view, percentage-wise, how much do you do in the house and how much does your partner do?

How do you share:

Cooking

Doing the dishes (or cleaning up after a meal, putting into the dishwasher etc)

Laundry

Ironing

Grocery shopping

cleaning the house and general tidying up

Possible answers are:

1. Always her
2. Normally her
3. About the same
4. Normally him
5. Always him

How do you feel about how you share the housework?

If couples with children separate, in your opinion, who should be granted main custody of the children? The mum? The dad? Shared custody? Why?

Ideas about a 'good mother' and a 'good father'

Could you please describe to me what it means, in your view, to be a 'good father' during the child's early years?

Which ones of the criteria you just described to me do you think you'll be able to fill?

Which ones do you think you will not be able to fill? Why not?

If not already answered above: What are your thoughts around managing to live up to your idea of being a 'good father' and continuing to work in the same way as you do now? If you see a potential conflict, could you please describe this conflict to me?

Plans for childcare

What are your plans in terms of childcare after the parental leave period has ended?

How will those arrangements fit with your working hours and your partner's working hours? (and travelling if applicable)?

In my case, due to my husband's long working hours and frequent travelling, I'm the one who both brings Sophia to the nursery and the one who picks her up 99% of the time.

Have you and your partner spoken about who will do what in relation to childcare?

If you could choose freely, say in an 'ideal world', how would you have liked the childcare arrangements to look like (for example sending your child to a nursery on a full-time basis, hiring a nanny or an au pair, staying at home on a full-time or a part-time basis, your partner to stay at home on a full-time or a part-time basis)?

Why is that your preferred option?

Positive question regarding the future

What do you look forward to the most becoming a father?

Additional comments and/or questions

Do you have any additional comments or remarks that you would like to add with regard to the topic we have discussed in this interview?

Are there any questions which I didn't ask but which you think I should have asked?

Do you have any questions for me that you would like me to answer before we end this interview?

Thank you very, very much for taking the time to speak to me. Please do contact me either on my phone or by email if there is anything you would like to talk to me about. I wish you all the very best for the birth and I will be in touch again in x number of months.

Appendix 4: Interview Schedule

1st interview with mothers-to-be, UK

General introduction to the study

Here I will introduce myself and my background, explain what the study involves, and how it will be carried out. I will assure each interviewee that their participation will be anonymous and confidential and that I therefore will not ask for any information that could reveal their personal identity (e.g. name, address). Moreover, in the cases where the father-to-be and the mother-to-be are interviewed separately, I will ensure each participant that the information they give me will not later be shared with their partner unless they wish to do so independently of the interview. I will also say that they are entitled to withdraw their participation at any time if they so wish. If there are particular questions they do not feel comfortable answering they can choose not to. Unless they have any objections, I will be tape recording each interview and then later transcribe them. The interviewees will be asked whether they would like me to send them a copy of the interview once it has been transcribed. Apart from me, the transcribed interview will only be available to my supervisors and academic staff at the University of Oxford. Before the interview commences, I will inform the participants that the interview is likely to last between 45-70 minutes.

All the information above will already have been given to the participants via email and/or conversations in person or over the phone prior to the interview taking place. From experience, however, not all participants will have read their emails carefully or listened attentively during conversations. Many details will hence have to be repeated. Moreover, sometimes only one person in the couple is fully informed about the study while the other (often the man) has accepted taking part in the study without really

enquiring about the process and intention. After having introduced my study and the terms and conditions it carries I will leave the room to let the couple together decide whether or not they still would like to take part. It is vital that both parties have been given a *real* and *informed* choice as far as participation is concerned. Interviewees who are not comfortable participating are less likely to speak openly and honestly with me and it is also to be expected that they decide to withdraw their participation before the second or the third and final round of interviews has commenced.

Introductory questions

Age: How old are you?

Ethnicity: If you don't mind, could you please tell me your ethnicity?

Religion: Do you belong to any religion?

Education: What is your highest level of educational attainment?

Are you married?

If yes: How long have you been married for?

If no: How long have you been together for as a couple?

When is the baby due?

Was the baby planned?

Why did you decide to have the baby now?

Are you excited? Scared? A bit of both?

Family-friendly workplace?

Before we start talking about the maternity/parental leave you and your partner are entitled to I would first like to know a bit about your job and the environment you work in. Could you please tell me about what it is you do for a living?

Juggling work and family responsibilities is a constant struggle for many parents. In what ways do you feel your workplace is facilitating a better work-life balance and enabling their employees to combine the demands of their jobs and the demands of family life?

In what way do you feel they are not accommodating?

How do female colleagues of yours combine a full-time job with being a parent?

How do male colleagues of yours combine a full-time job with being a parent?

Would you describe your workplace as female-dominated or male-dominated?

In what way, if any, do you think the baby may hinder your career progression?

Have you seen examples in your workplace of people's career suffering as a consequence of becoming a mother or a father? This could be as a consequence of taking maternity/parental leave as a consequence of the difficulties of juggling parental responsibilities with work responsibilities, or alternatively both.

Working hours

How many hours would you say you normally work per week?

In a month, how often do you typically work in the evenings and at the weekends?

How do your working hours fit in with the other aspects of your life, say going to the gym, meeting friends, spending time with your partner, special hobbies you may have etc? (do you feel you have enough time outside of work?)

If the interviewee feels she doesn't have enough time outside of work:

- So, you are saying that you don't feel you have enough time outside of work?
- Does it bother you that you don't have a lot of free time outside of work or is that an aspect that you are prepared to put up with because of how important your job is to you, a necessary sacrifice if you like?

- Were you aware of the impact this job would have on your private life when you chose it?
- What aspects of your life do you feel suffer the most by you working these long hours?
- What would your ideal working hours be?
- What is stopping you from working fewer hours?
- How does your partner feel about your working hours?

Working part-time or reduced hours

Do you think it would be possible for you to do the job you have now on a part-time basis or to reduce the number of hours you work?

If the interviewee says it would be possible:

- Is that something you would consider after becoming a mother?
- Why is that/why not?
- Have you spoken to your partner about this?
- How does he feel about you considering/not considering working part-time or working reduced hours?
- What reactions do you think you would have had from your manager if you had requested part-time work or reduced working hours/What reactions did you have from your manager when you requested part-time work/reduced hours?
- What examples have you seen in your company of people in similar positions to yours having chosen to go from full-time to part-time working hours?

If the interviewee says it would not be possible:

- How do you know it would not be possible?
- What reactions do you think you would have had from your manager if you had requested part-time work or reduced working hours/What reactions did you have from your manager when you requested part-time work/reduced hours?

Travelling

To what extent is travelling a central part of your job?

If the interviewee feels travelling is a central part of his job:

- How frequently do you travel?
- How many nights are you usually away from home when you travel?
- To what extent can you regulate the frequency and the length of your travelling yourself?
- How are you planning to deal with the travelling aspect of your job after the baby is born?
- Have you spoken to your partner about this? If so, could you please tell me about that conversation/those conversations?
- How does he feel about your travelling?

Changes in behaviour and attitudes

In what way, if any, has your behaviour at work changed since you found out that you were going to become a mother?

In what way has your attitude towards your job changed?

After telling people at work, including your boss, that you were going to become a mum, how did their attitudes and/or behaviour change towards you?

Do you feel that the way in which you wish to be a mum to your child is complicated by the hours you work and/or by your travelling?

Other changes

What changes, if any, (apart from going from full-time to part-time/reducing working hours and making changes to the frequency and/or duration of travelling if that has been mentioned above) are you planning to make to the way you work after returning from your maternity leave?

Why did you decide to make these changes/not to make any changes?

How does your partner feel about you making these changes/not making any changes?

What changes, if any, is your partner going to make to the way he works after the baby is born?

How do you feel about him making these changes/him not making any changes?

Dual-earners – dual-carers a realistic family model?

In your opinion, is it possible for a couple with children to combine 2 full-time jobs with parental responsibilities or is that just a political ambition? Follow-up *question*: How is that so?

How do you think this will work in your case?

Do you think it's good for children to grow up with parents working full-time or do you think it's harmful? In what way do you think it is harmful or good?

How do you feel about the claim that a child under school age would most probably suffer if their mother worked full-time?

What discussions have you had with your partner about the practical aspects of how you are going to combine parenthood with the demands of the jobs you both have?

Amongst your friends and siblings with small children, are both parents normally working full-time or do you see a different pattern? If so, which other pattern? What do you think of this pattern?

What do you think of the mothers who give up their careers to stay at home with their children?

Have you seen examples of dads giving up their jobs to stay at home with their children or who have reduced their work commitments? What do you think about this?

Growing up, what did your mum and dad do workwise? How did they share earning and caring? What do you think of the arrangement that they had?

Work orientations: home-centred, work-centred and adaptive

Would you say that you are the main breadwinner in the relationship or is your partner the main breadwinner?

How do you feel about being the main breadwinner/secondary earner in the relationship?

How does that impact your relationship (if at all)?

If your partner earned enough for both of you and the baby to have a comfortable life, would you ever consider leaving your job and staying at home on a permanent basis while your child was young? Follow-up *question*: Why is that?

What were your reasons for choosing the job you are in now?

In your adult life, did you always know that you one day would want to have children? If so, in what way, if any, did the fact that you knew you one day wanted to have children impact your choice of occupation?

Are you happy continuing in the job you're in now or would you like to move to something else in the future? Where do you dream of being say 3-5 years from today?

Awareness of parental leave entitlements

As you know, I am Norwegian and in Norway, we have quite a different system when it comes to maternity and paternity leave. Let's imagine that I know nothing about the leave entitlements you have here in the UK; how many weeks you and your partner can stay home with your baby, what the level of compensation is, how many weeks or

months you are entitled to compensation etc, etc. With that in mind, could you please describe to me the maternity and paternity rights you have?

How did you come to know about these rights?

The sharing of parental leave entitlements

If the interviewee does not mention anything above about the rights introduced 3rd April 2011 giving couples the opportunity to share the leave period:

- If I say to you that there were some changes introduced last year to how mothers and fathers could *share* maternity leave/parental leave, does that ring any bells?

If it doesn't, I will then briefly outline the changes that have taken place and the new rights they now have as a couple followed by the question:

- What are your thoughts on these new entitlements?
- Do you think the fact that you know this now will mean that you and your partner will change anything with regards to who will take what of the maternity/parental leave? Why is that/why will that not be the case?

If the interviewee does indeed mention the rights introduced 3rd April 2011 giving couples the opportunity to share the leave period:

- How did you come to hear about these changes specifically?
- What did you think when you first heard about these changes?
- What conversations have you had with your partner about the introduction of these new maternity/parental leave entitlements?
- How did these new entitlements impact how you are going to use the maternity/parental leave period?
- Do you know of anybody who has shared some of the maternity/parental leave period or somebody who is planning to share some of the maternity/parental leave period? If so, please tell me more.

So, we have spoken about your rights in terms of maternity /parental leave. How much maternity/parental leave are you going to take?

How much parental leave is your partner going to take?

Have you seen examples amongst your friends/colleagues/family/siblings of couples sharing some of leave entitlements or where the dad has taken more leave than the 2 weeks paternity leave just after the birth of the child? What do you think of that?

What are your thoughts about couples where the dad takes half of the parental leave? Do you think that's a healthy way of sharing? For the dad? For the child? For the mother?

I recently interviewed a rather untraditional couple here in the UK where she was going to take 3 months of maternity leave and then go back to work full-time. The dad would then stay at home with the baby for the next few years to come. What do you think of this way of doing it?

In Norway we have a 'daddy quota' of 12 weeks – which means that the father has to take these 12 weeks of leave otherwise the couple loses it. What do you think of this arrangement?

Communication and determining factors

Could you please walk me through how you came to the decision about how you were going to use the maternity/parental leave entitlements? Did you sit down one evening with a pen and paper? Did you talk about it during a chat you had when cooking dinner one evening? Was it a tacit agreement you had so no conversation was necessary? Did it happen so gradually that you can't quite remember how you decided to share the leave period?

What in your mind guided the way in which you decided to use the leave entitlements? (i.e. the child should stay with the mother during the early stages of his/her life, financial, breastfeeding, wish for the dad to be involved (why this wish?) etc).

How do you feel about the amount of parental leave you are planning to take?

If necessary to guide the answer: Would you have liked to take more/less?

If relevant from the answers above: What is stopping you from taking more leave/less leave?

What would your friends and siblings say, you think, if you decided to take more leave (or stay at home with the child and either start working part-time or quit your job)?

How would your boss react to such a request? And your colleagues?

What factors were in your mind important for how you decided to use the maternity/parental leave entitlements?

Finances

Does your employer give you any benefits in addition to your statutory rights in terms of compensation during the period you will be absent on maternity leave?

Some parents complain that the level of compensation they receive while on parental leave is too low and that they lose out financially by staying at home with their baby. In what way does that apply to you and your partner's situation?

How did finances impact the plans you have made about how the maternity/parental leave period that you are entitled to will be used?

If finances did not guide your decision, what in your mind could have guided it, you think?

'Ownership' of the parental leave period

If you were to give me a number from 1-10 where 1=nothing and 10=everything, how much of a say do you feel you had in the decision on how the maternity/ parental leave entitlements were to be used compared to how much of a say you feel you partner had?

Why do you think it is like that?

Do you think your partner is happy with the amount of leave you are planning to take or do you think he would have liked the leave to be used in a different way (for you to take longer leave/shorter leave, for him to take some of the leave?) If so, in what way do you think he would have liked the leave to be used differently?

If the father is not going to take any paternity leave in addition to the 2 weeks directly after the baby is born:

- As we discussed earlier, you and your partner can now share some of the maternity leave. Would you have liked your partner to stay at home for a period of time? Why is that/why not?
- How would you have felt if he came to you and said ‘Listen, I really would like to stay at home with the baby for half of the maternity leave and then you go back to work’?

What do you think will be the positive outcome of you taking maternity leave (for you, for the baby, for your partner, for the relationship)?

Do babies ‘belong’ with their mothers?

There has been much debate both in the media and in academia about whether or not the needs of babies are best met in the care of their mother or if the father is an equally important carer in the early stages of a child’s life. What are your thoughts on this debate?

If the interviewee is sympathetic to the idea that mothers are better suited to meet the needs of the baby:

- Up until what age do you feel the baby's needs are best met by the mother and therefore should ideally be taken care of by her? Why is that?
- In what way did your view on this guide how you and your partner decided to share the parental leave? (If the interviewee was not aware of the changes put in place 3rd April 2011, this question is irrelevant)

If the interviewee believes the father is equally suited to meet the needs of the baby:

- In what way did your view on this guide how you and your partner decided to share the parental leave? (If the interviewee was not aware of the changes put in place 3rd April 2011, this question is irrelevant)
-

Discussion/lack of discussion with the manager

What discussions, if any, have you had with your manager about the maternity leave you planning to take?

When did it take place?

Could you briefly tell me the content of that discussion and how you feel it went?

Organisational culture and parental leave

What do you feel is the attitude of your manager towards employees getting pregnant and going out on maternity leave?

What do you feel your manager thinks about the prospects of *you* taking maternity leave?

Have you seen examples of colleagues who somehow damaged their careers by taking maternity leave? If so, In what way?

Traditional and non-traditional domestic roles

How do you share:

- Cooking
- Doing the dishes (or cleaning up after a meal, putting into the dishwasher etc)
- Laundry
- Ironing
- Grocery shopping
- Cleaning the house and general tidying up

Possible answers are:

1. Always her
2. Normally her
3. About the same
4. Normally him
5. Always him

How do you feel about how you share the housework?

If couples with children separate, in your opinion, who should be granted main custody of the children? The mum? The dad? Shared custody? Why?

Growing up, what did your mum and dad do for a living?

How did they share domestic responsibilities and earning responsibilities?

Plans for childcare

What are your plans in terms of childcare after the maternity/parental leave period has ended?

How will those arrangements fit with your working hours and your partner's working hours? (and travelling if applicable)?

In my case, due to my husband's long working hours and frequent travelling, I'm the one who both brings Sophia to the nursery and the one who picks her up 99% of the time.

Have you and your partner spoken about who will do what in relation to childcare?

If you could choose freely, say in an 'ideal world', how would you have liked the childcare arrangements to look like (for example sending your child to a nursery on a full-time basis, hiring a nanny or an au pair, staying at home on a full-time or a part-time basis, your partner to stay at home on a full-time or a part-time basis)?

Why is that your preferred option?

If you had decided to quit your job or drastically reduce your working hours to care for your baby after the end of the maternity leave, how do you think your partner would have reacted to that? How would your friends have reacted to that? Why do you think that is?

Positive question regarding the future

What do you look forward to the most becoming a mother?

Additional comments and/or questions

Do you have any additional comments or remarks that you would like to add with regards to the topic we have discussed in this interview?

Are there any questions which I didn't ask but which you think I should have asked?

Do you have any questions for me that you would like me to answer before we end this interview?

Thank you very, very much for taking the time to speak to me. Please do contact me either on my phone or by email if there is anything you would like to talk to me about. I

wish you all the very best for the birth and I will be in touch again in x number of months.

Appendix 5: Interview Schedule

1st interview with fathers-to-be, UK

General introduction to the study

Here I will introduce myself and my background, explain what the study involves, and how it will be carried out. I will assure each interviewee that their participation will be anonymous and confidential and that I therefore will not ask for any information that could reveal their personal identity (e.g. name, address). Moreover, in the cases where the father-to-be and the mother-to-be are interviewed separately, I will ensure each participant that the information they give me will not later be shared with their partner unless they wish to do so independently of the interview. I will also say that they are entitled to withdraw their participation at any time if they so wish. If there are particular questions they do not feel comfortable answering they can choose not to. Unless they have any objections, I will be tape recording each interview and then later transcribe them. The interviewees will be asked whether they would like me to send them a copy of the interview once it has been transcribed. Apart from me, the transcribed interview will only be available to my supervisors and academic staff at the University of Oxford. Before the interview commences, I will inform the participants that the interview is likely to last between 45-70 minutes.

All the information above will already have been given to the participants via email and/or conversations in person or over the phone prior to the interview taking place. From experience, however, not all participants will have read their emails carefully or listened attentively during conversations. Many details will hence have to be repeated. Moreover, sometimes only one person in the couple is fully informed about the study while the other (often the man) has accepted taking part in the study without really

enquiring about the process and intention. After having introduced my study and the terms and conditions it carries I will leave the room to let the couple together decide whether or not they still would like to take part. It is vital that both parties have been given a *real* and *informed* choice as far as participation is concerned. Interviewees who are not comfortable participating are less likely to speak openly and honestly with me and it is also to be expected that they decide to withdraw their participation before the second or the third and final round of interviews has commenced.

Introductory questions

Age: How old are you?

Ethnicity: If you don't mind, could you please tell me your ethnicity?

Religion: Do you belong to any religion?

Education: What is your highest level of educational attainment?

Are you married?

If yes: How long have you been married?

If no: How long have you been together as a couple?

When is the baby due?

Was the baby planned?

Why did you decide to have the baby now?

Are you excited? Scared? A bit of both?

Family-friendly workplace?

Before we start talking about the maternity/parental leave you and your partner are entitled to I would first like to know a bit about your job and the environment you work in. Could you please tell me about what it is you do for a living?

Juggling work and family responsibilities is a constant struggle for many parents. In what ways do you feel your workplace is facilitating a better work-life balance and enabling their employees to combine the demands of their jobs and the demands of family life?

In what way do you feel they are not accommodating?

How do male colleagues of yours combine a full-time job with being a parent?

How do female colleagues of yours combine a full-time job with being a parent?

Would you describe your workplace as female-dominated or male-dominated?

In what way, if any, do you think the baby may hinder your career progression?

Have you seen examples in your workplace of people's career suffering as a consequence of becoming a mother or a father? This could be as a consequence of taking maternity/ parental leave as a consequence of the difficulties of juggling parental responsibilities with work responsibilities, or alternatively both.

Working hours

How many hours would you say you normally work per week?

In a month, how often do you typically work in the evenings and at the weekends?

How do your working hours fit in with the other aspects of your life, say going to the gym, meeting friends, spending time with your partner, special hobbies you may have etc? (do you feel you have enough time outside of work?)

If the interviewee feels he doesn't have enough time outside of work:

- So, you are saying that you don't feel you have enough time outside of work?
- Does it bother you that you don't have a lot of free time outside of work or is that an aspect that you are prepared to put up with because of how important your job is to you, a necessary sacrifice if you like?

- Were you aware of the impact this job would have on your private life when you chose it?
- What aspects of your life do you feel suffer the most by you working these long hours?
- What would your ideal working hours be?
- What is stopping you from working fewer hours?
- How does your partner feel about your working hours?

Working part-time or reduced hours

Do you think it would be possible for you to do the job you have now on a part-time basis or to reduce the number of hours you work?

If the interviewee says it would be possible:

- Is that something you would consider after becoming a father?
- Why is that/why not?
- Have you spoken to your partner about this?
- How does she feel about you considering/not considering working part-time or working reduced hours?
- What reactions do you think you would have had from your manager if you had requested part-time work or reduced working hours/What reactions did you have from your manager when you requested part-time work/reduced hours?
- What examples have you seen in your company of people in similar positions to yours having chosen to go from full-time to part-time working hours?

If the interviewee says it would not be possible:

- How do you know it would not be possible?
- What reactions do you think you would have had from your manager if you had requested part-time work or reduced working hours/What reactions did you have from your manager when you requested part-time work/reduced hours?

Travelling

To what extent is travelling a central part of your job?

If the interviewee feels travelling is a central part of his job:

- How frequently do you travel?

- How many nights are you usually away from home when you travel?
- To what extent can you regulate the frequency and the length of your travelling yourself?
- How are you planning to deal with the travelling aspect of your job after the baby is born?
- Have you spoken to your partner about this? If so, could you please tell me about that conversation/those conversations?
- How does she feel about your travelling?

Changes in behaviour and attitudes

In what way, if any, has your behaviour at work changed since you found out that you were going to become a father?

In what way has your attitude towards your job changed?

After telling people at work, including your boss, that you were going to become a dad, how did their attitudes and/or behaviour change towards you?

Do you feel that the way in which you wish to be a dad to your child is complicated by the hours you work and/or by your travelling?

Other changes

What changes, if any, (apart from going from full-time to part-time/reducing working hours and making changes to the frequency and/or duration of travelling if that has been mentioned above) are you planning to make to the way you work after the baby is born?

Why did you decide to make these changes/not to make any changes?

How does your partner feel about you making these changes/not making any changes?

What changes, if any, is your partner going to make to the way she works after the baby is born?

How do you feel about her making these changes/her not making any changes?

Dual-earners – dual-carers a realistic family model?

In your opinion, is it possible for a couple with children to combine 2 full-time jobs with parental responsibilities or is that just a political ambition? Follow-up *question*: How is that so?

How do you think this will work in your case?

Do you think it's good for children to grow up with parents working full-time or do you think it's harmful? In what way do you think it is harmful or good?

How do you feel about the claim that a child under school age would most probably suffer if their mother worked full-time?

What discussions have you had with your partner about the practical aspects of how you are going to combine parenthood with the demands of the jobs you both have?

Amongst your friends (and possibly siblings) with small children, are both parents normally working full-time or do you see a different pattern? If so, which other pattern?

What do you think of this pattern?

What do you think of the mothers who give up their careers to stay at home with their children?

Have you seen examples of dads giving up their jobs to stay at home with their children or who have reduced their work commitments? What do you think about this?

Growing up, what did your mum and dad do workwise? How did they share earning and caring? What do you think of the arrangement that they had?

Work orientations: home-centred, work-centred and adaptive

Would you say that you are the main breadwinner in the relationship or is your partner the main breadwinner?

How do you feel about being the main breadwinner/secondary earner in the relationship?

How does that impact your relationship (if at all)?

If your partner earned enough for both of you and the baby to have a comfortable life, would you ever consider leaving your job and staying at home on a permanent basis while your child was young? Follow-up *question*: Why is that?

What were your reasons for choosing the job you are in now?

In your adult life, did you always know that you one day would want to have children? If so, in what way, if any, did the fact that you knew you one day wanted to have children impact on your choice of occupation?

Awareness of parental leave entitlements

As you know, I am Norwegian and in Norway, we have quite a different system when it comes to maternity and paternity leave. Let's imagine that I know nothing about the leave entitlements you have here in the UK; how many weeks you and your partner can stay home with your baby, what the level of compensation is, how many weeks or months you are entitled to compensation etc, etc. With that in mind, could you please describe to me the maternity and paternity rights you have?

How did you come to know about these rights?

The sharing of parental leave entitlements

If the interviewee does not mention anything above about the rights introduced 3rd April 2011 giving couples the opportunity to share the leave period:

- If I say to you that there were some changes introduced last year to how mothers and fathers could *share* maternity leave/parental leave, does that ring any bells?

If it doesn't, I will then briefly outline the changes that have taken place and the new rights they now have as a couple followed by the question:

- What are your thoughts on these new entitlements?
- Do you think the fact that you know this now will mean that you and your partner will change anything with regards to who will take what of the maternity/parental leave? Why is that/why will that not be the case?

If the interviewee does indeed mention the rights introduced 3rd April 2011 giving couples the opportunity to share the leave period:

- How did you come to hear about these changes specifically?
- What did you think when you first heard about these changes?
- What conversations have you had with your partner about the introduction of these new maternity/parental leave entitlements?
- How did these new entitlements impact how you are going to use the maternity/parental leave period?
- Do you know of anybody who has shared some of the maternity/parental leave period or somebody who is planning to share some of the maternity/parental leave period? If so, please tell me more.

So, we have spoken about your rights in terms of maternity /parental leave. How much maternity/parental leave are you going to take?

How much parental leave is your partner going to take?

Have you seen examples amongst your friends/colleagues/family/siblings of couples sharing some of leave entitlements or where the dad has taken more leave than the 2 weeks paternity leave just after the birth of the child? What do you think of that?

What are your thoughts about couples where the dad takes half of the parental leave? Do you think that's a healthy way of sharing? For the dad? For the child? For the mother?

I recently interviewed a rather untraditional couple here in the UK where she was going to take 3 months of maternity leave and then go back to work full-time. The dad would then stay at home with the baby for the next few years to come. What do you think of this way of doing it?

In Norway we have a 'daddy quota of 12 weeks – which means that the father has to take these 12 weeks of leave otherwise the couple lose it. What do you think of this arrangement?

Communication and determining factors

Could you please walk me through how you came to the decision about how you were going to use the maternity/parental leave entitlements? Did you sit down one evening with a pen and paper? Did you talk about it during a chat you had when cooking dinner one evening? Was it a tacit agreement you had so no conversation was necessary? Did it happen so gradually that you can't quite remember how you decided to share the leave period?

What in your mind guided the way in which you decided to use the leave entitlements? (i.e. the child should stay with the mother during the early stages of his/her life, financial, breastfeeding, wish for the dad to be involved (why this wish?) etc).

How do you feel about the amount of parental leave you are planning to take?

If necessary to guide the answer: Would you have liked to take more/less?

If relevant from the answers above: What is stopping you from taking more leave/less leave?

What factors were in your mind important for how you decided to use the maternity/parental leave entitlements?

What would your friends and siblings say, you think, if you decided to take more leave (or stay at home with the child and either start working part-time or quit your job)?

How would your boss react to such a request? And your colleagues?

Finances

Does your employer give you any benefits in addition to your statutory rights in terms of compensation during the period you will be absent on paternity leave? (This can be during the initial 2-week period that fathers are entitled to take off directly after the arrival of the baby and/or during the time that the couple has decided the father will stay at home instead of the mother – the time that is being *transferred* to the father.)

Some parents complain that the level of compensation they receive while on maternity/parental leave is too low and that they lose out financially by staying at home with their baby. In what way does that apply to you and your partner's situation?

How did finances impact the plans you have made about how the maternity/parental leave period that you are entitled to will be used?

If finances did not guide your decision, what in your mind could have guided it, you think?

'Ownership' of the parental leave period

If you were to give me a number from 1-10 where 1=nothing and 10=everything, how much of a say do you feel you had in the decision on how the maternity/ parental leave entitlements were to be used compared to how much of a say you feel you partner had?

Why do you think it is like that?

Do you think your partner is happy with the amount of leave you are planning to take or do you think she would have liked the leave to be used in a different way (for you to take longer leave/shorter leave?) If so, in what way do you think he would have liked the leave to be used differently?

If the interviewee is planning to take paternity leave – either the 2 weeks directly after the arrival of the baby or some of the time belonging to the mother prior to 3rd April 2011:

What do you think will be the positive outcome of you taking paternity leave (for you, for the baby, for your partner, for the relationship)?

Do babies ‘belong’ with their mothers?

There has been much debate both in the media and in academia about whether or not the needs of babies are best met in the care of their mother or if the father is an equally important carer in the early stages of a child’s life. What are your thoughts on this debate?

If the interviewee is sympathetic to the idea that mothers are better suited to meet the needs of the baby:

- Up until what age do you feel the baby’s needs are best met by the mother and therefore should ideally be taken care of by her? Why is that?
- In what way did your view on this guide how you and your partner decided to share the parental leave? (If the interviewee was not aware of the changes put in place 3rd April 2011, this question is irrelevant)

If the interviewee believes the father is equally suited to meet the needs of the baby:

- In what way did your view on this guide how you and your partner decided to share the parental leave? (If the interviewee was not aware of the changes put in place 3rd April 2011, this question is irrelevant)

Discussion/lack of discussion with the manager

What discussions, if any, have you had with your manager about any potential paternity leave you planning to take?

If a discussion has taken place:

- Who initiated this discussion?
- When did it take place?
- Could you briefly tell me the content of that discussion and how you feel it went?

If a discussion has not yet taken place:

- Would you have liked to have a discussion with your manager about this?
 - If yes, what is stopping you?
 - If no, why is that?

Organisational culture and parental leave

What do you feel is the attitude of your manager towards employees taking paternity leave?

If you came to your manager now and said that you were planning to stay at home with your baby for say half of the maternity/parental leave period while your partner went back to work, what do you think his/her reactions would be?

Have you seen examples of colleagues who have taken paternity leave in addition to the 2 weeks when the baby is born? If so, how was this looked upon in the company?

Have you heard about any colleagues who are planning to do this? If so, what were the reactions to this in the company?

Traditional and non-traditional domestic roles

How do you share:

Cooking

Doing the dishes (or cleaning up after a meal, putting it into the dishwasher etc)

Laundry

Ironing

Grocery shopping

Cleaning the house and general tidying up

Possible answers are:

1. Always her
2. Normally her
3. About the same
4. Normally him
5. Always him

How do you feel about how you share the housework?

If couples with children separate, in your opinion, who should be granted main custody of the children? The mum? The dad? Shared custody? Why?

Plans for childcare

What are your plans in terms of childcare after the maternity/parental leave period has ended?

How will those arrangements fit with your working hours and your partner's working hours? (and travelling if applicable)?

Have you and your partner spoken about who will do what in relation to childcare?

If you could choose freely, say in an 'ideal world', how would you have liked the childcare arrangements to look like (for example sending your child to a nursery on a full-time basis, hiring a nanny or an au pair, staying at home on a full-time or a part-time basis, your partner to stay at home on a full-time or a part-time basis)?

Why is that your preferred option?

How long do you think it is right for a child to stay at home with his/her mum/dad?

If you had decided to quit your job or drastically reduce your working hours to care for your baby after the end of the maternity leave, how do you think your partner would have reacted to that? How would your friends have reacted to that? Why do you think that is?

Positive question regarding the future

What do you look forward to the most becoming a father?

Additional comments and/or questions

Do you have any additional comments or remarks that you would like to add with regard to the topic we have discussed in this interview?

Are there any questions which I didn't ask but which you think I should have asked?

Do you have any questions for me that you would like me to answer before we end this interview?

Thank you very, very much for taking the time to speak to me. Please do contact me either on my phone or by email if there is anything you would like to talk to me about. I wish you all the very best for the birth and I will be in touch again in x number of months.

Appendix 6: Questions post-parental leave

Parental leave

1. Last time I was here you were expecting your first child. Amongst other things, we spoke about how you were planning to use your parental leave entitlements and why you wanted to do it this way. How *did* you use your entitlements in the end? How come you changed your plans? (if that is the case)
2. What do you feel worked in terms of how you and your partner used the parental leave period?
3. What do you think did not work so well?
4. Would you have liked to have less time? More time? Why?
5. Would you have liked your partner to have had more time at home with the baby? Less time? Why?
6. If we pretend that we're back at that time when you were pregnant with your first child, but with the knowledge and experience you now have, what advice would you have given yourself in terms of how you use the parental leave rights that you have?
7. What advice would you have given yourself more generally when it comes to the arrival of a baby and everything that follows with becoming parents? What would have been good to know? What would you have done differently?
8. DADS who took parental leave: How did you feel about being home on daddy leave? Please tell me about this time
9. What would you do differently next time/what are you doing differently with child no 2/what did you do differently with child no 2? Why? How did you arrive at this decision?

Returning to work

1. Mums: After the maternity leave had ended, what did you do? Did you go back to your old job? Why? Why not? (What choices did you make in relation to your paid work and why?)
2. How did you arrive at the decision of going back to your old job/reducing working hours/changing jobs/resigning from your job?
3. How does your partner feel about this decision?
4. Mums who went back to work: How did it feel to get back to work again? How do you feel about work now?

5. When you came back to work after your parental leave had anything changed at work? Work tasks? Your manager's attitude to you? Your colleagues' attitude to you? How were you received back at work? Please tell me about the first few months being back at work.
6. Mothers who went back to their old job: Did you ever consider not going back/reducing your working hours/changing your job? Why/ why not?

OR

Mothers who stopped working: Did you ever consider going back to your old job or finding a different job? Why? Why not?

Do you ever miss work? What do you miss about work/Why do you think that you don't miss work?

OR

Mothers who changed reduced their hours/changed their job: Why did you make this decision?

7. Mothers who reduced their working hours or stopped working altogether: If you had decided to go back to work full-time, how do you think your partner would have reacted to that?
8. How do you think your friends would have reacted to that? Why do you think that is the case?
9. Mothers who went back to work full-time either their old job or a new full-time position: If you had decided to quit your job or drastically reduce your working hours to care for your baby after the end of the maternity leave, how do you think your partner would have reacted to that?
10. How would your friends and family have reacted to that? Why do you think that is?
11. In your opinion, is it possible for a couple with children to combine 2 full-time jobs with parental responsibilities? Why? Why not?
12. Mums and dads who are still working: Has your career/ability to do your job suffered from becoming a mum/dad? In what way?

Changes

13. What changes have you made to the way you work and to your personal life in order to make space for parenthood?

14. What changes has your partner made?

15. Why did you decide to make these changes?

16. How do you feel about having made these changes?

Second child – now what?

17. Mothers and fathers who already have a second child or who is expecting the second child: What did you do after the arrival of child no 2? Please tell me what the plan is in terms of your employment, will you go back after maternity leave? Full-time? Part-time? Any other changes? Why?

18. Mothers and fathers already with a second child or expecting a second child: How have you done it this time around in terms of the use of parental leave entitlements?/ How are you planning to do it this time in terms of the use of parental leave entitlements? Why? How did you come to this decision?

Doing things differently?

Housework and childcare

19. Housework:

- Who does the cooking?
- Who does the laundry?
- Who vacuum cleans?
- Who cleans the rest of the house and general tidying up?
- Who does the grocery shopping?

20. How do you feel about the way in which you share the housework now?

21. Please describe a normal morning. Who does what and how do you get ready? How do you think this pattern emerged?/ Why did this pattern emerge do you think? What are you happy about with this pattern and what are you not happy about with this pattern?

22. Please describe a normal evening. Who cooks? Tidies up? Does bath? Puts to bed? How do you think this pattern emerged?/ Why did this pattern emerge do you think? What are you happy about with this pattern and what are you not happy about with this pattern?

23. How does the child sleep? Who takes care of the child when he/she wakes up?
24. In terms of your overall responsibility for your child/children, in percentage, how much responsibility and involvement in your child's/children's life do you feel you have and how much do you feel your partner has?
25. Why do you think this pattern has emerged?
26. How do you feel about this pattern?
27. If you split up now, what would be a natural way to split the custody for the child?

Working routines

28. When do you arrive at work now and when do you leave?
29. Do you work in the evenings now?
30. Do you work overtime/weekends/travel?
31. Have your working hours/travel/amount of overtime that changed since you became a parent?
32. Do you feel your job prevents you from being the kind of parent you would like to be? If so, in what way? Why?
33. Do you feel your child prevents you from doing a good job at work/ hinders your career progression?

Childcare

34. For the parents who use some form of paid or unpaid childcare: What type of childcare have you chosen? Why did you choose this childcare?
35. How does this childcare fit with your and your partner's working hours? Who does the drop-off and who does the pick-up? How did you decide on this arrangement? Why did you decide to do it like this?
36. How much do you pay for childcare per month?
37. How do you feel about the fact that you are sending your child to this form of childcare?

38. Do you feel it's best for children to stay at home for the first few years of their life or do you feel that it's good for them to be out of the house and in a form of childcare for parts of their day? Why do you feel this way?

Sick child

39. When the child is ill how do you do it? Who stays at home? Why? How is your employer about you staying at home with the child when ill? Why do you do it like this?

40. How do you see friends and family with small children do it?

Finances

41. Children cost money; clothes, nursery, food, nappies etc. Who pays for this/how do you pay for this between you? Why do you do it this way? How do you feel about this arrangement?

Spare time/time to yourself

42. Do you feel you have time for yourself to do whatever it is that you like to do apart from being at work and being a parent? How much free time do you have compared to your partner? Do you feel the amount of free time you have and the amount of free time he/she has is a fair arrangement?

Norms and values

43. Do you think it's good for children to grow up with parents working full-time or do you think it's bad for them? In what way do you think it is good/bad?
44. What do you think of the mothers who give up their career to stay at home with their children?
45. What do you think of women who continue to work long hours after they have become mothers?
46. There has been much debate both in the media and in academia about whether or not the needs of babies are best met in the care of their mother or if the father is an equally important carer in the early stages of a child's life. What are your thoughts around this debate?

Now looking back

- 1 We talked at the beginning of the interview what *you* would have liked to do differently if you were back at the time before the baby was born. Is there anything you would have liked your *partner* to have done differently or anything you would have liked your partner to do differently now?
- 2 In an ideal world, if you could choose, would you have liked to work full-time? Part-time? Not work at all? Please tell me more
- 3 Parents who work: What changes in/to your life would make working and being a parent easier for you? More contribution from your partner? Shorter working hours? More understanding from your colleagues/boss about your responsibilities at home? More flexibility at work? Longer nursery opening hours? Longer parental leave?

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