

Men, Work and Family life: a study of policy and practice in the UK and Italy¹

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Introduction

This paper documents the key themes emerging from a collaborative literature review on fatherhood and paid work, undertaken both in the UK and in Italy⁶. The aims and objectives of the review are to consider what ‘involved fatherhood’ looks like and to identify the main factors that have been found to shape it. These are assessed against the prevalence of gendered structural and ideological constraints, which, on the one hand, bound the concept of ‘involvement’, yet can conceal a much more nuanced, day-to-day reality on the other. The review is a comparative one, as far as this is possible, by evaluating the literature on fatherhood both in the UK and in Italy and is organised according to the themes that were found to be dominant throughout⁷. Much of the literature has a UK focus. In Italy, while there is a growing academic focus on fatherhood, in the context of men and masculinity, the body of literature on this theme is scant compared to that on women and motherhood, and also compared to the international context. In particular, little research has been conducted on fatherhood and paid work: the workplace culture is typically considered from a legislative point of view (Calafà, 2004, 2007).

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⁶ Relevant databases, organizations and journal websites were searched for information in the course of the review. This strategy was augmented with proceedings from conferences and by personal communication with relevant authors. The authors recognize that the literature reviewed does not comprise an exhaustive list of all research on fatherhood.

⁷ A bibliography of the literature reviewed is attached, by way of an appendix.

Key themes

Six key themes were identified in the literature reviewed in this study. These are:

- Policy
- Politicization of ‘involved fatherhood’
- Post-modernity
- Gender
- Shifting family lives and constructions of fatherhood and motherhood
- Discourses and everyday lived realities

Important research gaps are also identified.

Each of these inter-related themes are considered in turn below. Shared across the themes is a focus on changing constructions of fathering, fatherhood, paid work and family lives.

Policy

Despite the current topicality of leave policy and an overall trend towards increased flexibility and fathers’ rights, there is considerable divergence across the European Union (EU), in terms of national approaches (Moss and Wall, 2007; O’Brien, 2009; Mazzucchelli, 2011). Moss and Wall (2007) construct six key ‘leave policy models’ in a comparative analysis of 19 European countries. These range from the ‘one year leave’ gender equality oriented approach, characterised in particular by the Nordic countries; to the ‘short leave part time mother policy model’, exemplified by Ireland, the Netherlands and the UK; and to ‘the short leave male breadwinner model’, prevailing in Southern Europe, including Italy. More generally, the UK tends to be categorized as a liberal-type regime, whereas the regime in Italy is perceived as being conservative corporatist, or familialistic (Hobson and Morgan, 2002; Lewis, 2002; Crespi, 2007; Rossi and Mazzucchelli, 2008).

In Italy, there is a relatively short but mandatory maternity leave (five months), paid at 80% of salary. Paternity leave exists only insofar as it may be invoked (up

to a maximum of three months after the birth of the child) if the mother is sick, or absent, or if the father has sole custody. In such circumstances, the father is entitled to three months' leave, paid at 80% of salary. However, in 2000, in response to the 1996 EU directive on parental leave (which was not signed up to by the UK), new legislation came into force, providing the option of parental leave and introducing the individual, rather than non-transferable, right of male employees to take time off work, in order to care for their children. In contrast to maternity leave this parental leave is not mandatory and is dependent upon negotiation. But in theory, at least, this law envisages the possibility of parenting as a genuinely shared task. The leave available extends to 10 months in total (extended to 11 months, if the father takes at least three months), at 30% of salary until the child is 3 years old (and subsequently unpaid, but available until the child reaches the age of 8 years) (Mazzucchelli, 2011). This contrasts with statutory maternity leave of 26 weeks in the UK, plus a further additional 26 weeks' additional maternity leave, available only to employees. The first six weeks of leave is paid at 90% of salary. Further payment is made for a total of 33 weeks, currently £124.88 per week. In addition, fathers may take 2 weeks' paid paternity leave, at a fixed rate (currently £124.88). This changed in April 2011 when fathers in the UK, *whose partners have returned to work*, may be entitled to up to 26 weeks' further paternity leave, at the same fixed rate.⁸ Unpaid parental leave is available, contingent on 1+ years' continuous employment, up to a maximum of 13 weeks per child under the age of five.

However, individual company policies often provide more generous leave entitlements, at their discretion. In Italy, for example, the public sector typically offers greater financial compensation (in the case of maternity leave) than the statutory minimum requirement. In the private sector, fathers may be granted one or two days off for the birth of a child, although this is often deducted from annual holiday leave, or counted as family leave. Similarly, in the UK, individual companies can offer terms that are considerably more liberal than the minimum legal entitlement, although, as in Italy, this also mostly applies to maternity leave.

⁸ For recent press coverage, see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-12204079>

In the European context, statistics available on take up of maternity, paternity and parental leave are patchy and often rely on self-reporting (Hearn *et al*, 2003; Bygren and Duvander, 2005; Moss and Wall, 2007; James, 2008; O'Brien, 2009). However, it is clear that, in the UK, there are significant financial disincentives to take up leave and, in 2005, it was estimated that only 1 in 5 fathers took their statutory entitlement (Fatherhood Institute; James, 2008). It is estimated that only a small minority – 4%-8% of eligible fathers – will take up the Additional Paternity Leave, introduced in April 2011 (Asher, 2011). In Italy, there is equally no real fiscal incentive supporting parental leave and the concept of fathers taking time off work to look after children remains stigmatized (Rossi, 2006; Mazzucchelli, 2011). While 65% of fathers in Italy are aware of their right to take parental leave, the vast majority (87%) have no intention of exercising that right (Mazzucchelli, 2011). Although the introduction of Law 53/2000 represents an innovative attempt to foster a cultural change in parenting roles and that of fatherhood, in particular, there are significant doubts over its actual success. The use of parental leave remains very limited, especially by fathers (7.5% take up in 2005)⁹, and less than a quarter (24.2%) of mothers exercising their entitlement (ISTAT 2008 citing data from April-June 2005).

The research literature generally concurs that public sector workers are more inclined to take paternity or parental leave (this is true both of Italy and the UK); that propensity to take such leave will be greater if there is significant precedent within the workplace and if the employer is a large company, as opposed to a small business or in the case of self-employment (Bygren and Duvander, 2005; Marshall, 2008). However, a major obstacle remains a financial one, which is all the more acute among low wage earners (O'Brien, 2009). This serves to underline the persistent difficulty in managing the relationship between work and family and the expectations that continue to underpin both.

Within the EU as a whole, divergent approaches to leave policy are the consequence of different ideological frameworks in which the relationship between the family and state are articulated (Rossi, 2006; Wall, 2007; Crompton

⁹ Among reasons cited by fathers in Italy for not using parental leave, was that they did not need it (ISTAT 2008).

et al, 2007; Crespi, 2007; Rossi and Mazzucchelli, 2008; Lewis, 2009) and how these are played out: either through overt state investment in children as ‘future citizens’, or through private, familial investment in children individually as future competent and contributing adults. Policy can either reinforce gender inequality or encourage greater gender equity (Crespi, 2007; Brandth and Kvande, 2009; Mazzucchelli, 2011). Long leave, for instance, serves to reinforce the paid/unpaid work divide. Additionally, the role of the market steers the possibilities and outcomes afforded by policy, at a corporate and national level, as well as at a more macro, EU level. Larger structural and cultural factors, therefore, are in force, shaping the discourses that underpin constructions of parenting and, specifically, in this context, fatherhood, notably: the welfare state, employment and work place cultures and the availability (and quality) of (subsidized) childcare. In the UK, the cost of childcare is high and only a limited amount of state-provided care is provided (Crompton *et al*, 2007). The situation in Italy is similar, particularly for children under the age of 3 years. This is compounded by the fact that parental leave taken after the child has reached the age of 3 is entirely unpaid (Rossi, Carrà and Mazzucchelli, 2010). These factors inevitably impact on the scope of actions (for mothers and fathers), the ‘right to choose’ in the context of take up of leave and the so-called work-life balance. It also influences the extent to which the reconfiguration of fatherhood is actually taking place. Additionally, some scholars contend that such factors in themselves still do not adequately explain the wide variation in lifestyles that can be found across Europe. Rossi and Mazzucchelli (2008) consider that a relational, as opposed to an individual, matrix lies at the heart of such variability, in which “[t]he couple acts as the life-sphere, or battlefield, on which the equity and disequity of roles are challenged” (Rossi and Mazzucchelli, 2008: 39; see also Dowd, 2000; Crespi, 2007; Williams, 2008). This endorses the appropriateness of a more nuanced approach to interpreting how fatherhood may be evolving (Dowd, 2000; Doucet, 2003, Dermott, 2008, Miller, 2011a) and this will be returned to later in this paper.

The UK’s working hours are the longest in the EU, averaging 48 hours per week (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, April 2000). Moreover, actual hours worked (by

employed fathers) significantly exceed their contracted hours (Working Families, 2011). This suggests the power of the relationship between masculine identity and the workplace culture in the UK and the difficulties inherent in effecting substantive change in favour of enabling family time and childcare. Perhaps not surprisingly, policy in the UK continues to be founded on an 'economic view' of fathering ('cash' rather than 'care') and does much to preserve cultural stereotypes: the notion of the 'male breadwinner', in particular. In this respect, there are clear parallels to be drawn with Italy, which also has a strong male breadwinner tradition and a persistent and marked unequal pay divide, although working hours in Italy are not so extreme as those in the UK (Rossi, 2006; Crespi, 2007). Women (not just mothers) in Italy undertake significantly more housework than their European counterparts (ISTAT, 2011). Even as more women enter the labour market, increasingly highly educated and professionally skilled, they still have to manage the dual role of mother and worker in the so-called 'double shift' (Baldo, 1978; Hochschild, 1989). Fertility rates are now very low, at 1.29 (ISTAT, 2011). The UK fertility rate has also declined over time, although not so markedly, and now stands at 1.9 (ONS, 2010). While female participation in the labour market is high – around 70% in 2004 (Stanley, 2005), maternal employment in the UK is typically part-time: 37% of mothers are in part-time jobs, compared to 29% of mothers working 35+ hours a week (ONS, 2011)¹⁰. This reflects the lack of provision of subsidized, high quality childcare, a restrictive family policy driving compromised work and family reconciliation strategies (Minguez and Ballesteros, 2007) and a workplace that has part-time worker demands. A corollary of this is that, although the percentage of women who work has increased significantly over the last two decades, the pay gap has hardly narrowed: not least because part time jobs are typically readily available only in certain sectors of the labour market, so leading to gender segregation by occupation (Ichino and Sanz, 2003; Stanley, 2005). It also perpetuates the use of part time work as a female reconciling strategy – and

¹⁰ For press coverage, see <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/jobs/hr-news/8418203/More-mothers-working-full-time.html>

this is valid for both Italy and the UK (ISTAT, 2003, 2007, 2008; O'Brien, 2005; Eurostat, 2007; Dermott, 2008). In this sense, the term 'dual earner' glosses over a more complex and less equitable reality than the language itself might imply. Part time jobs in Italy are relatively scarce and so mothers often have little choice but to work full time, if they return to work at all, although the part time workforce is dominated by women: 30.1% versus 7.4% men (ISTAT, 2007). In addition, in Italy, a career break typically involves a greater element of career sacrifice as, in contrast to the situation in the UK, there is no right to return to work at the same level or grade. Additionally, on average, women in Italy experience a longer period of employment interruption, following childbirth: on average, 25.3 months after the birth of a first child (ISTAT, 2007).

A combination of relatively accessible formal or informal childcare arrangements and the limited access to part time work therefore generates a different outcome in Italy when compared to the UK, in terms of work and family reconciliations (Ichino and Sanz, 2003), including a relatively low maternal employment rate (OECD, 2006, in Craig and Mullian, 2010:1346). The extent to which social policy reflects and reinforces culturally embedded notions of fatherhood and work and motherhood and care is evident here (Stanley, 2005; Burgess and Russell, 2003) as are the ways in which prevailing norms and values are co-constitutive in the relationships between institutions, the welfare state, the family and individual (Crompton *et al*, 2007; Lewis, 2007). For many families in Italy, grandparents remain the primary childcare resource – even in changing family structures. This intergenerational solidarity is strongly characterized as 'feminine', given that it typically involves mothers – and grandmothers and their daughters (Rossi, 2006).

Socio-culturally, the state in Italy plays a subsidiary role to that of civil society, which holds to a community-based welfare system as its principle objective (Rossi and Mazzucchelli, 2008:40). Under the auspices of 'Corporate Welfare' and 'Corporate Social Responsibility', companies in Italy are now required to recognize and support the needs of their employees, including the provision of services, such as day nurseries. The aim of this initiative is to transpose work and family reconciliation from a problematic issue into a critical integer – and

social opportunity - in the context of providing motivation, job satisfaction and productivity (Donati and Prandini, 2008)¹¹. The theme of corporate social responsibility emerged in European Commission documentation in 2001, with the aim of promoting the voluntary integration of social and environmental concerns into international operations. Social responsibility involves more and more organizations today, as it becomes a driver of innovation and competitiveness requiring that organizations demonstrate their investment in human capital. No such overt manifestation of aspects of corporate social responsibility currently exist in the UK, which, somewhat differently, tends to rely more on market forces, typically in the form of supply and demand of service, in order to regulate 'choices' (Hobson, 2002; Crespi, 2007).

However, policy enabling flexible working arrangements on a *right to request* basis (for parents as well as other carers) in the UK is becoming a focus of academic interest, including how and to what extent this is accessed by fathers in the workplace. Research conducted among fathers and completed in 2011 suggests that the concept of flexible working, while gaining some traction, remains far from being culturally enshrined, despite the potency of the positive business case which can be made in its favour (Working Families, 2011). The perception persists that flexible working arrangements, while notionally available to both men and women, are primarily aimed at mothers. Moreover, the success or otherwise of flexible working policies typically rests with line managers, who may either be resistant or facilitative, causing huge variation in practice, even within the same company. There is also an assumption among many fathers that choosing to work flexibly undermines promotion prospects (despite a paradoxical reality in which senior employees have much greater autonomy in determining their working patterns) (Working Families, 2011; Miller, 2011a). This can create issues of 'trapped talent' and perpetuates the (misguided) belief that the price paid for greater seniority is less flexibility

¹¹ This is the philosophy on which the Work & Family Award is based, a competition for companies, government and nonprofit organizations, created and promoted by the Lombardy Region in Italy and supported by departments (ALTIS and ASAG) and the Centre for Family Studies and Research at the Catholic University, Milan.

(Working Families, 2011). It is arguable that, against this backdrop, perhaps the notion of 'full time' and 'part time' work itself needs to be conceptually re-evaluated, in terms of how jobs and roles are constructed, defined and measured, in relation to productive output rather than time input (Working Families, 2011).

Politically, the current coalition government in the UK is encouraging the use of non-legislative measures to effect cultural and corporate change in the context of working practices and family obligations. As mentioned above, in Italy, the emphasis is placed on organisations – but also on communities - to implement family friendly working practices (in part, a historical legacy of the paternal, benevolent role played by companies) and similar, complex factors contribute to a parallel dissonance between changing family practices and the degree to which workplace cultures and practices are evolving (Mazzucchelli, 2011). The new policy focus in Italy on how work and family life might be better integrated brings together the various stakeholders: private and public sector companies and the communities they serve. This could potentially open up the family from being a private unit, with its reliance on intergenerational support, and, in doing so, ascribe increasing value and importance to the community and associative networks.

The extent to which socio-economic inequalities are rife in both countries is striking, although this is not covered extensively in the literature. Hearn and Pringle (2006) calculate, for example, that the UK ratio of income of the richest 10% to that of the poorest 10% is 13.8: a little less than Italy and 2.5 times more than in Finland. A gap between rich and poor also exists geographically in both countries, although inversely, affluence is concentrated in the South in the UK and in the North in Italy. These similarities are in stark contrast to the much more egalitarian cultures found in the Nordic countries, for example, and contribute to correspondingly different constructions of fatherhood (and motherhood) normative practices and associated notions of masculinities.

Several scholars draw attention to the potency of class stratification in shaping family life (Plantin et al, 2003; O'Brien, 2009; Gillies, 2009), observing too, how 'policy-sanctioned models of fatherhood are grounded in middle class

perspectives' (Gillies, 2009:49). The complexities and tensions inherent in social class differentiated attitudes and expectations will be considered further in the context of gender.

Politicization of 'involved' fatherhood

In 1997, after 18 years of Conservative rule, the election of a Labour government in the UK, with its 'third way' progressive manifesto, turned the political spotlight emphatically onto fathers, making fatherhood a key element in labour rhetoric and policy (Collier, 2001; Williams, 2008; Featherstone, 2009). The catalyst behind this was largely economic. The late 1980s and early 1990s witnessed a significant rise in the number of single parent families. Failure of absent fathers to provide financially for their children and the consequent cost to the state (and tax payer) had become a major issue on the policy agenda (Lewis, 2002). Ideologically, too, 'New Labour' promulgated the idea of the nurturing, emotionally involved father, leading to initiatives such as Sure Start. There was also a strong political and economic impetus to encourage more women back into the workplace. Two models of fatherhood emerged from this political change: 'fatherhood in transition' and 'fatherhood in crisis' (Collier, 2001; O'Brien, 2005)¹².

The literature is divided on whether such political initiatives constituted a negative or a positive shift in terms of focus and approach. Scourfield and Drakeford (2002) observe that New Labour consciously imposed what was tantamount to a mandate of masculinity, in terms of 'how society deals with men, what it expects of men and how men should behave' (Scourfield and Drakeford, 2002: 620). There is some consensus that the approach was more authoritarian than facilitative. It also had the effect of moving the family decisively out of the

¹² 'Fatherhood in crisis' is also a theme running through the Italian literature, documenting a loss of (male) economic, authoritative and cultural prestige. However, it is considered that the term 'crisis' is arguably misguided, if fatherhood is in transition, such that the role is infused by a new kind of awareness and sense of responsibility (Donati, Scabini 1986; Zanfroni, 2005; Bertocchi, 2009).

private sphere and into the public domain (Scourfield and Drakeford, 2002; Henwood and Procter, 2003).

Such political momentum also spawned a countervailing 'protest masculinity': galvanizing activists – mostly fathers – into speaking up publicly and demanding change, typically in the form of rights (Burgess, 2003; Featherstone, 2009).

Families need Fathers, The Fatherhood Institute and Fathers for Justice exemplify a range of movements, organisations and think tanks that subsequently emerged in the UK. It is argued by some that, in this context, such assertion of men's rights is an attempt to claw back paternal, patriarchal power eroded by growing maternal employment (Gatrell, 2007; Featherstone, 2003, 2009).

In Italy, perhaps with the exception of the legislative changes introduced in 2000, fatherhood has not been overtly politicized. There is no equivalent 'absent father' discourse: the issue of such absenteeism (and, indeed, that of single motherhood) has not been publicly problematized, as has been the case in the UK. Although the number of single parent families is rising in Italy, the issue of single parent families remains under-investigated and has yet to make it onto the policy agenda¹³. Any transformation towards more engaged, involved fatherhood continues to be negotiated and practised privately, rather than publicly (Zajczyk and Ruspini, 2008). Often, reassessment of fatherhood is prompted by material change, either through adjustment to a dual income family

¹³ In Italy the issue of single mothers was not recognised until 1983 and, although numbers are increasing, there is no overt focus on this as a social phenomenon (Bimbi, 1997). According to ISTAT data, single-parent families apply both to mothers and fathers, but is more likely to apply to mothers (1'88,6%) (ISTAT 2010B, Dossier Famiglia In Cifre). This is because women are more likely to be widowed than men and, because after a separation or divorce, the children are usually entrusted to the mother. The phenomenon of single mothers is associated with that of poverty (it is most common for women with a low or medium level of education,). The economic situation of single mothers is therefore particularly critical, given few or insufficient resources (ISTAT 2005). In such situations informal network plays an especially important role for single mothers.

model or, more radically, the more difficult adaptation to new relational circumstances, such as those precipitated by divorce. Such change (and the slow, but nonetheless perceptible, pace of change) needs to be seen against a backdrop of tension between deeply gendered traditional values, historically influenced by the Catholic church, and a more progressive approach, in which men are re-evaluating their identities in relation to changing family structures and to the workplace (Altieri, 2007; Ruspini and Zajczyk, 2008). Rossi (2009) endorses this view, observing, too, the enduring strength of family ties that remain typical of Southern Europe, despite a growing acceptability of post-modern familial transition, including marital breakdown (see also Crespi, 2007).

In contrast, across northern Europe and in Sweden, in particular, the drive towards gender equality began in the 1960s, principally to reinforce women's status, both socially and in the workplace, but also to encourage men to become more involved in and responsible for childcare and housework (Johansson and Klinth, 2007). To this end, an advertising campaign featuring a Viking holding a baby, followed by a succession of other campaigns in the same mould, influenced Swedish notions of masculinity to the extent that any publicly voiced dissent from the 'involved father' model would now be socially unacceptable (Crespi, 2007).

In Sweden, the discourse of the new, gender-equal man may have become culturally embedded – and hegemonic – but nonetheless it belies a more complex reality in which take up of leave has been slow (from 5% in the 1980s to around 20% in 2007 (Plantin, 2001, 2003; Brandth and Kvande, 1998; Johansson and Klinth, 2007; Vuori, 2007) and a labour market that remains one of the most gender-segregated in Europe. Such segregation operates on a horizontal level, whereby types of work are significantly gendered and also vertically, whereby men are more prevalent in senior- and highly paid – positions (Hearn and Pringle, 2006). The high level of part time maternal employment in Sweden, with all that implies in terms of pay and status, may be a contributory factor here (Ichino and Sanz, 2003). The introduction, in 1993, of the 'Daddy quota' – a specifically gendered scheme – accelerated take-up from 4% in 1993 to 75% in 2007 (Brandth and Kvande, 2009). This granting of a specific, masculine

employee right removed the onus on couples to negotiate use of leave between themselves and so disrupted the dominating gender scheme. It re-framed paternal leave as a 'normative' practice in the context of work.

Overall, there is considerable debate in the literature as to whether or not the emergence of a 'new fatherhood' merely replaces outmoded discourses with an equally hegemonic status (Doucet, 2003; Featherstone, 2003; Gatrell, 2007; Miller, 2011a) and this will be further considered later. Even as marriage is declining as an institution, there is little doubt that fatherhood is 'back in fashion' (Dermott, 2008; Featherstone, 2009). It should be noted, however, that 'involved' fatherhood is by no means an exclusively modern phenomenon, since earlier generations have also placed a high value on intimate fathering (Finn and Henwood, 2009). Qualitative research studies, mostly conducted amongst new, first time fathers, consistently show the desire to 'be there, to 'be involved'. Most respondents in the studies readily subscribe to – and can talk – the 'caring father' discourse (Barclay and Lupton, 1999; Henwood and Procter, 2003; Dermott, 2008; Miller, 2011a). In the UK, certainly, this emanates in part from the politicization of 'involved' fatherhood, bolstered by the media, which plays a significant role in idealising or glamorizing images of fathers, including celebrity (role model) and, more recently, politician, fathers (Westwood, 1996; Hearn, 2002). The spotlight on fatherhood also ensures a self-consciousness of 'involvement': talking the discourse, if not necessarily acting on it – in the context of social , as well as political, expectations of parenting and the tension between 'earning' and 'caring' (Collier, 2001).

Post-modernity

The notion of 'involved' fatherhood needs to be considered against a backdrop of social, political and cultural change associated with post-modernity: awareness of which permeates the literature. Parents – and children- are navigating an increasingly complex, less certain, less 'traditional' environment in which family life (and diversity) and paid work are experienced and managed. In the UK, two parent couple households have declined from 83% in 1991 to 77% in 2001

(O'Brien, 2006). Shifting marriage and divorce patterns (the UK has the highest divorce rate in Europe), the feminisation of the workplace and processes of both individualisation and globalisation are forces that are continually re-shaping the idea of 'the family', its dynamics and how the family intersects with the state and the market (Crespi, 2007; Williams, 2008). Additional pressures of job insecurity and instability, arguably even more intense in global economies (Hobson and Fahlen, 2009), combine to produce a degree of social complexity in which people can become 'improvised jugglers of irreconcilable worlds' (Mazzucchelli, 2011:11).

In Italy, in common with the UK and other European countries, co-habitation is rising, people are waiting longer before getting married and delaying leaving home. Concurrently and consequently, Italians are starting families later (typically at around 35 years' old -2-3 years later than the European average - in the case of men) and fertility is lower and in decline (Rossi, 2006; Crespi, 2007; Ruspini and Zajczyk, 2008). One of the most significant changes in family structure lies in the formation of the couple itself. Until just a few decades ago, this was dictated - and enacted - largely according to precise social norms, either implicit, or explicit: falling in love, engagement, religious marriage, birth of children. Today, in common with the rest of Europe, transitions and pathways to family life are multiple and varied (Rossi, forthcoming; Rossi, 2011¹⁴). Nonetheless, family law in Italy is less liberal than in the UK, with 3 years' mandatory separation prior to divorce and, although attitudes towards separation and divorce are becoming more neutral as society becomes more secularized, such transitions still bear the hallmark of stigma. While women are reaping the benefits of higher education, this does not translate into equitable reward in the workplace, where many jobs taken by women do not reflect their academic achievement and, despite improvements, unequal pay is still a major issue, even in job parity in Italy (Hearn and Pringle, 2006; Rossi, 2006).

¹⁴ For more details, see Rossi (forthcoming), *I percorsi di costituzione della famiglia in Europa tra morfogenesi e morfostasi*; Rossi (2011), *Percorsi e Legami di coppia: le trasformazioni della coniugalità in Italia*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano.

In the UK, the boundaries between home and work are becoming increasingly blurred. Widespread access to the internet, email, smart phones and other digital media, as well as home working, make it harder to draw a clear distinction between the office and family domesticity (LSE, n.d.; Hobson and Morgan, 2002). Technologies and networking are eroding the private domain and some scholars contend that the family itself has been drawn into the public arena, while others consider that the network society is increasingly becoming a substitution for kinship resources (Morgan, 2002). This is not nearly such a strong phenomenon in Italy, where socio-cultural resistance to the concept of teleworking persists, where a clear demarcation between work and family is preferred and the notion of the extended family still endures, most notably, in the pivotal role still played by grandparents in the provision of childcare (Rossi, 2006; Crespi, 2007). Paradoxically, it is also apparent that the effects of population mobility – the consequence of the changing workplace, demands of the market and the effect of globalisation - can resurrect and reinforce traditional gender roles: particularly if a career opportunity involving relocation applies to the father (Plantin and Daneback, 2009).

Meanwhile, in this context, the ‘work-family balance challenge debate’ continues (O’Brien, 2006). O’Brien argues that a ‘new set of structural conditions’ has dramatized the already extant tension between time spent at work and time spent with children. It is noted how fatherhood is typically associated with longer working hours, driven by a need to maximise earning potential, in order to provide for dependents (O’Brien, 2006; Miller, 2011a). Time spent at work is often used as a measure of productivity, even when this is not necessarily the case. The cultural context in which ‘paid work’ is so highly prized seems strongly resistant to change, particularly against a backdrop of core notions of masculinity and how these are linked to the workplace (Thébaud, 2010). Yet, research suggests that both businesses and employees stand to benefit substantively, in terms of motivation and other measures of positive outcome, from the implementation of schemes such as flexible working options, which cost a mere fraction of recruiting a replacement (Gambles *et al*, 2007; James, 2008). Even so, ‘work organisations in most societies are structured as if people have no

other life and as if no fathers worked there' (Burgess and Russell, 2003: 114). This is compounded by employment being framed as a 'choice' for women, but not for men, so reinforcing gendered assumptions about career sacrifices and domestic responsibilities (Wall and Arnold, 2007). It also remains the case that work-family reconciliation measures are characterised by their focus on critical events – childbirth, or illness, for example – rather than on helping accommodate the requirements of everyday family life. Furthermore, the language of the 'work- life balance', suggesting that work is somehow not part of life, further serves to undermine any real systemic, organisational change (Crespi, 2007; Gambles *et al*, 2007; Dermott, 2008).

Additional pressure comes to bear in the form of a growing cultural expectation in the Northern European countries, including the UK, in which fathers (parents) should intensively focus on their children's developmental and emotional needs. Indeed, research suggests that they may sacrifice other leisure activities, such as exercise, in order to achieve this (O'Brien, 2006; Crespi, 2007; Wall and Arnold, 2007; James, 2008; Craig and Mullian, 2010). This kind of 'hyper-parenting' or 'child as project' also feeds the perennial dilemma between the need to maximise economic potential (to provide for the family) and the desire to maximise family time (to nurture the children) and is seen to be more associated with middle class behaviours (Gillies, 2009). How 'choices' are framed needs to be considered, therefore, against the demands, opportunities and challenges encountered (often unequally) in post-modern societies (Featherstone, 2003; Miller, 2011a).

Gender

Gender shapes lives in all sorts of ways. Within family and employment domains, it retains its power to reinforce inequality (Crespi, 2007; Doucet, 2009; Finn and Henwood, 2009; Thébaud, 2010; Miller, 2011a). There is a clear recognition in the literature that transition to parenthood often suddenly (unexpectedly) activates deeply gendered dimensions of family life, in contrast to more equitable possibilities afforded as a couple (Sanchez and Thompson, 1997; Craig

and Mullian, 2010; Miller, 2011a). However, the picture here is particularly complex.

There is a considerable body of international literature focusing and reflecting on male identity. Much of this has emanated from the English-speaking world (Australia, United States and the UK); as mentioned in the introduction to this paper, comparatively few such studies have been conducted to date in Italy. A variety of themes have been explored in relation to masculinity: notably, education, health, violence, household division of labour, as well as fatherhood (Kimmel, 2000; Connell, 1987, 1983, 1997, 2005; Brod, 1987, Roper and Tosh, 1991; Brod and Kaufmann, 1994, Hearn and Pringle 2006; Bellassai and Malatesta, 2000; Piccone and Saraceno, 1996; Crespi 2008). Hearn and Pringle (2006), in a pan-European analysis of studies on men, observe that the focus on masculinity, while relatively recent, is not new. In Italy, analyses of the relationship between men, family and paid work has typically highlighted the differences between men and women in terms of domestic responsibilities and the participation in the labour market (ISTAT 2010a). However, Donati (1997) considers that a relational perspective provides a more subtle and useful interpretation, in which gender identity is built, not by dialectical negation, but by referring and relating, one to another. Gender difference, then, does not imply a clear division, but a reference code of similarity/dissimilarity (Donati, 2006). Against this backdrop, gender identity is created as a social relation; a process where masculine and feminine roles interact, in which men and women are distinguished by physical and biological differences, but where their social and familial lives become increasingly intertwined. This relational approach is developed and supported in the work of Rossi and Mazzucchelli (2008) and Crespi (2008).

Nonetheless, while constructions of femininity are closely bound up with motherhood, constructions of masculinity are tightly linked to the workplace (Connell, 1995; Doucet, 2006; Featherstone, 2009). We talk of 'working mothers'; but not of 'working fathers', so implicit is this relationship between employment and masculinity. Equally, we refer to 'stay-at-home' fathers, but not 'stay-at-home mothers'. Underpinning this is the separation of 'home' and 'work'

as an ideological construction, with all that implies for the societal value ascribed to unpaid 'housework' and 'care work' (Gambles *et al*, 2007; Thébaud, 2010). Socio-culturally and legally, in the UK, fathers are defined primarily in terms of rights, relative to children and women; whereas mothers are defined primarily in terms of caring 'responsibilities', relative to children (Collier, 2001; Hearn, 2002).

The idea of the 'male breadwinner' remains a strong one – both in the UK and in Italy. Linguistically, this may be problematic – it inflates and misguides – but the terminology itself is rarely questioned (Dermott, 2008). Every element of the term is heavily laden. The notion of breadwinning continues to be propped up by the policy discourse in the UK (with its focus on financial maintenance) while, at the same time, the role that fathers are playing is becoming ever more complex (Williams, 2008). Often, 'involvement' is positioned in opposition to 'breadwinner', so suggesting that economic provision is somehow distinct from 'care' (Dermott, 2003). Additionally, the so-called 'dual earner household' arguably connotes something simpler and more equitable than it actually involves.

Much of the research cited in the literature reveals an apparent willingness, of (many) fathers, to engage at least with the *idea* of 'involvement'. They are familiar with the discourse. They are clear about what a 'good' father constitutes (caring, 'being there') and a 'bad' father ('feckless', absent). However, defining 'involvement' is far from straightforward. Additionally, although not addressed in the literature, popular discourse acknowledges significant socio-cultural differences between Italy and the UK, in terms of the degree of (male) emotional expressiveness and public displays of affection (or reserve), including those in relation to children. This needs to be borne in mind when considering how the concept of 'involvement' is constructed, perceived and interpreted in both the UK and Italy (and across others) – and how and to what extent it is evolving. It also raises questions about how discourses are invoked and considered. Importantly, the terms used may be the same and yet conceal significant, semantic differences.

'Caring' is also difficult to pin down, in terms of whether it means equal time; a caring attitude or ethos; financial provision; undertaking domestic as well as child-based chores (O'Brien, 2006, Dermott, 2008), or a mixture of all of these. Furthermore, 'more minutes' does not necessarily equate to 'better fathering' (Dermott, 2008:43). However, the opportunity to care (or lack of it) is a fundamental issue here. As Featherstone (2009:136) points out: 'If care is a universal human need then, arguably, it should be possible for anyone to choose to do it'. Similarly, it has been observed that 'If "privilege" in parenting is defined as the *opportunity to parent* (Hobson and Morgan, 2002)...[then, arguably]...a system designed to promote sole (or main) breadwinning by fathers *under* privileges them' (Burgess and Russell, 2003:116, italics in original). While paternity leave is a rudimentary step in the right direction, truly comprehensive policies that encourage men to place value and purpose in providing care have yet to be devised.

In this context, it is useful to reflect on the concept of 'gender mainstreaming', launched as a major global strategy at the 1995 United Nations World Conference for Women in Beijing. The European commission, in particular, has been instrumental in enshrining the principles of equal treatment for men and women. However, it is also argued that the policies emanating from this strategy typically ignore issues of power and agency and fail to acknowledge and value positive gender differences. As a consequence, a 'feminised gender construction still prevails', whereby 'gender is often used as shorthand for "women" ', as the exclusive recipients of equal opportunities (Crespi, 2007:230; Browne, 2007). In both the UK and in Italy, men are not given equal opportunities to 'care' – neither in the approach to family and leave policies; nor by the labour market and workplace culture, which still resists real responsibility in terms of contributing to family welfare (Dowd, 2000; Crespi, 2007; James, 2008). Gender equality, or gender neutrality, while founded on positive principles, may not, therefore, necessarily generate advantageous outcomes (Crespi, 2007; Brandth and Kvande, 2009). Furthermore, Doucet (2009) points to the significant magnification of gendered differences in the very early phases of parenting and

suggests that this is often overlooked or underestimated in efforts to minimise such differences through the creation of gender-neutral policies.

As has already been mentioned, the male breadwinner identity seems to have lost little of its potency, either in the UK, or Italian contexts and this is especially the case among working class men (DfES, 2003), despite the cultural ideal of the caring, nurturing father. Yet, the model of the 'male breadwinner', as Hobson and Morgan (2002) observe, was a short-lived phenomenon, at its height in the 1950s in Western Europe and North America and founded on the notion of the 'nuclear family', propped up by the institution of marriage. This powerful template of male (sole) breadwinner/female caregiver sat readily within a functionalist perspective, in terms of accommodating the needs of mid-twentieth century industrialised society (Crompton *et al*, 2007). And, despite its poor fit with the requirements of contemporary society and the demands of its labour market, it is a neat, simplistic paradigm that mythically persists as being 'firmly rooted in the natural order of things' (Hobson and Morgan, 2002: 15). The male breadwinner discourse also helps perpetuate a stereotypical masculinity based on white, heterosexual, able-bodied men and overlooks a reality in which there are not only multiple, but hierarchies of masculinities (Hobson and Morgan, 2002; Connell, 2005). Scholars have cautioned against the conceptualisation of fatherhood as a single entity, given the diversity of experience and note, for example, the various forms of social, as well as biological, fatherhood (Dermott, 2008; Dowd, 2000). Further research is called for in this area.

Issues of gendered identities associated with fatherhood (and motherhood) are also evident in the literature: particularly in the UK. Finn and Henwood (2009) note the importance of men talking up 'a more hybridized responsibility for both nurturing and guidance' (2009: 560), but also observe the 'workings of a masculine hegemony that produces underlying tension in the modern man and father position' (ibid:554). This involves being able to relinquish an archaic form of masculinity on the one hand; but recognizing that this can feel unfamiliar and awkward, on the other. While men are now more involved in antenatal preparations and expected to be present at the birth, these services continue to

be delivered through a maternal lens and this perspective, often heavily laden with prejudice, continues post-natally (Dowd, 2000; DfES, 2003; Doucet, 2003).

Much of the literature in Italy has tended to focus on masculine power and authority; both generally and within the family. Historical studies of men as fathers have considered the transformation and redefinition of the authoritarian model of masculinity across different social strata and a range of family models (Dupuis, 1992; Cavina, 2007; Bertocchi, 2009).

Among some scholars working in the area of fatherhood there is a concern that any new 'involved' construction of fatherhood is as potentially hegemonic as 'old' forms of fatherhood: supplanting 'traditional' notions of the father as provider, educator and disciplinarian with caring, nurturing, emotional involvement (Henwood and Procter, 2003; O'Brien, 2006; Gatrell, 2007). Some researchers contend that the discourse particularly empowers middle class, Western men to derive the best of both worlds (home and work) because of their greater ability to exercise choice in relation to their involvement (Miller, 2011b). Furthermore, Henwood and Procter argue that this form of 'hybridized' masculinity, in which the rewards of being successful, both as father and worker, may be reaped, can be enjoyed at little cost and much convenience through 'projecting aggression, domination and misogyny onto other, subordinated groups of men' (Henwood and Procter, 2003: 340). In a similar vein, others, such as Gatrell (2007) consider that 'involvement' is a re-negotiation of power relations to counteract that being wielded by female partners in the workplace. Thus the concept of the 'new father' can enable men and fathers to gain more territory in family life, so valorising fatherhood and consequently their own self-images, but in a way that underscores gender inequity and reinforces powerful gendered norms.

It is often noted, in much of the research, how fathers, enacting 'involvement' will cherry pick the domestic and childcare activities that they enjoy, or prefer (typified by outdoor 'fun'/play) and will adopt avoidance or passive strategies to avoid the more mundane household tasks (Henwood and Procter, 2003; Gatrell 2007; Vuori, 2007; Dermott, 2008; ISTAT, 2007; Miller, 2011a; Miller, 2011b).

This task asymmetry will be considered further below, in the context of the household division of labour.

In the media, a growing proliferation of images of fathers often glamorise and idealise fatherhood, as well as running counter to everyday practice, so intensifying a divide between a stereotypical fiction and an everyday reality and reinforcing cultural scripts (Hearn, 2002; Lasio et al, 2010). Equally, the propensity for the media to portray males as inadequate, often through comedy, fuels a potent but over-simplistic discourse of the 'inept', 'inadequate' or 'feckless' father (Featherstone, 2003; Asher, 2011). Fatherhood cannot be disaggregated from perceptions and understandings of masculinities. However, it is not necessarily helpful to fuse together fatherhood and paid work and potentially disingenuous to use commitment to employment as a means of judging both, simultaneously (Dermott, 2008).

This is particularly significant in the context of the UK, in which, over the last 25 years, unemployment has had a major impact on working class men. Research conducted by Plantin *et al*, 2003, found that it is precisely this group of men who have the greatest difficulty in integrating the idea of 'involved' (tender) fathering with their own masculinities, yet who are beginning to find themselves, through force of circumstance (when female partners are able to find paid work more easily) undertaking a primary child care role, without the cultural means to ascribe sufficient value to unpaid care work and to their own ability to provide it (Plantin *et al* 2003. See also Henwood and Procter, 2003; Brannan and Nilsen, 2006; Gillies, 2009). Plantin *et al* suggest that it is much easier for middle class men to talk the 'involved' father discourse. These men have been less challenged by the repercussions of economic uncertainty and still derive benefit from the 'patriarchal' dividend. In contrast, unemployed or low-income fathers can feel stigmatized as "failed" breadwinners and as "deviant" in their roles as primary caregivers (Doucet, 2003; Dermott, 2008).

Comparing the situation in Sweden with that of the UK, Plantin *et al* conclude that UK fathers typically cling to the hegemonic position while gradually shifting towards less 'traditional' practices; the converse applies in Sweden. This pattern

is also observed by Vuori, writing in the context of Finland (2007). A similar picture to that in the UK, in which the traditional model is only very gradually giving way to change, seems to be the case in Italy, too (Ventimiglia, 1996).

Shifting family life and constructions of fatherhood and motherhood

Constructions of fatherhood and motherhood are essentially inter-dependent, regardless of whether they are considered in the context of individual, everyday experience, or against a wider, socio-cultural backdrop (Ranson, 2001; Donati, 2006; Rossi, 2006; Crespi, 2007; Dermott, 2008; Miller, 2011a). However, the dynamic is driven by normative assumptions of women's lives –still indelibly linked with the idea/ideal of motherhood, despite much research which challenges these assumptions. In the UK this dynamic has been underpinned by the state, which, over the last 200 years, has constructed what fatherhood is, or should be, in relation to women (Hobson, 2002). However, in contemporary times, it introduces a dilemma for new fathers, in particular, in terms of what 'involved' fatherhood is and might look like. The paternal role is more diffuse than the maternal role, which tends to be assumed and normatively proscribed. There appears to be no clear model for fatherhood, although something 'new' and 'different' seems to be in the making, albeit ambiguous and unstable (Dowd, 2000; Dermott, 2008).

The literature confirms that the default position tends to be one of relying on the mother's 'instinctive' capacity to care and so constructs the 'biological discourse', in which fathers may allow themselves to take a back seat, on the grounds that they need to acquire the skills that child care demands; while women have an innate ability to 'care'. This biological discourse is reinforced by gendered practices and power and notions of 'bonding' assumed through birth processes and breast-feeding behaviours and the return to work at a relatively early stage by the father (Miller, 2011a). Indeed, it is pointed out that opportunities to create a father-child bond are potentially undermined soon after childbirth, which now typically takes place in a hospital setting, and in

which the father, while expected to attend throughout the birth process, is treated as a 'visitor' and not permitted to stay (Asher, 2011).

Further differentiation in the constructions of fatherhood and motherhood is often explained by ascribing the ability to plan 24/7 and to assume particular responsibilities as an intrinsically 'maternal' characteristic (Brandth and Kvande, 1998; Doucet, 2006; Wall and Arnold, 2007; Miller, 2011a). The relationship between mother and child is considered by many men to be more intense and more emotional. It underlines the fact that contemporary fatherhood is not constructed as a natural or biological phenomenon in the way that motherhood universally (and erroneously) continues to be (Miller, 2005).

Closely allied to this are contested issues of 'maternal gate-keeping' through which fathers' 'involvement' is argued to be kept at bay. This is typically through the imposition of inflexible standards, a reluctance to share certain tasks and unwillingness to facilitate the social integration of stay-at-home fathers (Doucet, 2006, 2009). This, some have argued, acts as a key barrier to household gender equality. Linked to the notion of 'maternal gate-keeping' is a prevailing tendency for fathers to adopt a 'helping' or subsidiary, secondary role that is, some have argued, ultimately determined and managed by mothers. The father as 'helper' is often reinforced by media images, in which fathers are usually depicted caring for a child in the presence of a woman, or -ineffectively - alone (Hobson and Morgan, 2002; Lasio *et al*, 2010).

The interplay of power and agency is questionable in this context. Some scholars argue that male dominance is defended by claiming territory that is historically a female preserve (child care), but in a way that still exercises choice and preference in terms of not assuming full responsibility or undertaking unwanted child-related chores (Gatrell, 2007). Others, such as Burgess, challenge this view, arguing that the workplace burden on fathers, and lack of institutional support undermines their ability to 'be there' and to get 'involved' (Burgess, 2003; Browne, 2007). Some consider that this is dictated by the much more proscriptive mothering role, which is equally impervious to change (Hearn, 2002). There is certainly widespread evidence in the literature that mothers

typically have more responsibility and consequently have greater power and authority over childcare and domestic tasks – arrangements not necessarily/often of their choosing. The literature also confirms a clear desire among many fathers to undertake a caretaking, as well as an economically providing role (Henwood and Procter, 2003). The gender inequity in Italian households remains particularly marked, both in terms of domestic chores and childcare and is changing only very slowly (ISTAT, 2007). This is compounded by the much more striking division between the home environment and the work environment than in the UK, with all that implies in terms of attitudes to unpaid, caring work. However, overall time dedicated to parenting appears much less intensive in Italy than in Northern European countries (Craig and Mullian, 2010).

Bekkingen (2002,2003 cited in Johansson and Klinth, 2007) distinguishes between ‘child-oriented masculinity’, characterised by ‘cherry-picking’ the most enjoyable aspects of parenthood and ‘gender-equal men’ which involves a more radical transformation of masculinity. Williams (2008) also cautions against allowing a single, monolithic paradigm of ‘involved’ fatherhood to dominate, as this ignores the complexity of fathering in an arena where the parameters of femininity and masculinity are being redefined, leading to the reconfiguration of fatherhood and motherhood in multiple (and, in the UK, also class-stratified) ways. This extends to the binary presentation of masculinity and femininity, in which the two are often set in opposition, so encouraging the inflation of gender differences and perpetuated in the polarised concepts of primary carer and secondary carer, infused with deeply embedded assumptions about which gender represents which.

Discourses and everyday lived realities

There is widespread acknowledgement in the literature that the pace of actual change may be slower than that suggested by various discourses (Hearn, 2002; Gregory and Milner, 2005; Rossi, 2006; Dermott, 2008; Miller, 2011a). However, it is also argued that ‘Among men there has long been a contradiction between

the ideas they profess and the way they actually live' (Hearn and Pringle, 2006: 123). This may be, in part, driven by the potency of the hegemonic notion of masculinity, elements of which seem to remain obdurate and enduring, despite shifting family constructions and other transformations.

At the same time, it is noted how both verbal and written accounts often emphasize gender differences, at the expense of similarities which, arguably being less definitive, are less readily/easily articulated. Qualitative studies, in particular, have played a valuable role in deconstructing everyday realities from the ideology of change and tradition and the over-simplicity of the binary picture, in which masculinity is pitted in opposition to femininity. These types of studies provide a more nuanced account of day-to-day family living and help illuminate the ways in which domestic responsibilities are shared and negotiated (for example see Plantin *et al*, 2003; Doucet, 2006; Dermott, 2008; Miller, 2011a, 2011b). Such accounts challenge the neatness of dichotomies which give rise to – and reinforce - cultural stereotypes. They reveal messier and more complex narratives and, while gender differences play out in various ways, there is much more subtle commonality than discourses would suggest (Doucet, 2006). Researching the experience of stay-at-home fathers, Doucet considers how they reconstruct their masculinity by crossing 'the borders and boundaries of restrictive masculine definition around care-giving'. She also observes that a much more fluid dynamic is practised within daily family routines than the binary picture implies; a finding endorsed in other research (Dermott, 2008; Miller, 2011a, 2011b).

When extended to consider differences in family types, a more nuanced approach also helps to understand shifting paternal roles in the context of dual earner families, which Williams (2008) contends is increasingly actively negotiated between individuals. Dermott (2008) echoes this when she posits that increased democracy in households might be a better goal than gendered equality, a position considered by others (Sullivan, 2000; Bjornberg, 2004; Doucet, 2006 and Crespi, 2007).

It is appropriate, then, to ask whether 'involved' fatherhood has been over-stated and if, indeed, 'involvement' necessarily equates to 'improvement'. The extent to which fathers are reconfiguring fathering and masculinity will require on-going scrutiny, especially given that what is understood by 'fathering' is less easily delineated and less proscribed than mothering (Doucet, 2003; Dermott, 2008; Miller, 2011a). Research continues to show there are major structural, social and cultural impediments to 'involvement' on the part of fathers in the UK and in Italy (as well as in other Western countries). Such barriers include a policy focus that has been argued to do little to support fathers (or dual earner households); social class differences; cultural expectations of what constitutes a 'good worker' and a 'good mother'; maternal gatekeeping¹⁵ and the enduring power of the male breadwinner discourse. On the other hand, various catalysts for change have also been positively identified: namely, the rising numbers of dual earner households, leading to some renegotiation of domestic power; growing levels of male unemployment set against the feminisation of the workplace, particularly in working class households; and a slowly increasing acceptance of the plurality of modern fatherhoods.

Research Gaps

Several research gaps are referred to in the literature. A common thread is the call for a more critical and nuanced approach to understanding constructions of fatherhood.

- The prevalence of white, middle-class, heterosexual male samples is lamented by a number of scholars, concerned that other versions of fatherhood, shaped by class, ethnic identities, sexual orientation and other forms of diversity are overlooked.

¹⁵ As noted earlier, it is acknowledged that this is a contested concept and may over-simplify the complexity of negotiated parental roles (Bjornberg, 2004).

- There is scope for further exploration into the ways in which men express emotion and how this relates to fatherhood, including identification of why some men are more likely than others to embrace the 'nurturant' model. Allied to this is the need for a deeper understanding of the extent to which men's changing self-perceptions and self-reflexivity may impact on family lives and gendered arrangements. There is also some concern that issues of gender and power, in terms of men, gendered families and the gendered state, are not sufficiently fore-grounded in the fatherhood debate.
- How the media represents fatherhood and the extent to which it reinforces dominant assumptions about men and masculinity, often in ways that cultivate and perpetuate the segregation between men and women, is also a topic for further study.
- Although current literature frequently refers to the multi-level processes of reciprocal change between men and women (e.g. how the obligations and responsibilities of everyday family life are 'negotiated' on a day-to-day basis), there is still scant empirical data on this.
- More research is required on the extent of 'shift parenting', whereby mothers and fathers share childcare based on dovetailing work shifts.
- A need for a better understanding of the triggers for change (both positive and negative: for example, which factors might encourage involvement and which factors can alienate) could be particularly useful in the context of those fathers who see themselves as marginal and dispensable.
- Greater inclusion of the 'voices' of women and children might illuminate understanding of shifting constructions of fatherhood
- In addition, it is noted that most research currently emanates from western Europe and Scandinavia and this body of work would be enriched and enlarged by studies conducted in Eastern, Southern and South-East Europe.
- Finally, more research is needed into the contribution of workplace policies and into the impact of parental leave on child well-being. As part of this, a focus on how policy constructs men as fathers, particularly in terms of how parental and paternity leave policies may enable them to

'parachute in' on a temporary basis, but still fail to accommodate ongoing, everyday commitment to family life, could be especially valuable. Further investigation into low take-up of leave, even when it is available, would also be useful.

Appendix

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