

WHY CAN'T A MAN BE MORE LIKE A WOMAN?

In search of balanced domestic and employment lives

Gillian A. Dunne

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Abstract

Empirical research on gender and work usually focuses on either its paid or unpaid dimension and little attention is paid to their interdependency. This paper takes a more integrated approach to the study of work, by illustrating ways that outcomes in paid employment are deeply shaped by divisions of labour in the home and vice versa. Further, theorizing on this topic tends to assume that workers are heterosexual. While feminists may recognize that sexuality is socially constructed and that heterosexuality is an institution, the implications of this are rarely explored and developed in the literature on work. Failure to explore and recognize the impact of sexuality on women's life-chances means that we cannot distinguish between constraints that flow from being women and those that relate to being women who anticipate/experience heterosexual relationships. Thus the role of institutional heterosexuality in the reproduction gender inequality remains obscure.

To illustrate the significance of institutional heterosexuality for reinforcing aspects of gender differences that can lead to inequalities, the paper focuses on divisions of labour between co-habiting non-heterosexual women. It investigates ways that lesbian parents allocate the tasks and responsibilities associated with work in the home and the labour market and compares their arrangements to mothers and fathers more generally. The more balanced outcomes found for lesbian partners suggest that gender segregated divisions of labour are not only unfair but in many ways inefficient. Further, the implications of their approach to paid and unpaid work helps us understand why patriarchal arrangements are so central to the operation of capitalism. As the balance that these women achieve is greatly facilitated by the absence of gender difference and their occupation of a similar gender power base, lesbian relationships may represent models for feminists regardless of their sexuality. Consequently, developing an understanding of the limits and possibilities offered in non gender polarized relationships throws light on the different sources of constraint facing women and men, and by providing insights to enable change, illustrates the depth of the problem.

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Introduction

The past 25 years have witnessed major changes in the British economy. There has been the decline of heavy manufacturing, the growth of service sector employment, increased casualization and the expansion of part-time employment. Associated with these changes is the rise of unemployment, and the expansion of employment opportunities for married women with children. Women now comprise 45% of the British labour market. While women have increased their representation in managerial and professional occupations, much of this advance has been into low-paid, part-time employment. Despite equal opportunities and equal pay legislation, a substantial gap remains in earnings between women and men, for full-time workers this is a net 72% gap (Low Pay Unit 1995). The persistence of a gender pay-gap is facilitated by the tendency for the labour market to be segregated along lines of gender; women and men do different kinds of work which are unequally valued. I do not want to rehearse the different feminist positions on how women come to be disadvantaged in the labour market. Instead I want to supplement these explanations by focusing on another aspect of work segregation, that of unwaged work in the home. I also want to deepen the analysis by taking sexuality into account, as a way of flagging the often neglected role of institutionalized heterosexuality for maintaining aspects of gender difference that underpin an unequal division of paid and unpaid labour.

1. Divisions of labour

1.1. The problem

Although women have expanded their repertoire of activities into paid work, it has been well documented that men have not made a corresponding shift into women's traditional realm of domestic and caring work. While there is some evidence that men and women can form egalitarian domestic relationships (VanEvery 1995), a distinctly asymmetrical division of unpaid-labour remains the majority pattern. Women tend to retain responsibility for the bulk of routine, time consuming domestic work and men the non-routine household work. This situation holds for partnerships where we might expect change to be most evident, for example, households where men are unemployed (Morris 1995) and women are sole earners (Wheelock 1990), full time dual earner couples (Brannen and Moss 1991, Mansfield and Collard 1988), where both are in professional occupations (Gregson and Lowe 1994), or the wife has a higher status job than her husband's (McRae 1986). Even men and women who perceive themselves to be sharing do not necessarily escape the impact of gender differentiated assumptions shaping their work strategies (Doucet 1995a).

What it means to be a woman has increasingly expanded to include a social identity derived from the workplace, and the status and financial rewards that can flow from engagement in paid work can raise levels of confidence and broaden options. What it means to be a man, however, has not gone through a corresponding expansion of identity. The so called 'crisis of masculinity' may well relate to men's reluctance to embrace the traditional domain of women, which both reinforces and confirms the lack of value that is assigned to this kind of work.

The persistence of gender patterns shaping the allocation of labour attests to the entrenchment of social,

economic, ideological, and political mechanisms which mediate and hinder the process of change. As such, researchers have directed their attention towards developing a better understanding of what constitutes a constraint on the ability of individuals to organize their interpersonal relations differently. Constraints that have been identified include, the organization of waged work (Bradley 1989, Brannen and Moss 1991) the inadequacy of childcare provision (Melhuish and Moss 1991, Morris 1990, Dex and Shaw 1986) and the power of polarized gender ideologies (Berk 1985, Hochschild 1989, Lewis and O'Brien 1987, Morris 1990).

1.2. The relationship between waged and unwaged work

The organization of work needs to be understood as having two interdependent dimensions, waged and unwaged. The review and reassessment of the relationship between the public and the private has enabled feminist scholars to develop a critique of their distinctiveness. This illuminates, for example, ways that women and men's employment circumstances are shaped by their arrangements in relation to work in the home and vice versa. Men's ability to appropriate women's unpaid physical and emotional labour means that women and men do not compete in the labour market on the same basis (Adkins 1995, Pateman 1988). Men can be more single-minded in their approach to paid work and experience opportunities because they relinquish much of the responsibility for performing the more routine and time consuming aspects of domestic and caring work. If men do not take on their share of unpaid work, women in paid work are faced with the dual or even triple burden of paid, domestic and caring work. They must either find ways of incorporating all these different types of work into their day by working more intensely and/or reducing their paid working hours, or they must find others do their partner's share. Some households have access to relatives to do this work, while the more geographically mobile professional households are increasingly buying this in (Gregson and Lowe 1995)¹.

1.3. Taking account of sexuality

The link between men's ability to appropriate women's unpaid labour and their employment advantage is helpful but it does assume that work is being performed within a heterosexual framework. As Catherine MacKinnon (1982) argues, 'sexuality is to feminism what work is to marxism' and this is a crucial insight. Sexuality and emotions can take many forms, but within the context of institutionalized heterosexuality, ideological and material processes limit their expression, and provide justification for drawing women and men into relations of inequality. By taking sexuality into account we can see the extent to which this can mediate people's experience in the home and in the labour market. What happens if, for example, women's lives are not organized around primary inter-personal relationships with men? Ways that non-heterosexual women are empowered by anticipating and experiencing intimate relationships with other women is illuminated in my earlier life-history study (Dunne 1996). This illustrates the material dimension to sexuality, and shows that in the absence of polarized gender difference to structure their relationships, non-heterosexual women can develop more creative approaches to work in the home and the labour market. The insights gained in that study are now being developed in this current project which

¹ Gregson and Lowe (1994) estimate that a third of middle-class dual-earner couples are employing domestic help.

specifically investigates divisions of labour between lesbian partners with dependent children.

The extension of our field of vision to include the experiences of non-heterosexual women allows us to map the impact of institutional heterosexuality on women's life chances. This deepens our analysis because we can be more precise about the different sources of disadvantage women face. The advantages lesbians experience suggest that some of the impediments faced by women are not simply the result of their gender but relate to their experience of being women who anticipate and/or experience heterosexual relationships. Thus, a more complex relationship between gender and inequality is revealed. If we fail to extend our critique of social relations and institutions to include heterosexuality we reinforce dominant notions that heterosexuality is natural rather than a socially and materially produced outcome².

1.4. Sexuality and gender

Sarah Berk concludes that gendered patterns of task allocation, which she considers to be irrational, are so engrained and taken for granted that they 'hamper our ability to imagine other ways of organizing work' (1985:199). She suggests that science fiction might provide the only source of more creative practice. This suggestion illustrates the limitations of an exclusive focus on heterosexual practice when theorizing divisions of labour - the impact of institutional heterosexuality itself is lost in the analysis. The extent to which women and men are compelled to affirm their differences through the enactment of dichotomous gender strategies should not come as too great a surprise given the logic underpinning heterosexuality.

In contemporary Western societies sexuality is strongly bound to processes of gender differentiation. We do not select partners simply on the basis of their anatomical sex, we are drawn to them as bearers of the social and cultural meanings that are attached to being the possessors of male or female bodies. The likelihood that people will form heterosexual partnerships rests on the social construction of dichotomous and hierarchical gender categories and practices. As Butler (1990:17) observes, 'The heterosexualization of desire requires and institutes the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between "feminine" and "masculine".' Likewise Rubin (1975) argues that union between women and men is assured through the suppression of similarities between them, so that a 'reciprocal state of dependency' will exist between the sexes (p.178). As these reciprocal differences become *eroticized*, heterosexuality becomes the attraction of opposites (Connell 1987:246). As difference (real or perceived) is a prerequisite of inequality then this link between the polarization of identity and practice along lines of gender and the maintenance of institutional heterosexuality needs to be discussed more explicitly in our analysis.

When we recognize the connections between sexuality and gender we can begin to think more creatively about why same-sex relationships might offer greater flexibility in the organization of tasks. As Connell (1987) points out, gender is a process, it is something that we do and have done to us. How we think of ourselves and the kind of attributes and skills we develop will differ along the life-course and in different social contexts. Whether these social contexts are single-sex or cross-sex are important. We only have to

² See more detailed discussion and summary of historical and anthropological evidence in Dunne (1996).

think about how differently we experience interaction in single-sex situations as compared to mixed-settings (the classroom, the sports-hall, the pub etc) - we can become different sorts of people (levels of confidence and competency, tasks performed etc). In same-sex settings we can be less aware of ourselves as gendered individuals, and interaction places fewer restrictions on what constitutes appropriately gendered action. In mixed settings we tend to be reminded and reminding of the appropriate content of gender categories, thus reinforcing gender boundaries between the sexes. As the social categories 'masculine' and 'feminine' exist as a hierarchical relationship, women are placed at a disadvantage. Consequently, we can develop Connel's insights by recognizing that *the gender of who we are doing our gender with/for and who does it to us matters*. If we extend our thinking about same-sex interactions to include interpersonal relationships we can see why lesbian relationships can be viewed as offering the potential for more creative arrangements. The women concerned inhabit a similar gender power base and their interactions with each other are less likely to be guided by polarized gender norms. I am convinced that for women, moving beyond heterosexuality is deeply related to this additional gender dimension/context to the process of gendering. This is why so many of the lesbian women that I have interviewed have expressed views such as 'I cannot be *me* in relationships with men in the way that I can with women - or at least not the same *me*'.

1.5 How can the inclusion of non-heterosexual experience broaden our understandings of divisions of labour?

We may have a theoretical basis for predicting that divisions of labour will be more flexibly organized in non-heterosexual households, but as I mentioned earlier, a wide range of constraints have been identified which may be relevant to couples regardless of their sexuality. The almost exclusive focus on heterosexual relationships, however, limits our ability to distinguish amongst the different kinds of constraints shaping domestic arrangements because we know very little about how these are organized when action is informed by broadly similar gender ideologies³. The detailed analysis of divisions of labour in lesbian households, for example, provides an opportunity to explore whether gender difference really is the key variable in the organization of household and employment strategies, by asking whether partners take on differentiated or more symmetric responsibilities?

This question opens up for investigation the sources of differential roles within the household. Is this a peculiarly male/female dynamic or a response to externally derived constraints - such as occupational demands? The analysis of divisions of labour between lesbians with children, allows us, for example, to explore whether being the birth-mother of a young child determines both **employment opportunities**, and **domestic arrangements**. Moreover, by gaining access to their employment histories and attitudes to paid work, we can determine whether and to what extent hours of work influence domestic and child care

³ My own work and a small but growing body of mostly North American research suggests that lesbians and gay men are more likely to both value and experience egalitarian approaches to the allocation of household work than heterosexual couples (see summary in Dunne 1996).

contributions.

Further, the investigation of divisions of labour in non-heterosexual partnerships takes us deeper in our empirical understanding of the significance of the social production of dichotomous gender identities, expectations and outcomes. If, for example, lesbian partnerships provide greater possibilities for the operationalization of egalitarian ideals, surely their partnerships represent models for feminists *regardless* of how they define their sexuality? As such, we have a common interest in illuminating the limitations and possibilities offered within partnerships that are not structured by gender polarization and inequality. As we will see later, through understanding these arrangements we gain important insights into the relationship between institutionalized heterosexuality, gender inequality and capitalism, and are offered important insights into why feminism can be so threatening to capitalism.

In the spirit of extending our understanding of the different sources of constraint shaping divisions of labour, I now want to turn to my current research, and present some initial findings.

2. The lesbian household project - Methods

The *Lesbian Household Project* aims to investigate divisions of labour between lesbian partners⁴. It draws on the experience of 37 cohabiting couples with dependent children and ten without. Fieldwork involved a series of two to three hour depth interviews, beginning with a joint interview which was followed by an individual one several months later.

The first interview centred on the creation of a 'Household Portrait'. This is a 'creative/participatory technique which allows both partners to reflect upon and discuss how their household is run according to a broad range of tasks and responsibilities'⁵ (Doucet (1995b)). These are organized around six colour-coded themes - routine domestic; household provisioning tasks; childcare; kin work; finances and decision making; and finally, responsibility for activities within these themes. The Household Portrait is produced by placing colour-coded task/responsibility tokens onto a board which offers a continuum ranging from 100% 'Partner A' (the birth mother of the youngest child) to 100% 'B' (her partner), with a 50% line down the middle. The colour-coding helps facilitate discussion by illuminating patterns in their allocation strategies.

Their perceptions of 'who does what' in relation to work in the home is complemented by data from time-diaries which participants later complete for a seven-day period. To enable comparison with other diary collections, our diaries and coding frame are based upon those used in the large-scale diary collection from the Social Change and Economic Life Initiative (SCELI) conducted in 1987 by Jonathan Gershuny, with whom we are collaborating.

For the purposes of this paper, the analysis will draw on the sharing strategies of the parents. As we are in the early stages of analysis, we will focus on the more quantifiable aspects of the findings.

2.1 Recruiting the sample

⁴ I am collaborating with Bob Blackburn and Kim Perren at Cambridge University and Henrietta Moore at London School of Economics. We are grateful to The Economic and Social Council for the funding of this project, reference number R00023 4649.

⁵ The Household Portrait was first developed by Andrea Doucet for illuminating the sharing strategies of heterosexual couples who perceive themselves to be sharing in the home. She discusses this very useful technique in Doucet (1995b).

Lesbian parents form a highly invisible section of the population, even, as we discovered, within the lesbian community. This poses problems for researchers eager to learn from their experience. The aims of the research required the recruitment of co-habiting parents, which further limited the pool of potential participants. Initially we anticipated that most of our sample would have become parents within the context of a previous heterosexual relationship. However, the recent popularity of donor insemination amongst lesbians proved very fortunate for us as it provided greater possibilities for including couples who had made a joint decision to have children.

As our subjects would be hard to locate and our topic was highly sensitive, requiring high levels of trust between participants and the researcher, a great deal of personal effort was devoted to publicizing the study through appropriate networks. The organizers of Lesbian Parenting/Fostering Groups in London, Bristol, Manchester and Liverpool were contacted and these women agreed to distribute project information leaflets to parents. Help also came from two law firms which specialized in lesbian legal matters. Project information leaflets were distributed at two large Lesbian Parenting Events, in Women's Centres, Alternative Bookshops, and a local lesbian and gay newsletter advertised the research on several occasions. Each new participant was given project summary sheets to distribute within their own informal parenting networks. Such was the enthusiasm that several couples included project leaflets in their Christmas card mail-out, and several others gave out leaflets to women with children at the 1995 London Gay Pride March. Consequently, our sample is drawn from a wide range of different sources. The majority live in urban areas in three northern cities and three southern cities. The only criteria for including couples in the parenting sample was that they be living together with at least one dependent child and all who contacted me agreed to participate in the project and were interviewed.

Parents with children via donor insemination form the majority (75%) of our sample. The cohabiting criteria, together with the high representation of parents via donor insemination, means that the sample is not representative of lesbian parenting experience more generally. It has also led to our sample including women who are older⁶ and more educationally and occupationally advantaged than would have probably been the case had we confined our study to lesbians who had had children via more conventional methods.

As donor insemination is a relatively recent option for lesbians, couples with children under five are well represented, forming 59% of the sample. It is worth mentioning that in almost 40% (14) of these households, co-parents were either themselves birth mothers of older dependent or non-dependent children, and in a further four were planning to become birth mothers. In several instances where one partner experienced difficulties in conceiving, her partner went through the pregnancy instead. To facilitate distinguishing between partners I shall use the term *birth mother* to identify the mother of the *youngest* child, and *co-parent* to describe her partner.

I will now outline some of the early findings on: Respondents' employment situation, their Household Portraits and their time-use.

3. Respondents' Employment Circumstances

⁶ The average age of our 74 participants was 42, and for those with children under five it was 39.

Households employment circumstances differ from national patterns in a number of important ways. In line with findings from an earlier study (Dunne 1996) education features strongly in respondents' past, present and future plans, 70% hold degrees or professional qualifications. It was common for respondents to have gained these qualifications as mature students, often timing their entry to higher/further education with the arrival of children.

Respondents' current or normal occupational position as compared with their fathers' indicate a fair amount of social mobility, 51% came from professional, or managerial/technical backgrounds and 74% currently or normally occupy these groups. Almost all employed respondents work for public sector employers or are self-employed. They are usually professionals, managers, technicians or administrators in female-dominated occupations, such as, social work, education, local government, health and counselling.

3.1. Starting from a different place - level of employment participation

Divisions of *paid* labour in our sample, and how these differ from heterosexual parents more generally, are crucial for understanding their arrangements in the home. We must remember that our sample comprises relatively privileged women who have greater control over the circumstances of their lives than women and men more generally. This control appears to extend to their level of employment participation. Table 1, which compares our parents with mothers in British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) shows that they are much more likely to be employed than mothers living with male partners more generally .

Table 1. Comparison respondents' employment situation with a National sample of mothers with children under 16 (BHPS 1994).

Birth Mothers	Co-Parents	BHPS Mothers
Percent		

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					P e r c e n t
30 plus hours	27		59		26
10-29 hours		46		22	31
1 - 9 hours		5		5	5
0 hours	22				
					1
					4
					3
					7

At the time of the first interview, 13 (18%) respondents were not in paid employment and a further four (5%) were in casual employment for less than ten hours a week. For many this was a temporary situation, two were on paid maternity leave, four were engaged in full or part-time education, and three had chosen to take time-out from stressful paid jobs⁷. However, five were at home largely because of illness or disability, two because of redundancy, and three previously married women could not find jobs that paid enough to enable them to combine paid-work and childcare.

To illustrate the unusualness of their employment circumstances, I shall focus on a sub-sample of the 22 couples with pre-school aged children, because this stage in family formation usually represents a time of increased polarization in the earnings and paid working hours of mothers and fathers. As qualifications influence mothers' ability to be flexible in balancing childcare and paid work, we will compare our sub-sample with BHPS parents with higher qualifications.

⁷ The flexibility of respondents' employment situations was such that their employment hours had often changed over the few months that separated first and second interview. Several full-time employed respondents had reduced their hours, one part-time worker had increased hers to thirty hours, and the two respondents on maternity leave had returned to part-time employment.

Table 2. Comparison of the employment situation of birth mothers with children under five, with National Sample of mothers with higher qualifications and children under 5 (BHPS 1994).

	Birth Mother Percent	BHPS Mothers Percent
30 plus hours	23	3
		0
10-29 hours	50	2
		4
1 - 9 hours	0	6
0 hours	27	4
		1

Table 2 indicates that our birth mothers appear more likely to be in paid employment than mothers with higher qualifications more generally, although this does not quite achieve statistical significance ($p = .09$).

However, it is the employment situations of co-parents which represent more radical departures from the heterosexual parenting norm.

Table 3. Comparison of the employment situation of co-parents with children under five, with fathers with higher qualifications and children under 5 (BHPS 1994).

	Co-parents Percent	BHPS Fathers Percent
30 plus hours	59	85
10-29 hours	27	3

1 - 9 hours	5	0
0 hours	9	12

Table 3 shows that fathers are unlikely to use the power that comes through education to construct more flexible balances between home and paid work, 85% were employed full-time, and only 3% part-time⁸. Although our co-parents were much more likely to be employed full-time than their partners, 41% were either employed part-time or not in paid employment. The mean paid-working hours for employed co-parents was 34 hours compared with 46 for fathers, and this difference is statistically significant ($p > .001$).

The employment flexibility experienced by mothers with higher qualifications combined with their male partner's inflexibility means that three main employment combinations dominate - full-time dual earners, father employed full-time and mother part-time, father employed full-time and mother not employed (Table 4). As flexibility often characterizes the employment strategies of both partners in our sub-sample (for example, 36% of co-parents worked shorter hours than their partners) we find more unusual employment combinations.

⁸ Even in Andrea Doucet's study of heterosexual parents who were committed to sharing homelife responsibilities, all but two of the 23 fathers were employed full time (1995a:124).

Table 4. Comparison household employment combinations for sub-sample (n=22) of parents with children under five, with National sample of mothers and fathers with higher qualifications (BHPS)

Partner Employment combination	Lesbian Household Project %	BHPS households %
Full-time/full-time	14	33
Part-time/part-time	18	1
Full-time/part-time	32	24
Part-time/home	14	1
Full-time/home	23	34
Both not in paid employment	0	6

Both parents are employed full-time in only three (14%) of our households with pre-school children. As one of these full-time dual earner households includes a couple where the co-parent had given up a full-time professional job to care for her daughter, but combined this with a full-time, paid childminding job, 20 (91%) had at least one partner at home on a part or full-time basis.

3.2. Attitudes to homelife responsibilities

An important reason for the unusual household employment strategies was the attitudes to homelife of both birth mothers and co-parents. The general feeling amongst our parents with young children was that childcare was a valuable and enjoyable task which offered a welcome break from the stresses of full-time employment and the reduction in paid-working hours was largely through choice, and was sometimes combined with a return to education (in three cases). A powerful motivation informing women's employment strategies seems to be the desire to *maximize* contact time with their children. This held regardless of whether children were the result of donor insemination or a previous heterosexual relationship. However, parents via donor insemination pointed out that after all the struggles associated with having children they were particularly keen to be centrally involved in their early care.

I asked both birth mothers and co-parents whether the arrival of children had influenced their views on the centrality of employment. I will just take a moment to illustrate a dominant view with one of their answers. Helen and Maggie⁹ made a joint decision to have children and divide the care of their three-year-old son between them. Both are employed part-time in professional occupations. Maggie, explains

⁹ To maintain confidentiality the names of participants and their children have been changed.

her changing attitude to paid work:

It has changed, yes. Yes, and work is not as important to me now. I think the original reason for working part-time was to share Paul. But actually I'm not sure now even if I'd want to go back to full time - probably not back to being a totally work person, which would be stressful and horrible... The motivation behind it was to do with Paul, and to make sure that he was equally cared for - because neither Helen nor I wanted to be either the one that was at work or the one that was at home all the time.

What is interesting is that Maggie is not Paul's birth mother. Importantly, this shift in attitude towards paid work was common for birth mothers and co-parents alike. With persistent regularity women spoke of seeking balance in their lives. Most employed respondents enjoyed their jobs, and regardless of employment situation, almost all believed that having a working life (or project) outside the home was very important - it was a source of stimulation and provided the ability to contribute financially. However, time at home with children and partners was equally, if not, more important. Thus, on the arrival of children, **both** partners usually lowered their commitment to their careers. Those in full-time employment often spoke of planning or hoping to reduce their hours.

Although Maggie's initial reason for reducing her employment hours was related to childcare, she was in no hurry to return to full time employment, feeling that as her child grew up she would find other activities to occupy her time. Our parents with school age children confirmed this view as we find a similarly broad range of household employment strategies¹⁰. While family time was important for many of the parents with older children, space for self and/or time for other creative activities also motivated their decisions or desire to reduce their paid employment hours.

¹⁰ In the fifteen households with children aged five plus we find these employment combinations:

	Percent	Number
Full-time/full-time	33	5
Part-time/part-time	20	3
Full-time/part-time	13	3
Part-time/home	7	2
Full-time/home	7	1
Home/home	7	1

Some fathers may also feel a strong desire to spend time with their children. However, the existence of powerful ideas that link men's parental responsibilities with breadwinning, together with an employment structure which ignores their parenting needs (Brannen and Moss 1991) tend to lead men to engage more fully with their paid work. Consequently, processes which construct and maintain gender difference play a crucial role in shaping how men and women come to understand and express their parenting responsibilities. Andrea Doucet, like other family researchers (Hochschild 1989, Berk 1985) found that it was mothers rather than fathers who voiced the opinion that their childcare commitments necessitated a readjustment of their paid working life - mothers felt guilty if they thought that they were not spending enough time with their children, and fathers experienced guilt if they felt they were not putting enough energy into their jobs (Doucet 1995a:140).

Two crucial related factors inform the more balanced employment strategies found amongst our parents and these relate to the experience of non-heterosexuality. First, women who form primary relationships with other women usually expect and want to take equal responsibility for income generation in their partnership, consequently they are normally in jobs that provide a living wage (see Dunne 1996). The parents in this study rarely saw themselves or their partners as breadwinners. As they understood that having a working life was important, and did not necessarily see level of pay as an indicator of value, it was unusual for one partner's 'career' to take priority over the other. Further, they usually recognized that time at home and time in paid work was equally desirable, involving aspects of drudgery, stress, relaxation and pleasure. Consequently, they were keen to avoid a situation where one partner experienced longterm monopoly of one area at the expense of the other. Thus, most saw the ideal household employment strategy as each having half or three-quarter time employment. Within reason, achieving a satisfactory balance between homelife and paid work was perceived as far more important than the accumulation of money.

Second, women who bring up children together do not have access to gender differentiated ideas about how each should enact her parenting. Thus, it is as women, that each partner experiences and expresses her parenting, and in common with single mothers more generally, the absence of fathers leads to a redefinition of motherhood to encompass the breadth of parenting styles and practices (breadwinning and caring/mothering) that are more usually contained within the dichotomous categories mother and father¹¹.

¹¹ For at least five recently divorced parents in the sample, a sense of apprehension tinged with enthusiasm characterized discussion of the need to expand ones repertoire of activities and personal competencies to include the more 'male' preserves of, for example, breadwinning, DIY and financial decision-making.

Their location in predominantly female rather than male-dominated occupations, may also enable the operationalization of greater balance between their domestic and employment lives - although some had to struggle to reduce in their paid-working hours, for example, co-parents who are college lecturers. Importantly, for many birth mothers and co-parents, the timing of the arrival of children had been planned to correspond with a point in their working lives where they could reduce their hours, or take a career break to be at home for children without undue penalty¹².

3.3. Pay

The more extreme divisions of labour found during early family formation in heterosexual partnerships means that this period represents a time when mothers usually experience greatest financial dependence on their partners. If mothers are in paid employment, substantial gender differences in income exist. For example, Brannen and Moss (1987) found that only 5% of mothers in their dual-earner households with young children earned as much or more than their partners. Regardless of whether mothers have paid employment most perceive their male partner to be the primary or sole provider, and this has a major impact on the division of unpaid work, and women's judgements about the fairness of their partners domestic and childcare contributions (Doucet 1991:24)

Our data show a very different situation for lesbian parents with pre-school children. Despite birth-mothers being less likely to be employed and more likely to be employed for shorter hours than their partners, half (11) earned more than their partners. Even in partnerships where one had a considerably lower income than the other, she was unlikely to think of her partner as the provider.

Men's superior earning capacity is a major problem facing heterosexual couples who wish to share their homelife responsibilities. Often a male wage is essential for family survival, or in the case of better off households, for the maintenance of a standard of living that they have planned their lifestyles around. For Andrea Doucet's (1995a) largely middle-class sample, the prioritization of fathers' careers was often viewed by the more ardently egalitarian partners as the result of 'rational' financial considerations rather than conforming to gender norms. Clearly, the entrenchment of gender inequalities in earnings means this outcome is the result of making choices using a heavily loaded dice.

Given the existence of financial constraints on decision-making around who should reduce their hours to care for a child, I was interested in exploring this with respondents. I asked Maggie whether both working part-time made financial sense?

¹² Many years of planning characterized the journey to parenting for most couples who experienced donor insemination. Employment considerations featured in this planning process, which, I suspect, is an important factor in why the average age (39 years for our parents with children under five) is higher than we might expect for parents with similar aged children more generally.

If we were only concerned with finances, Helen would be working full-time because she earns more than I can, and I would be not be working at all and looking after Paul. It affects things, whether you can manage with the loss of money. Obviously it was discussed. But it was about what we wanted to do that was important. How important being with Paul was to us, and how important employment and the balance between them and our relationship, and our relationship with Paul. These were much more important than purely monetary concerns.

Like many of the couples interviewed, their employment strategies tended to be geared towards the *maximization of parental care, and partner input* rather than the *maximization of household income*. Respondents' decisions about who would reduce her hours to care for a child do not necessarily make economic sense. I think the issue of standard of living versus quality of life is a central one. Certainly, when I explored this in interviews respondents rarely saw them as necessarily linked. The common view was that, within limits, time for children was more important than increased earnings. For heterosexual couples who desire balanced paid and unpaid working lives, the gender weighting of the dice requires acknowledgement and balance may well require the planning for and acceptance of a reduced standard of living (in the short-term).

Other households had experienced or expected to experience change in relation to who was the primary carer of their child/ren. For example, Angie, the birth mother of two-year-old Steve, took maternity leave to care for him in his first year. Then Sue, her partner, felt it was her turn to have time at home - despite being the higher earner of the two. Sue gave up a £23,000 a year job and now works from home as a full-time self-employed childminder. Both agree that they would be financially better off if they paid for full-time childcare, or if Angie - Steve's birth mother - remained at home.

Again their arrangements do not make economic sense. But do they? Angie, whose career was less established, was aware that a lengthy break from the labour market could lead to marginalization in her job. Surely, where possible, it makes better long-term sense for each parent, rather than the parent with the most vulnerable labour market position, to shoulder the 'career' penalties that our society associates with the caring for children? Failure to do this can only create or accentuate pre-existing gender inequalities in employment prospects and earnings¹³.

It is worth reflecting on the broader implications of the social emphasis of *gender differentiated* parenting roles and how their anticipation shapes the employment situation of men and women before the arrival of children (Mansfield and Collard 1988). We need to think about whose interests are served by current arrangements. Conversely, what is challenged when both parents decide to de-emphasize an economic imperative? We will return to this later.

I now want to consider respondents' sharing arrangements. These were illuminated in two different ways. The first was the Household Portrait, which was designed to provide a sense of their perceptions of 'who did what' around the home. The second method was the completion of diaries, which recorded how they

¹³ The time mothers have spent caring for their children represents the single most important cause of their occupational downgrading when they return to the labour market (Dex and Shaw 1986).

allocated their time in relation to paid work, domestic and childcare work and leisure for one week.

4. The Household portrait and the doing of routine domestic tasks

4.1 Background

In heterosexual households the allocation of unpaid labour tends to be gender segregated, with women performing the bulk of everyday domestic tasks, and men the more flexibly scheduled non-routine household work, such as car maintenance and D.I.Y. While change in the home has been slow, in certain circumstances there has been some blurring of the boundaries between women and men's household work (see, for example, Wheelock 1990). Our analysis of BHPs data on 'who does what' in relation to domestic work, indicates the dominance of gender segregated task allocation but also that if employed women held degrees they were significantly more likely to involve their male partners in routine domestic work than other women. Gregson and Lowe's (1994) study of dual-earner professional couples in full-time paid-work, therefore, represents a particularly useful comparison, because their sample is closer to ours in terms of occupational and educational characteristics. They found that in 70% of these households, cleaning the bathroom, doing the laundry, ironing, cleaning and dusting, was performed exclusively by women. Cooking was an exclusively female activity in 60% of the households, and shopping, Hoovering and washing-up was a shared activity in half of dual earner professional households (Gregson and Lowe 1994).

The search for egalitarian couples has generally lead researchers to focus on how many domestic tasks are shared equally (Wheelock 1990, Gregson and Lowe 1994). This method is useful but limited when assessing divisions of domestic labour between women. This is because women who live together tend to have a flexible approach to the doing of domestic work. Table 5 shows the outcomes of routine task allocation for our sample, and we can see that they are very different from what we would expect to find in heterosexual relationships. In each household some domestic tasks are perceived as shared equally, but because the performance of household work is not gender segregated either partner may perform more of another domestic task. Overall, 50% of core domestic tasks are perceived as being shared equally, while the remaining half are performed more often by birth mothers in 60% of cases and by co-parents in 40% of cases. Some tasks are more likely to be seen as equally shared than others, these include, grocery shopping, washing-up, and surprisingly, ironing, and cleaning and dusting. Cooking is a shared activity in only 41% of households but the partner doing more is just as likely to be the co-parent as the birth mother. A similar situation exists for bathroom cleaning. The doing of laundry is the least likely task to be viewed as equally shared, and here we find birth mothers doing more than half in 41% of households. However, there is evidence of some trade-off between laundry and ironing as co-parents are more likely to be doing more than half of this task than birth-mothers.

Table 5. The Performance of Core Domestic Tasks for the Sample

Task	Birth Mother 'A'				Co-Parent 'B'				Total No		
	Exclusively "A"		Mainly "A"		Shared Equally		Mainly "B"			Exclusively "B"	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%		No	%
Washing-up	2	5	6	16	23	62	6	16	0	0	37
Cleaning & Dusting	2	6	8	24	19	58	3	9	1	3	33
Grocery Shopping	2	5	9	24	21	57	2	5	3	8	37
Ironing	4	13	1	3	16	53	2	7	7	23	30*
Bathroom Cleaning	5	14	4	11	17	49	6	17	3	9	35
Hoovering	5	15	9	27	15	45	2	6	2	6	33
Cooking	3	8	9	24	15	41	7	19	3	8	37
Laundry	5	14	10	27	14	38	4	11	4	11	37
Totals	28	10	56	20	140	50	32	11	23	8	279

*** It was not unusual for households to dispense with the need for ironing. Eight households employed a cleaner for a few hours a week (a man in two instances and a daughter in another).**

When the allocation of tasks are not gender segregated, patterns still remain. More research is clearly required, but we could speculate that aside from individual preferences employment circumstances may have some impact on the assignment of specific tasks. The tasks which are more likely to be carried out by birth mothers (laundry, cleaning and dusting, grocery shopping and hoovering) are usually tasks where there is less discretion in the timing of their performance, and birth mothers are more likely to have shorter or no paid working hours. In contrast, those tasks which co-parents perform equally or more of (ironing, bathroom cleaning, cooking, washing-up) can be done at the end of the paid working day.

4.2. Keeping things ticking over on the domestic front

It may be strategically imperative for egalitarian heterosexual couples to structure their sharing around a 50/50 split, because they are trying to initiate change from a deeply engrained norm. The flexibility that lesbians' experience is based on negotiation within a non-gender polarized context. Respondents who had lived with men, spoke of their relationships with women offering freedom from gender assumptions around the allocation of household tasks. While, most viewed their heterosexual relationships positively because they had usually been involved with men who they viewed as exceptionally egalitarian, they felt greatly advantaged by the absence of 'gender scripts' to guide their relationships with women (see Dunne 1996). They contrasted the ease with which domestic arrangements emerged in their partnerships with

women. Mandy, who works half-time and is the co-parent of a two-year-old boy, describes this:

In comparison with heterosexual experience, is there any difference in how you approach and feel about doing housework? Oh yes! Because it is open for negotiation in a much more real sense, and you are not fighting against anything. No matter how New Mannish or not, there is a prevailing subconscious belief that women do housework. And I think a lot of women - I mean, I did - fall into that. I did more than my fair share, or I battled not to. But I didn't negotiate on an equal footing. So yes, I think there is a big difference because it's up for grabs.... You are not battling against either overt or covert beliefs in who should do what.

The flexible approach experienced in lesbian partnerships is further facilitated by their socialization as women, which has usually equipped them to be fairly competent domestic workers. When we explored this in the individual interviews, respondents usually spoke of both themselves and their partners being actively involved in keeping things ticking over on the domestic front.

4.4. Perceptions of who does what

To facilitate comparison and to help make sense of the different household sharing strategies found, we have focused on who does what in relation to a group of routine labour-intensive domestic tasks. Included in this core domestic grouping are: laundry; ironing; tidying and dusting; cleaning the bathroom; general cleaning; hoovering; cooking (weekdays and weekends); washing up; and grocery shopping. As the allocation of domestic work in our households is not gender segregated in the way that heterosexual approaches tend to be, we cannot assume that because each task is not equally shared their arrangements are unequal. Instead we need to consider areas of work as a whole. A more useful way to categorize our sample is to devise a very simple scoring method to summarise their contributions to the rhythm of domestic work¹⁴. A 'domestic contribution' score was calculated by adding together a partner's contribution to each of the nine core tasks and dividing by nine to get an average. In addition, a fairly crude 'domestic responsibility' score was calculated by averaging each partner's percentage involvement in taking/having responsibility for: compiling the shopping list; remembering to buy groceries; planning meals; deciding what needs doing for housework; and remembering to pay bills.

¹⁴ We have calculated separate scores for childcare tasks and responsibilities, but for the purposes of this paper we shall use the diary data to illustrate divisions of labour in relation to childcare.

We originally defined domestic scores which fell within a 60%-40% threshold as balanced contributions¹⁵, but as many households, 21 (57%), came within this broad sharing threshold, we have a stricter sharing threshold of 55%-45%, within which the average domestic scores of 13 (35%) households fell. Seventeen households (46%) had domestic responsibility scores which fell within the 60%-40% sharing threshold.

Just as being the birth mother of the youngest child was not a good predictor of employment or income differentials in our sample, Figure 1 shows that it is a poor predictor of the balance of core domestic tasks between partners. Taking the domestic scores for all 37 households, birth mothers have an average score of 52% to co-parents' 48%, and their average share of domestic responsibility is 55%.

¹⁵ It should be noted that our scores provide only a rough sense of the degree to which partners participate in these routine domestic tasks rather than how equal their domestic load is. A complicated system of weighting tasks on the basis of individual household practice - how time consuming or disliked a task is, for example - would be required before we could begin to make judgements about the equivalence of contributions. However, our diary material provides an additional vantage point from which to assess a person's domestic load. This must, however, be tempered by an awareness of the notorious difficulties in capturing simultaneous tasks/activities.

As mentioned earlier, compared with heterosexual households, our respondents' domestic work strategies are negotiated within a far more flexibly constructed division of paid labour. This is crucial because differences in time devoted to paid-work can generate and provide justification for domestic imbalances. To examine this link we shall discuss the sample's domestic arrangements on the basis of employment hours.

Households with similar paid working hours

In 16 households both partners have similar non-paid working hours to devote to domestic work. The domestic scores for these households usually indicate high levels of partner involvement in routine domestic work. The birth mothers' average domestic contribution in this grouping is 53%, and her average share of domestic responsibility is 51%.

Figure 2 above shows that 11 (69%) households fall within our broader sharing threshold and seven (44%) within our stricter definition. The two scores at the extremes indicate the shortcomings of this form of measurement rather than unequal divisions of work (see footnote 15). In one household, routine domestic work was less flexibly organized - the score of one partner was low because she almost exclusively performed only three tasks (cooking, washing-up and shopping) while the other shared the remaining housework tasks with their four school-aged children. The second represents a household where both were technically employed full-time. The birth mother had recently returned to her full-time job and the co-parent was based at home as a paid childminder for four days a week. Much of her cleaning burden is the result of the demands for cleanliness and tidiness of her job situation.

Households with dissimilar paid working hours

Twenty-one households have imbalances in partner's time at home and within this group we find greater diversity in partners' domestic contributions. Figure 3 below shows that 10 (48%) have domestic scores which fall within our broad definition of shared contributions, and only five (24%) within the stricter sharing definition. As being the birth mother of the youngest child did not necessarily provide the rationale behind the reduction of working hours, her average domestic contribution score is 51%.

Imbalances in participation in core domestic tasks were more likely to depend on the degree to which partners' paid-working hours differed. In partnerships where one is employed full-time (30 hours or more) and the other part-time (10-29 hours a week), the 10 fully-employed partners usually manage to maintain a fairly central place in the rhythm of domestic work, with an average share of 43% to routine domestic tasks, and 36% of the domestic responsibility. Five households (50%) come within our broader sharing threshold and one contributes more than 60% to domestic tasks. In the five households where one partner is employed part-time (16-29 hours a week) while the other is home-based, contributions are also usually fairly balanced. Employed partner's domestic contributions average 42%, and 46% of domestic responsibility. Two fall within our strict sharing threshold and one employed partner has a score of more than 65%.

It is only when we come to our six households with extreme imbalances in paid working hours that the home-based partner is more likely to make higher domestic contributions - the domestic scores of 50% (three) fall below 30%. Employed partners make an average domestic contribution of 34% and their average share of domestic responsibility is 26%.

4.5. Discussion

This analysis reveals that despite their more flexible approaches to who does what in relation to performing and taking responsibility for routine domestic work, the scores of most households indicate fairly balanced partner involvement in the rhythm of domestic life. Differences between partners in terms of hours in paid employment had a much smaller impact on domestic contributions than I had expected, although partnerships shaped by extreme paid work imbalances were more likely than other households to perceive unequal domestic inputs. In some households a partner with longer paid working hours had a higher domestic score than her partner. While in some respects this may seem an unfair situation, this was rarely viewed as such by the partners concerned. Those who had chosen to reduce their working hours, particularly those who were currently in part-time employment or on maternity leave, had done so in order to care for a child. Most respondents regardless of employment status viewed the care of a young child as particularly demanding work which placed constraints on the amount of domestic work that could be comfortably done during the day. Consequently, respondents rarely held an expectation that time out of the home released a partner from her responsibility to perform domestic work.

I now want to turn to our time-use data to see whether they support respondents' perceptions of enjoying fairly balanced domestic contributions.

5. Time-use data

Respondents were asked to complete time-task allocation diaries for one week,¹⁶ and 31 sets of diaries have been returned and analyzed. This time-use data provides a useful supplement to the data on partners' perceptions of their domestic and caring arrangements. The main task that was performed in each 15 minute time slot is categorized into different sorts of activities, paid work (which includes commuting time), domestic work, childcare, active and passive leisure, and then divided by seven to provide a sense

¹⁶ So that the week would reflect some sense of typicality, respondents were asked to avoid a time period which they knew in advance would be unusual, for example, half-term or holidays.

of what a day looked like¹⁷. This illuminates how each partner distributes her time across paid and unpaid work, and allows us to make comparisons within our own sample and between ours and other time-use studies.

The analysis of our diaries confirms the interesting deviations from the heterosexual norm that we have already noted. Being the birth mother of the youngest child is a poor predictor of which partner spends more time on domestic work - their contribution averages 54% of the total household time devoted to domestic work, and those with children under five average 50%. As our couples have usually broken the link between biological motherhood and the role of primary carer and domestic worker, it makes more sense to discuss our data on the basis of employment hours. We will begin by continuing our exploration of whether differences in hours of paid work translate into domestic imbalances and conclude by comparing the time-use patterns of our sample with mothers and fathers more generally.

5.1 Time-use patterns by differences in paid-working hours

Figure 4 shows the distribution of time across activities in our 11 partnerships with similar paid working hours, i.e., both are employed full-time, part-time or not employed. Time devoted to unpaid work (domestic, shopping and childcare) is very evenly divided between partners. Time spent on domestic work (1.6 hours a day versus 1.7 hours) is similar, with the contribution of the partner working the longest hours representing 48% of total household time spent on domestic tasks. Time spent on shopping (0.6 hours compared with 0.8 hours) is also fairly evenly balanced between partners, and the contribution of the partner with longer paid working hours is 43% of household time on this activity. Finally, differences in time devoted to childcare (1.7 hours compared with 2.1 hours) meant that the contribution of the partner with the longest paid working hours was 44% of the total household time spent primarily occupied with children.

Figure 5 shows the average time-use patterns for our ten households where there are greater differences in paid working hours (10-29 hours). Time devoted to domestic work (1.6 hours and 1.8 hours) and childcare (1.6 and 2.1) is similar to the couples above and is also evenly balanced between partners. The partner with longer paid working hours contributes 47% of total household time on the domestic work and 43% on childcare.

This time allocation data supports our earlier argument that fairly balanced divisions of unpaid work can be achieved when employment responsibilities are more evenly shared. However, the data from the Household Portraits suggested that extreme employment differences could generate greater imbalances.

¹⁷ This 'day' represents an average for activities that are contained within a seven day period (weekdays and weekend). This day is, of course, an artificial construct because people's paid work is usually concentrated into weekdays, and their leisure and perhaps domestic work into weekends.

As anticipated, Figure 6 shows that in our ten households with extreme differences in paid working hours (30 hours plus) the bulk of the household work and childcare is performed by the partner with shorter/no paid working hours. The fully employed partner had an average paid working day of just under seven hours. Her one hour a day devoted to domestic work compared with her partner's 2.8 hours represents 27% of total household time primarily devoted to this activity, and her two hours devoted to childcare as compared with her partner's 3.8 represents 34% of total household time spent on childcare.

A point to note is that fully employed partners in this group spend about the same amount of time on domestic work as partners in the full-time dual earner households that we will come to later (Figures 11 and 12 below). Hence, they have not necessarily reduced their time input because their partner is home-based. The domestic imbalance comes about because home-based partners are doing more domestic work than usual. Increased time at home provides the opportunity to perform more domestic work, but equally importantly, it creates a situation where more domestic work is generated, for example, preparing lunch, and, if they are at home primarily to care for a child, the more immediate domestic work that relates to the presence of children, such as tidying-up toys. The situation for full-time dual earner couples is interesting, insofar as both partners feel able to prioritize childcare over domestic work in ways that women in partnerships with men seem unable to do. An important reason for this may be that men's domestic contributions are less effective than women's, another relates to the division of domestic responsibility between partners. Few of our respondents felt that it was her job to maintain domestic standards, it was a combined effort.

These couples knew that their domestic outcomes looked traditional, but were keen to point out that they arose through expediency rather than the adherence to roles. Their employment situation was often beyond their control because of redundancy or illness, or it was temporary while one took maternity leave or a career break. They felt that an important reason for their situation differing from traditional arrangements was that they viewed their roles as interchangeable, and subject to change. They had all experienced more balanced contributions in the past and some anticipated a reversal of roles in the future. Like the rest of our households, the allocation of domestic work was almost always viewed as subject to active negotiation rather than assumed, and respondents spoke of trying to counter prevailing attitudes by re-conceptualizing unpaid work as being of equal or higher value to paid work.

5.2 Comparison of the time-use of lesbian parents with National Sample of Mothers and Fathers

The repetition of time-use studies drawing on large, fairly representative samples allows researchers to chart change over time, and deviation within the population. They indicate that women's employment circumstances have very little influence on men's domestic contributions (Berk 1992, Shelton 1992, Gershuny and Jones 1987, Pleck 1985). Interestingly, Shelton's (1992) analysis of three North American diary surveys conducted in the mid 1970s, early and late 1980s finds that single men spend far more time on household work than cohabiting or married men, and single women far less than cohabiting or married women. Quoting La Rosa (1988) she says that "there may be some cultural expectation for men with children to spend time in the household but that those men may be 'technically present, but functionally absent' (Shelton 1992:65)"

Our notions of what is possible in relation to the organization and division of labour between partners has been based on heterosexual experience. To my knowledge there are no published time-task allocation studies which compare the time-use patterns of heterosexual and non-heterosexual partners. We have

already seen that many lesbian parents are attempting to change the nature of employment constraints on how work in the home is organized, so they are negotiating the division of domestic labour from a different place which makes comparison difficult. However, we can gain some comparative insights by looking at our data on the basis of households where at least one partner is employed full-time. To see the extent to which the time-use patterns of our sample deviate from those of mothers and fathers more generally we shall turn to a comparison with the parents of children under 12 in the Social Change and Economic Life Initiative (SCELI) data.

Figure 7 and 8 illustrate the extent of imbalances in the allocation of paid and unpaid work between mothers and fathers. Regardless of their partners' employment situation men's contribution to work in the home is small (two hours), and mothers perform the bulk of household and childcare work even when they are in full-time paid employment. Fathers' working day is primarily occupied with paid work, which represents just under 80% of their total paid and unpaid working day. In contrast, the time-use patterns for mothers indicate a much greater focus on work that is unpaid, approximately five and a half hours (73% of her total working day) when she is in part-time employment, just over three and a half hours (37% of her working day) when she is in full-time paid employment, and seven hours when she is not in paid employment.

If we focus on the unpaid work contributions of fathers and mothers (Figures 9 and 10) we can see that fathers do very little domestic work, while the bulk of mothers' time is primarily occupied with this activity. One further comment to make here is that approximately half of fathers' domestic contribution, regardless of their occupational status, takes the form of car maintenance and/or DIY. When partners are home-based, men's 50 minutes primarily occupied with domestic work (compared with mothers' 3.8 hours) represents 17% of total household time primarily occupied with this activity. When their partners are employed part-time, men's one hour represents a 23% contribution to total household time spent on domestic work, if their partners are in full-time employment, their 30 minutes represents a 23% contribution.

One could take a generous position on explaining these inequalities in the allocation of work in the home by pointing to men's longer paid working hours. Men and women's paid and unpaid working days are similar, but men's time is taken up by paid work. Differences are purely a matter of emphasis. However, in my view this is not the explanation for fathers' limited involvement in the performance of work in the home, instead it is an outcome of these gendered arrangements which enable men to retain their advantaged labour market position.

The average the time-use patterns of our full-time employed parents who worked the longest hours in each relevant household are summarized in Figure 11. Immediately we can see that they spend a far greater amount of time on unpaid work than fathers. Their average paid working hours are similar to men's but their total working day does not reflect waged-work specialization to the same extent. Time devoted to unpaid work ranges from just under four hours when their partners are in part-time employment (40% of their paid and unpaid working day) to approximately three and a quarter hours when their partners are home-based (31% of their working day) or employed full time (34% of their working day). Their time-use patterns suggest that unlike the tendency for men their ability to have longer paid working day comes at the expense of passive leisure time (watching the television, reading a book etc) and is less likely to depend on their partners doing the bulk of their share of work in the home. This may account for why so many of our full-time employed respondents felt unhappy with their current balance between home and work, wishing that they could reduce their paid working hours, and why others had already done so. It also offers insights into why men seem less compelled to struggle for the reduction of their employment hours.

Figure 12 shows the average time allocation patterns of respondents with shorter paid working hours than their full-time employed partner. They are remarkably similar with respect to the allocation of their time to paid and unpaid work to mothers' in Figure 8 .

Differences, however, are much more apparent when we focus on unpaid work (Figures 13 and 14). We can see that for both lesbian parents childcare forms a far greater proportion of time devoted to work in the home than is the case for mothers more generally¹⁸. Further, even when both partners are employed full time their combined time spent primarily occupied with childcare is higher than the average in at home/full-time heterosexual situations. This suggest that it is not mothers' employment commitments per se that shape the availability of time for children but the inflexibility of fathers. Our parents have a greater amount of time to devote to actively caring for their children because domestic tasks and responsibilities is more equally distributed between them than is usual for heterosexual households. In full-time - at home households the average time devoted to domestic work of full-time employed partners represents 21% of total time primarily devoted to this activity, this increases to 43% when their partners are employed part-time and 52% when they are in full-time employment. Further, in contrast to fathers, these domestic contributions are focused on routine domestic work, with car maintenance or DIY rarely featuring in their diary entries.

Discussion

Our time allocation data for lesbian parents allows us to see what domestic divisions of labour look like when they are not structured along lines of gender difference. An analysis of what two female partners can fit into their day provides an alternative sense of what is possible, which has been obscured by the exclusive focus on cohabiting male-female couples. There are many ways of interpreting our findings but, in my view, the most plausible conclusion is that the gender division of labour is not only unfair, but inefficient. The prioritization of men's paid working lives over women's can accentuate and confirm gender inequalities in earning potential. It also comes at the expense of men relinquishing responsibility for performing their own share of domestic subsistence and caring work. Further, by putting most of the household eggs in one basket, specialization places a household at greater risk at times of economic recession. Finally, if the logic behind a gendered division of labour has anything to do with having time for children, then a practice that burdens women with the responsibility for performing routine time-consuming domestic work at the expense of time for more pleasurable childcare related activities, such as play, makes little sense.

Concluding discussion

The absence of gender polarized norms informing approaches to parenting and divisions of labour allows lesbian partners greater flexibility in negotiating their arrangements. As such, many women in the sample could construct more balanced approaches that did not necessarily link a primary domestic and caring role with biological motherhood. Households acted as a team in a much truer sense than is usual for heterosexual couples. On the one hand, their employment strategies reflect the taken-for-grantedness of a woman's right to an identity beyond the home, to be financially self-reliant and have her working life valued. On the other hand, the expectation that each woman is domestically competent and should pull

¹⁸ These differences hold regardless of the age of children or occupational status of parents in the SCEDI sample.

her weight in the home, together with the recognition that unpaid labour is valuable and necessary *work*, containing elements of pleasure and drudgery, meant that differences in employment hours did not usually lead to unbalanced domestic arrangements except when extreme.

The search for greater homelife equality between women and men requires that we recognize the impact of working hours on domestic contributions. Our findings indicate that men could do a great deal more in the home, and that their contributions may not be as effective as women's, but it would be unfair to expect equal divisions of unpaid labour when there are extreme employment imbalances. We must, however, be mindful of the inter-dependence of paid and unpaid work, as arrangements in one area have an impact on the other. Nor can we treat the home in isolation from wider social contexts where gender processes shape men and women's employment opportunities, and assign value to the kind of work that they do.

A committed worker, as defined within the masculine model of employment, is one who is free from time and labour responsibilities in the home (Bradley 1989, Brannen and Moss 1991). If women are to successfully negotiate employment opportunities within this model they need partners who share work in the home. Failure to challenge gender divisions in the home will institutionalize other forms of inequality as male and female employment 'success' may have to increasingly rely on the labour of others, usually working-class women.

I do not, however, believe that the solution is simply for women to become more like men. In the absence of change at home women represent a cheap and exploitable source of labour, while success usually requires conforming to the dictates of a masculine model of employment, which can involve women joining men in their dependence on others to perform the necessary caring and domestic work. Without a corresponding shift of men into the home much of the financial advantage gained by being dual earners becomes absorbed by rising costs of living, thus reducing the scope for others to operationalize more balanced approaches to work. The truly radical solution is for men to become more like women. Domestic equality requires a more balanced approach to the allocation of time between the home and the workplace, and this involves men and women joining together in the struggle to transform the organization of paid employment. This, however, will remain a utopian dream so long as social processes exist to differentiate people on the basis of gender. If, for example, fathers experienced parenting in similar ways to mothers then they would be just as reluctant to prioritize time at work at the expense of time with children. Similarly, if they had to take responsibility for the performance of their own subsistence work they would probably find the time demands of employers unrealistic¹⁹. Here we can see why the feminist project meets such resistance - challenging patriarchy threatens capitalism. Men becoming more like women would undermine capitalism in its present form.

We need to extend our understanding of the processes that underpin the differential 'doing of gender' and place limits on people's vision and willingness to change. Here we can draw on theories of sexuality,

¹⁹ A recent study of parents aged 33, by Ferri and Smith (1996) based on the National Child Development Study found that more than a quarter of fathers worked over 50 hours a week.

and more specifically, the relationship between the social construction of heterosexual identities and the creation of differentiated gender identities and outcomes discussed at the beginning of the paper. Since much of what makes women and men socially different relates to the structures of power that feminists are challenging we need to recognize our common interests in undermining the *institutional* dimension to heterosexuality.

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